

Confident Fellowship: Damaging and Restoring Fellowship

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[0 : 00] So John chapter 3, starting at verse 19 to 21. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light, because their deeds are evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

And if you turn to 1 John chapter 1, starting at verse 5. Oh yeah, that's page 1225.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

[1 : 13] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Thanks very much, Dan.

Please keep your Bibles open at 1 John. There is a sheet being passed around with pens, which you can follow along to take notes if you want one. Just indicate to Ethan.

We started a new series just last week. You can follow them all online if you miss any. So 1 John, chapter 1, verse 5, and to chapter 2, verse 2.

[2 : 36] It's a very, very practical letter, helping us to know how to live the Christian life.

Well, let's ask God for his help as we look at his word together. Our Father God, we thank you for your love.

And we thank you for your word to us, which is an expression of your love to us. We pray that as we read it together, as we study together, that you would speak into our lives in such a way that we see what it is to live in right relationship with you.

Help us to identify the things that hinder our relationship with you. And help us to put into practice the things that will restore our relationship with you.

Be gracious to us, Father, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So we start with a very heart-searching question.

[4 : 05] How is your fellowship with God? Would you say it's in the red hot zone? Or is it in the blue cold zone?

Where would you place yourself on that scale? Or over the last week or month, would you say you've been taking steps towards the red zone?

Or have you been moving towards the cold zone? Perhaps, like me, you find that it fluctuates. It's bouncing from one end to the other.

Hot one week, cold the next. Well, remember, we have all been invited into fellowship with God.

Look at verse 3 of chapter 1. This is John writing on behalf of the apostles. He says, We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.

[5 : 07] So they saw Jesus and they heard his message. So we proclaim to you what we've seen and heard. So that you also may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. So here John is inviting people like you and me to share in the deep, intimate relationship and partnership with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

So what the Father shares with the Son and what the Son shares with the Father, we too can participate in that love.

He says to us in verse 4, we write all of this. We write this invitation into this fellowship to make our or your joy complete.

Living in fellowship with God is where we are fully satisfied. This is where we find our joy.

[6 : 11] Now this morning we're going to see how we can enjoy this fellowship every day. How we can enjoy it the way God intends us to.

So there's two big ideas we're going to look at this morning. The first is what hinders and damages our fellowship with God. And the second is this, what restores and renews our fellowship with God. So the first one is going to be quite hard. Not hard to understand, but hard because it takes a look at our hearts. So what is it that hinders and damages our fellowship?

And then secondly, what restores and renews our fellowship? So let's look at these two big ideas together. First, sin hinders and damages our fellowship with God.

Look at verse 5. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you. God is light. In him there is no darkness at all.

[7 : 23] Followers of Lord of the Rings, and I'm sure most of you have seen them, will know that light and darkness are really important themes. You've got those who represent light, like Gandalf, and he's good and he's pure.

And then there are those who are evil and wicked, like Sauron, and they're described as being on the dark side. So we've got this light and darkness theme.

And it's the same idea in biblical language. So in verse 5 we're told that God is light. That means he's full of goodness. He's full of justice and purity.

There's no darkness in God. There's no evil. There's no hate. There's no impurity. In other words, light and darkness are incompatible.

You can't mix light and darkness together. Psalm 5 tells us that you are not a God who takes pleasure in evil.

[8 : 24] With you, the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You see, you can't have light and darkness together.

Now, just as light and darkness are incompatible, so a life of sin and a life of fellowship is incompatible.

In other words, he's building us towards a big theme, which is this. We can't mess about with sin and at the same time enjoy fellowship with God.

Just as you can't mix light and darkness, so you can't mix a life of sin and a life of fellowship. They just don't go together. Sin is serious.

It hinders and damages our fellowship with God. That's the big theme of the rest of this chapter and into chapter 2. We tend to minimise it. We don't think it really matters.

[9 : 30] So we hide it and we excuse it and we ignore it. But sin drags us out of the red hot zone and it pulls us into the blue cold zone.

