

The Basis for Christian Fellowship

By Keith A. Price

These principles are based on many years of inter-denominational fellowship and are conclusions I have reached after making many mistakes and after having had considerable discussion with scores of Christian leaders. I am particularly indebted to the correspondence of Anthony Norris Groves - a dentist-missionary to Baghdad in the 1830s - who practiced many of these principles. Although they have never before appeared in the form I now give, I have retained a number of the excellent expressions he used in his correspondence.

1. The basis of our fellowship is life in the Christ of the Scriptures rather than Light on the teaching of the Scriptures. Those who have part with Christ have part with us. Because our communion is one of life and love more than one of doctrine and opinion, we seek to show that the oneness in the life of God through Jesus Christ is a stronger bond than that of being one of us - whether organizationally or denominationally.

2. Because our fellowship is based on our common life in Christ, we do not reject anyone because of the organization or denomination with which he may be affiliated; nor would we hold him responsible for the conduct within that system, any more than we would a child

for the conduct in the home of which he is merely a part.

3. We do not feel it desirable to withdraw from fellowship with any Christians except at the point where they may require us to do what our consciences will not permit, or restrain us from doing what our consciences require. Even then, we maintain our fellowship with them in any matter where we are not called upon to so compromise.

This ensures that (insofar as we understand the Scripture) we do not separate ourselves from them any further than they separate themselves from Christ.

4. We do not consider an act of fellowship to be indicative of total agreement; indeed, we sometimes find it a needed expression of love to submit to others in matters where we do not fully agree, rather than to prevent some greater good from being brought about. Our choice would be to bear with their wrong rather than separate ourselves from their good.

5. We believe it more scriptural to reflect a heart of love

ready to find a covering for faults,
than to constantly look for
that with which we may disagree.
We will then be known
more by what we witness for
than by what we witness against.

6. We feel it biblical
never to pressure men to act in uniformity
further than they feel in uniformity;
we use our fellowship in the Spirit
as an opportunity
to discuss our differences
and find this to be the most effective way
of leading others - or being led by them
- into the light of the Word.

7. While enjoying such a wide range
of Christian fellowship,
we would not force this liberty
upon those who would feel otherwise minded.
In such circumstances,
we enjoy fellowship as far as they will permit,
then pray
that the Lord would lead them further
into this true liberty
of the common life in Christ.

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