

The Meaning of Fellowship

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[0 : 00] 1 John chapter 1 and verse 3.

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In a way in which he hadn't communicated to the rest. And so, because they thought they were so special, and they did, because they believed that they had a hotline to God that other Christians didn't have and that they had this secret knowledge that they weren't allowed to tell anybody else.

[2 : 05] They believed that they wanted to separate themselves from the rest of the congregation because they were of a different category, a different class to everyone else.

And so John has to write this letter, amongst other things, to try and encourage those who were left behind, those who didn't belong to this secret group that claimed to know things that other people didn't know.

And his message to all the rest was this, don't believe a word of it. Listen to what I've got to say.

And he knew that as he wrote his letter to them, there would be those in the congregation who were saying, well, why should we listen to you? Why should we listen to you and not them?

What makes you think that you have the truth? And John says, I'll tell you. Because remember, I was there when Jesus walked the face of the earth.

[3 : 29] I was with him. I saw him. I touched him. I witnessed everything that he did. I saw him walking on the water. I saw him healing the sick.

I saw him raising the dead. I saw him changing water into wine. I saw him feeding the 5,000. I was there. And that's why he opens this chapter, this very beginning of the chapter, by saying this, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard and which we have seen with our eyes and we have looked on and touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

And that which we have seen, verse 3, we have proclaimed to you. In other words, what I am telling you is what I have heard from Jesus himself.

I know because I was there. And that's why you should believe me. And anybody who tells you that they have some secret access to God better be ready to prove it.

And they can't prove it because they're deceiving themselves and they're disrupting the fellowship of God's people and they're destroying the work of the gospel amongst you.

[4 : 44] And that alone should prove that they are not of God. So that's the reason why John is writing this. Because there was a group that was claiming to be closer to God than they were.

John's message is this, that we are all in this together by faith in Jesus Christ. And if you have Christ, you have everything. If you're following Jesus, you don't lack anything.

And just because people act a little bit different from you, it just simply means that their pride has so corrupted them that they are actually not doing any good to the fellowship of God's people.

They're doing you harm. Now, what I want us to look at this evening is not so much the reasons why John was writing this, but I want us to focus on the second part of verse 3.

And particularly this word fellowship. It's a word we use a lot, isn't it? We use it as a word that describes the bond that exists between Christians.

[5 : 56] But sometimes I wonder if we really know what it means. And it's only when you stop at a word like this and spend some time focusing on it that we can truly appreciate, I think, what it really means and its significance.

And then by appreciating it, we can treasure that word and we can develop the fellowship that exists within the people of God.

So I want this evening just to, for a few moments, to focus our attention on the question, what is fellowship? Fellowship. It appears, the word appears several times in the New Testament.

But even if the word doesn't appear, the idea appears loads of times in the New Testament. It means, in the Greek language, the word, the original Greek word is koinonia.

And it means to have a share in something. If you have a share in a property, if you're the joint owner of a property, you can say that you have fellowship in that property.

[7 : 00] If anything is shared out in equal terms, in equal divisions, then that was what the word koinonia meant in the Greek society.

And that gives us an idea of what it means in the church. It means to have a share in the gospel. It means that the gospel is something that all of God's people take an equal part in.

No, and some are not more equal than others. Every one of us has an inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ and we all share in that inheritance.

All the more reason why this group that had broken off from the church claiming that they were better than anyone else, they were wrong. Because the gospel is for everyone who believes and who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are no categories. I know that there are some people who live nearer to the Lord than others. I'm sure that by their obedience and by their commitment to the Lord.

[8 : 04] And that's something we all need to address in our lives. If you're drifting away from the Lord, then you need to stop. And you need to ask that the Lord will draw you back into fellowship with himself.

And yet, if you're a Christian, you have an equal share in the gospel and in all that the gospel gives. God's inheritance is for his people and every one of us has a share in it.

