

# Fellowship

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Preacher: Alasdair I Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn back to our reading in the first letter of John and chapter 1, and I'll read again in verse 3. 1 John 1, 3.

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Now fellowship is one of the great words, one of the great themes of the New Testament, and indeed of the whole Bible.

It's a great Christian word. I remember some, well many years ago now, as a young minister in Array, Muravord, we were as a presbytery invited to visit Murray Firth Radio, which then was a new radio station, to see what they did and to meet the people and to talk about whether we might be involved in some way in having a Christian input into local radio.

And as an exercise, one or two of us were asked to prepare a 90-second talk, a sort of thought for the day. I didn't have to do it, but one or two others did it, and they tried it out, and the presenters and producers commented on what we'd done.

[ 1 : 44 ] And the only thing I remember vividly was how critical they were of one of our men using the word fellowship in his talk.

And they said, you can't use the word fellowship. Nobody uses that word anymore. It's an in-word among Christians. But you're going to be speaking, I thought for the day, in between two pop songs. And you can't use that kind of language. Many years later, I remember hearing some young people at no connection with the church using the word fellowship.

And I remembered that this is a word that nobody knows. So I said, where do you get that word from? Well, they'd just been to see a film.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy was starting to come out. And they'd been to see the fellowship of the ring. And they were excited about that kind of fellowship.

[ 2 : 57 ] Somebody put it talking about the film. Here are people who are racially mixed, culturally different, and variously gifted. But they're thrown together into, notice this word common, into a common life with a common mission, a common enemy, and a common destiny.

Fellowship is found to be greater than that of the individual parts. Frodo takes the ring to the terrible land of Mordor. And even when he and his friends are separated from one another by circumstances, there's evidence that they are still in allegiance to one another and to the task.

And he says the strength of their fellowship has a real effect on audiences who are drawn to the depth and strength of their relationship with each other.

Their commitment to each other. And people in a world of loneliness and disconnectedness wonder what it would be like to know that kind of fellowship.

So hear this great word from the Bible. Fellowship. It's a big idea. In fact, I venture to suggest you could actually write the whole of the Bible story in terms of fellowship.

[ 4 : 25 ] At the beginning, man and woman have fellowship with God. Unbroken. Then that fellowship is ruined by sin.

And then you have the whole story of the Bible as God brings people into fellowship with himself. You have the story of Jesus above all. When Jesus, who has perfect fellowship with his father, has that fellowship disrupted on the cross.

Where he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He doesn't know fellowship in the darkness. Because he's taking our hell of distance away from God.

So that we might have the fellowship of God because of what Jesus did. Then through the Holy Spirit, Christians are brought into fellowship with God.

And invite other people into fellowship with God in Christian mission. And at last, in heaven and the new heavens and the new earth. We once again have perfect fellowship with God.

[ 5 : 34 ] There's a sense in which fellowship is the theme of the whole Bible. And fellowship in the Bible means sharing. It means having things in common.

A common life. A sharing together in the same things. Remember these words. Sharing. And common. As we work through the text.

Well, I want to think about four things. As time allows. The fourth one I'll just mention very briefly. Because it's just hinted at in the text.

Four things. I want to think about divine fellowship. As we look up. Then I want to think about apostolic fellowship. As we look back.

Then I want to think about Christian fellowship. As we look around. Then finally, evangelistic fellowship. As we look out to the world.

[ 6 : 39 ] So first of all, divine fellowship. You notice what John says in verse 3. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father.

And with his Son, Jesus Christ. If fellowship means sharing. If fellowship in the fellowship of the ring meant sharing life with others.

Then this means sharing with God. That the Father and the Son share life with us. And we share life with God.

That's an amazing thought, isn't it? That the living God. The triune God of the whole universe. Should want to share his life with me and with you.

Think of it in this way. I'm not going to go into these things in any detail. But just leave these thoughts with you. The Father shares himself with us.

[ 7 : 53 ] And the Father shares the Son with us. And the Son shares himself with us. And the Son shares his Father with us.

