

Cultivating Community - Fellowship: Our Sharing Together

1 John 1:1-10

July 23, 2017 AM

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I believe that this morning marks our seventh message in our series on cultivating biblical community. We have studied various passages that have considered everything from the foundations and frameworks of community, to the focus and formation of our being together as God's people. In all of these messages, we have been looking to God's Word to inform and shape our view of community to align with God's instruction and design.



Fellowship in Community

Our Sharing Together

July 23, 2017

This brings us to this morning's message. Our text this morning is found in the first chapter of the first letter of John. In the opening of this letter to the early church, John establishes and affirms that the Church experiences true fellowship in Christ and with one another. This was an important message, because the early church faced opposition in the form of false teachers. Particularly, there were those called Gnostics, who taught that having a special knowledge of God was more important than following God in obedience. Such a teaching threatened to confuse the faith and fellowship of the early church. So here in the opening section of this letter, John reminds them of the significance of what they share together in Christ.

Introduction

- ❑ Ironically, the idea of community becomes more about self than about others
- ❑ Without Christ in our community, there is no true biblical fellowship
- ❑ True Christian fellowship is found in a community that is known for its love for one another, a desire to hear and heed the Word, and a passion for expressing the wonder and power of the Gospel together

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It is likely that one of the effects of the false teachers was to cause some of the early believers to leave the fellowship of the early church. If you think about it, if only knowledge matters, then fellowship would certainly be optional. This is the danger when we fall away from sound teaching. We can lose sight of the centrality of Christ to the point where in whole or in part, we abandon the essentials of fellowship and community together.

This was not just a problem for the early church. Today, we still see people who choose a church or chose to participate in a church based on their own unbiblical views of fellowship. Too often people will look for how they can be served, for how their priorities will be supported, or for a deeper personal experience. And ironically, the idea of community becomes more about self than about others.

Fellowship is not just developing friendships that make me feel needed. Fellowship is not just finding others who share my interests. And fellowship is not just social interaction in circles I am comfortable in. These things may be found in the midst of true fellowship, but they are not the essence of Christ-like fellowship. All of these things can be found in communities outside of Christian fellowship.

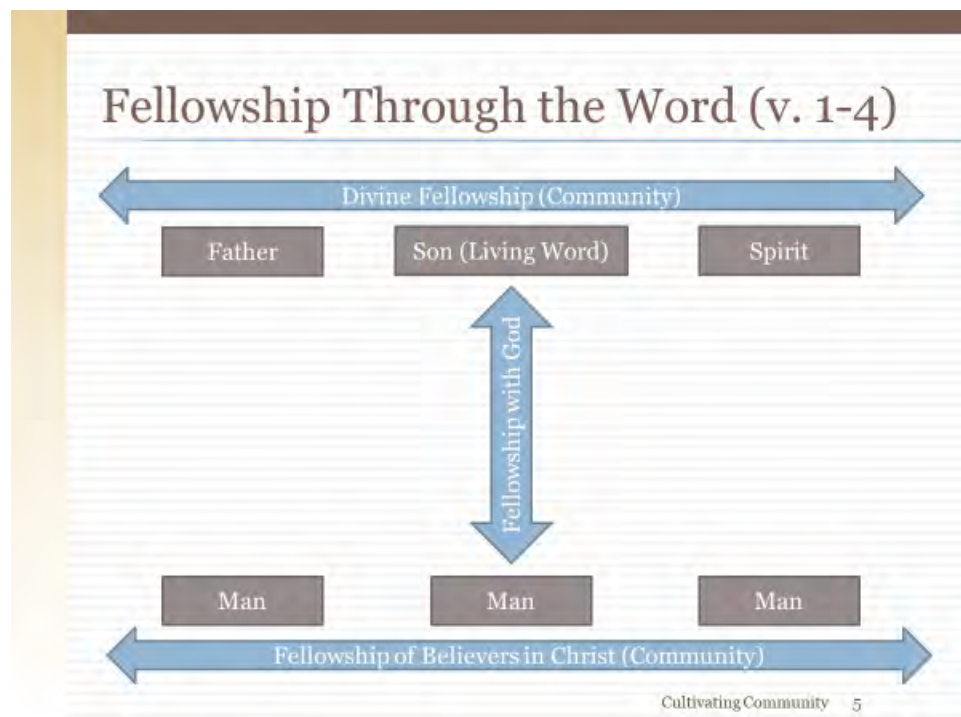
What John is about to tell us, is that without Christ in our community, there is no true biblical fellowship. Christ and the Gospel changes everything about our being together. Our friendships are relationships are built around Christ. Our shared interests are centered around the Gospel. And our social interaction focuses on bringing God glory. Christ, and not self, becomes the focal point of our being together.

