

The Responsibilities of the Church: Fellowship, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

90-138

This morning as we turn to our time in the word of God we make a transition in our prolonged study of the anatomy of the church. When we first started this series I really didn't know how long it would take, how long it would go. The Lord has continued to encourage my heart to keep on this same track and I noticed in the bulletin this morning that this is message number 29 this morning and number 30 tonight and I'm not near to finishing so there'll be plenty more coming. But what a joy it has been to see how God has used this particular study to bless many many hearts both here in our church and in other places where the tapes go.

My own heart has been encouraged as well through this study as I have gone back and refreshed myself over those matters which are so essential to the life of the church. And this morning we make a transition, we started out in our series on the anatomy of the church by looking at the skeleton of the church, taking Paul's figure of the church as a body and sort of expanding it a little bit and extrapolating from that basic premise. We've taken the body as it were and divided it into four parts: the skeleton, the internal organs, the muscles, and the flesh, and we've looked at the church in those various categories.

We started out looking at the skeleton of the church, those sort of basic foundational aspects of theology truths that give the church its shape and its form, those non-negotiables on which the life of the church hangs, and then we made a transition into the internal organs and those are spiritual attitudes that carry the life of the church. And for weeks and weeks and weeks we've been going through those various spiritual attitudes finally culminating last Sunday in the attitude of hope which is the final attitude, I guess, as we anticipate the future.

And now this morning we transition into the third general category of the anatomy of the church; we like to call it the muscles. And now we get to look at the church in action. We get beyond the attitudes or beyond the foundational doctrinal issues and we move now into the very life of the church as it moves, as it acts; the muscles of the church, those things which put the church into motion. This is what we do here.

We've already talked about the foundations of what we believe. We've talked about the spiritual attitudes we live by that carry the very life of the church and now this is what the church does, this is how the church functions, and we're going to be looking at some very very important issues, and not necessarily in any order of priority. There is no real priority list, they sort of all belong to the life of the church and so I haven't put them in some kind of special priority list even as we did not do that in the case of the spiritual attitudes, we haven't done it here either.

But the first function of the church that I want to address is one that I do think has some very broad, in fact the broadest possible impact on us and the broadest possible connotation for every one of us

and that is the function of fellowship. Fellowship. That is the first of the muscles that we want to talk about. The first of the very functioning motions that the church carries out; this is the church in action.

The first one of those is fellowship. Now when I talk about fellowship, this is what I mean; fellowship is a mutual sharing of life and ministry among the people of God. It is a mutual sharing of life and ministry among the people of God. That's really what fellowship is and that has all kinds of aspects and all kinds of implications, the likes of which we will address this morning and again tonight and maybe even next Lord's day, we'll kind of see how that goes.

Let me take you to a Scripture passage that will sort of set things in place for us. Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 and I'm going to read a somewhat extended portion of this as a foundation for our thoughts, not with the intent of an exposition of this, but of getting the general picture in your mind as a foundation for this concept of fellowship.

1 Corinthians 12 and we need to start in verse four. "Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same spirit there are varieties of ministries and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the spirit, to another the word of knowledge according to the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another gift of healing by the One spirit. To another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy. And to another the distinguishing of spirits to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues or the translation of languages. But one in the same spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body though they are many are one body, so also is Christ for by one spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and we were all made to drink of one spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say because I am not a hand I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ears should say because I am not an eye I am not a part of the body, it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members each one of them in the body just as He desired, and if they were all member, where would the body be?

But now there are many members, but one body, and the eye cannot say to the hand 'I have no need of you.' Or again the head to the feet 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker or necessary and those members of the body which we deem less honorable on these we bestow more abundant honor and our unseemly or less beautiful members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked so that there should be no division in the body but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are the body of Christ or Christ's body and individually members of it."