And then of course, though it's not in this text, but in many other texts that John writes. The Father and the Son share the Spirit with us.

You see, there's this triune God. And that God, Father, Son, and Spirit always had perfect fellowship. And always will have perfect fellowship.

They share life. They share life. But that God wants to bring us into fellowship with himself. And so the Father and the Son and the Spirit share themselves with sinful men and women in grace.

So John says, our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ. Isn't it an amazing thing, for example, that the Father shares his love for the Son?

[ 9 : 06 ] Here is John, who in his gospel records Jesus in his high priestly prayer. Speaking of the love that you had for me.

Being the love that he has, the Father has, for his people. So the Father shares the love that he has for the Son with the people of the Son.

And they're all embraced by the Father in the love that he has for his Son. And the Father shares with us all that the Son has procured for us in his life and death and resurrection.

Everything that Jesus won. The Father says, I give that to you and that to you and that to you. I will hold nothing back. If Jesus paid the price by his own blood, then I share everything Jesus achieved with every one of his people.

Or think of it this way. The Father gives us all that the Son deserves to inherit forever. So we have heaven and the new heavens and the new earth.

[ 10 : 16 ] Because remember, we are joint heirs with Christ. So all that the Son deserves to inherit, the Father says, the people of the Son will inherit.

Because they're in the Son and I want to share his inheritance. And he wants to share his inheritance with everybody who will ever trust in him.

You could spend the rest of the day talking about the ways in which the Father shares. And the Son shares with us in grace. Another way to look at it is for yourselves to read through this book of 1 John.

And see all the places where there's reference to our union with God. That we as Christians are in God.

And God is in us. I'm going to read just a few of these verses so you'll get the flavour of this two-way fellowship. Communion.

[ 11 : 26 ] As we abide in God. Chapter 2, verse 5. Middle of verse 5. By this we may know that we are in him.

Whoever says he abides in him. Ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Or in verse 24, chapter 2, second half.

If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. Or 324.

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us.

413. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us. Because he's given us of his Spirit. From 15. Whoever confesses Jesus is the Son of God.

[ 12 : 23 ] God abides in him and he abides in God. So we have come to know and believe the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever abides in love abides in God.

And God abides in him. And it goes on all the way to the very end. 520. The Son of God has come. And we are in him who is true. In his Son, Jesus Christ.

So the whole letter throughout is saying, if you're a Christian, you are in God. And if you're a Christian, God is in you. You have this intimate fellowship with God where his life and your life are married together in an amazing way.

You have this connectedness with God. This relationship with God. This fellowship with God. That means that he shares his life with you.

And so we are called by John here to come to know this God in the gospel and then to live in such a way that we abide in this relationship so that we do not spoil it and cloud it.

[ 13 : 42 ] And when we do, we come back to God in repentance. You can see that in verses 7 and 8 here. If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood cleanses us from all sin.

Previous verse, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. He's saying to people, maintain this fellowship by God's grace. Walk closely with God.

And whenever you fail and the fellowship is clouded, come straight back to the blood. The blood that goes on cleansing you from all your sins.

So you come back into the communion that you knew and the loveliness of that relationship with almighty God. And one other thing before I leave this theme.

There's a relationship that we have in communion with God with each of the persons of the Trinity. And here we're told that our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.

[ 14 : 49 ] Now, I don't have time to go into that anymore, but just to make this point to illustrate it, the relationship is particular with each person.

We have a relationship with the Father and he acts towards us as a father to his children. We have a relationship with the Spirit and we also here have a relationship with the Son.

Now, in the context here, I just want you to think about one thing that makes that relationship with the Son unique. The previous two verses, we'll come back to this theme in a minute, but the first two verses of the book have stressed that Jesus the Son became flesh, incarnate, and lived in this world.

And of course, he is still in the body in heaven and he still remembers what it was like to live in this world. So, having fellowship with the Son, among many other things, in the context here, means this, that you have fellowship with a divine person who is in the body, has a human nature, and remembers what it's like to live in this world and struggle and be tired and be lonely and be afraid and knew all the relationships that we know and all the struggles we know without sin.

