

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

1 John 1:1-10

Key verse: 1:3

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Apostle John wrote John’s gospel and 1 John. While the aim of John’s gospel was evangelistic to lead us to put our faith in Jesus, the aim of 1 John is pastoral, to give believers the assurance of eternal life (1Jn 5:13). Bible scholar Alfred Plummer (1841–1926) wrote: “[John’s gospel] shows the words and works of Jesus in order to prove that he is the Son of God, while [1 John] shows the words and works that the believers must do.” We are living in a world that is full of lies, confusion and uncertainty. As we study 1 John, we want to live victorious lives in Jesus by knowing and living out the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today’s passage, chapter 1, emphasizes the importance of having genuine fellowship with the Father and the Son. This fellowship is different from mere human fellowship because it is with the Father and with the Son. It brings true joy, freedom and peace. We long for this fellowship. We’ll think about this fellowship through two questions: (1) What is Christian fellowship like? and (2) How do we maintain Christian fellowship?

First: What is Christian fellowship like? (1-4) Look at verses 1-2, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” This letter begins saying, “That which was from the beginning....” He talks about the beginning, just like John’s gospel 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” So, “that which was from the beginning” refers to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Alpha, the Beginning, the First Cause. He is not a created being, but the Creator of the universe and all life. Later in verse 1 he is called “the Word of life,” and in verse 2, “the eternal life.” This life is not temporal or fading, like that of human beings, but indestructible, eternal life. “The life appeared” refers to God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. We call this “The Incarnation.”

John proclaimed Jesus’ incarnation, saying, “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it,

and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us" (1b-2). The verbs "have heard," "have seen," "have looked at," and "have touched" have deep meaning. The verb tense indicates something that started in the past at a certain point and has continued on to the present. John's experiences were not just one time, but continuous through living with Jesus. John's experiences were not just a distant memory; they were life-changing and stayed with him. So he could not but testify to and proclaim to others his experience with Jesus, who came from the Father.

John heard words of life from the Word of life directly. For example, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Not only that, John had seen Jesus' amazing miracles, such as giving a man born blind the ability to see. John not only looked at Jesus up close, but he even touched him. He reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper. Apostle Thomas even touched the nail-scarred hands and pierced side of Risen Jesus. All the apostles were ready to die to tell others about what they had seen and heard, for they saw God in Jesus' life, Jesus' words, Jesus' miracles, Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection.

Then what was John's purpose in testifying about Jesus' incarnation? Verse 3 says, "We proclaim to you what we have 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." Here we need to think about the meaning of "fellowship." Here the word "fellowship" has the meaning of intimate sharing or participation. We human beings are social creatures. So we create many kinds of fellowship through gatherings, clubs, leagues, blogs, Youtube channels, gaming, apps, etc. We form fellowships due to a common interest or for mutual benefit. These kinds of fellowships are temporary and shallow, and some can even be harmful. But Christian fellowship is different. It is everlasting, blessed, deep and mutually edifying. In it we can find true satisfaction and joy in our souls. This is because it is fellowship with God the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

This fellowship comes from the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, three persons who have perfect fellowship in perfect harmony and order. This fellowship is mutual, intimate, and personal, as well as dynamic, constant, and loving. This fellowship is based on humility and self-giving. In this fellowship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit respect, love and depend on one another. In brief, this fellowship is possible through self-denial, giving, humility, obedience, respect and love in God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

God intended to have this fellowship with us when he created us. So he made us in his image. But we broke this fellowship through sin, rebellion and disobedience to God. Still, God did not abandon us completely. God made a way time and again to bring us back into fellowship with him. He called Abraham to bless him and make him a blessing. And Abraham was called "God's friend." God chose Israel as his own people and made a

covenant with them. God brought them out of slavery in Egypt by his mighty power. God provided a means for forgiveness to have fellowship with his people through the tabernacle and the temple sacrifices. But his people rejected his love and broke fellowship with God again and again. Even so, God did not abandon them for another people.