So right from the very beginning, this word fellowship was used to describe what was going on in the church. You remember in Acts chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit was poured out and the result was the birth of the New Testament church.

And here's what we read. They devoted themselves, the people who trusted in Jesus. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship.

The sharing in the gospel. That's what their church services were all about. It was a sharing in the word of God in which they all took part and to the breaking of bread and prayers.

[9 : 12] But it also means a sharing in the presence of God. It means a particular bond that God has created by way of the death of his son.

1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 9 Paul says this, God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord.

In other words, when a person comes to be born again and when that person comes to faith in Jesus, a particular bond is created between you and God himself and that bond is called fellowship. 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 14. This is something that we hear often at the end of a service, a benediction, in which the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The question of course is, what is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? When I say that at the end of a service, when I give out the benediction and say, what is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit?

[10 : 31] What does that mean? Does it mean the fellowship that we have with God through the Holy Spirit or the fellowship that the Holy Spirit creates amongst God's people?

It's an interesting question, isn't it? You can discuss that amongst yourselves as to what that means. Both, I think, are correct because God has created a bond, a union between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ, a union that is quite unique in which our sin is taken away and washed and purged and in which we are drawn into the family of God and in which the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit starts that work of sanctification which he continues day by day working away, transforming us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it's in this chapter that we find that the word is used extensively. Three times it's used in this chapter and he seems to love this word, this, the, you'll know, of course, that the letters of John are often called, John is often called the apostle, the disciple of love and that's because love is all the way that these letters are awash with the idea and the word love.

John seems to have been so, so engrossed with, with the Savior and all that Jesus had done for him that he just could not but talk about the love that Jesus had for him and the love that he must have for his brothers.

But in verse 3 he talks about fellowship in two senses. He talks about it first of all in the sense of having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

[12 : 37] You'll find that at the end of the verse. The fellowship that is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. that's the first bond that is created when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ and it's a bond that only exists in a Christian, a person who has come to see that he is a sinner and that he needs the only way in which he can be reconciled to God is by faith in Jesus and when that person comes to take hold by faith of Jesus Christ then that bond is created by God.

Paul describes it in this way he says therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now of course that creates a separation between those who are the Lord's people and those who aren't and as always as always never let there be a day a Lord's day that we don't ask you do you have that fellowship with God?

are you right with God? Is your sin forgiven? Or are you still separated from God and estranged from him?

Is this yet another week that you've come to church and you haven't become right with God? That's what needs to happen.

That is your first priority and only God can reconcile you to himself and create that bond and he will do it and he will give ask and you will receive knock and the door shall be opened to you seek and you will find he will he never casts out anyone who truly believes and who trusts in him and it's a bond in which our sin is forgiven but there's more than that when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ the Bible tells us that we are justified do you know what that word means?

[14 : 53] It's the most marvelous truth that I can think of this evening because it describes what God has done for me in the first instance by faith in Jesus he has justified me it means that first of all that all my sin has been washed and it has been forgiven that's the first thing but that's only the beginning don't ever believe anyone tells you that all that a Christian has is forgiveness of sin he's got much more than that because what God has done he has taken my sin and he has made Jesus guilty of my sin on the cross so that my sin is removed because Jesus became guilty on the cross for my sin therefore my sin has been removed and I'm washed and cleansed and free and so are you if you're a Christian tonight but God has done something else he's taken Jesus righteousness his perfect obedience

Jesus perfect goodness and he has made it ours he's transferred it to us and so that when he looks at us this evening if you're in Christ if you're a follower of Jesus God sees the righteousness of Jesus in you now you might say well that's certainly not the way it feels that's certainly not the way it feels because if you knew anything of what was going on in my heart and the corruption of my heart and the disobedience of my heart and the temptation that I so easily give into and the way in which I wander in my thoughts and the way in which I say wrong things daily and which even when I try to obey the Lord out of love for him I fail and now you're telling me that when God sees me he sees the goodness and the righteousness of Jesus yes he does yes he does and not only so he as the judge of all the earth before who we are accountable he has made a declaration he's come to a verdict about us and he has said despite all your sinfulness you are righteous with the righteousness of Jesus