Now that passage gives you the big picture. As a body we are interconnected, interrelated, and the life of the whole body is dependent upon the functioning of every individual part. That's fairly obvious. Any simple knowledge of the anatomy of the human body understands this interdependence. When a body mutually functions the way it ought to function when every part supplies what it's supposed to supply, you have a healthy, whole body. When some organ of that body or some limb of that body or some function of that body is not operating as it ought to operate then you have sickness or illness, disease. You have a crippling effect of whatever it might be and the body is dishonored in the sense that it cannot fully function the way it should if it were appropriately operating.

And the same is true in the life of the church. The church, if it is to be what God wants it to be, if it is to be the fullness of the stature of the measure of Christ, must then be a fully functioning body. It must be a mutual life and ministry of people sharing with one another. That is how the body is to operate. That's really what fellowship is, and I really believe that that's a part of life. I think God has built into the heart of people a desire for that. I mean even secular people have that; even unconverted people are forever establishing associations, aren't they? And clubs and groups and they assemble around the most bizarre and strange kinds of things. There are people who have great conventions all over the world because they're interested in tattoos, for example, and they have this huge fellowship in the secular sense of people who have that common interest. There are people who do the same about stamps and coins and myriad of other things and every kind of small little nuance in life seems to collect some people who, for reasons I suppose partly connected to the thing itself, and more importantly connected to the need to belong, assemble in these various groups.

I remember when I was back in Baltimore with Dick Mayhue, we were back there holding a Bible conference, and much to his joy we found out that just down the street from the Hampton Inn where we were staying there was a convention of people who are into electric trains, and of course for him this was millennial. This was nearly like the second coming and he has this great fascination with trains so he took me down to the convention of people who are into trains and this was something brand new for me to see these people, thousands of people with little blue and white conductor hats in the full bloom of adulthood acting like kids. You know? And I mean they had trains everywhere, tattooed all over them, all over their t-shirts, and they were sitting around and discussing this caboose and that engine and this cattle car and there were all kinds of little stop lights and _____ configurations and thousands of people and they had stickers all over their cars and some cars looked like trains and, oh, it was just, now this is all about this human need to belong and to collect around some folks that have a common interest so that you can enjoy fellowship on a human level.

Bruce Larson some years back wrote "The neighborhood bar is probably the best counterfeit there is to fellowship. It's an imitation," he says, "of the real thing dispensing liquor instead of grace and escape rather than reality. But it is a permissive, accepting, inclusive fellowship and it is unshakable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes," he says, "not because most people are alcoholic but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved and many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."

Well I think he's right. I think that there is this need for people to know and be known and love and be loved and be touched by somebody else. This is just part of human nature, but it is brought to a completely different level in the framework of Christianity because we not only share a common human life and common interest in worldly things, but we share now in Christ a common spiritual life

and a common interest in the Kingdom of God that pulls us together not only on the basis of human interest but on the basis of divine operation and power. This desire for fellowship then, so much a part of normal human life, finds its truest and highest expression in the church of Jesus Christ, the spiritual fellowship of his body.

When we're talking about fellowship then, we're talking about something that is spiritual. We're not talking about something that is human. We're talking about something that is spiritual. That is to say it goes deeper than a discussion of politics or sports or jobs or the news or any other item. It is something spiritual. It is something profound, and the church is that fellowship. It is that fellowship. And I suppose we're going to be posing a question to you all the way through this discussion about fellowship and the question is how important is the fellowship to you? How does this fellowship fit into your life? Where does it fit? How precious is this fellowship to you? What does it mean to you to be able to join with God's people and to share your life with them? What does it mean for you to be with those who love the Lord Jesus Christ? How important is it for you to minister to somebody else in the family of God to strengthen, to build them up, to encourage, to instruct, to improve, rebuke or whatever else may be necessary?

How important is it to you to be ministered to by somebody else? To be loved? To be known deeply? To be cared for? To be instructed? Do you take it for granted? It is to be readily available to you, is it so much around you all the time that it loses its value? Have you forgotten the privilege because it is so available? Maybe a reminder.

