

Friendship But Not Fellowship

I pray faithfully for many men in the ministry, men I respect and admire for their work as a pastor. But these men are not always men with whom I can fellowship.

Some men stand against the things for which I stand. Some men are in conflict with me in one area or another: not about the Gospel or the Bible, but about methods, ministry ideas, or application of Bible principles. (These conflicts are different enough that I remain at a friendly distance.) We can pray together, call each other now and then, and honestly care for one another without allowing our differences to clash.

To pray for a man or his sick child, or send some money to help with a building project will have no adverse effects on my ministry. But to attend a conference, or sit for a few hours to talk might change the way I think or administer the ministries of my church. That relationship would be dangerous. I might become critical or I might change — both of which I fight against.

To be a friend, to pray, or to care when his heart is hurting, I can do without bringing about a conflict.

There are men for whom I will preach, but whom I will not have preach for me.
There are men with whom I will share a meal, but I will not preach for them nor they for me.
There are men to whom I would send money to help with their ministry or personal needs for whom I might not preach. There are few, if any, I would not help in their time of need. Yet I might not have them speak in our school chapel or church.

The reasoning for this is two-fold: CONFLICT and CHANGE. I do not want to do anything which would push me to change, but neither do I want to cause conflict or division.

I may say a few words of warning to a young preacher for whom I feel responsible, but those words would never be spoken publicly. I do not want to become a critic or a slanderer. I do have a biblical responsibility to warn those under my leadership, as Paul did in Acts 20.

There may come a time when I publicly say something in regards to an influence that a ministry may have on my church or friends through books or conferences. That case has been rare in the last four decades, but it has happened. I much prefer to have a warm friendship and a faithful prayer relationship with all pastors and to avoid any difficult situation; that is my desire, but not always a reality. I am commanded to warn my flock and to protect them from wrong influences within and without the church.

Acts 20:29 “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

The pastors under my influence are not children, and they have a right to do as they please. (Autonomy is what we stand for in Baptist circles!) I expect no one to bow to my wishes. In fact, rarely has a church started out from our own that did not do some things very differently from the way we do them. But we are INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS, and I will fight for the right

of our young pastors to do things the way they think they should be done. However, when someone has come out from our ministry or has grown up in our church, I feel a duty to warn them of things that perhaps they do not see or yet understand. I have watched the churches and pastors of America since before many preachers were born. I see trends. I have watched directional changes, and I have seen the end result of given actions. I reserve the right to “warn” as Paul said:

Acts 20:31 “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

We each have to make our own choices as to when we speak, and how much we say. My reasoning, as I said, is two-fold: to protect myself from change, and to avoid conflict. However, because of my obligation to warn the brethren, there will be conflict. But conflict has been a reality since the beginning of the church in our Lord’s life, and it will not cease as long as the devil roams the earth.

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