Christ that's a fact whether you feel that way or not it's a fact the fact that you don't feel that way and the fact that you're aware of the shortcomings and the awfulness and the horror of the sin in your own life that's good it's good to be aware of it because you know what then we run to Jesus and we confess our sin to Jesus and we ask him to forgive us and to cleanse us and to wash us and to continue to wash us on a day-by-day basis that's exactly what John is saying in this chapter he's saying these things I write to you so that you do not sin that's what we want we want a sinless life don't we we yearn for it we struggle with it you know why because when we sin it doesn't bring us joy it doesn't bring us satisfaction and it only brings us guilt and shame and all the more so when we remember what Jesus did for us on the cross and the love that he has for us day-by-day so what do we do about it that's the question what do you do about it you run to

Jesus and you confess your sin to Jesus and you ask him to pardon you one more time and to give you a fresh determination to live for him and to live close to him and to obey him from your heart and you ask him that his Holy Spirit will produce within you day by day the character of the Lord Jesus Christ now when I say you come to Jesus when I say you confess on what basis do you come to Jesus on the basis that you are justified that he has done this work in you and he looks on you tonight and he looks on you with the righteousness of Jesus Christ that's why I say it's the most

I wouldn't be here tonight I wouldn't have the confidence to stand here tonight if it wasn't for that tremendous transaction in which my sin becomes Jesus on the cross and which his righteousness becomes mine that's what it says in 2nd

Corinthians chapter 5 verse 28 says for God made him who knew no sin that's Jesus to be sin for us so that we listen to this we might be made the righteousness of God in him that's what God produces in every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ now we have to lay hold upon this this is not just for a theological college it's not just for theologians this is a truth to be lived out this is the truth that gives us confidence to go back to God and to pray to him and to ask him to forgive us and to lead us and to guide us and to make us obedient to his will this is a truth that is for everyone for everyone because it gives us the confidence to come to the Lord and then the second thing that [20 : 43] God does to a person is that he brings that person into his family not as a servant not as a guest you know you can have guests staying at your house can't you maybe for a day or for a two days or for a week or for a fortnight either relatives or friends or whatever but they're only temporary residents aren't they but when God brings someone into his house he makes that person his son or his daughter he adopts that person into his family God doesn't do anything by half measures when God does a work he does it completely and he does it to the full and that's why John thrilled he can't you can hardly believe the relationship he has with God he says see what kind of love the father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are so that's the second thing that God does for a person in which he creates that bond of fellowship but the third thing is equally marvelous the third thing is this

God himself comes down into that person and he dwells he lives in that person if you're a Christian you're a person in whom God lives in the person of the Holy Spirit are you aware of that every day do you wake up in the morning and you remember that God lives in me and that's going to affect all my choices and my decisions everything that I do is going to be affected by the fact by the reality that God lives in me that's what fellowship with God means so that you too may have fellowship our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ let's practice that fellowship let's practice as someone else said practice the presence of God day by day no matter what believing that God is our constant companion our shepherd our guide our Father in Heaven who will never leave his children he will never abandon his children he will never forsake them that is a truth that we can rely on from day to day the second way in which

John talks about this word fellowship is at the beginning of the verse so that you too this is what we have proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us because the same God who created that bond of fellowship between us and him is also the God who creates a bond of fellowship between God's people God that stands to reason doesn't it that if I have been adopted into his family and if you have been adopted into his family we've become brothers we've become sisters in the Lord we're in the same family by virtue of our adoption and by virtue of our having been united to the same Jesus and him having given his life for us on the cross it stands to reason doesn't it we have a particular bond that has been created and so that's why when the church came into being the new testament church came into being in

