

# Are you sure you know what it is

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the deep meaning of the word 'fellowship' in Christian circles, emphasizing the true fellowship found in God as a triune Godhead. It explores the concept of fellowship with the Father and the Son, highlighting the importance of abiding in God's light and surrendering the self-life to fully experience this divine union. The speaker encourages listeners to embrace the grace of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform their lives and lead them into the profound fellowship available through Christ.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, John 14:9, John 10:30, Ephesians 2:4, John 17:21, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 1:3

**Topics:** "Divine Fellowship", "Transformation through Grace"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the deep meaning of the word 'fellowship' in Christian circles, emphasizing the true fellowship found in God as a triune Godhead. It explores the concept of fellowship with the Father and the Son, highlighting the importance of abiding in God's light and surrendering the self-life to fully experience this divine union. The speaker encourages listeners to embrace the grace of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform their lives and lead them into the profound fellowship available through Christ.

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## Transcript

Today I'd like to take a different course with what I want to share with you. I was thinking earlier this morning that we have to confess that in Christian circles there are so many buzzwords and I almost want to say oops at that point because I've just used one, Christian circles. But there are many which are used, I mean we hear words like Father God for example which comes up quite frequently or being on fire for God or the hedge of protection and when people are praying, how many times do we hear the word just repeated over and over and over again multiple times.

And then on the other hand there are words which are clearly biblical words but perhaps to some degree some of them have been reduced to buzzwords to use this more modern expression. By their being used over and over again perhaps overused sometimes they've been reduced to being a kind of buzzword and one of those words and it's the one I want to focus on in this session is the word fellowship. I can remember I think the first time I consciously heard that word although I was brought up in a Christian home from my infancy but I remember having been to a youth camp and we were, it was the end of the camp, a week's camp and I think probably I was about 12 or 13 years of age and as we were in several coaches, single-decker buses, I don't know, it depends where you live, you might call them by different names but anyway there were a couple of hundred of us and we were in different vehicles and as we were approaching the Liverpool area again the bus would stop at different times and let some folk off which was

nearer to their own homes and I can still remember the tent officer, my tent officer, his name was Terry Leach I remember clearly and he'd become a bit of a hero to me during that week.

I had not known him before then but as other tent officers were saying goodbye to one another they were using this expression thank you for your fellowship and that phrase just for some reason just stuck in my mind but we use the word commonly I mean today I suppose we hear people say well let's get together and have a bit of fellowship or we have a fellowship night for our church group and that usually means that it's a social time and probably have some food involved as well and but as the result of using a word such as fellowship and there are others I can think of over and over again there's a tendency for those words to lose or perhaps totally lose their biblical meaning and significance and in so far as that happens the loss is enormous and it's my own opinion that today there's a great need within the churches not for more dynamic personalities and not for more sort of clever preaching technicians but for ministry that allows the Holy Spirit to refresh and quicken the divine intent that is somehow encapsulated within words within the context of God's holy word of course in particular and you know having said all of that one of the many discoveries that I have made over the years is that so many modern Christians excuse the expression are almost entirely comfortable with the distorted and more superficial and pain-free version of truth which of course ceases to be truth when that happens and inevitably when truth ceases to be truth it degenerates into a lie and of course that version of truth quote-unquote will never minister life to the hearers so in this session together let's consider the true meaning and significance behind this new testament word fellowship I know the word fellowship at times is used in the world at large for one reason or another in one way or another but we're thinking in terms of the bible we're thinking in terms of the way we find the word in scripture and what what God the Holy Spirit intends us to understand by the word when we think about it and it's it's the the greek word koinonia which is sometimes translated in our bibles communion and the fact that this word is translated fellowship and communion helps us to grasp a little bit more of an idea of what fellowship means communion or a common union now before sort of getting into this any further let me let me clear up a few things the word fellowship again I won't repeat this again but within the context of understanding its teaching and meaning in the bible this word fellowship is not a synonym for friendship you know none of the disciples while walking with Jesus around Galilee experienced fellowship in the sense that we're going to think about it fellowship is not some high ideal that we as professing christians are to work toward or try to cultivate in some way or other put into practice this word fellowship is not dependent upon two or more professing christians agreeing on certain theological concepts and perhaps their personalities for some reason being comfortable the one with the other I remember when Jesus was speaking to the crowd when he was on the mount from that passage we've almost affectionately referred to as the his sermon on the mount but you remember this in one particular context I'm not discussing the context in this session but Jesus said it was not so from the beginning and that statement is very very important because so many of the great questions that we have concerning the teaching of the bible as it unfolds are sorted out for us or greatly helped by going back to the beginning and see how God because we believe he inspired the scriptures introduced this idea there's actually a principle of bible interpretation which is referred to as the law of first mention and some of us have followed that idea through on occasions over the years and in doing so we found how that the first mention of particular issues particular doctrines of the new testament for example are really there as it were in seed form but almost always at that time that we first find them there's a feature or perhaps several features that are included there which are so helpful they're pointers they sort of illustrate something that's going to be unwrapped and made clear and taught in the new testament so going back to the beginning we go back all the way to the beginning we can't go back any further than this so far as the bible is concerned but in genesis chapter one and verse one you remember the opening words of the bible are in

