

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

1 John 1:1-10 (Key Verse: 1:3)

“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.”

A Bible scholar by the name 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.” This shows that 1 John is a pastoral book which also reveals what should a Christian life look like. Today we want to focus on Christian fellowship. We have been hit by Covid-19 that disturbed many things in our lives including how we fellowship. We could not just visit family or friends, we could not even go to campus. While busy having nice conversation we had to cut it short so that we do not go over the curfew time. The situation disturbed our fellowship with church members, brothers and sisters, friends and family members. Our world is also filled with deception, corruption and uncertainties. It is not easy to build good fellowship with others. In today’s passage John emphasizes the importance of having genuine fellowship with the Father and the Son. We call this “Christian fellowship.” It is different from any other kind of fellowship because it is with the Father and with the Son. People long for this fellowship. Let us learn the nature of this fellowship and how we can participate in it guided by these two questions. What is Christian fellowship? And how do we maintain Christian fellowship?

Let us firstly look at what is Christian fellowship? The internet definition of fellowship is, “friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interests.” Does this then mean we have Christian fellowship because the interest we share is to follow Jesus? What is Christian fellowship? Let us begin to look at this passage in order to learn what Christian fellowship is. Look at verse 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. 2The 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.”* The beginning here is not the beginning of the world, but rather at the beginning before God even created the world, we can say John is pointing to Genesis 1:1. So John is talking about that which was from the beginning, they have heard from him, they have seen him with their eyes and they have touched him with their hands. John is testifying about the incarnation of Jesus Christ whom they refer to as the eternal life. Right here John reveals an important truth about Jesus, that he was in the beginning before all creation with the father and his life is eternal. This shows us that indeed Jesus is God, just as God has no beginning no end, Jesus does not have beginning or end because he is the eternal life and was in the beginning with the father. The amazing thing is that this very Jesus, appeared on the earth. He did not only appear but they had seen him, heard from him and touched him. That means they had a personal relationship or encounter with Jesus. Because of the coming of Jesus God made possible Christian fellowship. As we learned last week about how Jesus raised the twelve disciples. They had fellowship with Jesus, this was the Jesus they were proclaiming to believers. All the apostles were ready to die to tell others about what they had seen and heard, for they saw God in Jesus’ life. There is no other Christ Jesus but the one who was in the beginning with the father, who is eternal God, who is the word of life and was manifest in this world. This Jesus was longing to have fellowship with us, for he came into this world and had personal relationship with the believers. The father the son and the Holy Spirit already had fellowship since the beginning, it is through Jesus that their fellowship is extended into the world.

However why is John telling us all this? Look at verse 3, *“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.”* Already John and the believers had fellowship with Jesus and the father, however he proclaimed who Jesus was so that they too may have fellowship with him including the believers. Right here John is describing Christian fellowship. John is firstly saying, Christian fellowship is to have fellowship with the correct Jesus, the biblical Jesus who was in the beginning with the father and was manifest into this world. Secondly he is saying that, they already have fellowship with Jesus and the father, for they have seen Jesus, touched him. Thirdly, he is saying his motivation to proclaim this is so that believers may have fellowship with them, which is the Christian fellowship. God intended to have 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. 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. This personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the father as proclaimed by John is what John was longing for other believers to be in fellowship with. And what was John's motivation? Look at verse 4, "We write this to make our joy complete." It was so that their joy may be complete. As people we long for a complete joy. So we create social clubs, family gatherings, Church social activities, etc. All these fellowships are created for 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.

Secondly, how do we maintain Christian fellowship? Or put another way, how can we participate in Christian fellowship and maintain our participation? 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." First importance is to know who God is, Jesus had taught the disciples that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. This was not John's teaching but a teaching by God himself of himself. We all know that darkness cannot co-exist with light, where there is light there is no darkness. The only way to have darkness is to remove the light. So because God himself is light there cannot be darkness in him, for he cannot remove himself from himself. However what does it mean that God is light? It means God is perfect, holy, pure and complete (lacks nothing). There is no sin or evil or imperfection in God all goodness is in him. Only God is all good. There is no fault in God. There is nothing wrong with God. He has no need and he stands fully complete of himself and in himself. He has no beginning no end. 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.

