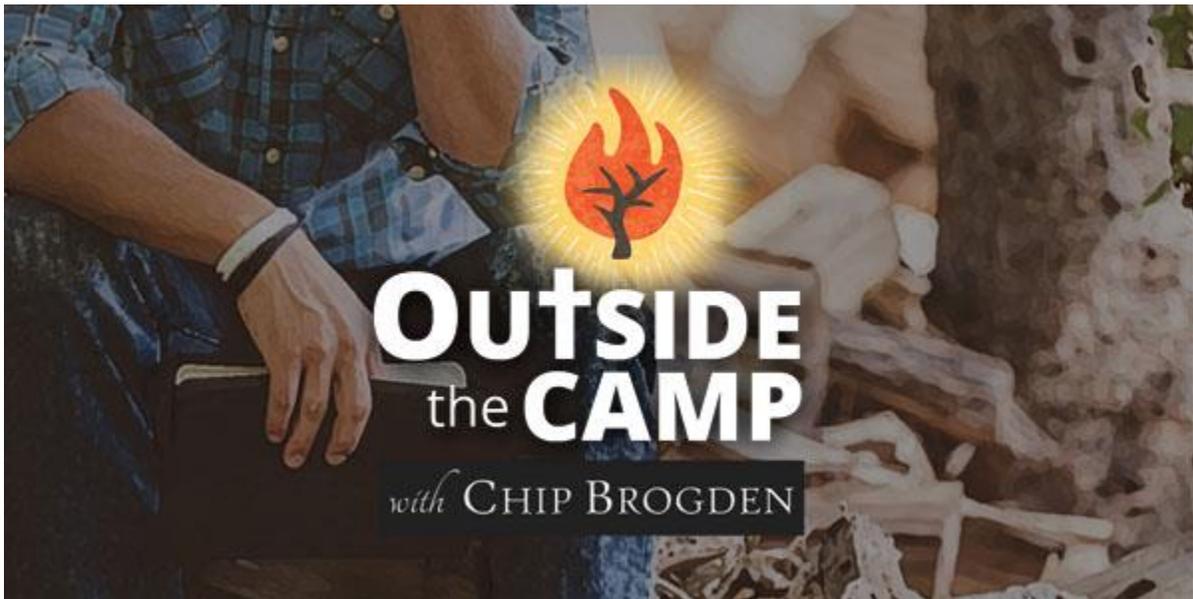


TRANSCRIPT

OUTSIDE THE CAMP WITH CHIP BROGDEN



EPISODE 8: No Fellowship? Here's 7 Ways to Deal With It

Audio File Location:

<http://www.chipbrogden.com/otc-8-no-fellowship-heres-7-ways-deal/>

ANNOUNCER: Support for this program comes from listeners like you. To find out more, visit us online at [ChipBrogden.com](http://www.chipbrogden.com).

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this edition of Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. Helping you discover the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. And now, with today's message, here's Chip Brogden.

CHIP: Many people have had to lose their religion in order to find their faith. Many people are learning what it means to walk with God without participating in Organized Religion, or as the Bible calls it, going “outside the camp” to be with Jesus. Now, being outside the camp doesn't mean you never gather with other believers. It doesn't mean you are a hermit who has cut off all contact. It simply means you've been set free from

Sunday Morning Religion, you've been liberated from a church-centered faith and are beginning to experience the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith. Your faith is in a Person, not in a religion. And this Person is real, living, and present with you always – a spiritual reality, not merely a religious belief. You begin to see just how many things you've said and done and believed and thought over the years that are influenced, not by the Spirit of God, but by the spirit of religion.

I've said many times that I believe church does have a place in society. When it works as it should, church fulfills a social, moral, and institutional function in the world. But in terms of your spiritual life, in terms of your walk with God, church is the greatest single distraction from the simplicity of Christ that I know of. What else is more deceptive than something coming forth as God, yet taking the place of God. And that, by the way, is exactly what is meant by the idea of an Antichrist – one that comes forth pretending to be Christ, but is actually opposed to Christ. That actually makes a lot of sense when you consider the damage that has been done over the last 2,000 years by the Church, by those who claim to be the representatives of God.