And you read the Gospels and you see how low Jesus came for us and how much Jesus experienced for us and how much Jesus suffered for us.

[ 16 : 31 ] And here's this real man tempted in all points as we are. And we have fellowship with the Son, the incarnate Son, who remembers the struggles of this life.

So, when you have fellowship with the Son, you have fellowship with this Jesus who understands human life from the inside, who understands what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty and bereaved and all the rest of it.

So, isn't that a very special kind of fellowship with the Son? Fellowship with the incarnate Son, who knows what it is to be a human being in this difficult world and who remembers all of these

experiences and all of that sympathy is poured into our relationship with him as Jesus listens to our prayers and meets us in our needs.

Okay, well, that's the first thing, this divine fellowship as we look up and amazingly, as we look within. We have fellowship with God who is in heaven, but who's in our hearts.

We have fellowship here with the Father and the Son. Secondly, I want to think about apostolic fellowship, just this one very briefly. Apostolic fellowship.

[ 18 : 00 ] Notice verse 3 says, that which we have seen and heard we proclaimed also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us.

Now, what I want to highlight here is that we have a very special relationship with people like John and the other apostles that he's speaking about and the other early preachers who had known Jesus and been with Jesus and who are passing on the truth and the truth that we have now enshrined in the New Testament scriptures.

You see, in the previous verses, as I said already, John has been talking about Jesus as divine and human.

You see, the language that he uses in verses 1 and 2, he talks about that which was from the beginning. That's the divine son, the word of life.

The divine word. Eternal life, the eternal son. So he uses these three terms that speak of the deity of Jesus who was with the father, he says.

[ 19 : 21 ] All expressions that tell us that Jesus, the son, already existed before he appeared on earth. The eternal son.

But John also says that this eternal son entered time and he says he was manifested, became flesh. So John says, you notice in verse 1, we heard him and we saw him and our hands have touched him.

He was the word made tangible. So he came into this real world in flesh and he could be seen and heard and touched.

And John is saying, I was there. I was there with Jesus, with the other disciples, with the other apostles. And we're telling you the truth.

We're telling you what we have experienced and what Jesus told us to pass on to others. And John is saying to his readers and to anybody else who reads this afterwards, you have a connection with us if you still believe the same things.

[ 20 : 40 ] You have a fellowship with the church of the past going all the way back to the apostles. If you believe what Jesus told the apostles and what Jesus gave them to preach and what Jesus inspired them to put in the New Testament, you have this theological fellowship, this connection all the way back nearly 2,000 years ago with the truth as they had it and preached it and wrote it in the scriptures.

Now, I know that for some of you that may not suddenly seem very significant or exciting but to me it is vital and exciting that every generation doesn't make up its own theology or its own good news but we have this unbroken line all the way back to the apostles.

It's the same truth. It's the same gospel. It's the same theology and if we depart from it we are out of apostolic succession.

We are out of apostolic fellowship. We're not in the same line at all if we change the truth that the apostles preached. And for me it's a very precious thing to think of the things that people like John preached and wrote in the scriptures for us and then all the generations after them believing the same thing, the same thing, the same thing.

And us nearly 2,000 years later here in point believing exactly what John believed because we're part of this apostolic succession of truth.

[ 22 : 35 ] we're part of the apostolic church and we hold dear the same truths that Jesus taught and that his apostles taught and that people have taught through the centuries when they held true to the word of God.

So we have apostolic fellowship. And then thirdly I want us to think about Christian fellowship and take a few minutes on on this one because the gospel not only offers us fellowship with God above and within and fellowship with those who have taught the truth through the ages as we share the same teaching, the same gospel, but it also offers us fellowship with people around us now, with our fellow Christians in the congregation and in the community.

So John here talks about fellowship with us. Then in verse 7 especially, he talks about we have fellowship with one another.

