

# Key Words: Fellowship

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Christian fellowship is a distinctively Christian experience that involves sharing in God and the Holy Spirit, and is implicit in the call of God to become a Christian.*

**Duration:** 51:28

**Scripture:** 1 John 1:3

**Topics:** "Fellowship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preparing oneself before entering into the presence of God. He mentions the call to worship as a summons from God to His people and highlights the need to acknowledge our faults and sins in prayer. The speaker also discusses the significance of gathering on the Lord's Day and the value of taking a few minutes of silence before the service begins. He emphasizes the idea of fellowship and sharing in the Gospel, urging believers to share their lives and good things with those who have taught them.

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## Transcript

This morning we continue with the theme that occupied us for a number of months in the fall. We are taking some key words from the New Testament and seeking to expound their meaning and their application to us in this day and age. And this morning the word that we are going to look at is the word, the familiar word, fellowship.

We read from 1 John chapter 1 because it provides one of the many chapters in the New Testament which serve as a very magnificent background against which to understand the meaning of this term. May the Lord help us then as we come to look it straight in the face and to try to see what it has to say to us. It's a word that is so familiar, a word that we use over and over and over again.

And yet I wonder whether we are using it always in a truly Christian sense. It has been said that one of the main problems of our day and age lies in the growing prevalence of what some people have called proximity without community. Now that's a special bit of lingo.

But what it means is this. Sometimes you have groups gathering as in a church like this for worship, for religious purposes. Their proximity to one another is rather close.

We sit together in the same pew maybe. We are together under the one roof. Yet we may be living in worlds that are poles apart and may know nothing of any deep agreement one with the other, even when we do know one another.

Or it may happen in a sports arena where people are even squeezed together because of the numbers that gather. But as Francis Bacon says in one of his essays, a crowd is not company. And though somebody may be actually stepping on your toe, you may be as far from that person as east is from west.

Proximity without community. Herded together physically, but as a matter of fact we are as far apart from one another as far can be. In consequence, one of the most heart-rending, perhaps the most heart-rending, heart-rending phenomenon of our age is the sense of isolation and loneliness that abounds in the world today.

It doesn't always mean that people are physically separated from others. A lonely person is not necessarily in a desert. Loneliness can be experienced in the heart of a crowd.

You may be crushed in the crowd and yet there is something still heavier crushing your spirit. And that is a sense of terrifying isolation. You're cut away from everyone.

And so there are multitudes, myriads of people in our world this morning who feel that they are severed from the mainland of humanity and they're like little islands dotted in the ocean and they have no contact with people. This loneliness is crushing. Now God never meant this kind of thing for his creatures.

This is where we want to start. God never meant that kind of thing for his creatures. It is sin that has brought that into human experience.

This was never God's intention. The divine purpose is the exact opposite of this. And despite the fact that many of God's people miss the deep most experience of it, it is all wrapped up in this very common biblical New Testament term, fellowship.

God meant us to know fellowship with himself and fellowship with his people and to know something of care and compassion that is itself a bridge that brings us into the lives of other people. Now fellowship therefore is nothing new. It's not something discovered by modern man.

It's not an item. It's not something suggested by some doctor or other as an ingredient in therapeutic treatment. It's not something that man has recently discovered.

It's older than the book of Genesis. In fact, it is as old as the triune God. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit enjoyed koinonia, communion, fellowship together before the universe ever existed.

When we come to the New Testament, we find that it is said of the early church right at its beginning, right at its inception. When the multitudes were brought to Christ in the day of Pentecost, we read they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. I propose then to try with you briefly this morning to look this word in the eye and see what really does it mean.

Is it possible for us to experience it? I propose to ask and try to answer two or three questions as time permits. First, what is Christian fellowship? Now some of you may be thinking, well surely you could miss that out and start somewhere a little down the line so that we don't waste time on that. Now I suggest to

you that that's precisely what we can't do because we have such hazy notions of what Christian fellowship really is, of what koinonia in the New Testament sense is.

And so we've got really to start here. And it may be expedient to speak, to try and describe it negatively as well as positively because we sometimes speak of things as, or speak of experiences as constituting fellowship when it means something altogether less than the New Testament means by that word. Negatively then, what fellowship is not? First of all, fellowship is not to be confused with mere socializing.