God's fellowship with us reached its climax in Jesus, who came into our world as "Immanuel," God with us. Jesus gave up the glory and majesty of heaven and was born in human likeness to bring us back into fellowship with God. While on earth as a man, Jesus served all kinds of sinners. For example, Jesus had fellowship with a scratchy, thirsty Samaritan woman. Through this fellowship, Jesus gave her living water welling up to eternal life. Jesus had close fellowship with 12 uneducated, working class men. Jesus taught them, bore with them, and even washed their dirty feet. Through this fellowship with Jesus, they were transformed into men of God who changed the world by the message and love of Christ. Now, Jesus continues to be with his people through the Holy Spirit, as we love and serve him in fellowship with one another.

In the summer of 1806 five college students met together to pray for the world to know Jesus in what became known as "The Haystack Prayer Meeting." God inspired them to begin a mission agency. Within 20 years, they sent lifetime missionaries to China, Africa, India, Turkey, Palestine, and Hawaii. Within 50 years, they sent over 1,250 missionaries. When God is with us, great things happen, far beyond what we ask or imagine. Our fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is life-changing and world-impacting. God's heart's desire is to have fellowship with us. This fellowship with God brings hope, healing and salvation to the world, even in times of crisis, like we're having now.

Verse 4 tells us another reason that John wrote this letter: "We write this to make our joy complete." Fellowship with God and with other believers in Jesus gives complete joy in our souls, for it is the joy of God.

Second: How do we maintain Christian fellowship? (5-10) Thus far John described the nature of Christian fellowship, what it is like. Now he tells us how we can participate in and maintain it. To have fellowship with God we should know who God is. Verse 5 says, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." John heard from Jesus and declared to others that "God is light, in him there is no darkness at all." What does this mean? God is light means that God is perfect, holy and pure. There is no sin or evil or imperfection in God. God is good. Only God is all good. There is no fault in God. There is nothing wrong with God. God is quite "other" than human beings, who are all weak and sinful. Whenever we have a problem, we tend to blame God or someone else and become bitter. But when we truly

know God, we can fully trust God, knowing that he is good, even when there is nothing good in us.

As we know, darkness and light cannot get close together. Light drives away darkness. Then how can sinners like us have fellowship with God, who is holy and perfect?

Just as knowing God is important, knowing ourselves is also important. In verses 6-10, we find the word “if” repeated five times, once at the beginning of each verse. Verses 6, 8 and 10 are lies and deceptions about ourselves that hinder us from having fellowship with God. Verses 7 and 9 tell us how to maintain fellowship with God.

First of all, we need to consider what hinders fellowship with God. Verses 6, 8 and 10 all contain claims about ourselves which are not true. Verse 6 says, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.” What does it mean to “walk in the darkness”? It means to live in sin. Words are not enough to make us right with God. Believing the right things about God is important. But this is not enough in order to have fellowship with God. People can claim to have fellowship with God with their mouths, while their actions do not reflect God’s character of light, holiness, truth and love.

Verse 8 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” We cannot claim to be without sin. We cannot say, “I’m forgiven, so it doesn’t matter how I live.” There are many exhortations in the New Testament telling Christians not to live according to sinful desires. Apostle Paul said, “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2Ti 2:22). We need to live daily in the awareness that we are sinners who need God’s help not to fall into temptation and the power of evil.

Verse 8 denies our sinful nature. Verse 10 denies our sinful actions: “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.” This claim is not only self-deception, but it also makes God out to be a liar. Truth is: there is no lie or deception in God at all. God is faithful, righteous and truthful. We must not blame God or other people for our problems and unhappiness. The fault is in ourselves. The Bible says, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Ro 3:10). To have fellowship with God, we should humbly acknowledge that we are sinners before God. In one of his parables, Jesus teaches us who can be justified by God. It was a tax collector, who beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Lk 18:13). This shows us how to have and maintain fellowship with God.