In the grey dawn of an April day in 1945 in the Nazi concentration camp at Flossenberg, a man, a pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed. He was executed by special order of Heinrich Himmler who was Hitler's executioner. Bonhoeffer, this faithful pastor, had been arrested two years before and during the two years of his incarceration in Nazi concentration camps he had been systematically moved from prison to prison to prison. He went from Tegel to Berlin to Buchenwald to Schoenberg and finally to Flossenberg and this was a process that was planned out by the Nazi's to gradually disconnect him from any contact with anybody that he knew in the outside world. And eventually it worked.

He arrived at Flossenberg and all contacts with the outside world were now completely severed, and he lost, according to his own confession, the most precious thing he had in life and that was fellowship with believers. He wrote a book called *Life Together*, in it he said this. "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his dearly beloved son in the faith, Timothy, to come to him in prison in the last days of his life. He would see him again and have him nearby. Paul had not forgotten the tears Timothy shed when last they parted. Remembering the congregation of Thessal _____ Paul also prayed night and day exceedingly that we might see your face and even the age of Apostle John knows that his joy would not be full unless he can come to his own people and speak to them face to face instead of writing them with ink he says.

The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. They recognize Christ present in his body, writes Bonhoeffer. They receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's benedictions as the benedictions of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in the daily

fellowship of life with other Christians.

It is true, of course, he says, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed.

Therefore let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare it is grace nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in fellowship with Christian brothers."

That from a prisoner who lost all fellowship. Fellowship is a precious gift, do you understand that? Do you revere it as such? I hope after our study you will have a fresh, new appreciation for fellowship.

Now to understand fellowship we begin with the concept of the church as a body because it's such a graphic metaphor. Fellowship is shared life just like in a human body. Everything is shared mutually. Everything benefits everything else and that's fellowship. It is involvement with one another, mutually sharing life and ministry in the power of the spirit of God.

As a kid, you know, I always heard the word fellowship, people in the church have always talked about fellowship and every church that I was ever in as a kid, my dad being a pastor, always had a Fellowship Hall, but I can honestly tell you when I think about a Fellowship Hall in my years growing up I don't think about anything spiritual. I don't think about anything really even relational. I always think about little old ladies with grey hair and buns on the back of their head who are serving red punch and stale cookies. Because Fellowship Hall was where you went and got that when we were kids. We went down there and the floor was always linoleum and there were ping pong tables in the corner and we sat at long tables with metal chairs and we got served that stuff while the adults drank coffee and they always said we're going to Fellowship Hall for that. Well that was what it was, coffee, red punch, and stale cookies, but not necessarily fellowship. Now I'm sure fellowship happened there on a spiritual level, but I can't remember it, at least not in my experience as a kid.

But true fellowship is not social. We're not talking about some social activity. True fellowship is spiritual. True fellowship gets below the surface of what we normally think of as fellowship which is merely social, and we're going to talk about that true spiritual fellowship, I trust, in ways that will cause you to be able to grasp its meaning and to estimate its value for your own life and to be faithful to fulfill your responsibility in that regard.

When we talk about fellowship, we're talking about shared life, shared love, shared purpose, shared ministry, shared truth, shared power. Spiritual realities. This is fellowship. Now just a little bit about terminology. The New Testament word that we associate with fellowship is a verb *koinoneo*. *Koinoneo*, a noun also *koinonia* or *koinonas* can come in either form. The verb is used eight times and this will help you to get a little idea of its meaning. The verb *koinoneo*, to have fellowship, is used eight times, but it's never translated in the NAS to have fellowship. Seven of those times it's translated share, to share, and one time participate, and that's basically what it means. To have fellowship means to share on a spiritual level. If you have truth, you share truth. If you have encouragement, you share encouragement. If you offer intercession, you intercede. If you offer wisdom, you give wisdom. If you're going to help somebody carry their burden, that's what you share

with them. It is simply the sharing of spiritual resources. Participating together.