It should not be too surprising, because we see in the New Testament that Jesus gives us advance warning that leaven would enter into the pure, unleavened bread of a Christ-centered faith. Jesus told us to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. Paul warned how false brethren would enter in, trying to scatter the flock and draw away disciples after themselves, yet they were enemies of the cross of Christ. And by the time John wrote his letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation, we see how far some of them had fallen – not all, but enough to be concerning. Then there is that spiritual vision in the book of Revelation of a political and religious system symbolized by a harlot who is drunk with the blood of all the saints she has killed. Well, there you have it – that is the end result of this religious system, because you see, that religious system is under the judgment of God.

And, I would not have believed it, but many of God's people are still trapped in that system. How do I know? Because in the Book of Revelation, God warns us saying, "Come out of her, My people." You can read it for yourself. And it just struck me one day: some of God's people are still stuck in a religious system pretending to represent Christ, yet it opposes Christ. Some people? Maybe most people. The point is God still calls on His people to come out. He still has some people in there. But the warning is, that if they don't come out, they are going to get swept up in the same sins and be judged with the same judgment. So there is the warning in Scripture, and the Spirit of Jesus bears witness that these things are true. We see it happening right now.

It's time for all of God's people to get over their religious addiction with church and discover their first love again. But oh my... we have so many entanglements with the church system, so many other loves that keep us from being obedient to God. People love their ministries more than they love God. They love their worship music more than they love God. They love their preaching and teaching more than they love God. They even love God's people more than they love God! Strange, isn't it? But how do I know? Because when God calls them to walk alone and apart with Him for a while, they become all miserable and mopey. With no church service to go to and no meeting to attend and no fellowship to partake of, they feel like the whole world is going to end. And with people who think they are called to the ministry, it's even worse. Their only context for ministry is within the four walls of a church building or a ministry organization, and without that, they just don't know what to do.

If any of that describes you then it just shows that Jesus is not enough for you. It shows that you have a church-centered, or maybe a people-centered faith, or a ministry-centered faith, instead of a Christ-centered faith. That represents a fatal flaw in your spiritual life, if Jesus is not enough. That's something you seriously need to look at.

Examine yourself and ask yourself if Jesus really is enough; if not, why not? And if so, why are you so unhappy?

You say, “But God would never call us to give up something that there is nothing wrong with. What’s wrong with having a ministry? What’s wrong with going to church?” Well, what’s wrong with Isaac, that God told Abraham to give him up as a sacrifice? You see, it’s not about right or wrong, it’s about who do you love the most? It’s not about right or wrong, it’s about whose will is more important – your will, or God’s Will? Even something that seems “right” can be “wrong” if you’re walking in disobedience, right? But my words are not directed to those who are still going to church. I am here to encourage those who have already left, to let you know that you are not crazy and that you are not alone. Even so, many people who no longer attend church still struggle with the idea of having no fellowship. In fact, I get more requests for “how can I find fellowship with others” than I do for “how can I find a deeper fellowship with God.” That, to me, is very telling.

But I want to share something that I think will help those of you who are struggling with feelings of loneliness outside the camp, where fellowship with others seems so rare compared to the weekly meetings you were used to attending. Here’s seven things I think will help you – seven ways to handle the issue of not having anyone to fellowship with.

1. Focus on your personal walk with God

If you find yourself without fellowship with others, resist the urge to rush out and fill the void as quickly as possible with people. Instead, take it as an opportunity to focus on your personal walk with God. I sincerely believe that God not only permits, but actually calls us, to experience seasons of isolation so that He can have us all to Himself for a while, without the distractions of other people. We can become so habituated to

fellowship, discussion, and interaction with others that we lose the ability to focus on the Lord Himself. God's people cannot substitute for God Himself. Relying too much on other people can become a hindrance, especially if a panic ensues the moment we find ourselves "alone." Yet, we are never truly alone. We should always have a conscious awareness of the presence of the Lord, both with us and within us. Sometimes our spiritual immaturity and lack of depth are covered up as we immerse ourselves into a larger group, speaking the Christian lingo and going through the motions of other people who seem to know what they are talking about. But when we are alone, we have a chance to see whether our faith is in people, or in the Lord. If our faith is in the Lord, our joy and peace will be unaffected by the temporary lack of people; on the other hand, if we find ourselves longing for people, it shows a weakness.