Secondly, we need to walk in the light to have fellowship with God. While verses 6, 8 and 10 speak of the hindrances to fellowship with God, verses 7 and 9 tell us the

means and blessings of having fellowship with God. Verse 7 says, "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." What does "walk in the light" mean? It means to acknowledge that God is light, accept his light and follow him. When our hidden sins are exposed before God, his light can fill our souls. Sin is the biggest hindrance in having Christian fellowship. Sin breaks our fellowship with God and with others. How can this fellowship be restored? Only Jesus can restore this fellowship. As we come to God with a repentant heart, the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. His blood has power to cleanse all our sins. There is no sin that cannot be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Then our fellowship with God and with other believers is restored.

Verse 9 explains more the meaning of walking in the light: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." To confess our sins implies a detailed specific confession of our wrong thoughts, words, actions and attitudes. It includes the good which we do not do, as well as the evil that we do. In the world, when people confess their sins, they are criticized, condemned and judged. No one confesses their sins in a job interview. We are afraid to confess our sins. But God does not condemn and judge those who confess their sins. Rather, if we confess our sins, God is so faithful and merciful and forgives all our sins. Moreover, God purifies us from all unrighteousness. Then we can grow to be more like Jesus. And our fellowship with God and with others can be deeper, more meaningful and fruitful.

In his book, "Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness", author and professional Christian counselor David Powlison, calls God's forgiveness of our sins "spectacularly unfair." He writes: "Forgiveness means you don't get what you deserve. Think about that. Because God is "unfair," we have hope. Instead of fairness, you get someone who is deadly serious about wrong but acts on your behalf in ways that are inconceivably unfair" (p.81). He quotes Psalm 103:10, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."

It is good and necessary to confess our sins to God. But in some sense, that is much easier than confessing our sins to people, especially to those we have sinned against. James 5:16a says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Healthy, thriving human fellowship involves confession and forgiveness.

In another book, "Anger: Taming A Powerful Emotion", pastor-author-counselor Dr. Gary Chapman writes (p.126): "When we sin against others, it is our responsibility to confess and repent of our own sins. We should take the initiative as soon as we realize that we have done or said something unfairly to another...whether I have sinned...or someone has sinned against me, it is my responsibility...to seek reconciliation...and restore the fellowship with the other person."

He also writes: “The moment we confess our sins to God, we experience the warm embrace of our heavenly Father. The barrier is removed, and we can now continue our fellowship with him” (Happily Ever After: Six Secrets to a Successful Marriage, p.261).

Praise and thank God for his forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ, so we can have fellowship with God and with other Christians in Jesus’ name!

This world is corrupt and sinsick. Relationships are easily broken. The problem is that many people deny that sin is the problem. They want to blame someone or something or the system. They deny that sin is a problem at all. This attitude prevents people from believing the gospel and having fellowship with God. Due to the spread of Covid-19, the necessity of social distancing has been emphasized. People are afraid of gathering and have most of their social interactions online. It is hard to have genuine fellowship, even among believers. Yet we cannot blame the situation; the main problem is sin. The only way of having genuine Christian fellowship is to restore our fellowship with God, confessing our sins sincerely and walking in the light. As we do, our Christian fellowship can be a great influence to those around us.

So how is your fellowship with God and with other Christians? Do you feel disconnected from God or from other Christians? Here’s another question: Is your life characterized more by anger or by joy? There are so many angry people. But anger almost always comes from pride and self-righteousness, disrupts our fellowship with God, and breaks our relationships with others. Recently, I felt angry and judgmental a lot and it disrupted my fellowship with other Christians. But after confessing my sin and apologizing to my Christian brothers my joy was restored and I could encourage them. This is a constant battle, to walk in the light, confessing my sins. In contrast to our human anger, love and joy come from the Holy Spirit and build relationships. I’m thankful for my fellow Christians who confess their sins and seek God sincerely. This is the way to walk in the light and maintain fellowship with God and with fellow believers in Christ.

May we confess our sins to God and to one another, walk in the light, and have fellowship with God the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and with one another. In Jesus’ name. Amen.