So let's see how this is true. Two things. First, claiming to have fellowship. Look at verse 6.

He says this, If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

So if we say that we have fellowship with God, but yet we mess about with sin, then we're just living a lie. He's saying we don't live by the truth.

Now remember, he's writing here to people who are Christians. Have a look at chapter 2, verse 21. Chapter 2, verse 21.

[10 : 31] He says there, I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

So he's writing to the people, he's writing to us, he's saying you know what the truth is. You know who the truth is. You know what it is to love Christ.

You know what it is to love people. But here's the big problem. You're claiming to be in fellowship with God when in reality you're walking about in darkness.

It's the complete opposite of true fellowship. Look at chapter 1, verse 7. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

You see here in verse 7, we have the picture of one who doesn't hide from the truth. They're not pretending. They're not living a lie. They walk in the light.

[11:40] In other words, their desire is to let God shine his spotlight, to shine his light by the Holy Spirit into their lives, to show them where their sin is so that they can deal with it and put things right so that fellowship with God is restored.

Here's the people who walk in the light. They crave openness and honesty before God. But he's saying, what you're doing is walking in the darkness.

You're hiding. You see, our fellowship with God works on two levels. I want us to get this clear in our minds.

There's a legal aspect and a personal aspect. So when we trust in Christ, we enter into a legal relationship or fellowship with God.

That means it can't be broken by our sin. So if I mess up, if I fail, my relationship with God is intact. It's legally binding. There's a contract on that relationship that can't be broken because God is committed to it.

[12:53] However, when I sin or when we sin, the personal aspect of the relationship is damaged.

So let me try and illustrate this for us to get it into our minds. When Kirsty and I got married, we entered into a legal relationship. So no matter what we say, no matter what we do, we remain legally married.

We can fall out, we can have an argument, but we've got a contract that says, we're married. We're still in that relationship. But here's the point. If I'm unkind, if I say something that upsets her, it deeply affects the personal relationship.

And the relationship is damaged. The joy and the intimacy of that relationship is removed. It's broken. And so it is in the same way.

God still legally loves us. He is committed to us. He is bound to us even when we sin. But here's the problem.

[14:03] The personal joy of that relationship is damaged. Every time I fail and fall, every time I walk in darkness, the relationship with God, that personal, deep, intimate relationship, is damaged.

You see, messing about with sin damages our fellowship with God. It is serious. Of course, it's not just claiming to have fellowship.

There's another problem. There's claiming to be without sin. Look at verse 8. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Messing about with sin ultimately leads to self-deception. Do you see what it says in verse 8? It says we deceive ourselves. The tragedy is we can get to the point in our life where we can't even see the damage sin is causing to our own lives.

We're so much in the darkness that we cannot see what it is doing to our relationship with God. We used to joke when we were younger about our granny that she had asbestos hands.

[15:33] Basically, she could just take anything that was roasting hot out of the oven with her bare hands. She never used a cloth. She could handle hot plates. Not a problem. But there was a problem.

Because her hands were very marked and scarred. There were burns all over them. And over time, her hands had become insensitive to the heat. And it caused terrible damage.

And in the same way, we can mess about with sin so much that it gets to the point where we become insensitive to it. We're not even aware of the effects that it has.

But over time, it's causing untold damage to our lives in our relationship with God. One of the ways it can affect us is our relationship with other people.

Look back at verse 7. Do you see what it says there at the beginning? It says, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

[16:43] You see, fellowship with God can't be separated from fellowship with other people. If our fellowship with God is damaged, then our fellowship with other people is damaged.

So, let me ask us all another question. What is our relationship with each other actually like? If you're married here this morning, how is your relationship to your wife or your husband? Is it cold? Is it broken? How are you relating to one another? Or how are your relationships with people in the church?

Are they on healthy terms? Are you getting on with people? Because broken and damaged relationships can be a clear sign of claiming to be without sin.