2. Let God bring the right people

Can we trust God to bring the right people into our life? Hopefully we will learn sooner, rather than later, than whenever we go out and try to "make something happen" we tend to make a mess of things. Our hunger and thirst for fellowship opens us up to the possibility of entering into relationships with people who will do us more harm than good. Lonely people are easy prey for wolves in sheep's clothing. If we look to the Lord to meet all our needs – including our need for social interaction and fellowship – then He will certainly bring the right people into our life, at the right time, and for the right reason. Anything else is simply the yearning of the flesh. We often say to unmarried persons who want to get married, "Be patient. God has the right person for you." But patiently waiting for the Lord is difficult. Often, when someone is yearning for a marriage partner, they tend to rush into a relationship with the first available person. Sometimes it works out, but many times it does not. Desperately seeking fellowship, searching for the perfect church or group or community, looking for like-minded people to interact with, can take us down a similar path. Can we be patient and trust God to

connect us with the right people, at the right time? And if He does not, or has not, can we trust that He knows who and what we need better than we do?

3. Lower your standards

By “lower your standards” I don’t mean that you should settle for less-than-quality people to associate with. What I mean is that sometimes our standards are set so high that no one qualifies. Our expectations are so unrealistic that no one can meet them. If your idea of a “like-minded believer” is some who believes, thinks, speaks, and acts exactly the way you do then you are being too narrow-minded. Lower your standards, not by compromising your beliefs, but by accommodating beliefs other than your own. You should eliminate all the preconceived ideas in your head about what constitutes “fellowship” or “like-mindedness” among brothers and sisters and broaden your horizons a bit. Certainly we should be in agreement on major issues; the trouble is that some folks think every issue is a major issue, and this inevitably leads to major disagreements. We can afford to grant one another some leniency in secondary things that don’t really matter. Not a day goes by that someone points out to me that they really like most of the things I say, but they feel compelled to tell me that they do not agree with me 100% on everything! Is it really necessary to agree with anyone all the time on everything? Is it really necessary to even mention what percentage of things you do not agree with? But we can all benefit from one another just by focusing on the few things that we do agree on. In addition, by regularly engaging with people outside your comfortable area of belief, you might have your eyes opened to some new things that you had not considered before. You will never grow if you only interact with people who are just like yourself in every way. This is true spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

Another way to “lower your standards” is to get away from the idea that if it isn’t a large group then it isn’t really fellowship. Going back to a previous episode, “Simple

Gatherings,” Episode 7, we saw that the minimum requirement for a gathering in Jesus’ Name is two or three. Not two or three thousand or two or three hundred, but you and one other person is good enough for Jesus. Lower your expectations about big revivals and large meetings and huge gatherings. Connect with the one or two right in front of you, and bring Jesus into your midst. Radical concept, to be sure.

ANNOUNCER: More of Jesus, less of everything else. You’re listening to Outside the Camp with Chip Brogden. www.ChipBrogden.com.

4. Go back to church

I’m going to be honest with you – if you’re really having a hard time with the lack of fellowship, don’t complain or argue with me, just go back to church! Seriously. Because in the end, no matter what, people are going to do what they think they have to do. You are a grown person and can do whatever you like – you don’t owe me any explanation. But before you do go back to church, think about the reasons why you left to begin with. Did you leave because God really showed you the truth about the religious system? I used to think that everyone who stopped going to church did so for the same reason I did: because God showed me the truth about the harlot church system and told me to come out of her in order to experience the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. But what I have discovered through the years is that few people actually leave church because of a deep revelation of Christ and the spiritual Body of Christ, the Ekklesia. They leave church because they read a book, or listened to a teaching, that said they should. Some of them have even read one of my books and come out, and then they complain to me about how miserable they are! That is coming out for the wrong reason. Please go back until the spirit of Jesus teaches you something. Sometimes folks leave church because they are generally dissatisfied and contrary to everyone and everything; they go into a home group and cause problems

