

# (1 John #2) Christian Fellowship and Its Fruit

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the enriching fellowship that comes from sharing eternal life with God and with other believers, and encourages believers to have fellowship with the apostles.*

**Duration:** 39:40

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 9:13, 1 John 1:2-4

**Topics:** "Fellowship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fellowship and sharing among believers. He explains that when we are taught spiritual things, we should communicate and support those who teach us, either spiritually or materially. The speaker also highlights the experience of sharing in the life of God, which is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He refers to the book of Acts as an example of believers living on a supernatural plane, sharing in the resources, presence, power, will, and love of God. The speaker concludes by emphasizing that our sharing and fellowship with God and other believers transcends differences in race or background, as we are all joined together in Christ.

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## Transcript

One has the advantage in these morning services, you all know where the text is going to be, so we turn directly to it. We turn to 1 John chapter 1, and we shall read this morning verses 2 to 4. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Since the eternal life which was with the Father has been historically manifested, that is manifested in the first place to the apostles of our Lord, certain things become possible, many things become possible.

That eternal life as embodied and expressed in Christ is, according to this apostle, the gift of God to man. Now, you may have wondered why John is making so much of this right at the beginning of his epistle, the eternal life which was with the Father being manifested. Well, in the body of the epistle he says more than that it has been simply manifested.

The life has not only been revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we know its kind and its texture, but in Jesus Christ, by his death upon the cross, and his resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to complete what he began, Jesus Christ becomes the donor of that everlasting, that eternal life to men and women who repent and believe. The eternal life then that was manifested in the Lord Jesus

Christ becomes the gift of God to men in Jesus Christ. Listen to what John will say later on in chapter 5 verses 11 and 12.

And this is the testimony, he says, that God gave us eternal life. This life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life, the life.

He who has not the Son has not the life. Now, here then is the thread linking us with what we were discussing last Sunday morning. The life has been manifested.

We know what God's life is like because we have seen it through the eyes of the apostles in the first and in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. But now, God offers us that eternal life as a gift from him. He has made it possible by the death and resurrection of his Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit that that eternal life which dwelled in himself eternally was shown in Jesus Christ should be given to us.

Now you may ask, what is the import of that? This. If we can possess eternal life then we can have fellowship with God. In the possession of eternal life we have in our hearts the life of God that is capable of communicating with the God of life.

Without this there is no fellowship with God. The beast of the field cannot have fellowship with God. An unregenerate man cannot have fellowship with God.

He may know the mercies of God. He may even see the fingerprints of God evident in the course of history and in nature around. And he may know the workings of God upon his conscience, and he may even reason certain things concerning God.

But fellowship with God, touching the reality who is God, is only possible when we have come to Jesus Christ and have received the gift of eternal life. That life within us enables us to communicate with the God of life in glory through Jesus Christ. Now, one word of explanation.

John does not imply by what he says here or anywhere else that we possess eternal life simply because of our Lord's incarnation. This is part of the difficulty of working through a book of the Bible little by little. We dwell upon one facet of the truth today, another facet of the truth next time, and so on, and it takes a long time to get through.

Last time we were concentrating our thoughts upon the incarnation. But John does not suggest for one moment that we can be saved simply because God became man. Indeed, in this very context, in chapter 1, he tells us, it is the blood of Christ that cleanses our sin, not the birth of Christ.

And if you go on to chapter 2, he tells us that Christ, by his death and his blood, is the propitiation for our sin, not by his incarnation. But, of course, the point is this. There could have been no death of Christ without the birth of Christ.

There could have been no life of Christ without the birth of Christ. There could have been no teaching coming from his holy lips without his first having come into human life, so that the incarnation of the Son of God is absolutely basic to everything else. Not, however, apart from what he said and taught and what he did in his death and resurrection and ascension.

Now, our theme this morning, then, is the enriching fellowship. Notice John's word, that you may have fellowship with us. Now, this word, fellowship, is so absolutely strategic to John's exposition of the truth in

this epistle.