Dr. James Packer brings this out very clearly, very forcefully in one of his books. There are so many people who say that they've been socializing. Maybe they've been members of a football team and they've been away on tour and they say, oh we had great fellowship together.

They may not have been Christian at all but they say that they fellowship together. There are members of a political party that have been out canvassing for new members and they've had a great time together and they say we've had great fellowship. Or there may be members of the pro-life group who've been doing something similar and waging warfare against something they believe to be wholly alien and ungodly.

And they say we had great fellowship. We had opposition but we had fellowship. Now that kind of comradeship experienced in sport, in politics, in anything else, in social action, is something altogether inferior and different in kind from Christian fellowship.

Koinonia, what the Bible speaks of as fellowship, is something which is in a different league altogether from this mere kind of comradeship in politics, in social action, what have you. Even the kind of comradeship that people have around a cup of coffee after maybe a service such as this or whatever, unless of course they're really Christian. Secondly, fellowship is not even to be confused with theologizing.

Theologizing, by theologizing I mean the study of the Godhead. Now let's make no mistake about it, if we are to have fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then we shall have to study what is revealed about God, and in that sense we shall have to study God, to know Him. But it is possible to be involved in theology and to theologize about God without having any fellowship with God at all.

A famous renowned German theologian of an earlier age put it like this, there are two kinds of people, he said, that come to the theological seminary, he said college, that was his language, to the theological college. Some come to sit over the Word and over the Almighty to dissect both God and His Word. Others come to sit under the Word and under God to be disciplined and transformed and redeemed and sanctified and commissioned and empowered by God through His Word.

The mere fact that we are involved with theology does not mean to say that we have any fellowship with God in and of itself. Fellowship is not synonymous either with the set of liturgical exercises. I can't pursue this, but one could bring forward a number of things and we would have to say now that is not fellowship.

We may have our liturgy, we have a kind of liturgy here if you like. We come in and we start with prayer, call to worship, prayer, hymn, usually the reading of scripture and so forth. You cannot equate fellowship with these things.

We may go through them, we may take part in them verbally, physically, we may even kneel to prayer, we may even be prostrate on our faces on the ground and yet never know anything of fellowship. Fellowship is not synonymous with any liturgical mode or practice. But let's move to the positive.

Positively what fellowship actually is. Now the New Testament evidence I believe is overwhelming and I don't think that any scholar contemporary or otherwise will really deny this. Fellowship, *koinonia*, is a distinctively Christian experience.

And however religious you may be, unless you are a Christian, you do not know this. This is the line that divides really. The Christian knows *koinonia*.

Now he may know it very imperfectly and he may have much to learn and there are deeper experiences that await him. But if a person is a believer, he has tasted *koinonia*. Fellowship.

Fellowship is a distinctively Christian experience. It is something which is only possible to those who have been reconciled to God through the blood of his Son and regenerated by the blessed Holy Spirit to newness of life in Christ Jesus. Fellowship is always in Christ or in the gospel, never outside of Christ, never outside of the gospel.

Fellowship is circumscribed by the tenets of divine truth revealed and by the work of the Spirit of God wrought within our hearts. Unless we have received the truth and experienced the Spirit of God regenerating us, fellowship is only of theoretical significance to us. Fellowship is only possible to Christian people.

Fellowship is intrinsically the experience of sharing. Now many people use this word instead of fellowship and perhaps there are advantages to that. At least it brings out the heart of it all.

The key word used in the New Testament to describe fellowship is *koinos*, meaning common. This underlies the noun *koinonia*, which is the Greek and the Greek word translated fellowship. *Koinonos*, meaning partner, and *koinonia*, meaning to share.

Now all these things come together. Partnership, we're sharing in work, sharing what we have with other people and other people sharing with us, we're receiving and giving all of us together. Christians share first of all in a common inheritance.

We have fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Now every Christian, this is true of every Christian, every Christian enters into this inheritance. He shares something with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit.

This is the objective aspect of fellowship, a sharing in God. God is my portion, says the psalmist. And the Christian says that.

God is my portion. God is my lot. God is mine.

My God. You notice how the Bible speaks of the God of Abraham. Did Abraham possess God? Well of course no man can possess God exclusively, but Abraham did possess God.