there, too. There is a pattern of not getting along with anyone. Some people are just undisciplined and lazy, and like hanging around with “like-minded” lazy people. All of that is to say that there are many different reasons why church does or does not work for people, and not all of them are spiritual or Biblical reasons. Regardless of what anyone says (including me), you have to figure that out between you and the Lord. I’ve already figured it out!

Here's another interesting thing I have observed. People leave church for whatever reason, and after a period of time they become lonely and feel miserable. They long for the fellowship they think they are missing. So, after a lot of hand-wringing and soul-searching, they go back to church. There they find things are not as good as they remembered it to be, and they are more miserable than ever. So they leave again. For some that is all it takes; they learn the lesson the first time around and they are cured. Others repeat this process over and over again. In cases like this it only proves that people who behave this way are acting according to their own feelings; they are not being led by the spirit of God. Further, their faith seems to be based on having people in their life, not having Christ as their Life. I can find no other explanation for such a back-and-forth, in-and-out, up-and-down existence solely based on proximity to other people. A Christ-centered faith relies upon the continuing presence of Jesus, not the continuing presence of other people.

5. Find or start a home group.

A lot of people who come out of church are really excited about finding or starting a home group or house church. If that is you then God bless you. But let me tell you why I don't recommend this as soon as you come out of traditional church. I try to tell people that getting out of Babylon is a lot easier than getting Babylon out of you. When you first leave church there is a great big void where church used to be. We assume that void

should be filled with something, so we naturally begin looking for a home group or something to fill the void. If we can't find a group to join and we are well-connected we might entertain the thought of starting our own home group. This is especially true with people who feel called to the ministry – with no church to attend, a home group sounds very attractive.

What folks fail to realize is that this church-shaped void in your heart doesn't need to be filled at all; it needs to be eliminated. That church-shaped void in your heart competes with the Christ-shaped void. That ministry mindset you picked up in the religious system needs to be denied, not fulfilled. That fellowship fantasy needs to be forsaken, not indulged or re-created. I encourage people who come out of church to take a year off and don't do anything but sit at the feet of Jesus and get back in touch with your first love again. Few people can do it. They are under pressure to give an account for their absence, and it helps to be able to say, "Oh we no longer attend church, but we have this wonderful home group we're going to instead!" That is just exchanging one thing for another in order to save face. Better to be able to say, "I am sitting at the feet of Jesus, and until I get over my religious addiction, I'm focusing on my spiritual life in Christ." Without that sober acknowledgment you will simply recreate some version of the church you just came out of, either finding something similar or going to the opposite extreme.

However, if you feel really strongly about getting together with others in their home, feel free to pursue it. Just don't be surprised to find just as many problems in the house church as there are in the institutional church. Some of these problems are just part of being with people, but many of these problems are the result of folks just continuing to do the same religious stuff they have always done. Changing how you "do" church doesn't remove the religious spirit, but feeds it.

6. Connect on the Internet

You know, one way to look at fellowship is to stop thinking in terms of physical proximity, but look at it in terms of staying in touch, even from a distance. Today we don't so much have "pen pals" because social media has really eliminated the need for it, but the idea back in the day was to exchange letters back and forth with people. A lot of times you never even met the other person, you were joined together by getting on some kind of pen pal list, and you got matched up with someone who had similar interests, and you would write letters back and forth. Some of you are too young to even remember such a thing, but it used to be popular. Now, as I say, social media essentially fills that need and allows you to maintain contact with people all over the world. So there is an option for you. It may be that, for whatever reason, it is difficult or impossible for you to make face-to-face contact with other believers. Yet there are thousands of people online with similar interests, and so many people connect with others that way. Increasingly, that is their primary way of connecting with people, and for some, it is the ONLY way.