the beginning God and we don't find the word fellowship there granted but what I do know is that the word God used on that occasion in the original hebrew text is in plural it's speaking about a God who is somehow plural in the beginning God and the idea is further developed but it's pointing this idea that I'm introducing is pointing toward like a transcendent mystery a mystery that's just beyond anything that we can get our heads around the fact that somehow God is one and yet there's this plural feature that emerges as we read on we could look in genesis chapter one verse 26 for another hint along this same direct along the same line but the the bottom line that we want to extract from this today is the fact that God himself is a fellowship the the seed is there we know as we read on through scripture we read about God the Father we read about God the Son we read about God the Holy Spirit there's a word sometimes it might be referred to by some as a buzzword but it's a word that's not in scripture but we it's somewhat helpful to us it's the word Godhead within the context of the Godhead there are three persons who eternally exist in in a holy communion a holy common union a holy fellowship together you know over the years the the church fathers have struggled to sort of grasp this mystery and in order to teach it in order to teach things they formulated their writings in such a way as to try to explain things which in many cases are just very hard to explain such was the case in respect to the Godhead for example in the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646 I think it reads like this in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons of one substance power and eternity God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Ghost the Father is of none neither begotten nor proceeding the Son is eternally begotten of the Father the Holy Ghost is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son so you can understand what I'm trying to get at this is this is a mystery it is indeed a transcendent mystery it's an unfathomable mystery and so far beyond our ability to understand but nevertheless it's the clear teaching of scripture in John's gospel chapter 14 and verse 9 I find Jesus talking to Philip Philip said to Jesus Lord show us the Father and it's sufficient for us in verse 9 Jesus said unto him have I been so long time with you and yet thou hast not known me Philip he that has seen me has seen the Father and how sayest thou then show us the Father believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me and the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the works that important text continues to unfold then John 14 the fact is there's just a mystery in John chapter 10 and verse 30 we have that succinct and yet heavy challenging mystical statement I and my Father are one there's a sense in which I think for those of us who've been Christians for a while and we truly believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God we're aware of these concepts or this concept in particular not one of us professes to be able to unfold it and people have suggested different examples to illustrate or to help illustrate this mystery but none of them are adequate the fact is it's beyond us and we but we unashamedly believe it and embrace it to be be true and as we struggle to get our minds around these things we begin to understand at least and believe that there is a triune God who exists in a ultimate holy union or communion of uninterrupted and purest love John the apostle says God is love the conclusion I want to draw from these statements which we try to sort of get a hold of in our minds is basically this our God is not merely a fellowship he is the fellowship because whatever we may try to understand about fellowship whether it's the world using the word as they may use it or us as professing Christians using it as we use it when all's been said and done we look away as though we're looking at a sort of a Mount Everest as it were we're looking away to that distant peak but this peak is higher by far than Mount Everest it's this peak of spiritual fact and truth that God is the ultimate fellowship whatever else we understand about fellowship it's going to come within this context ultimately God is a fellowship yes he is the fellowship as we turn our attention you know back down to where we live back down to humans and human experience and I'm still thinking back into the book of Genesis I think of Adam and Eve and Adam Eve for some unspecified period of time they they abode together in a closeness with God more than any person any individual following them um the fact is they they were