He put the arms of faith around him and he said, my God, the God of Jacob, the God of Isaac, the God of David, the God of Saul, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first thing is this, in fellowship, we possess God. God gives Himself to us as we give ourselves to Him, and we begin to share things with the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That's fellowship. And so it is of course that Jude speaks of a common salvation, and Paul speaks of a common faith, probably faith with a capital F, meaning the faith, the Christian faith. Not our trust in God,

but the faith itself.

We share in this. Are you a believer? Then you've received the faith. Are you a believer? Then you share in God.

Now this is very precious, but it starts there, you see. And this is why we have a line of demarcation between mere socializing and Christian fellowship. It is first of all a sharing in God.

Do you know God? Jesus said, this is eternal life. It is to know the Father, and Jesus Christ whom He sent. And knowing means, biblically, sharing.

Adam knew Eve. There was intimacy between them. To know God is to have spiritual intimacy.

Christians also share a common subjective experience. Not only do we share in God, but we have a common experience. It may not be exactly the same in every life, but it'll be basically the same.

Consciously or not, all Christians have shared, as Peter puts it, in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust. All believers share, and this word is used, have fellowship in, share in, have koinonia in the divine nature. Or if you want to put it differently, we share the Holy Spirit.

No man belongs to Jesus Christ, says Paul in Romans 8, unless the Spirit of God is in him, the Spirit of Christ is in him. Or if you want to put it in John's terms, every Christian has eternal life. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life.

And therefore, the fellowship is the fellowship in life eternal. Here and now upon earth. You see, this raises it from mere socializing with my fellow politician or my fellow educationist or my fellow whatever.

This elevates it, this lifts it up. It is a fellowship in eternal life here upon earth. It is sharing in God, and inwardly something is happening.

One has been regenerated, and the Spirit of God has come in, and we have a kinship and a sharing of spiritual things on the level of the Spirit. It will be evident that such fellowship is tripartite. I like to think of it in terms of a triangle.

I don't know whether this is proper language or not. I've never seen it in print. But in real Christian fellowship, there are always three sides, as there are three sides to a triangle.

And you have that in 1 John chapter 1. First of all, we, says John, we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Now there is the we. All those of us who are believers, who are together at any given moment, there is the we.

That's one side of the triangle. Then there is the Father and the Son. That is another side of the triangle.

And then there is every other believer. The church militant and the church triumphant. The church in heaven and the church on earth.

And when you're in this circle of fellowship, you always have a link with other Christians that are together in the we. With the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the glory. And with the church of yesterday and of every other yesterday.

And the church militant of today. We have fellowship together. We belong to the whole.

Let me read John's words. We proclaim to you what you have, 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 our Lord.

Fellowship, then, is the very opposite of unqualified individualism. It stands over against the experience of isolation, which we mentioned earlier on. It involves a togetherness as participants in something.

And not simply as participants, but as sharers with others of what we have participated. As we shall see in a moment. It creates a bonding experience.

It binds us together. Because we live together and belong together on a deeper level than the mere physical. Secondly, how does one enter the sphere and experience of such fellowship? How does it begin? Now, I'm going to be brief, because I have one other thing, at least, beyond this that I want to say.

But even though I'm going to be brief, I hope I can be very clear. Fellowship is a privilege which is implicit in the call of God to become a Christian. Fellowship is something that is offered when the gospel is proclaimed.

Fellowship is part of the good news. It's not something extra to the good news. It's part of it.

Now, this is something that the 20th century has forgotten or minimized. God is faithful, says Paul, to the Corinthians. Now, they were not a very happy lot.

Morally and otherwise, they were quarreling among themselves. And some of them were living immoral lives. And there were many other things, though they had lots of gifts and lots of potential.

Nevertheless, it wasn't a very noble church, to take as an example. But now, says Paul, God is faithful, even in your case. He doesn't say that.

I'm saying that. I think he meant that. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

By whom you were called into the fellowship. All of you, he says, when you heard the gospel call, heard as an intrinsic element in that call, the summons into fellowship. Now, you haven't come, many of you, he says, you're still split.

You're still sundered. The one from the other. There are divisions among you.

Some say, I'm of Paul. Others, I'm of Apollos. Or others, I'm of Cephas.

And some, I'm of Jesus. And you're dividing up. But listen, he says, this was the call.

It was implicit in the call. No one is called to God in Christ, who is not also called into fellowship with all others in Christ. Now, this is very important.