The noun form appears 30 times and has the same idea of sharing and it is even translated that way sometimes. It's also translated fellowship, contribution, partnership, participation, so you get the idea. It has to do with sharing things and they are spiritual things in the body of Christ. Sharing with one another as partners in a common life and a common cause. Sharing the realities of spiritual life whatever they are.

There is no place in Christianity, in the church, for spectators. You understand that. We don't come on Sunday and watch something happen. We are part of a fellowship with mutual responsibility to the same degree that a part of the body is responsibility to carry out its function for the good of the whole. We need you. God wants you functioning in the fellowship, and we need to get back in touch with this very basic core of our common life together.

Now to understand that I'm going to give you six features of fellowship. I'm going to talk about its basis, its nature, its symbol, its danger, its responsibility, and its results. Its basis, its nature, its symbol, its danger, its responsibility, and its results. This morning we're just going to take point one, its basis. What is the basis of fellowship? Or to put it another way who am I supposed to have fellowship with? That, by the way brings up all kinds of questions. I get asked these questions over and over and over again; John, should we have fellowship with this person? Should we have fellowship with this ministry? Should we cooperate with this event? Should we get involved with these folks over here? I'm not sure whether we should cooperate with this deal over here. You know, they're Christians, but they got a little different spin on things and they've got a little different theology and what is the basis of this common life? What is it? Very important, and it's very good that the Bible has given us an answer.

The basis of our fellowship, listen carefully now, is not emotional, it's not limited to those people who are attractive. It's not limited to those people who like trains or tattoos or have some other common thing. It's not limited to denomination or to non-denomination. It's not based on the fact that we're all Baptists or that we're not Baptists. It's not based on anything ecumenical, that we all belong to religious groups and religion is its own commonality. It's not societal. It's not because we're all culturally connected. It's not cultural, it's not because we're at a certain strata in life. It's not racial and can I even add another one? It's not even theological. Are you ready for that? It's not even theological.

The basis of our fellowship is apart from all of those things. 1 John 1 tells us what it is, very important. 1 John 1 and I'm going to spend a little time in this chapter as we finish up, boy that went quick, wow. 1 John 1 verse 3, John says this, "What we have heard and seen we proclaim to you also that you also may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ."

Now let's kind of break that down. The son and the father are in fellowship. John says, "I have fellowship with the father and the son. Our fellowship is with him." And he could be encompassing the apostles as well, our fellowship as apostles is with the father and with the son and what we've seen and heard, we're proclaiming to you so that you can have fellowship with us. We want to pull you in to the circle of fellowship that we're enjoying with the father and with his son. The proclamation then that John is talking about, the message that he's proclaiming is not an end in itself, it has a goal, and the end is fellowship. We want you to come into the common life, the common

sharing, the common purpose, the common ministry, the common power that we enjoy because we are linked to God and Christ.

Now the question at this point is, what is this that he proclaimed that produces that? What is it that brings someone into this fellowship? Go back to verse one.

"That which or what was from the beginning which literally we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled," here it comes, "concerning the Word of Life."

Now who is the word of life? In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. Who is the word of life? Jesus Christ. Alright so John calls him the word in his Gospel and he calls him the word here in his epistle, and John says, "The word," go back to verse one, "was from the beginning," that is eternal, he is the eternal word incarnate. "We have heard him, he came into the world we were there when he talked, we have seen him with our eyes, and we beheld. Literally that takes seeing deeper. We have penetrated into his life having walked with him for three years and we have touched with our own hands."

Christ is the theme here. Christ who was from the beginning the everlasting second member of the trinity came into the world, we heard him, we saw him, we looked deeply into his life, we touched him. Verse two, "That life, that word of life, that eternal God was manifested, we have seen and bear witness firsthand and we proclaim to you the eternal life." Now he came into the world to bring eternal life, right? So John is simply talking about the Gospel. He is saying it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "The incarnate God who came into the world, taught, we were with him, we saw him, we touched him, we heard him teach. It is the Gospel of eternal life which was manifested in him that we preach to you," now we come to the middle of verse three; "we proclaim it to you that you also may have," what? "Fellowship."