We've got to the point where we've deceived ourselves, where we become completely insensitive to what's going on. We're not even aware of damaged relationships.

[17 : 58] Look at verse 10. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him, that is God, out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Instead of owning up to our sin, we excuse it, we ignore it and we hide it. We brush it underneath the carpet. We push back against God's gentle conviction through his word and we refuse the diagnosis of our hearts.

Claiming to be in fellowship with God and at the same time messing about with sin ultimately damages and hinders our fellowship with God.

It robs us of our joy. That is the danger. That is the seriousness of what it can do to us. So how can our joy be made complete?

What we've just looked at is hard and difficult but it does because it requires an inward looking at our own hearts. So how can it be restored? How can we know deep, intimate joy with the Father?

[19 : 16] Well second, Christ restores and renews our fellowship with God. We often think of repentance and faith as something we do before we become a Christian.

So I repent of my sins and I put my faith in Jesus. That's true. We all need to do that. But just as we start the Christian life with repentance and faith, we must continue with repentance and faith.

We don't just do it once and then leave it there and tick that box. We continue with repentance and faith every single day. So let's look at each of those aspects in these remaining verses.

First, repentance, which is ongoing dealing with sin. Look at verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

You see, confession or repentance is vital if we are to enjoy fellowship with God. But we've got to be clear what true repentance is.

[20 : 31] Sometimes we can be remorseful, but that's not repentance. Remorseful means we regret that we've done something wrong because of the consequences it has to my life.

So the thief will be remorseful because he's been caught. He's got money in his pocket that he shouldn't do and he ends up in prison and he's saying I wish I hadn't done that.

He's only sorry because he's been caught and he's being punished. That's remorseful. Being repentant is completely different.

Repentant means we seek a genuine heart change regardless of the consequences to my life. So the thief who is repentant will face up to the seriousness of his crime.

He will accept the consequences. He will accept what's going to happen because he wants to change his life and change the ways. He confesses because he doesn't want to do the same thing again.

[21 : 40] Now there's two people who are very helpful examples for this and you know them very well. Judas and Peter. Both Judas and Peter acted in denial and betrayal.

Both of them had sinned. Judas though was remorseful. He was remorseful because he was found out and he ran away and what did he do?

He hung himself because remorse leads to despair. There's no way out. Peter on the other hand was repentant because he knew he had done something wrong.

He knew he had to go back to Jesus and that relationship was restored and it led to a joyful relationship again. So we've got to be right about being remorseful or being repentant.

And look what happens when we are genuinely repentant. Again look at verse 9. He will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[22 : 47] Here's the result. We are forgiven. That means God will no longer hold that sin against us. It's not going to be thrown back in our face. It's cancelled.

It's paid for. It's dealt with. But not only is there forgiveness, he also purifies us. That means God will make us clean.

He will make us pure. What defiled us in the first place has been removed. It's washed away. It's wiped clean. It's all gone.

And it all leads to restored fellowship. Genuine repentance means restored fellowship.

Because I own my sin. Because I seek genuine heart change. Because I'm willing to deal with my sinful behaviour. Because I want to walk in the light and let God show me up for what I am and what I need to get right.

[23 : 50] I can now enjoy fellowship with God. We come to a Father who longs to forgive us. Who longs to purify us so that we can enjoy him.

So there must be repentance. And there must also be faith. Faith which is ongoing trust in Jesus Christ.

Look at chapter 2 verse 1. My dear children, this is the heartache of a writer who longs for his people to be in right relationship with God.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. I want you to experience a life that is not damaged or hindered by your sinful behaviour.

I want you to enjoy this deep, intimate relationship with God. I want you to experience it in its fullness. So he says I write this to you so that you will not sin.

[24 : 57] But if anybody does sin, because he knows we all do and we all mess up and fail. So he's saying to us, look, as you go along your life, your relationship with God, when you sin, here's what I want you to see.

This is where I want you to look. I want you to look at two things. First, Jesus is our defence. I write this to you so that you will not sin.