I don't know how these very exclusive groups are going to manage in the glory. You see, you cannot have God as your father without having his children as your brothers and your sisters. You can't have it.

But many people try. And they want God as their father, and all the privileges of the fatherhood of God, and the saviorhood of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But they build walls between them and other Christians.

You just can't have it. It's sin to do that. It's moving against the Word of God.

It is disobedience to the Word. It is dishonoring the Spirit. It's all contrary to the purpose.

Having been called, now we're fighting against that to which we've been called. The capacity for fellowship is inherent in the action whereby God receives sinners and saves them. Whenever God receives a sinner, in so receiving a sinner to himself, something happens.

God does something which is the basis of fellowship and gives individuals the capacity for fellowship. I can only throw out a few illustrations this morning. For example, justification.

It gives a righteous basis for our acceptance with God, and therefore the basis of fellowship with God. Because in justification, God accounts us righteous in his Son. And that means when we come to God, we don't have to come cringing.

We may come with awe. We should, if we know anything about God. And if we remember the pit from whence we are hewn, we shall come humbly.

But we may come boldly to the throne of grace, says the New Testament, because the basis is laid. We are justified by grace. The blood of Jesus takes our sins away.

The righteousness of Jesus is imputed to us. We come clothed in Christ, and we are accepted in the Beloved One. And it's all in justification.

Justification sets the ground for fellowship, for intimacy with God. And so the Bible even tells us to draw near to God. Oh Bulba, sorry, that's a Welsh saying.

I shouldn't say that. Uh, we really don't know what the Bible teaches us. It bids us to come near to God, right close up.

Jesus breathed on his disciples. Have you ever felt the breath of God on you? The ground of it is laid in your justification. Adoption introduces us into the sphere of fellowship, giving us the rights to come, not just to come, but to come as children.

Now this is wonderful. To come as children to our own Father, who has chosen us. I don't know why he chose me.

It's all the mystery of his infinite love. But he chose us. Brother and sister, this is the imponderable of imponderables.

God chose a sinner like me. God chose sinners like you. He chose us to be his children, and he's brought us in.

And this adoptive work of God is placing us within the circle where intimacy with him is possible, where sharing is possible. Regeneration imparts the new nature. The indwelling Holy Spirit within every believer encourages and enables us to enter into fellowship, and should be discouraging us from doing those things that mar fellowship.

Now a personal confession of faith in Christ is ipso facto. A confession that we come not only to belong to Christ, but to all that are his. We enter the family.

We move into the household. We join the community. This is why you see in the New Testament there is no such a phenomenon as a Christian who doesn't belong to a Christian congregation.

It is incongruous, because we do belong, and we cannot deny the fact we ought to acknowledge it by taking our place with the fellowship of God's people. Now that brings me then to a very serious question. Why is it so apparently rare? I can well hear someone say, if that is what fellowship is, then I haven't seen very much of it.

Why is it so rare? The answer in a nutshell is that it costs to develop fellowship according to the New Testament. And many true Christians are content to live a life that is manifestly below standard, unworthy of the name we bear, of the experience which is ours already. Whilst many nominal Christians have yet to learn that there is such a thing.

As Jesus, the ascended Lord, refers to when he writes to the church of the Laodiceans, and he says, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and it's J.B. Phillips who says, and we'll dine with him. We'll dine together. Now fellowship with God and his people needs to be recognized as essential, and not as the optional extra some people seem to take it to be.

We need to recognize that having been called into Christ, and called to repent of our sins, called to be the Lord's, this is involved in the calling. And it's part of our business to get on with the job. It is we who are responsible for the lack of it.

Piety that is short of this is suspect in Scripture. Fellowship in terms of spiritual sharing with God and sharing with his people is everywhere the norm in Scripture. Paul seeks to involve all kinds of people in his work, and the word he uses, in one form or another, is the word fellowship.

He thanks the Philippians for their partnership in the gospel. And the word he uses is the word for fellowship. Now you might think that the Philippians have been out evangelizing with Paul, but they hadn't.

Or you might think that the Philippians were with him on some particular missionary journeys. Well they were not, save when he was in Philippi. But the point is they were thinking of him, and they were praying for him, and every now and again they were sending a gift to support him.

And you see they were thus fellowshiping with him. They were sharing their gifts with him, as he had shared the gospel with them. And in sharing the gospel, sharing his life.