Acts chapter 2 then they all wanted to be with each other they didn't want to scatter all to be himself to be on his own they wanted to be because that's where the real action was that's where the life was that's where the vibrancy was that's where god's spirit was operating and there you had that bond in which they took part in which they shared in the life of the church by with one another you see church in the new testament operates on two levels and indeed it does so in every age it operates in the level first of what we're doing this evening coming together to worship this is what we call public worship and it dates back all the way back to that very first Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead and the disciples gather together what we're doing this evening it's not our invention it's not something that we've made up as a denomination we trace our history all the way back we're simply doing well we have a building to make us more comfortable and we have perhaps orders and a routine that perhaps has evolved over the years but nevertheless what we're doing is essentially what we believe the disciples did on that very first day of the week and what we believe the disciples did on the day of

Pentecost we pray oh don't we don't you pray with me that we'll see a time of when the Holy Spirit will move in great power we believe that the Holy Spirit is moving in great power but we ask that God will move in extraordinary power amongst us but you know if you ask that you better be very careful what you're move in extraordinary ways amongst us then every one of us should be willing

to say to the Lord well Lord whatever you want to do amongst us whatever you do then do it do it amongst us taking a big risk when you ask for that might be a radical change to our lifestyle and our routine anyway these are all speculations don't we want though the Lord to do great things amongst us do we want the Lord to touch people's hearts people who have no thought of the gospel this evening we want him to open their hearts and to bring them to himself well let's keep praying for that well that's the first thing that's what we're doing this evening what the church is doing we're worshipping we're hearing

[26 : 58] God's word that's our natural it's like an appetite that they were so aware of their need to hear Jesus word his message well that's why we're here this evening but the church continues beyond tonight doesn't it it continues beyond the Sunday continues into the week we operate on another level on the level the fellowship should not come to an end with a benediction fellowship continues because that relationship that God has created between one another it continues into day-to-day life and it ought to take meaningful place in our relationships with one another it means several things it means when one person rejoices then the rest rejoice we're told that

Romans chapter 12 and verse 15 rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep there are times in our lives when we rejoice well we do so and we share in the joy that other people have other Christians have but equally when someone suffers then we all suffer or we ought to suffer and it should be more than just well I'm sorry to hear that we should really feel or try to feel as much as we possibly can the pain and the anguish and the difficulty that someone else expresses to us and we should have a deep and genuine concern and commitment towards the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ that's what fellowship is about it's not just having a piece of pizza next door important that that is by the way it is really important to have conversation with but extends beyond that it goes much further than that it means that we pray together the new testament is littered with examples of of

God's people coming to pray together when the disciples were in trouble in Acts chapter 4 what did they do almost by instinct they came together when Peter was put in prison in Acts chapter 12 what did they do they came together they had to come together and they wanted to be together because they knew that only God could rescue them from the danger that they were in sometimes sometimes they would they would they would be like if we were in danger if there was a threat I reckon there would be a huge difference but why should there be a difference why why should it be a chore and what I'm saying to you I would say to anyone the problem is national and it's not just a free church problem it's a problem that goes beyond our borders it seems that in our modern sophisticated world that God's people have given up on the need to pray together I don't understand why and it doesn't seem to matter what style of prayer meeting it is the same problem exists in churches that have a different style of prayer meeting every church says the same thing I don't understand it it's a real problem and it's a symptomatic of the condition of the church in the west believe me it's not the case in the church in the south do you know where God is working in great numbers today he's working in the south what they call the global south the majority south places like south america places like africa places like india places like china and they're God's people there is a life that we seem to have lost but I don't think we should give up I think we should say no I'm not going to let this happen I'm not going to give up on what should be natural to me my bond with my fellow christians my longing to be with them and to care for them and to help them and to have them help me it means also encouragement you remember that shining example in acts chapter four and all the way through acts this man called barnabas his name wasn't actually barnabas his name was his name was joseph but they called him barnabas as a kind of nickname and the name barnabas means son of encouragement and it and it it typified who he was the kind of character that he had every church needs a barnabas in fact we all need to be barnabas and you know what barnabas used to do he used to look out for for christians for him his relationship his fellowship with his fellow christians wasn't hi how are you tonight i'm fine how are you off we go that wasn't he wasn't good enough for him barnabas had to go deeper and when you have a deeper relationship you're more exposed it means that you we have to give up our individualism in today's world we're all so proud of our own privacy aren't we of course everyone has a right in a certain measure to our own privacy of course there are certain areas of our life that some people don't have any of course i'm not saying that but as far as i can see it's all private isn't it and it's quite convenient when it's private because nobody gets a look in nobody sees the dirty linen and it means that we don't have to expose ourselves or our weaknesses or our failures to other people