There's the bottom line folks, the bottom line is this anybody who believes the Gospel is in the fellowship. That is what that is saying. Anyone who believes the Gospel is in the fellowship. Whatever might be your emotional attachment. Whatever might be their denominational or non-denominational identification, whatever they might be in terms of their societal place or their culture, whatever race they might be, whatever theology within the framework of Christian theology they might believe, if they have come to faith in Jesus Christ and believe the Gospel, they're in the fellowship. They're in the fellowship.

In 1 Corinthians 6:17 is a verse that I quote so often because it has such profound implications. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Anytime a person is joined to Christ through faith in him, they become one with him and consequently one with every other person who is one with him. You say are you talking about Episcopalians? Those that are in Christ. You're talking about Armenians who don't believe in reformed theology? Those that are in Christ. You're talking about Pentecostals? Those that are in Christ.

See the bottom line basis of the fellowship is saving faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If they understand the Gospel and they understand saving faith, they're in Christ, and if they're in Christ, they're in the fellowship. This is pointed out in the book I wrote *Reckless Faith*. If you want a detailed presentation of this one of the chapters in *Reckless Faith* titled "What are the Fundamentals?" And it outlines what I've just said to you in more detailed terms. If somebody doesn't understand the

Gospel and doesn't understand salvation by faith alone, and then nature of saving faith, they cannot be considered in the fellowship, alright? But anyone who does understand that and has put their trust in Jesus Christ genuinely is in the fellowship.

You say, you mean people who have bad theology? People who don't agree with us in theology are in the fellowship? That's right. That's right. They're in the fellowship. They're part of the body, and for people who have an aberrant theology, who don't understand all the things that are so important in the rest of Scripture beyond the Gospel our ministry to them in the fellowship is to instruct them. And for those who are in the fellowship who say don't understand because they're ignorant, they don't understand the level of devotion and commitment they ought to have to certain aspects of life and the church our responsibility is to encourage them. For those who have fallen into some kind of patterns of sin and are maybe over extending their Christian liberty, our responsibility is to go to them, reprove them, rebuke them, instruct them, build them up. But our responsibility is not to ignore them. Our responsibility is to help them.

If a preacher preaches and misrepresents something or fails to represent something that was absolutely essential, the responsibility that you would have is to come to the preacher and say, "Dear friend, may I minister to you in this way by encouraging you along this line?" That's how the body ministers. It is equally important when you recognize the goodness in someone, when you recognize the truth coming from someone that you go to them and encourage them and build them up and look them up as they have been faithful in that regard. But if they're in the fellowship, they're in the body, and the body needs to mutually minister, right?

It's very important to understand that because it's easy for people who get a highly defined and highly refined theology to get into ivory tower and all you do is sit there and shoot people who don't agree. Nothing could be further from the desire of God or the heart of Christ for his church. If there is error somewhere, then our responsibility is to assist those people lovingly to come to know the truth about it, but they're in the fellowship. We don't decide the fellowship by your view of baptism or by whether you're a dispensationalist, a non-dispensationalist or whether you believe in a pre-trib rapture or a post-trib rapture or a mid-trib rapture or a pre-wrath rapture, or no rapture.

We don't decide whether you can be in the body of Christ because you're a reformed theologian and you've got all your Calvinistic i's dotted and t's crossed. If you're in Christ, you're in the fellowship, and the fellowship has a responsibility to you. I can say that from a personal standpoint. One of the compelling reasons in my life for writing books and writing commentaries is to assist people in the fellowship beyond these walls to come to a fuller understanding of the truth, and that's ministry within the body to them.