True Christian fellowship is found in a community that is known for its love for one another, a desire to hear and heed the Word, and a passion for expressing the wonder and power of the

Gospel together. These characteristics work to build up a community of believers that treasure righteousness, are growing in maturity, and find joy in our redemption. It is the kind of community that lives out the Gospel, with a priority of sharing in it together as God's people and sharing it with the lost.

Please turn with me to 1 John Chapter 1. We will be reading all ten verses that open the first chapter of John's letter. In this letter, John is essentially answering the question, "How do we know we are Christians?" He answers this by describing a number of qualities or characteristics that give evidence to true faith. The main idea here is that if we know what true faith is, then we can identify false teaching that would corrupt it. With that backdrop in mind, please follow along as I read God's word to us this morning.

"1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 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. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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 cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."



As we were reading and hearing the first few verses of John's letter, some of you may have recognized the parallels with John's Gospel. Let me remind you of the first verse of John's Gospel which begins, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Did you hear the similarities? John starts his letter repeating several key themes such as the beginning, the Word, life, and light. One of the reasons for this is that both books are about true belief. In this first letter, John intends to remind us that Jesus is eternal, yet came to earth and was seen and heard by the apostles. What John writes of is not a fictional story or account invented by the Jesus' disciples. It is nothing less than the testimony of first-hand witnesses.

It should also be clear that what John refers to as "That which was from the beginning" is no other than Jesus who is the Word of Life. Jesus, the Son of God, was in fellowship with the Father before the creation of time and space. Even before creation, Jesus was in community with the Father and Holy Spirit. In addition to his presence with the Father before creation, Jesus is also described in terms of being personally known and present with those who were with Him while living on earth as a man.

John notes four aspects that confirm Jesus' presence with them. Look at the progression of authentication that John uses in verse 1 to describe their time with Jesus. John writes of Jesus that "we have heard", "we have seen", "we looked upon", and "have touched". I wonder if we are intended to see the wonder here that Jesus, who was with the eternal Father before creation and far beyond our perception, comes to earth and is heard with human ears, is seen with human eyes, and felt with human touch. Also in this verse, we see that the divine Son of God comes to earth in human form and fellowships with man. It was a fellowship that was a physical reality as Jesus was present in bodily form and lived among us.

John continues this thought in the second verse with an emphasis on Jesus appearing or being made manifest among us. This is the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus, the divine Son of God, physically appears and dwells among men. Contrary to the false teachers of that time, Jesus came to earth and fellowshiped with man in a way that could be physically perceived. And it is this appearing of the living Word of God that John and the Apostles give testimony to.

Why is this important? John is about to tell us why this matters. Look at verse 3. Do you see the phrase "so that"? Why do they proclaim this Christ? So that others may have fellowship with them. Or in other words, so that they may fellowship together as the body of Christ. Those who believe in Christ are to persist in fellowship together. The idea of this phrase is that we are to continue in an active state of being close together. The Gospel is proclaimed so that God's people may be saved and join in fellowship together.

At the end of verse 3 we see how fellowship comes full circle. John writes that our fellowship is not just with each other but is with God. Notice the progression of fellowship John is describing to us. Jesus is in eternal fellowship with God the Father and Holy Spirit. Jesus physically comes to earth and fellowships with man to bring us into fellowship with God. And because we have

fellowship with Christ, we have fellowship with one another. The horizontal fellowship of Jesus with the Father, leads to a vertical fellowship of God with man, which leads to the horizontal fellowship of man with man in Christ. And as one commentary put it, “there is no real fellowship with God which is not expressed in fellowship with other believers”.