abiding in an unrepeatable degree of innocence and harmony with God God we're told in the scripture came down in the cool of the day and communed with them in their in their innocence at that point in time now we know uh that in due course Adam and Eve surrendered themselves to the prince of darkness and as the result of that action they they forfeited paradise and they themselves became creatures of the dark kingdom the kingdom of darkness and they according to the principle laid down by God in the beginning they reproduced after their kind and here we are today I love those two words that come in Ephesians chapter 2 we've noted them you've noted them as well I'm certain but God but God I want to say in spite of what I've just been describing but God in a in a staggering act of and revelation of his grace he changed things there Paul right into the Colossians said that that God has delivered us he's delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear son amen I'm my Bible's still open at John's gospel I'm looking over into chapter 17 and the opening words I think you all are familiar with the context of John 17 it's this passage which recalls Jesus' prayer to his father immediately before the cross the very first words of the chapter open this way these words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said father the hour has come glorify thy son that thy son also may glorify thee father the hour has come of course in making that statement and this was of course the context as well the cross was now in sharp focus or to put it another way the the shadow of the cross lay dark across that scene and we know the awful things which would take place on the cross very very shortly but in in some way that that I'm not going to even try to describe I've heard people try to describe it but I think at the end of our best attempts we're left with foolishness and ignorance but in some way somehow somehow this is not an emphatic statement when I say somehow it's in quotations it's in italics I've highlighted it somehow that I can't explain that fellowship that Jesus enjoyed with his father was somehow forfeited in some way and I'm not going to try and explain it as I've said that would be I would demonstrate my ignorance which I admit to in this respect but Jesus said on the cross my God my God why has thou forsaken me something happened somehow that in some way at that point whether however we're going to try describe it something happened to the closeness that Jesus commonly enjoyed with his father all right but his bloodshed on the cross made possible the and continues to remain the key to men and women such as you and me experiencing in our lives the the indescribable benefit that is ours under the new covenant that that bloodshed inaugurated and made possible you know just reading on a little further in this 17th chapter of John there's a there's a phrase I'm just taking the phrase at the moment from the 21st verse and I read this as Jesus is speaking to his father that they also may be one in us how amazing brethren what what what an incredible thing is this we've talked about God who is the ultimate fellowship we've got this scene before us that I've just been referring to as Jesus approaches Calvary and then we in our minds we we see again the that which was enacted on the central cross of Calvary the blood that we shed we we have the benefit of the writings inspired by God ours through the epistle through the apostles rather in their epistles explaining to us the value and the efficacy and the product of this bloodshed and what it means for men and women in their relationship to God our brother sang about it earlier in one of the songs but Jesus is saying as thou father art in me and I in you and then he goes on to say that they may be one in us what I really want to emphasize and really this is the core of my message is that the grace of God has created a way whereby men and women who were trapped as prisoners in the kingdom of darkness can be delivered from that kingdom and translated into the kingdom of God's dear son in other words brought into the benefit of the new covenant brought into the staggering wonder of being in Christ and in Christ in a common union in a bond in a relationship in fellowship with him brought into the fellowship amen I think this this truth here just reaches its its real peak here at this point in time it's this this that I'm now touching on is the wonder of all wonders it's the miracle of all miracles that that God has made a way for those who were dead in trespasses and in sins that we can be birthed by the miracle of redemptive grace

and by the power of the Holy Spirit into that union our fellowship think of that think of it you know putting it putting it perhaps a different way at the cross Jesus he provided for justification but now today the Holy Spirit is executing that miracle that regenerating work in the lives of men and women have you experienced this girl you know making the the inclusion into that fellowship the fellowship a reality he's made it available may the Holy Spirit open the eyes of our understanding because it needs to become realized in our inner man in a man in our person and it needs to become experienced in our lives glory to God and I mentioned earlier the fact that during the time of the disciples walking with Jesus they never experienced this they experienced with Jesus an astonishing amazing indescribable friendship but they never entered into this blessing which was not then available for men and women as it is available for you and for me today Jesus would say to Philip have I been so long with you Philip and yet you have not known me they didn't really know him there was something that was not yet revealed and not yet available and but this this I believe with all my heart this again is it's the needed message in the churches but who's listening who's listening today one of the thrilling things and I mustn't digress here too long but one of the thrilling things about what we're doing right now in sending this word out as by this method of technology and many of the people who are listening they're not they're not just routine religious church goers but we're discovering that so many of them are people with hungry hearts as I'm speaking right now I know even in the local situation where I am there might be eight or ten different countries represented the nations represented and and as it goes out further onto the internet I don't know how many places it's going but it's finding people I trust like you my dear brother or my dear sister who are not just routinely a church goer because you go because well your best friends are there and your parents used to go there or you just really appreciate the pastor or the teaching or whatever it may be but I trust that today I'm talking to people who are hungry for God as the heart panteth for the water brooks so panteth my soul after thee oh God he goes on to say the living God amen I believe that it's the Holy Spirit of God that's stirring up that kind of response in people's hearts and if he's stirring it up I can guarantee you insofar as you yield to it he will meet you and bring you ever more fully into the greatness of this salvation that he's made available for us you know I'm turning over my bible if you're following me in that way then please you can do it as well this is in first epistle of John first epistle of John let me just read a few verses here I'm reading from verse three as John writes he says that he's talked about the life perhaps I back up slightly and in fact I can't do better than this I'm reading from the top of the chapter that which was from the beginning that which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes we've looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life for he said the life the life was manifested and we've seen it and we bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the father and was manifested unto us that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you that you also may have fellowship with us and truly truly our fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ and these things right we unto you that your joy may be full this then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all if we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin amen what a wonderful thing what a wonderful thing this is this this um this pure transcendent unmatched fellowship exists exclusively in God and now John in expounding this great truth to his privileged hearers among whom are we he said he he introduces another idea fellowship with us fellowship with us and what what what John is explaining is that first and foremost primarily fundamentally supremely our fellowship as individuals is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ because he is the fellowship and as we are privileged by his grace to be brought into this place of union with him in Christ there I enjoy the fellowship I am privileged to enjoy the fellowship and as God brings you my brother or you my sister into this place in him we are together in him and in him