For those of you who pray for people, that's your ministry that they might be strengthened or delivered in their time of need. Sometimes it takes the form of a reproof or a rebuke or an instruction or admonition, but that's a responsibility within the body and a very basic one at that.

The basis then is salvation. The basis of fellowship is salvation. The objective, John says, very simple; preach the Gospel so that people could hear it and believe in Christ and enter into the fellowship. To become a part of an eternal partnership. Sometimes you hear somebody say, "Well so and so's out of fellowship." No, that's can't happen. Being out of fellowship would be like losing your, what? Your salvation. You can't be out of fellowship. You can lose the joy of the fellowship. Look at verse four, "These things we write that our joy may be made complete." There are issues of joy and

blessing in the fellowship, I mean it even says in Matthew 6:14-15 that if you don't forgive the sins of others, the Lord won't forgive your sin. That's not talking about eternal forgiveness, that's talking about temporal forgiveness. Your eternity is cared for, but I'll tell you something if you have a root of bitterness and you have an unforgiving heart towards somebody else, you're going to have misery in your temporal life because the Lord's going to withhold his blessing. That's what that's talking about.

Sure it's possible for Christians to forfeit joy. For Christians to be under the chastening of God, but that is not losing your salvation. That's quite a different thing than losing your salvation. I think Dr. Barnhaus gave an apt illustration of this. He said, "A man walking along the deck of a ship might fall and his fall might hurt him, but it wouldn't be the same as falling overboard." And Barnhaus said, "The believer when he sins has fallen on the deck, but he certainly is not lost overboard." Christ has seen to it that no wave, death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height; depth shall ever sweep us off the deck.

So you're never out of the fellowship, but you could certainly lose the joy of it. It is important then to understand that every saved person is entitled to the ministry of the fellowship. Every saved person. That's why in Matthew 18 we're instructed not to despise even the least of these of these little ones who believe in me. Not to look down on the ones for whom God the father and the holy angels are so concerned, remember that? The father in heaven as well as the angels are concerned about even the least of these. God is certainly no respecter of persons and he's certainly no respecter of persons in the sense of preferring some of his own over others. We're all in the fellowship. The basis of fellowship is salvation.

To support his point John goes through this whole epistle really giving us a clear picture on this matter of who is in the fellowship. Now we say, "Okay, salvation is the basis and somebody who is a Christian is in the fellowship. The next and immediate question is how do you know who's really a Christian, right?" So you know where your responsibility lies, you need to know who's a Christian and John is going to send us through this epistle on a journey to know how we can tell a true Christian.

Turn to chapter two for a moment before we look a little more at chapter one, but chapter two very quickly verse three, "By this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his", what? Commandments, alright, it's the person who submits to the authority of Scripture. The one who says, in verse four, I have come to know him, I'm in the fellowship, but doesn't keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected and by this we know that we are in him.

So you look for somebody who submits to the authority of the word of God. Then down in verse nine we see another test, "The one who says he is in the light," the light of salvation, God is light of course. "The one who says he's in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him, but the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and doesn't know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

Second thing, see how he treats Christians. Does he desire to be with them? Does he have affection for them? Does he treat them with kindness or does he have disdain and dislike and animosity toward God's people? Is he indifferent to them? Does he have no longing to be with them? Very important test.

And down in verse 15, "Do not love of the world," he says, "and the things in the world indicates that the love of the father is not in him." So you ask the question does he submit to the authority of the word of God. Does he show affection for other believers? Does he disassociate himself from the things of the world? Are the things of God's kingdom more important to him? Down in chapter three, verse six, "No one who abides in him sins. No one who sins has seen him or knows him." Now you have to qualify that so verse seven does, "Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous just as he is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil."

So he says in verse six, "The one who abides in him doesn't sin. The one who sins doesn't see him or know him." Then he tells you what he means by that. "The practice of righteousness means a righteous person. The practice of sin means one is of the devil." In other words it's the pattern of their life. Look at the life, is the pattern an unbroken pattern of sin? Then that's not a believer, no matter what they claim.