We've got to dwell upon it for a little while. We have to dwell upon it because it doesn't mean very much to the ordinary man or woman today. Use this word, fellowship, and what do people think about? Well, a social intercourse with people, good neighborliness, or the kind of comradeship that people had during the Second World War, or any other war, for that matter, when they're fighting on the same side, a comradere of soldiers.

Or, if you like, people playing football or ice hockey or what have you in the same team, and they live together and train together and they fight together, in another sense. I wish they didn't fight quite so much now, from time to time. But people in the same team, living together, working together, toiling together, whatever they're doing together, this togetherness of men.

Now, that's not what the word means in Scripture. The word has a depth of meaning and a breadth of significance that those associations are completely short of the goal. As a matter of fact, the term fellowship involves almost everything within itself that is implied in the experience of being served.

Whether you think of your salvation as something that happened in the past, as something that is ongoing through the present, or as something that is to be consummated in the future. Everything from the past through the present into the future. It is all involved here in fellowship.

Fellowship is the outworking of God. Fellowship implies, first of all, our reconciliation with God through the death of his Son. There is no fellowship with God until we receive the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

The barrier of sin is torn away and the Savior brings us to God and hands us over as one of his. It not only involves reconciliation, it involves adoption into the family of God. It involves the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It involves our union with God as the branch is united to the vine, as the limb is united to the body of Christ, and our communion. The word stands for the togetherness of God and his people in all the circumstances of life and of death and of glory to come. Now, one contemporary scholar divides it up in this way.

Now, this is not infallible. You don't need to do this, but it may be helpful. We're simply thinking now of fellowship as such.

What does it mean? This particular scholar says that there are three aspects to it, but the three make one. Not three separate things, the three make one whole. The first aspect he speaks of is having a share along with others.

Having a share along with others. Now, what he has in mind is this. Every Christian man or woman is sharing eternal life, but not alone.

You can't share eternal life alone. You share it along with others. We are fellow citizens with all the saints and of the household of God.

We have come into an inheritance, but along with others. God mentioned me in his will, but he mentioned me along with all the saints of all the ages. And fellowship is this.

It is seeing that I enter into my inheritance, covenanted by God in his Son, but along with others. Men and women of every kindred and tribe and people and nation and tongue. Isn't it wonderful? Oh, this is thrilling.

It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is. How often I say that. It needs to be said over and over and over and over and over again.

It doesn't matter what your background is. We share together. And no one person has the preeminence.

We have a togetherness in our sharing. We were all mentioned in Christ, in the divine covenant and will, sharing together. Now, if you want to pursue this, we are told in Scripture that we are joint sharers of Christ, Hebrews 3, 14.

We are joint sharers of the Holy Spirit, Hebrews 6 and 4. Our salvation, says Jude, is a common salvation. And Paul says in Titus 1, 4, ours is a common face. You cannot go to your little corner and be aside and apart from the Lord.

You come to your inheritance with all the saints. Now, this is very awkward for people that are very individualistic and have always perhaps had their own way. Spoiled children.

In the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, my friend, you've got to see yourself as belonging to the universal church of Jesus Christ. You stand with every other believer because you've come to your inheritance, you've come into your inheritance along with. When you find Christ, you find his people.

When you find God, you find his children. They're always together. And you can never find Jesus Christ without his people.

You can never find God without his children. Finding God means finding his people. We share together with God's people.

A second thought involved in fellowship is this. We share with others. Now, this is part and parcel of fellowship.

Not only do we come to our inheritance along with others, but we share our inheritance with others. Now, let me just mention two or three scriptures which bring this out. Let me quote.

This is especially, of course, especially spoken of in the New Testament. Of Christian people sharing their material resources with others, but not exclusively. Sharing our spiritual experience and our spiritual capital with others, too.

But it particularly has reference to Christians sharing whatever they've got when they see other folk in need. Now, let me just quote one or two passages. I quote first of all from 2 Corinthians 9.13 in the New International Version.

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. Did you get that word sharing? It's the same word as we have for fellowship in John. Fellowship means sharing.

Not that I have my own, I call. I hold it for the giver. You have the same thing again in Romans 15 and 26.