Why is John telling this to us? Look at verse 4. So that in knowing these truths and avoiding the error of false teaching our joy will be made complete. We are to see that there is a natural flow of fellowship that will bring about a completeness or fulfillment of joy in our hearts. That is to say, we cannot experience a fullness of joy until our fellowship with Christ flows into a fellowship with one another. It is one of the evidences of true faith where there is a desire to be close with other believers. In doing so, we find protection and encouragement against false teaching. And we are blessed by the righteousness and kindness of others.

This may rub against our sense of individualism and a culture that emphasizes self over others. But the participation in a fellowship of believers is essential to our Christian walk. More importantly, there is an intimacy of fellowship that is in view here that should drive us to be closer to Christ to one another. If our hearts are seeking after the least amount of fellowship possible, then we have it all wrong. We are to go after a fullness and completeness of joy that is found only when we press into close fellowship with Jesus and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fellowship in the Light (v. 5-10)

If we say we have fellowship with God but continue to live in close fellowship with the world, we are lying to ourselves and others.

If we have fellowship with the light as Christ is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

If we confess and acknowledge our sin against God, He will restore the breach in our relationship.

In verses 5 through 10, John develops the idea of our fellowship with God by connecting it to His righteousness. Our fellowship with God will produce a walking with Him in light. Said another way, if we say that we have fellowship with God and His people, then we will avoid fellowship with sin and the darkness of this world. There is a necessary connection between who we are in fellowship with Christ and what we do. We cannot live with our heads serving heaven when the rest of our body is serving the passions of this world.

Look at verses 5 and 6. John reminds us that the message of Christ that they proclaim is this. That God is light and in Him is no darkness. If we say we have fellowship with God but continue to live in close fellowship with the world, we are lying to ourselves and others. Remember that true fellowship with Christ changes everything. To say we have close fellowship with God and then live in a way that disregards Christ and continues in fellowship with sin is not true faith. In a war, one does not say they are for one side and then go and spend one's time fighting with the enemy. And do not think that in terms of Christian fellowship we are not in a spiritual war.

And claiming that you know God or have experienced Him in some way, is not practicing the truth, as John puts it. Doing what is right without having fellowship with Christ is a vain attempt to secure our relationship with God through works. There is no fellowship between light and darkness. Darkness hates the light because light destroys it.

Thankfully there is another way which John describes in verse 7. If we have fellowship with the light as Christ is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. One of the results of having fellowship with Christ is that we now walk with Him in the light. Our identity has changed and we have been given a new nature that has fellowship with Christ and a desire to walk in the light. And as we walk in light we have fellowship with one another. That is, to live in the light is to fellowship in that light as a community of believers.

But does walking in the light mean that we never sin? From this passage and others, we know that is simply not true. We will continue to sin against God and others until the promise of heaven separates us from this sinful body. But even if we do sin, this verse reminds us that the blood of Jesus has taken care of those sins.

Our fellowship with Christ means that our sins no longer condemn us and His blood has cleansed us from the stain of sin. And as we fellowship in community with one another, we live in the midst of each other's sins and imperfections. But we remember that those sins, as well as ours, have been covered and cleansed. And if Christ no longer holds them against us, neither should we hold the sins of others against them. In this way, we preserve our fellowship and prevent the destructive power of sin from harming and hindering our relationships in the body.

In the last three verses of our passage this morning, John continues to address our sin in light of our fellowship with Christ. Keep in mind that we are not talking about our sin with respect to salvation. The context here is our continuing sin as believers. John is addressing believers who have already experience the cleansing of salvation. Without a doubt, we stand forgiven, once for all, by Christ's sacrifice.

But the reality of the flesh is that we continue to struggle with sin. In fact, John says in verse 8 that if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves. So if we say we have fellowship with God and walk in darkness we lie; and do not practice the truth. And if we have fellowship with God and say we do not sin we make God to be a liar; and the truth and His word are not in us.