So when you ask the question who is really a believer, and by the way it goes this way all through the epistle we don't have time to go any further, but you ask how do I know if this person is a Christian? How do I know if they're in the fellowship? You look at their life. Do they submit to the authority of the word of God? Do they demonstrate affection and love for the fellowship of believers? Do they turn from the world and the things in the world and pursue the matters of the kingdom? Is that their priority? And do they as a pattern of life pursue righteousness and not live in an unbroken pattern of sin?

If they pass the test, then they're in the fellowship. Go back to verse five of 1 John 1 now and we'll wrap this up. 1 John 1 I'm going to read verses five to seven. "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announced to you that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light," and walking in the light would be summed up as carrying and obeying the word, loving your brothers, being disconnected from the world, having a pattern of righteousness, all the things we saw; "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."

Now let me tell you what he's saying, it is the people walking in the light who are in the fellowship, and it is the people in the fellowship who are having their sins continually cleansed. That's the issue. It's the people in the fellowship who are having their sins continually cleansed. The people having their sins cleansed are the people in the fellowship. How do you know who's in the fellowship? They're walking in the light. What does that mean? That means they submit to the word of God, that means they love the brotherhood, that means they disconnect from the world and set their minds on the things of God, that means they have a pattern of righteousness in their life. They're walking in the light.

Such people are in the fellowship. They're in the fellowship and when they're in the fellowship we have this responsibility to minister to them, whatever their need might be and to remember again what Bonhoeffer said. Let me read you another paragraph that is very very insightful. He said this, "I am a brother to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me. The other person has become a brother to me through what Jesus Christ did for him. This fact that we are brethren only through Jesus Christ is of immeasurable significance. Not only the other person who is earnest

and devout who comes to me seeking brotherhood must I deal with in fellowship. My brother is rather that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, delivered from his sin, and called to faith and eternal life. It is not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality, his theology, his piety that constitutes the basis of our fellowship. What determines our fellowship is what that man is by reason of Christ." Our fellowship with one another consists solely in what Christ has done for both of us. This is true. Not merely at the beginning he says, "As though in the course of time something else were to be added to our fellowship, it remains so for all the future. I have fellowship with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ." He then summarizes, "Christian fellowship is not an ideal which we must seek, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we must participate. _____ more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone. The more serenely will we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it."

In other words, when another believer comes to me, Christ comes to me. What he or she is in Christ is the source of our fellowship and if there is sin, my part of the fellowship is to minister to that. And if there is error or ignorance, my responsibility is to minister to that. And if there is the need for encouragement my responsibility is to offer that, and we are all gifted in different ways to be more effective in certain areas than in others, aren't we? And God so uses us in the body as we saw the gifts laid out in the 1 Corinthians 12.

We have much more to say, but suffice it to say at this point you now understand, I hope, the basis of the fellowship; salvation. Next point is the nature, that is to say how does it function and we'll save that for tonight.

Let's pray. It is with joy our Lord that we come to you to thank you, that we've become a part of the fellowship. Sometimes we can become so smug and self-satisfied, confident and even proud about our particular doctrine, ministry, spiritual achievement, piety, devotion, Bible knowledge, that we forget that the only reason that the only reason we're in the fellowship is because of what Christ has done in us. The only reason we're in the fellowship is because you, a sovereign and loving God, sought to save us apart from anything we are or could do. The only reason we're in the fellowship is by grace, and may we show the same grace to others in the fellowship that you showed to us when we were sinners and Christ died for us. And help us Lord to understand our responsibility to the fellowship and to minister to all who come across our path. We know that we can't cover the whole fellowship, but help us to respond to other believers whenever we have the opportunity by offering ministry that encourages, instructs, strengthens that other person. And Lord we pray that there might be even today some precious souls who will come into the fellowship because they believe the Gospel. For your honor we ask these things, Amen.

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