Now, connecting with people on the Internet may be a good solution for some. It's not a perfect solution but it's better than nothing. Psychologists are still trying to determine the long-term effects of social media on our ability to communicate and interact with other people. Sociologists are looking at how society and community is evolving and adapting to social media as more and more people go online, and how these changes are helping society or making things worse. I've been online since the mid- 1990s, before there was social media. We used chat rooms back then. And the same thing is true today as was true then: people will do and say things online that they would probably not do or say if they were in a face-to-face conversation with you. A lot of social media is fake and feeds the flesh. The computer gives people a façade to hide behind. It makes it easy for

people to pretend to be something they are not. But, generally speaking, people who are nasty in real life are going to be nasty online, and people who are pleasant in real life are going to be pleasant online. Social media tends to amplify your persona, for better or worse. As a communication tool, as a way to interact with others, as a way to meet people you would have never met otherwise, as a way to have some interesting discussions and conversations with people, social media provides an opportunity for all of that. Of course, some people abuse others with that tool and do a lot of harm, but that will always be the case with any communication medium.

Ideally, social media should augment, or supplement, face-to-face interaction with others. In other words, social media should be a part of your life, not your whole life. From a spiritual standpoint, I don't believe that social media will ever take the place of face-to-face interaction with people. Nor should it. Paul said I want to be with you, to impart some spiritual gift to you. Of course, once Paul was in prison, he couldn't visit them face-to-face, so he had to write letters. John said there are things I want to say to you but I would rather not use paper and ink, but will save them for when we are face-to-face. And even in their day, a personal letter written to people they already had a relationship with is quite different, and really not comparable, to interacting with people on social media today. I'm saying, here's a solution for those of you who are looking for social interaction. It's one option.

7. Learn to walk alone

Now, you might not like that advice, but I'm trying to be honest with you. If you learn to walk alone you'll stop feeling so frustrated and you'll be more at peace. And, when you do come across others, you can be a blessing to them, instead of being a burden, instead of sucking all the life out of people you can get what you need from God and be a giver to other people, instead of a taker. Many who walked with God did so in isolation. Enoch

walked with God. Moses walked with God 40 years in the isolation of the wilderness. David was alone with God, learning to minister to the Lord and sing praises to Him when he was by himself, tending sheep. Daniel was alone in the lion's den. Jesus was alone in the desert for 40 days when He was tempted by the devil, and Jesus was alone on the night of His betrayal, when all His disciples fled. Paul was alone when he left Damascus after his revelation of Christ, and went away into the desert of Arabia. No one can say for sure why Paul went, because Paul doesn't say; but I know exactly why he went – he had to get by himself, get before God, and unlearn everything he had been taught as a Pharisee so he could learn what only the Spirit could teach him – in isolation.

To be sure, these were only seasons of isolation and loneliness, but they were necessary. Perhaps God calls all of us to go through these seasons, but we have been so conditioned and so dependent upon fellowship with others that we can't bear to be alone and apart with God.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "Most of the world's great souls have been lonely... Loneliness seems to be one price the saint must pay for his saintliness. It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. 'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.' His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else. He learns in inner solitude what he could not have learned in the crowd that Christ is All in All, that He is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that in Him we have and possess life's *summum bonum*." – that's Latin for "highest good."

* * * *

So, there you have it – seven ways to handle not having any fellowship. Do you agree, or disagree? Do you have something to add to my list? If so, I'd like to hear from you. Just email chip@chipbrogden.com and share your thoughts.

And that will do it for this episode of Outside the Camp. Until next time, this is Chip Brogden, reminding you that this is the day that the Lord has made, so make it a good day; and remember that greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world!

ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. We hope you enjoyed today's broadcast and found it helpful and encouraging. If you'd like to get additional teachings, audio recordings, books and other Christ-centered resources to help you grow spiritually, visit us online at ChipBrogden.com. Outside the Camp is made possible by the prayers and financial support of listeners like you. Until next time, on behalf of Chip Brogden, I'm Kathy Smith, reminding you that you can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you!