

The apostle John, along with others who were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ, proclaims the joy of experiencing true fellowship with the living God so that Christians who have not seen Jesus might also experience the same fellowship—with God and each other—provided they pass the "fellowship tests".

Introduction - What does it mean to explain Christianity as "a relationship"? Is this helpful?

I. The Reality and Possibility of Fellowship

A. What we are made for (vv. 3-4)

The joy of *koinonia* (translated as "fellowship"). There are two aspects to this biblical idea: shared relationship and shared partnership. The relational aspect includes sharing of faith, authenticity, and friendship - all of which bring a kind of joy unique to all other friendships or associations.

B. With God (vv. 1-3)

People who were close enough to see, hear, and touch Jesus - those to whom Jesus revealed himself - were in fellowship with God. They continued in that eternally living relationship with God even after Jesus ascended to heaven. Those who saw, heard, and touched Jesus also knew that believers without those same experiences could nevertheless share in the same relationship with God.

C. With other Christians (vv. 3, 6-7)

Sharing in a true relationship with God necessarily creates fellowship with other believers. Fellowship is by nature triangular. Consider the testimony of spiritual fellowship in Scripture and personal experience. Have you ever lived in life-giving fellowship with other believers?

II. The Tests of Fellowship

A. With God

1. Walking in the light and not the darkness (vv. 5b-7). If you are walking in the light, habitually seeking to know, love, and obey him, then you've passed the first fellowship test. Since God is light absent any darkness, if you walk in his ways, then the Bible says that is a proof you have fellowship with God.

2. Confessing and not denying your sins (vv. 8-10). Because we are sinners, relationship with God requires that we don't ignore our sins, or just assume that God will ignore them either, but that we bring them to him with the right attitude and the right request. When you confess your sins to God, it is another proof you have fellowship with him.

B. With other Christians

1. Pursing intimacy and transparency, not isolation and privacy (vv. 5b-7). Fellowship with God requires you walk with him in the light. According to the same pattern, you must walk in the light with others to have fellowship with them. When you have such a shared relationship with other Christians, you display a mark of true fellowship.

2. Being humble and authentic, not proud and hypocritical (vv. 8-10). Pride offers to fill another's relational needs from a position of sufficiency. When you cultivate relational humility and authenticity by giving and receiving, you display a mark of true fellowship.

III. The Practices of Fellowship

A. With God

1. Seeking to know God and be known by him (vv. 3, 5-7). You get to know God by experiencing him over the long haul. Over the years you "see, look upon, and touch" God through his Word of life and his Spirit. You listen and respond in faith and obedience.

2. Confessing you are a sinner in general who still sins in particular (vv. 8-10). Notice the grammatical forms of the word "sin." As a singular noun (general, nature); plural noun (particular, fruit) and as a verb (action). Most Christians have little trouble confessing a *sin nature*, but have a hard time confessing *sins*.

3. Trusting God to forgive and cleanse your sin in Jesus' blood (vv. 7, 9; 2:1-2). Some Christians have a hard time believing God's grace applies to you personally. This is just a form of unbelief, of walking in darkness. Trust he is faithful and just to forgive.

B. With other Christians¹

1. Sharing one another's beliefs, thinking, and spirituality (Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 1:10; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Believers possess union and communion with God, and they share union and communion with each other. Christians live a shared life together that should manifest itself in the larger corporate body, but also in smaller, more intimate groups of believers.

2. Serving one another through accountability (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:25; Jas 5:16). We must have the kind of relationships with other Christians in which we are confessing our sins to each other. It takes a long time to become intimate enough to do this. We must not walk in darkness alone or with others. We cannot live hypocritical lives, hiding certain sins, keeping them secret from other Christians, while claiming to walk in the light with God. This kind of hypocrisy is spiritual suicide. Secret sins have not been cleansed by the blood of Christ. They will destroy you through either pride or fear. They will rob you of the joy and experience of fellowship with God and with other believers.

3. Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation (Mt 5:23-24; 18:15; Gal 5:26; Eph 4:2; Col 3:13; Jas 4:11). We must have the kind of relationships with other Christians in which we are free to forgive those sins committed against us, and to love in such a way to cover a multitude of sins. This only happens if we have Christian friendships that bring us real joy and enrich our experience of fellowship. Real Christian friendship, a fellowship of brothers and sisters, does not come easy or naturally. It is costly, because the one forgiving absorbs the sin debt, which can feel like a heavy burden. Thankfully God provides believers everything they need to experience joyful fellowship, but Christians must devote themselves to the practice of fellowship. It takes time, commitment, scheduling, saying no to other pursuits, and often leads to seasons of frustration, tears, anger, hurt, loneliness, and apathy. But the lasting fruit of devotion to fellowship is joy - shared with God and each other - experienced as eternal life enjoyed now and forever.

¹ These three points are adapted from Timothy Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 66-69.

Conclusion - The shared relationship aspect of Christianity is of a different sort than what other religions, institutions, and human associations can provide. Christianity is experienced as a relationship between a person and his Creator-Savior. It is not merely like being part of a family. It is being and experientially living in the family of God our Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and all his children. This committed relationship is a spiritual fellowship of shared faith, shared authenticity, and friendship. To be in fellowship with God and other Christians is eternal life. Fellowship: it's what we're made for.