A very similar thought. For Macedonia, says Paul, and Achaia, have been pleased to make some contribution. Now, that word contribution is the word kynonia, some contribution for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem.

Kynonia means this sharing. And if I have and my brother there is need, kynonia means sharing with him. The King James Version.

Let us say a good word for the King James Version. It's not as read as widely as it used to be. Let me say a good word for it here.

In Galatians 6 and verse 6, I think it has the most beautiful rendering of a statement when it says, Let him that is taught in the word communicate. Now, the Greek word is kynonia, the word for communion, the word for fellowship. This is a beautiful rendering.

Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teaches, and communicate in all things. What Paul is saying there, of course, to the Galatians is this. If there is a teacher or an evangelist that is teaching you spiritual things, you communicate with him to enable him to continue his work.

If you can't communicate spiritually, communicate materially. This is fellowship. Sharing with others, what we've got.

Now, the third notion is this. It's the actual experience of all this. Not just knowing that we share or have fellowship or enter into our inheritance along with other people, not just knowing that, not just knowing that we are expected to share with other folk, but sharing and sharing alike.

Going into it, the actual experience, living in the experience of sharing. You know, it's a delightful thing when Christian people have come to the point where they call nothing exclusively their own, but all is for the household of faith and for the purpose of God, whatever it is, material and spiritual. The whole of life is for God.

Now, you have this coming out in passages such as follows. Acts 2.42, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and the breaking of bread and of prayers. What does that word fellowship mean? Well, you read through the context and you will find it meant at least this.

Not one of them had any need. Not one of them had need. Now, let me repeat, not one of them had need.

Why? For the simple reason they were enjoying fellowship, and those that had made theirs available to those that needed so that no one had too much and no one had too little. This is fellowship. It's the experience of sharing, really sharing, living by sharing.

Now, this, of course, is what is meant when Paul says in Galatians 2.9, for example, that James and Cephas and John, the pillars of the church, gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. From that moment on, they looked upon each other as equals in Christ, and they began to share life together. Up until that point, James and John and Peter were a little bit suspicious of Paul.

Just that little bit, but no longer. They now live with an open heart toward one another, and open hands toward one another. This is a wonderful experience, when the saints have open hearts for one another, and open hands to one another, and open homes for one another, and everything is open.

But when the shutters are up, or our hands are closed, or our hearts are cold, you don't have fellowship. You know, my friends, it's a condemnation of any church that we have to organize fellowship. Now, don't be cross with me for saying that.

I don't mean to chide. This is the last thing in the world that we should need to organize, because it should be the spontaneous expression of the eternal life which was in God, now enjoyed by us. You see, God has always been a sharing God.

The Bible speaks of a triune God, of a trinity, of the love of the Father for the Son. You know, the writers of the New Testament go so far as to describe the experience of, or rather the relationship of the Father and of the Son as looking over against one another. And some commentators have interpreted that as the Father and the Son looking into each other's faces.

I know I'm speaking pictorially, but it describes a fellowship. God has always been a God sharing within the trinity, sharing thought and love and so forth. So must His people be.

Now then, having said that, let me come to mention what John does here. First of all, the Apostles claim. Our fellowship, says John, is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Now mark the privilege that he claims. He says we have fellowship with God the Father and with His Son.

In the light of what we have said about the meaning of the term fellowship, the immensity of the Apostles' claim will be at once evident. He's claiming to be a sharer in the saving benefits brought about by the Son of God in such a manner that he has also come to know God the Father. Indeed, he is claiming to be sharing some things directly with the Father and with the Son.

It's a life of sharing. Now isn't this exactly what we see in the book of the Acts of the Apostles? I don't propose to take this too far this morning, but let me throw it out. My friends, isn't this self-evident? When did you read the book of the Acts last? These simple men, and women too in some cases, these simple folk in the book of the Acts of the Apostles are living on a supernatural plane.

How comes it? Well, they're sharing life with the deity. They're sharing with God, and God is sharing with them. They're sharing.

The resources of heaven are made available to them. The presence of God is with them. The power of God is given to them.

The will of God is made known to them. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. God is with his people, and it's a life of sharing.

