

How to Respond ... Fellowship

Question: Why do you travel so far to church when there are all kinds of churches closer to where you live?

Visible vs. Invisible

There is a difference to be made between the Visible church (church bodies) and the Invisible Church (joined together by faith and crosses denominational lines).

Everyone who is joined to Christ by faith is joined to other believers as well (1 John 1:7). There is only one way to heaven, and that is through faith in Jesus. God, and God alone, knows who the true believers are (2 Timothy 2:19). We cannot see the heart of others, so the only way we can tell if a person shares our faith is by their confession (Romans 10:10).

Positive and Negative

Fellowship is a very important concept throughout Scripture, and one that is discussed often. The word fellowship comes from the Greek word *koinania* and describes a joining together or sharing. In Scripture this word describes both a positive and negative action.

- On the positive it describes the joining together of believers with God (1 Corinthians 1:9). It also describes the joining together of like-minded believers in Christ (1 John 1:3).
- On the negative side it warns against joining together with others (Ephesians 5:11).

Some would say that the negative side of the fellowship principle applies only to non-Christians, or only "fundamental" doctrines of the Bible like the Trinity, or the deity of Christ.

But Scripture tells us that our fellowship should be based on all the doctrines of Scripture. Every doctrine of Scripture has been given by God, and every passage has only one Spirit-intended meaning.

We cannot "agree to disagree" on the doctrines of Scripture and continue in fellowship, ignoring these differences in doctrine.

Answer: God has given us the doctrine of fellowship for our own good, and out of love for us and our souls. He wants us to understand the nature and danger of false teaching. He wants us to be alert for the intrusion of false teaching, and avoid it as soon as it is noticed. He wants us to join in fellowship with those whose confession agrees with the teachings of Scripture, and stay away from fellowships which bring with it false teaching. May He give us the wisdom understand and the strength to carry out His will!

God's Principles for Finding a Church

How does a person go about finding a church? Such an important decision should not be based on how close a church is to your home. It should not be based on the size of the church, the number of programs it offers, or how friendly the members or pastors are. Your search for a church home should be based on whether or not the church is faithfully proclaiming the Word of God.

- **Understand God's will for church fellowship.**
Hebrews 10:23-25; Acts 1:13-14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 1 Corinthians 11:17-19; Romans 15:5-6; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 1:27; 1 Peter 3:8-9
- **Understand the nature and danger of false teaching.**
Jeremiah 23:31-32; Galatians 5:7-9; 2 Timothy 2:14-18
- **Be alert for the intrusion of false teaching.**
Matthew 7:15-16; Romans 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1
- **Avoid false teaching as soon as it is noticed.**
2 John 1:9-11; Romans 16:17-18
- **Find a church that only teaches the true doctrines of Scripture**
2 Timothy 1:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Hebrews 10:23-25; Jude 1:3