However we also know ourselves that we are not holy and pure like God, so how can sinners like us have fellowship with God? Let us first look at what actually hinders fellowship with God? Look at verse 6, "*If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.*" To walk in darkness is 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 our actions do not reflect God's character of light, holiness, truth and love. It is not a matter of words but actions or the way we live. If we walk in darkness then we are living a lie because God is light. We would not have the truth of God. However as 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 it mean to walk in the light, it means to live a life that follows God and is sincere before God. This means when we sin the word of God is able to rebuke us and we accept God's rebuke by being humble enough to confess our sin before God. In this way the blood of Jesus then purifies us from all sin. In other words, our fellowship with God is because of the blood of Jesus, it is because of what Jesus did on the cross for us. There is no sin the blood of Jesus cannot purify.

When the light of God reveals our sin and we confess them in repentance, then Jesus' blood purifies us and makes us holy and pure before God. This is what it means to practically walk in the light. It's a life of daily repentance before God through the power of the blood of Jesus. In this way we would then have a genuine fellowship with one another. However it is not easy for us to recognize our sin before God even before others. Also many times our hearts can become so proud and stubborn. However according to verse 7, If we follow Jesus by trusting and obeying His word, then the light of God will shine upon us through His word, we will be humbled by the word of God to see our sin and repent. That is why it is our ministry's prayer that we receive at least one word of God each week. However, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." This claim is more of a self deception, moreover it also makes God out to be a liar,

look at verse 10 *"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."* However, the truth is that there is no lie or deception in God at all. We must not blame God or other people for our problems and unhappiness. The fault is us because we are sinners. Rom 3:10, reveals who we are, it reads *"...for there is no one righteous, not even one."* A common practical deception is to 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. To have fellowship with God, we should humbly acknowledge that we are sinners before God. This is how we can have fellowship with God.

Verse 9 further shows how we can maintain and have fellowship with God, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* What a wonderful promise of God. The light of God does not only reveal our sin, but the end goal is for us to confess our sin and repent. 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. 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.

Our world is corrupt because we are sin sick. Relationships are easily broken. The problem is that we as people deny that sin is the problem. We want to blame someone or something or the system. One pastor was asked, what is the problem with world, his answer was, I am the problem because I am a sinner. However, we easily deny that sin is a problem at all. This attitude prevents us from believing the gospel and having fellowship with God. 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 entitled, *"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."* This is not easy to do, however through our faith in Jesus and trusting in what he accomplished for us on the cross, we have the power to deny ourselves and confess our sin. This is an amazing work of God it is a sure and a powerful way of testifying to the world and to ourselves that indeed Jesus lives. Because of the forgiveness of our sin through Jesus Christ, we can have fellowship with God and with other believers.

How is your fellowship with God and with other Christians? Do you feel disconnected from God or from other Christians? Is your life characterized more by worry, anxieties or by joy? This past week I called my brother and we started to talk about the house plan we want to build in Kuruman. He shared how he felt, that I had cut him out from being involved since our last heated phone call last year. However I shared how his judgmental attitude and loose words left me feeling attacked and made me low spirited after the house plan conversations. In fact I was left with a bitter spirit and some anger even. So I decided not discuss the house plans with him unless he brought the discussion up. To cut story short he apologized for thinking the way he did and the way he spoke with me. I also in return apologized for having made him feel cut out of which was not the case with me. Just to have found each other confessing our wrongs to each other filled me with joy. I could confess and I believe he too could confess because we both believe in God, what Jesus did for me on the cross humbled me to approach this situation with humility and not self righteousness or anger, which led to my brother seeing his wrong and apologizing. I believe the joy I felt which I believe he also felt is from God. I am really convinced that my deepest need in life is to have fellowship with Jesus and the father because I am God's creation and made in His image. Once I am in fellowship with Jesus and the father, then I can be a source of joy and blessing to my Christian brothers and sisters. I pray I may always strive to participate and maintain to live in the light of God so that I may have God's joy and peace in my heart.

Many times when we share our sin struggles in our fellowship it sometimes fills me with fear. It is as though am sensing God's presence because how can our brothers and sisters share such shameful things before us. It can only be because of the power of the blood of Jesus, God present with us. Then there is a great sense of freedom and safe space to be genuine and sincere with God and one another. This is joyful. I am thankful for our Christian brothers and sisters who share sincerely their sin before God and others. May we continue to struggle to walk in the light by confessing our sin through faith in the power of the blood of Jesus. This is the way to maintain fellowship with each other and with our Lord Jesus Christ. And the reward is far greater than any fellowship this world tries to promise or provide, we will have the joy that comes from God and live in His peace. As st. Agustine once wrote in his book, Confessions, "Thou [God] hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." I pray that our ministry may be marked by a genuine fellowship with the Father and the Son, so that we may have joy that comes from God and grow a joyful kingdom of God in this world. Amen!