God is sharing. But who is John referring to here? Who are the participants? He says our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. Who comes within the scope of that our? Is it a kind of royal we? I believe that what John is claiming is first of all for himself and for his fellow apostles, though of course he's the only survivor of the apostles now, but I think he is also claiming that all those who have come to Christ and have known fellowship with the apostles as the followers of Christ and believers in him, they too share this, because this is the privilege of every Christian.

Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. It wasn't exclusively an apostolic experience, though it was basically. Now there's the apostle's claim.

Now notice his concern. What's he writing for? Well, first of all he says, verse three, that you may have fellowship with us. Now will you notice the picture, the metaphor here? We have fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

That you may have fellowship with us. I'll be coming back to that in a few moments. These words do not simply reflect John's allegiance to the terms of our Lord's commission, nor even to his sense of a moral compulsion to write.

John is here writing as a pastor. He has a concern. Something of this came out last Lord's Day morning.

There are heresies abroad. Satan has his agencies. Should we call them angels? Perhaps not.

Though there are angels of darkness, Satan has his agencies everywhere. And what John is afraid of, you see, is this, that some people who have almost come to the birth, spiritual birth, should be diverted from coming into the swim of eternal life, into the fullness of it, and that the devil should lead them up a kind of dead-end alley, into a cul-de-sac where they get stuck in the mud forever and ever and never know the kind of fellowship that he and his brethren know with God the Father and with his Son. Now down the centuries of time there have been men and women who have been up that dead-end street, who've never really known the quality of intimacy with God that John and his fellow apostles and fellow Christians knew.

His sense of urgency and pastoral concern is this, that you, right down to this century, and every believer, particularly those that he addressed in the first verse, I believe that God at any rate if not the apostle would have us take this as seriously as the first readers of the epistle, that you may have fellowship with us. You with us Now that's the pattern that is laid down. You with us.

As to the reality and the depth of the apostles' fellowship with God, there can be no doubt. We've referred to that in the miraculous expansion of the early church and its message, the message of a crucified Christ into a Roman world that was drunk on concepts of power and into a Greek world that was equally drunk on concepts of intellectualism of one kind or another. Into such a pagan world, the gospel of a crucified criminal was proclaimed and taken.

And in every place, by the power of the Spirit and the presence of God, groups of believers emerged. In other words, the fellowship of the apostles with God is a self-evident thing to those who read the scriptures. Now, it's the pattern that John lays down that I want you to notice.

You with us. The pattern is that each successive influx or ingathering of converts should share in the apostles' own heritage. Can I put it like this? John doesn't suggest for one single moment that the apostles had a kind of experience of God on the spiritual plane, that they had a kind of experience which is substantially different from that of other Christians.

On the contrary, what he's saying is this. We share with the Father and the Son. We have fellowship with God the Father.

We have fellowship with God the Son. Now, he says, I'm writing to you that you may have fellowship with us and therefore that you may join the group concerning which I may say at a later date. Our fellowship, including you, is with the Father and with the Son.

That's the logic. That's the nature. In other words, the pattern is this.

John is wanting to get every Christian, man and woman, into the enjoyment of the kind of fellowship with God and his Son that he and his fellows will here enjoy. Oh, this is so important. Can you see your Christian calling this morning, my friend, as not simply a calling to believe certain things, though you are someone to believe.

Not simply a calling to do certain things on the human plane, though we are called to do much on the human plane. But a call to fellowship with God and with his Son and with his people. To share with God our daily lives.

To drink of his cup. To feed from his hand. To rest in his love.

To share with God. John would have the Christians here at rest recognize their privilege as having been called into fellowship with that redeemed community founded by God through his incarnate Son and headed in the world by those whom he called to himself as its first members and with whom he shared the spoils of his triumph in the first place and upon whom he breathed forth his Holy Spirit. All successive generations of Christians need to have that sense of belonging to the apostles' fellowship.

Now, this is a principle, and I guess I will have to draw to a close with this this morning, but we'll take up the threads next time. This is an important principle. You see, this establishes or guarantees at least three things.