And he keeps talking about this through this book, especially in terms of the love that Christians should have for one another. John has a lot to say about assurance and one of his marks of a Christian is that they love their brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he says, for example, in chapter 3 in verse 14, we know we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

[ 24 : 17 ] By this we know love. And then in verse 18, this is crucial as well. This love that he's talking about, this love that shows our fellowship, is one that is in word, not just in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

So he's saying, you have fellowship with one another. That fellowship is based on the love you have for one another. And that love must be expressed in doing things, not just in wishing things, but not even just in saying things.

So that's part of it. But it must be expressed, he says, in deed and in truth. You do things to express your fellowship with one another in this shared life that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to take maybe five minutes to run through a list of things that New Testament talks about, where it speaks of fellowship in terms of the way that we express fellowship with one another.

Just run through them quickly. They're easy to get hold of, and I'll mention a few references for each one, but you don't need to remember these details.

[ 25 : 46 ] One way in which the New Testament says we express our fellowship in our common experience and life together is in loving and forgiving one another.

It's not always an easy thing to do, but Jesus said a lot about it. And I love the expression I heard from somebody once, talk about Christians as the fellowship of the forgiven.

And he was saying, if we're the fellowship of the forgiven, forgiven, then we should be a fellowship that forgives. If we have experienced forgiveness, then we should be ready to forgive others.

And Jesus spoke about this a lot. Remember the great story of the man who was forgiven a great deal. Then he wouldn't forgive another man something trifling.

He hadn't really understood the good news of forgiveness when he wouldn't forgive somebody else something very minor. And Jesus said in the Sermon on Mount, if you go to worship and your brother's got something against you, go before worship and deal with that and sort out the problem.

[ 27 : 00 ] Peter says to him, how often will I forgive my brother? Later in Matthew, Jesus says, when Peter says seven times, Jesus says 70 times seven. You see, the fellowship of the forgiven will be forgiving because they have tasted grace themselves and they will want to be gracious to others.

It's something you do in fellowship. You forgive. Another thing that you do in fellowship according to the New Testament is you pray with others.

Maybe with one person, maybe as a small group, maybe with a whole congregation, but you pray with others. When you read the book of Acts, you find this from the very beginning.

In chapter one, they all continue together in prayer. Then later on, you find them praying together and the place is shaken and they're filled with a spirit and they're filled with courage.

Or when Peter's in prison, what are they doing but praying in a house together? Or when Paul meets a group of elders from Ephesus and he says farewell to them, what do they do?

[ 28 : 12 ] The last thing they do, they kneel on the shore and they pray. The early Christians expressed their fellowship by praying together. That was something that they did.

Another way of expressing fellowship is in empathy and in sympathy with your fellow Christians. Paul talks about this a lot when he speaks about the body.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, he talks about the body and its parts having concern for one another. And he says, if one part of your body suffers, I mean, the rest of your body feels it, doesn't it?

You can't have pain in your hand and say, well, that's just my hand, the rest of my body isn't affected. If you have pain in your hand, you feel the pain, you feel the pain.

It affects the rest of your body. And he's saying, so with the church, if it's a body, if one part feels pain, then the rest of the body should empathize and sympathize with the pain that's being felt.

[ 29 : 24 ] And so he says in another place, if you have a concern for your brother or sister, you should bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ.

You sympathize with a load somebody else is carrying and you say to them, can I help you in some way to carry that load? What can I do to bear your burden with you and so fulfill the law of Christ? So Christians in fellowship will be sympathetic, compassionate, looking out for the other and ready to bear the load with another.

Or another thing we do together in fellowship is to minister to minister to one another. From God's word and from our own experience of God, we share with one another.

We learn from one another. We teach one another. We grow together in fellowships in homes, in Bible study groups, in children's church, in engage, in youth fellowships, in all kinds of other fellowships in the church.

[ 30 : 35 ] We learn from one another. The Bible keeps saying this, 1 Thessalonians, encourage one another and build each other up. Or Hebrews 10, the passage that says don't forsake assembling yourselves together.

It says spur one another on towards love and good deeds. So the early Christians had fellowship that meant that they taught one another, shared with one another, encouraged one another, and spurred one another on.