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. Have you got the picture that we have there?

It's an amazing picture. Because when we sin and our fellowship is damaged, Jesus immediately steps in to speak up on our behalf.

Jesus as our defender, and we've got to get this picture right again, he's not pleading with a reluctant father who is unwilling to forgive.

[26 : 07] He does not have to try and convince God or cajole God to be merciful or try and trick God to be nice towards us. No, Jesus simply reminds the father of what they have achieved together, that the sin has been paid for, that they are forgiven, that they are clean, that they belong to the father and the son and they share in fellowship and Jesus brings all of that before the father and says, we can forgive.

I am the one who stands in defence of you. Jesus guarantees and assures us of our acceptance so in faith, when we fall, we look to Jesus as our defender.

But not only that, we look to Jesus as our sacrifice. Verse 2, he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

God. You see, God doesn't just ignore our sin. He doesn't go, oh, we'll just forgive that and it doesn't matter anymore. He can forgive it because he has taken it seriously.

He has dealt with our sin through his son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, as we were singing about earlier, atonement took place.

[27 : 39] That's the word that we have here in verse 2, a sacrifice of atonement. And that simply means two things. First, Jesus takes our guilt on himself.

He becomes our sin for us. So all of my guilt, all of my shame, all of my sin is removed from me and placed upon Jesus.

That's the first step. And the second step is this, Jesus now absorbs God's wrath on himself for me. He bears the punishment for me.

So he removes my guilt and he removes or deflects the wrath of God from me onto his own son.

And that's what we mean when we say Jesus is our atoning sacrifice.

So each day, every time we fail and fall, we look in trust to Jesus Christ. We depend not on our own performance, but on the perfect performance of Jesus Christ, our defence and our sacrifice.

[28 : 49] And all of that leads to renewed fellowship. The results of genuine faith is renewed fellowship with God.

Because I look to Jesus, because I dare not trust in myself, because I turn to Christ when I see my sin. Fellowship with God is renewed.

Faith is the means by which I can enjoy God. I can enjoy his presence. I can enjoy fellowship without any fear of judgment or punishment whatsoever.

So where are you in your fellowship with God? Are you in the red hot zone? or are you in the cold blue zone?

Which direction are you travelling? Are you walking in darkness and avoiding sin? Or are you walking in the light and letting God deal with it as it should be?

[29 : 55] As we finish, let me just close with an illustration. fellowship with God is like horse riding.

Have any of you ever gone horse riding? I remember my very first experience. The horse went that way, turned a corner and I kept going. The question is, it's not if you fall off, but when you fall off.

And when we fall off the horse, we don't just stay down, we get up again and we get back on and we keep on going. Now when we fall and fail in our fellowship with God, when it's hindered and broken and we sense that lack of joy, we don't just stay down, we get back up again.

And here's how we get back up again. We do it by repenting of our sin. forgive me Father, for I have fallen again, but I do not want to fall again.

Forgive me, I do not want to fall again. We do it by repenting and we do it by faith in Jesus Christ. We look to him and say, I cannot do this alone.

[31 : 17] I dare not trust in my own self, but I trust in you, my defender, my sacrifice, to hold me and keep me. So let me say this to us all.

Get up, fallen Christian. Ride again and enjoy your fellowship with God.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, it is our desire always to be in that place where we enjoy fellowship with you, unhindered, undamaged, to delight in you, to have no fear.

And yet, Father, we confess there are things we do and say. There are actions that we get involved in that hinder and break and damage that relationship.

so, Father, we repent of them. We come to you afresh and we say, I've done it again, but help me not to do it again.

[32 : 57] Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our defender, speaking to the Father in our defence. Thank you that you are our perfect, sufficient, and complete sacrifice, taking the blame for all that we have done wrong, so that we can enjoy you and know you.

So, Father, wherever we are today, help us to get back up again. Help us to keep on going as we look only to you.

Bless us and fill us with your joy, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.