The church's purity, the church's unity, and the church's ministry. What do we mean by the purity of the church? This, that we can share life with God the Father and with the apostles. If you, when you read the Gospels, when you read the Scriptures, if you feel that you're at loggerheads with the apostles of our Lord, the probability is that you're at loggerheads with the God of the apostles, because they were appointed to be the exponents of the truth.

And if you are not in fellowship of mind and of heart with the apostles of our Lord, it is impossible to be at fellowship with the Lord himself. Can I move on to the question of unity? It arises from what I've said. Now, we hear a lot, we have heard a lot in the 20th century about the unity of the church and the ecumenical movement and so forth.

Now, have you noticed the emphasis is upon, essentially so, though it should never be exclusively. That is the point I want to make. The emphasis is upon gathering together of professing Christians in a given age and trying somehow or other to give them a semblance of being together, of unity.

But I'll tell you something which is much more important than that. It is this. It is making sure that in coming together in any given age, we still maintain our fellowship with the apostles, because they were the bedrock of the Christian church.

They were the first members. They were the authorized exponents of the truth. And it was so evident that they were a true church of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the church of the 20th century must know something of the communion of the saints in that they think with the apostles and feel with the apostles and serve to the same end and with the same motives in view as the apostles did. In other words, Christian unity is not just a unity among people that live in the 20th century or in any decade in the 20th century. Christian unity is a unity of a man in the body

of Christ.

And the body goes back to the beginning and right on to the end. You see, one of the things that the leaders of the ecumenical movement have almost forgotten is this, that the test of our real Christian unity is the measure in which we have received the word and the life of God as it was manifested in Christ to the apostles and experienced by them first. The apostles are absolutely strategic to the whole Christian case and the whole Christian message and the continuity of the Christian church.

I close with this. We see here emerging a picture of the Christian fellowship which is triangular. I'm not sure that that word triangular is the best.

You can think of a better one. Come and let me know. I couldn't think of another.

What I mean is this. There are three sides to a triangle and there are always three sides to Christian fellowship. Now the base of the triangle is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

It's the deity. That's the static. That's the standard.

That's the base. One side of the triangle is, it comprises the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were linked with God the Father, with His Son, and with the Spirit.

Linked by faith, linked in life, linked in the enjoyment of the life of God in their own circle, in their own hearts, within the company. But now, here comes the other side of the triangle. You with us, says John.

You with us. And this is what makes the fellowship complete. This is what makes the triangle complete.

That I can have fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and of course, essentially so, with the apostles of our Lord and with all who are apostolic in doctrine and experience. My friends, where are we this morning? What is the church to you? What is God to you? Are we really, are we really, beyond the threshold of the Christian experience where we've believed John 3.16 and a few other texts? Oh, if the apostle John were here this morning, he would say, these things I'm telling you, that you good people in the transepts, on the sides, in the center, on the gallery, in the pulpit. Pardon me for putting it like that.

I believe John would have to say that he doesn't want anybody left out. That you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. In other words, we want you to come into the triangle.

We want you to make the thing complete. We want you to be inside, not outside, that the life of God may throb in you and express itself through you, and the purpose of God be fulfilled through you, even as it was in us and through us. Isn't it a great gospel? You know, it's wonderful as mere teaching.

But it is no mere teaching, this. The apostle bids us into fellowship. May the Spirit of God help us and bring us in.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, when we meditate upon these things, thou knowest the almost instinctive reaction of our hearts. We sense such a chasm between this kind and quality of experience of fellowship with thyself and that which is commonly known among men and women today.

Forgive us if there is anything in us which is hard and unyielding. Rock has no fellowship with rock. Briar has no fellowship with briar.

And if our hearts are stony and briary, O come, thou mighty God, and fit us into the body where we can share along with others, and share with others, and share in the life of God and the resources of heaven, and serve the purposes of thine eternal wisdom. Bless us now, one and all, and at the close of this morning hour we offer a special prayer for one person. Thou knowest that lady who was picked up by two of thy children coming here on the Lord's Day morning, and this morning she was not in her apartment.

Wherever she is, O Lord, we pray that thou will care for her. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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