

THE REDEMPITIVE FELLOWSHIP

INTRODUCTION: The New Testament teaches us that the method of the Lord Jesus Christ was not to wait until he had a large nucleus of 100 or more eager disciples before he started his work of redemption, but to call, train, and work with a small fellowship of twelve men. In the way he did this lies some of the greatest lessons of his ministry for us today.

I. The CALL of this tiny Redemptive Fellowship.

- A. They were called to follow him. (Lk. 6:12-16)
 They were not called to be perfect, or to change the world.
 They were called "to be with him" and to be his followers (Mark 3:14).

- B. The priority in the business of being a christian is not on believing correct doctrine or on living a certain style of ethical life, or on maintaining a proper "image."
 It is on a relationship, a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is on spending time with him, attending to his words, loving him, and making him the center of our lives. That's what being "with him" means.

- C. This implies a need to forsake the influence of what we know as "the mass mind." There is a tendency today, especially under the powerful influence of TV, radio, the modern technological media, propaganda, advertising, and campaigning, for us to be deluged by the mass mind, until we think what the mass thinks, feel what it feels, and are driven by the same materialistic goals which drive the mass of men and women, and take the same moral short cuts as they take.

I'm reminded of the customer at the checkout counter of the super market. She started to write a check for her cart full of groceries, then hesitated as she noticed the sign: "\$15 charge for returned checks." She studied her checkbook and then turned to the cashier and asked, "Should I just add the \$15 to my check?"

The terrible temptation is to be like everyone else; to buy what others buy, seek what they seek, and live like they live. The mass mind gets religious and cries "Hosanna" one week, and gets irrational and cries "Crucify him" the next week.

- D. One of the tragedies of the church or denomination today is that they tend to measure success in terms of size alone. And many of these churches try to rope the individual christian into a tight social organization and reduce him or her to a condition of little responsibility for his or her own thinking. Churches should raise their members out of the mindless masses, and make clear to them the priesthood and responsibility of the believer. However, many churches shamelessly engage in brainwashing and gameplaying with the souls of their members, saying in essence, "we'll do your thinking for you; we'll get the Lord's guidance for you; don't question our authority, or spirituality, or wisdom."

These people operate on the basis that whoever interprets the rules wins the game. There is an old joke about how the devil challenged St. Peter to a baseball game. "How can you possibly win?" St. Peter asked and added "All the famous ballplayers are up here." "How can I lose?" retorted Satan. "All the umpires are down here."

II. The TRAINING of the Redemptive Fellowship.

A key method of Jesus was to REMOVE BARRIERS.

- A. Of course one barrier was MORAL or SPIRITUAL barriers — sins, or sin, had to be dealt with. He taught them that sin was not always outward; it was sometimes inward, that is, in the heart.

Jesus said that it was not what goes into the mouth that defiles anyone, but what comes out of the heart, that defiles (Mt. 15:11). With this he threw out an entire theological system of ceremonial defilement. He had a different method of scriptural interpretation from the rabbis, scribes, and Pharisees. He said that whatever comes out of the mouth

comes from the heart. Spiritual defilement is caused by things like evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander. These are sins that make people unfit to share in public worship or church ordinances, not eating with ceremonially unwashed hands, or breaking other legalistic rules. The Rabbis, scribes, and Pharisees, wanted to interpret all the OT scriptures literally, because they assumed they were "inerrant," but Jesus insisted that sometimes it is better to interpret the scriptures spiritually rather than literally.

B. Jesus also had to deal with the emotional barriers which the apostles had. The problem with these emotional barriers is that many of them are largely unconscious. The apostles didn't even know they had such barriers; they certainly didn't know what they were or how to get rid of them without the Lord's help.

1. Many of us today may not be aware or conscious of our own emotional barriers to spiritual growth. For example, if we are not able to accept and love ourselves, we probably are not able to accept and love others. If we can't do that, we probably can't love God as we should (Mt. 19:19). Many psychologists and skilled pastoral counselors have repeatedly said this, but their advice goes largely unheeded in most christian circles today.

2. Carl G. Jung said to a group of ministers in 1932: "We cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate. It oppresses. Acceptance of oneself is the acid test of one's whole outlook on life." To accept and love yourself properly is the great question of the christian life. You may be a fine christian otherwise, but if you cannot stand yourself, or cannot love yourself properly, you probably are not able to love anyone else as you should, including God.

III. The Fellowship's METHOD OF OPERATION.

A. Patience (The patience of Jesus)

1. Waiting for their improved understanding of the death and res. of Jesus.

2. Waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Luke 24:49). Jesus said to them, "wait here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Before they dashed out into the world to evangelize it Jesus commanded them to wait until God's H.S. had united, healed, cleansed, and empowered them. We have no mandate to change the world until we have had this experience with God.
- B. Having their personal spiritual needs met.
1. Jesus always offers to meet our needs before he sends us out to meet the needs of others.
If we have a crisis, he will deal with that crisis. If we have a chronic need, he will deal with that.
 2. Above all, we need genuine love and acceptance among ourselves. And this love must be unconditional and honest. It isn't always easy to be totally honest.
 3. This reminds me of a pilot who was explaining a takeoff delay. He announced, "Folks, we've had a look at the front wheel and decided to take 30 minutes and have it changed. After all, your safety is our first concern. Well, actually," he quipped, "our safety is our first concern, but you come a close second!"
 4. Christians must honestly love and accept each other just as we are. That doesn't mean we ignore shortcomings and pretend there's no room for improvement. But we accept and love each other just as we are, and we go on from there by the grace of God.
- C. Only then are we ready to go out to minister and witness in his name, ~~or to establish a local church or a special ministry to bear a unique witness to his gospel and bring glory to his name.~~

CONCLUSION:

What a Fellowship! What a joy divine!
What a privilege to be a part of His
Redemptive Fellowship.

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