So what are we to do when as Christians we sin? We find the answer to this in verse 9. We confess our sins to God and He will faithfully forgive us. The forgiveness we receive must be

understood in the context of our fellowship with Christ. It is true that we have been forgiven and saved from our sins as believers, but I believe that what is in mind here is our relationship with God. In effect happens when we sin as believers is that we create a breach or break in our relationship with God. It is an offense that obstructs our relationship but does not cause us to lose our salvation or require additional forgiveness to secure our salvation.

But the break must be healed. And so our God, who is indeed rich in mercy, provides a way for us to restore our relationship with Him. If we confess and acknowledge our sin against God, He will restore the breach in our relationship. He forgives the offense and is faithful and just to not hold our sin against us. If we confess our sin to him and ask for His forgiveness, He will not withhold forgiveness from us. He will not violate or keep us from being in fellowship with Him.

It is hard to escape that if this is true of our fellowship with God, then what is the implication to our fellowship with one another? Just as a breach in our relationship with God is to be restored, so should we value our relationships in fellowship with one another enough to forgive sins within the fellowship of believers. When we sin against each other, we likewise create a breach in our relationship. There is now something between us that impedes our fellowship together. While there is much more we could say about confession and forgiveness in the context of believers, the point here is that we are to reflect the forgiving nature of God and restore breaks caused by sin. Our desire should be to preserve our unity through the demonstration of love and mercy in forgiveness.

Reflect and Respond

- The priority of our fellowship
- The priority of confession and maintaining our relationships with one another

I'd like to close this morning and reflect two aspects of this text. The first of these is to challenge our view and priority of fellowship. In other words, let us each examine our hearts around priorities of fellowship and to be sure that it aligns with scripture. Second, let us consider our view and priority around dealing with sin in light of our fellowship with Christ.

Let's first consider the priority of our fellowship. If our fellowship with one another reflects and flows out of our fellowship with God, do we treasure it as we should? And is our concern for one another focused primarily on our fellowship with Christ? These are important questions because we live in a culture that bombards us with messages that encourage an independent mindset and serving self, and we can adopt worldly ways of thinking without even realizing it.

So when you consider being a part of a fellowship of believers, what makes the top of your checklist? There are many who look for great music and a moving worship experience. Others look for people like themselves with whom they can find social engagement. Not that these things are necessarily bad, but are they really the priority? Is our fellowship as believers more about making us happy or about developing a deeper relationship with Christ and our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we look more for what we can get or for what we can give? John has reminded us this morning to treasure all that we have in fellowship with Christ and one another. And in treasuring our fellowship together in Christ we will find great joy.

What about the priority of your relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ? What are you most concerned about for them? Is your focus on their happiness, personal success, good health, love, or safety? All of these are important at various levels, but are these the most important thing we are to be concerned about relative to our fellowship in Christ? What I take from our text this morning is that we are to be focused on a fellowship that authentically walks in the light so that we may bring glory and honor to God. My hopes and prayers for myself, my family, and the body of Christ are found first in walking in the light as Christ is in the light. May we want the will and way of the Father above all else; for ourselves and for each other.

The second area to reflect on is the priority of confession and maintaining our relationships with one another. I think it is easy to become so comfortable knowing that we are no longer condemned by our sin that we fail to confess them to God. Is confession of sin a regular practice in your life? Is there a sense of urgency to restoring the break in your relationship with God or are you content going days and weeks without making it right? We should be broken over our sin and rush to confess them to Him. Understanding that our sins not only affect our relationship with God, but our relationships with each other as well.

What about sins against a brother or sister? Do we just ignore our sin and expect others to cover it with love? Are we more concerned about wanting our way or being right, than maintaining a good relationship with others in the body? I know that for me, my pride gets in the way and I don't want to admit I have sinned. Will we pray that God would give us humble hearts that are ready to confess sins and right relationships? Will we pray that God would give us hearts ready to forgive and restore when we are asked? May God give us a passion for fellowship that seeks unity and righteousness for all and grants mercy those who seek it.

[closing prayer]

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