You cannot share the gospel with anyone without sharing your life with people. Paul urges the Galatians, let him who is taught, share all his good things with him who taught him. What he's saying is this.

Somebody's come and taught you the gospel. Well now you've got something to give to that person. Give what you can.

Whatever you've got, be a sharer. Have communion. Let there be this two-way experience of giving and of receiving.

I suppose that the example par excellence that I can think of is Paul's writing to the Romans in chapter one, when the great apostle Paul is writing his letter to the Christians in Rome. And you know the strength of mind and spirit that is reflected in the epistle to the Romans. Here is this gigantic man of God writing to Christians in Rome, and he says, oh he says, I've been longing to visit you.

And he says, I've been longing to visit you in order to impart to you something that I may have fruit in you as I've had elsewhere. But also, he says, that you may be of profit to me. Well let's get that.

See this is fellowship. There is no one too high, there is no one too lofty, there is no one who's gone on so far ahead in the Christian life that he cannot benefit from the least of the saints. And so we are called upon to fellowship.

To share. Let's move on. Fellowship with God and his people needs to be practiced and cultivated with the greatest care in all our spiritual exercises.

We ought regularly to ask the question, am I really fellowshiping with God and his people? Now let's start here. I think this is where it does start. It should start at the family altar.

I will not embarrass you. I will not ask how many of you have family altars where parents pray with their children. I hope that every parent has one in the home, and every head of a household knows something about this.

But the point I'm getting at is this. God expects us to share here. And he expects the kids, when they come of age, to be able to do something and to impart something into the fellowship.

And the parents, not they, they don't have everything to give. Of course, of course, naturally, by dint of experience and calling and what not, it is they who are going to teach their children. But in the family, the whole family is to learn to give and take, give and take.

And if our children don't learn to give and take in the family and at the throne of grace, my friends, they will never give and take in the world. They'll always be wanting. Oh, I would urge, I would urge every family here in Knox this morning to take this seriously, to know fellowship with children and fellowship with our spouses in our homes.

If parents and children began to do this together, it would soon be reflected in the statistics relating to divorce and child delinquency. I'll not say any more, but God expects it of his people. The Old Testament is full of it.

And the New Testament takes over the legacy from the Old Testament. We should learn to make all our services to be occasions of fellowship. Now, I don't know how many people who come to Knox or go to another church really think why the order of service is as it is.

You may say, oh, we've all got into a rut and somebody started it 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 years ago. Sometimes we think before Adam. And we've got into a rut and there's no meaning, there's no rhyme or reason to it at all.

Oh, wait a moment. Our fathers were not as dumb. I'm speaking generally now because there are differences between churches, but the principle is this.

First of all, we gather here on the Lord's day. And it is a precious thing if there can be silence and waiting in the presence of God for two or three minutes before the service begins. I used to take part in conventions with a dear senior friend.

I was telling Don McLeod about him the other day. He was a leader with the brethren in England. At one stage, he and I preached a lot together.

I was the young Timothy and he was the father. And we used to preach in conventions, in tents, in cities. And the dear old man, whenever we came to start, he would say to the people three minutes before the hour, now, brothers and sisters, he would say, in three minutes from now, we're going to focus all our thoughts and hearts upon Almighty God, Father, Son, and His Holy Spirit.

Are you ready? Now, we would say, let's get ready. Let's think about Him. Let's prepare for it, that we may have fellowship with Him.

You see, my friend, you cannot just rush and dash into the high court of the King of Kings with your eyes half shut after the night before. You can't do it. You've got to prepare.

The call to worship represents the summons of God our Father to His people and some promise of His. And in prayer, we respond and we say, well, my Lord, this is what You've called us to. Here we are.

We always come and we have to acknowledge our faults and our sins and our unworthiness. And this is not because we can't say anything else in our prayers. This is not because we can't think of anything else to pray at that point.

This is because it is necessary. I find it is absolutely necessary when I come into the presence of a holy God to acknowledge that I'm a sinner. And sin has entered my mind and my thoughts and my heart.

And so you see, this is where the fellowship begins. He speaks, we respond. And then we'll stand perhaps to praise Him as He has spoken.