in the ultimate fellowship we find fellowship one with another because we're in this together what a wonderful thing what a wonderful thing now what John adds to this is this fact he said now keep and I'm paraphrasing of course now keep this in mind he said God is light and in him there is no darkness at all and if I further paraphrase what he's saying is now if you're claiming that you're having fellowship with him or you're in this fellowship and there's darkness in your heart and in your life he said you're deceived you and your claim is a lie it's not true he says but if we walk in the light as he is comma in the light we have fellowship one with another in other words what we're finding here is is that true fellowship exists exclusively and only in him we experience this fellowship as we abide in him but if we permit darkness to enter and exist or be present in our lives that that there's a dreadful price that we pay in terms of the benefit of that of that fellowship amen you know this really really requires another session altogether but let me at least just say this when two or more are experiencing fellowship with the father they spontaneously experience a depth of union that is immeasurably beyond mere human friendship it's it's beyond you know chemistry it's beyond personality it's beyond theological agreement but rather they discover a spiritual fragrance we recognize a spiritual fragrance in one another insofar as one or another are abiding in him but darkness destroys that fellowship and I think I think um you know perhaps perhaps to just look at it from a slightly different point of view you know the the real darkness you know what it is it's the big capital I it's the self the self life the self life where it is permitted to be expressed can only express itself in darkness it might have all the right theological words and be able to respond in very appropriate ways in in christian contexts but the fact remains that where I is being promoted there's darkness those who enjoy this intimate union with him where this fragrance is so permeating their lives they are those who who no more live listen to paul he says it's no more I that live us but it's christ who lives in me and he continues on Galatians 2 20 famous wonderful verse certainly amen amen the the priority of our lives must be him our focus must be him how easily self creeps in even to the most noble seemingly spiritual acts we may engage in but it's for self promotion it's to be recognized it's to be appreciated but the fellowship that we're talking about which exists in God alone is is enjoyed uh ever more fully by those who have allowed the power of the cross to bring brokenness into their lives the cross doesn't destroy it doesn't smash us but but our will is broken our will is yielded our will is surrendered we can say with pause no longer I that lives this is an this is a statement that that points directly to the grace of God and the power of God bringing the redemptive work of Christ shed blood and impacting my life and enabling me to realize it in my experience amen the joy of those who've learned to live in this place to abide in this mutual state together this is the true church it's no longer no longer I glory to God let me be just personal as I close here is this sacred fellowship something that is your daily enjoyment let the let this be the focus of our coming together whether we're coming together in a in person or whether we're coming together as we are today we can enjoy fellowship I was thinking earlier this morning that really this this fellowship that we're looking at and thinking about in a sense bottom line it doesn't require that we're together in person it's wonderful to be together where we can embrace and share and love one another but the only way I know God in person is through you my brother and sister who are abiding in that fellowship where the fragrance of Christ is about your life and I see Jesus in that particular way but here we are we're separated perhaps by thousands of miles and insofar as we're in him and we're in this fellowship and we're abiding in it and we're enjoying it as John says if I want your joy to be full if you want fullness of joy come here enter in this is for you isn't it wonderful that nothing about your past life can disqualify you from this so nothing that you've done or nothing that you've failed to do that you should have done or whatever if God is speaking to you my dear friend today if God is speaking to you rest assured he's speaking to you because it's your day of visitation he's visiting you in order to accomplish this in your life and bring you for some of you it's to bring you back to him for others it's to draw you who have never yet entered into this union this holy union

with God will you surrender to him today I'm going to just pray and close but let me say before I do that if all of this is meaningful to you let's let's develop the link of fellowship together I invite you if you're on YouTube click one I don't even know what it's called subscribe just to say I'm with you we're together in this some of you leave comments leave your comment talk express what's happening glory to God father we look to you in the name of Jesus that you Lord will cause your Holy Spirit who alone can truly speak to the hearts of men and women speak father to those who have been listening and who are still listening right now speak your word that word that's so powerful that it penetrates the deepest parts of our being speak Lord let it be that there are those who are listening with wide open hearts to you Lord and Lord we pray that you will minister your gracious spirit and enable them Lord to enter into this teach them lead them show them Lord whatever it is empower them perform your work of redeeming grace in listening open hearts today father and start something new let it be not just even the turning of a page or a turning of a chapter but to start it freshly altogether no translated delivered from darkness translated into the of your dear son we pray in Jesus name amen

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