that's not the way it was meant to be at all in god's church and the problem is if we're all so private that we refuse to be open with one another then it's only going to get worse and worse and worse and harder and harder and harder and the relationship that god has created amongst god's people is lost you know it's a tragedy when non-christians sometimes have a closer relationship to each other in the pubs than god's people have i've seen i've seen that not that i go to pubs but i've seen sometimes the way that non-christian ask non-christians relate to one another i'm thinking why can't we be like that because we're proud perhaps because we're too afraid of sharing our difficulties with other people in case they go and gossip them to someone else you've got to trust we've got to trust each other don't we and we've got to be trustworthy that's what fellowship means it means restoring one another galatians chapter six and verse one brothers paul says if someone is caught in a transgression you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted

what that means is an extension of what i said about barnabas barnabas looked out for the needs of people he looked out for where people were were failing in their christian lives and he wouldn't go to them well i think you shouldn't be like that you shouldn't do that but he would go and say well is there anything i could do to help you let me get alongside you let's let's talk about this and in a loving and in a subtle way barnabas would get alongside that person in order to restore him to where he should be where are the barnabases in today's church i hope there are many i'm quite sure that there are many of you who who work in exactly the same fashion in trying to get alongside people well that's the way it should be and that's what fellowship is all about we help one another also first john chapter three verse 16 and 17 it comes down to even this it says by this we know love that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers but listen to this if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him how does god's love abide in him it's as practical as that if you see your brother or your sister in need and you have what they need and you just walk away then how says john can the love of god be in that person by this said jesus shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another love that's not just in word but in deed and in truth let's bow our heads in prayer our father in heaven give us that love our father we all come short we all confess our failure to live to what your word demands of us as a church and as people our father we pray that having recognized and having been convicted by your word we pray that we that you will search us and know us and that you will restore that spirit of fellowship where it has been lost our father in heaven we pray that you will that you will give us that openness and that honesty with one another and that you will give us to respond in love and in with helpful care and prayerful interest our father we believe that you will bless such love and we pray that you will that you will show us how to have a growing appreciation for one another and one and a bond which the world can see is quite unique and one which can only be attributed to the love that God had for us in sending his son into the world in

[37 : 41] Jesus name amen we're going to sing in closing in Psalm number 133 and that's on page 175 it's in sing Psalms and the tune is land of rest Psalm 133 how excellent a thing it is how pleasant and how good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should it is like the precious oil that poured out on Aaron's head that running over down his beard upon his collar spread Psalm 133 sing Psalms versions page 175 five we're going to stand to sing how excellent a thing it is how pleasant and how good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should for it is like the precious oil poured out on

Aaron's head that running over down his beard upon his collar spread like care monster upon the hill of Zion it descends the Lord bestows his blessing there a life that never ends father we pray that you'll bless the provision that you've made for us next door bless our fellowship together our conversation and our relationships with one another may they may they reflect what you have done in us and for us and may they may they

Holy Spirit bring us closer and closer give us Lord to forgive one another and give us Lord to help one another and encourage one another because we live in such a time when it's so difficult to be a Christian we pray that your grace and your mercy and your peace will be ours in Jesus name amen
you