Not only in the early words of the call to worship, but in all that we have known in the gospel. And we'll stand to praise and we'll worship Him in the great words of some of the hymns that we have. And the music will accompany us and will enable us to be giving to God and acknowledging who He is and what He's done together.

And we'll listen to His word again, at least in the morning hour. I don't know where the announcements come in. I think they ought to be somewhere else actually, but that's beside the point now.

But then there must come prayer again, the response you see. Make your known all your needs. Come as children.

Draw near and bear the needs of others. Bring your fellow Christians with you. Bring the needy with you.

Bring the world with you. Bring with you whom God has laid upon your heart. In every service such as this, there should be fellowship.

There should be sharing expressed. One, in the hearing and receiving of the word of God. Two, in submission to the word and will of God.

See, we hear it. Now we respond by submitting to it. Believing it, receiving it, submitting to it.

There should be fellowship expressed in the acknowledgement of what God says is wrong. God puts His finger on a raw spot. We have fellowship with God when we say the word confess means say the same as God says.

If God says to you, that's wrong. To confess your sin is to say the same as God is saying. To acknowledge the truth of what God is saying to you.

This is fellowship. And so we could go on. Having thus fellowshiped in worship, however, we must then proceed to fellowship with God and with His people in service.

And every day's service should be nothing less than this, a walking with God. Enoch walked with God. Truly, says John, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

We are not sent out into the world as messenger boys, leaving the one who has sent us behind somewhere in the sanctuary of Knox or somewhere else. We are asked to go out with God. This is fellowship.

The maintenance of this kind of fellowship with God and His people is costly, and I'm going to end now. It will prove costly in terms of time. It will require us to change our priorities probably many times over before we get to the right place.

It will be costly to self-interest. See, to share anything with anyone else, when somebody else comes close to my life, my wife and my children, for example, that's the nearest link. Now, to share life together means self-interest is going to suffer.

If there's going to be fellowship, then there's got to be give and take. Its maintenance and promotion will leave us less time to gratify our own purely selfish desires. We must not allow selfish desires to separate us from those to whom we should be drawing so close.

It will be costly in one other sense. It will be costly in that it requires open, openness, or to use a Johannine phrase. Now, the phrase in John means more than this.

I'm fully aware of that, but it includes this, I believe. Walking in the light, living openly. There are some people whose lives, they're always trying to hide something, and whenever you talk to them, you always know that they're hedging, and they're hiding something, and you never know when you got them, or when they said something.

They've never said everything. They're never living in the light. They're never open.

There's always something to hide. Now, this is very difficult for some people, because you see, you cannot have fellowship, which means sharing with others as well as with God. You cannot have fellowship without limiting your own.

If fellowship means sharing, then there comes a limit to my own right to my own privacy, and I have to share. You can't have fellowship with a closed mouth, or a closed heart, or a closed hand. There's got to be a giving as well as a receiving, and I can't expect others to give unless I am prepared to give, and it's in the giving and the receiving on both sides that we have fellowship.

Let John say, God is light, in him is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son keeps on purifying us from all sins.

This, brothers and sisters, is fellowship. Are we building walls between us and other people, or are we building bridges? Are we drawing nearer to God and nearer to his people, or are we allowing things to

separate us? Fellowship, fellowship. They continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship.

Do we? Have we begun? If not, the gospel calls us today, and it calls us not only to Christ, the only Savior who can pardon our sins and transform our lives, but it calls us to be with him and with all those who are likewise with him. It calls us into fellowship, and in this fellowship you will never need to be lonely. You may be lonely, but you never need to be lonely.

Lo, I am with you always, and the way to my Father's throne is always open, and my Father will always hear his children, says Jesus. And God has his people and his witnesses everywhere. Brothers and sisters, may the Spirit of God and the Word of God quicken in us an understanding and an acceptance of what fellowship means, that we may experience it more and more to the glory of his name and to the extension of his kingdom.

Let us pray. Lord, we acknowledge our failures and our sins before you again. Those failures in us that come to light as we meditate upon your truth, and we would at the conclusion of the service, as we did at its beginning, say the same things as you were saying about these issues in our lives, that we may have fellowship with you and be one with you and share your view of things.

We pray likewise, O Lord, that should there be between us and one another anything that is disturbing and harming this fellowship, that you will enable us to tear down the hedges and enable us to be open and honest, seeking only your glory and not our own defense. Help us in all things to honor you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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