They did these things in fellowship. Another thing would be hospitality. Doing something to express fellowship.

It's actually a command in the New Testament. Romans 12, practice hospitality. 1 Peter 4, offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Hebrews 13, offering hospitality to strangers and thereby entertaining angels unawares. And so on. And many other things as well.

[ 31 : 49 ] Serving together is another one. Doing things together. Paul in Philippians 1 talks about your partnership in the gospel.

And later on in that chapter he talks about Christians striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. And it's a picture of teamwork.

The way that any team, he might be using a military image or we might think of it in terms of a sporting image, but a team needs to strive side by side as he's saying.

As we might say in football, you need to keep your shape and you support one another. And he's saying you need to keep your shape.

You need to be a team and move forward together as a team and defend together as a team and know each other, each other's weaknesses and strengths as a team.

[ 32 : 49 ] And he uses that picture for Christian service. People expressing their fellowship in working together and of course developing their fellowship in working together as a team.

I'm sure many of you have found that, that doing things together in the church could be anything, but people in back talk about it in terms of when they were building their hall and the fellowship some of these guys had in building the hall.

And more than one person has said to me that he took an interest in the gospel because he came into that and saw Christians working together. He was using his gifts and he got more interested in the gospel because he was working with Christians and seeing them and it brought him into the orbit of the fellowship.

He's now a member of the church. So doing things together expresses fellowship but it also deepens our fellowship as we serve the Lord together.

You see, Christianity is not a solitary religion. It's personal but I don't think it's private in a sense.

[ 34 : 03 ] It's personal. You have to come to know Jesus for yourself. But you can't be a private Christian who never says I'm a Christian, who never goes to church, who never fellowships with other Christians, who keeps them at arm's length and says I'll be a Christian on my own.

I'll be a maverick on my own. It doesn't work. You need the fellowship. You need the means of grace. You need to be supported and to support others.

It's personal but it's not private in that absolute sense. Christian fellowship. We look around us and we fellowship. And then finally, evangelistic fellowship.

I don't have time to look at this one. But just to make the simple point that for John and for the whole of the New Testament, our fellowship should think of those outside the fellowship.

Our fellowship, the more we enjoy it, should also drive us to think of those who don't know the same Lord and don't enjoy the same fellowship so that we might come to see them join us.

[ 35 : 19 ] John, at the beginning of chapter 2, emphasizes how great his vision is and how much of a vision he wants these people to have from their fellowship because he says Jesus is not just a savior for our sins but he says for the sins of the whole world.

John thinks of a needy world. And this is the same John who said in his gospel that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So John is John the evangelist. John who wrote a gospel so that people might know about Jesus. His passion was to proclaim the word.

He keeps using that word in chapter 1. He's proclaimed the word to them. And of course now he wants them to think of the needy world around them and bring the gospel to others.

And there's nothing more powerful for the gospel than a living, loving Christian fellowship that proves that God is in the midst because they live together and they love one another.

[ 36 : 40 ] And they also are a welcoming fellowship who want to bring others into the orbit of their love. But above all into the orbit of the love of Christ as we point others to come to know him.

So we mustn't be selfish with our fellowship. We mustn't be selfish with our gospel. We must think of a needy world around and want to be an evangelistic fellowship so that others are drawn in to know Jesus for themselves.

But it all begins with that divine fellowship, doesn't it? Everything else is founded on that. We have fellowship with these apostles who knew that fellowship in their own day.

We believe the same things as them. We have fellowship with Christians around us because they believe the same things and we're part of the same family with the same father in heaven.

And we're in evangelistic fellowship longing that others would come to know the fellowship we know with God through Christ. It all depends on that primary priority fellowship with God.

[ 37 : 59 ] And that's the gospel that you're invited to today. to come to know Jesus for yourself as your savior. To come into the fellowship of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And to know the fellowship that he alone can give. And a fellowship that will never end. As you enjoy fellowship with those who believe the same gospel.

Those who share the same church. And those who want to reach out into the same world. If we have fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

Then we have a fellowship. A shared life. That will never ever end. Amen. May God.