

What is Fellowship?

The Problem of Sin Part 2

1 John 1:6-7

Summary: Fellowship with God is the most important thing there is. It is the summary of the Christian, the whole of what God calls us to, and the solution to all our problems. John puts fellowship with one another where we expect fellowship with God, showing the two to be inseparably connected. There is no fellowship with people apart from fellowship with God because fellowship with people is sharing together in God. And there is no fellowship with God apart from fellowship with people because God loves people and requires that we love them in order for us to be near Him (think of the love you receive from the Church because God is like that!) Watch out for the "I don't need friends" pride and the "It is your fault when my needs aren't met" pride. WALK IN THE LIGHT!

Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. 6 If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Fellowship with God

The most important thing

Why would someone who is not having fellowship with God claim to have fellowship with God? Even unbelievers seem to intuitively know that fellowship with God is a desirable thing. God has planted in us a desire to have fellowship with Him - so much so that even when we are not having fellowship with Him we invent ways to convince ourselves that we really are. Think about it – what could be greater than fellowship – personal, favorable interaction with God? If it is true that God is the Creator, then He is the only source of life, the only source of blessing, the only source of health, joy, safety, provision, salvation, forgiveness, meaning in life, strength, healing, power, happiness, wisdom, truth, delight, fulfillment, satisfaction. Everything you ever do all day every day is to obtain something in that list. And if God is the only ultimate source of those things, what could you ever do with your time that would be more important than seeking fellowship with God?

Goal of the Christian life

Our goal in life should be to please God, and what pleases God is when we have fellowship with Him. According to Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5, Enoch was so pleasing to God that God just took him right up into heaven. And the thing that made Enoch that pleasing to God was the fact that Enoch walked with God.¹ Walking with God is another way of describing close fellowship. The whole reason for the gospel – the whole reason for the New Covenant, is for us to draw near to God.

¹ Enoch's walking with God is interpreted by the writer of Hebrews as the equivalent of pleasing God. The Hebrew of Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The LXX puts the word "pleased" in place of the phrase "walked with". "And Enoch pleased God and he was not found because God had taken him."¹ The author of Hebrews follows the LXX.

Genesis 5:24 LXX: καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο ὅτι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός (and he was not found because God had taken him)

Hebrews 11:5: καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο διότι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός (and he was not found because God had taken him)

Genesis 5:24 LXX: (εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνωχ τῷ θεῷ) "Enoch pleased God"

Hebrews 11:5: (Ἐνώχ... μεμαρτύρηται εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ) "Enoch...commended as pleasing God"

By following the LXX the writer of Hebrews confirms that walking with God is the equivalent of pleasing God.

Hebrews 10:19-21 Therefore, brothers ... since we have a great high priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith

Paul summarized the whole Christian life in 1 Corinthians 1:9 as a calling into fellowship with Jesus Christ. The greatest commandment is to love God,² and receiving love from God is better than life at its best.³ That relational interaction and mutual exchange of love in a personal, intentional way is described in the Bible in many different ways. Here it is called fellowship with God. In other passages it is called nearness to God, or seeking God, listening to God, eating and drinking God, seeing God, walking with God, knowing God, remaining in God - all of those metaphors describe some aspect of drawing near to God and having a positive experience of direct, personal interaction with Him. Fellowship with God is everything. It is right up there with grace and love.

2 Cor.13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Solution to all problems

It is the solution to all your problems – every one of them without exception. Are you sad? What is the solution to the problem of sorrow and grieving? In John 16:22 Jesus said that after His resurrection He would come to us and our grief would give way to a joy that cannot be taken away. So the solution to being sad is the nearness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you in need of comfort and tender compassion? God's compassion and the tender love of Christ are expressed to us through fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Php.2:1,2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded

And that fellowship with the Holy Spirit gives you not just encouragement and compassion from God, but all kinds of wonderful benefits. When you have fellowship with the Spirit, 1 Thes.1:6, Romans 14:17, and Galatians 5:22 promise the result will be joy. Romans 15:13 promises hope. Ephesians 1:18 and 1 Cor.2:14 point to enlightenment as something that comes from fellowship with the Spirit. Romans 8:6 and Galatians 5:22 promise peace from the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 3:24 and Ephesians 1:13 it is assurance of your salvation. In Acts 15:28 we see guidance resulting from fellowship with the Spirit. In 1 Cor.2:13 (and chapters 12-14) it is enablement for ministry. In Galatians 5:17 it is power to defeat the flesh. In Romans 8:26, 1 Cor.14:15, and Philippians 3:3 we see help in prayer and worship as a result of fellowship with the Spirit. Romans 8:15 identifies all the benefits of sonship as coming from fellowship with Him. And in 1 Cor.6:11 it is the entire sanctification process.

Do you have longings and desires that are going unfulfilled and unsatisfied? What is the solution to that? According to John 6:55, Psalm 36:7-8, Isaiah 58:11-14, Proverbs 9, Psalm 63:1,5, Isaiah 55:1-2, Jeremiah 2:13, Jeremiah 15:18, Psalm 42:1, Psalm 143:6, Psalm 1:3, Psalm 34:8, the solution to that kind of hunger and thirst in the soul is fellowship with God - experiencing God in such a way that His presence satisfies those appetites of the soul in a way very similar to how food and drink satisfy physical hunger and thirst. The pleasures of this world *sometimes* temporarily satisfy – other times they do not. But the experience of the presence of God in fellowship with Him *always* satisfies the soul – no exceptions.⁴

² Mt.22:37.

³ Ps.63:3.

⁴ Jer.2:13.

Psalm 145:18-20 The LORD is near to all who call on him ... He fulfills the desires of those who fear him

Are you struggling with some sin? The solution is fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Are you afraid or in danger? The solution is fellowship with God in which you experience Him as a refuge. No matter what need or desire you have, the solution is fellowship with God. That is what life is all about.

So when John comes along and says it is possible that your claim to have fellowship with God is false – that is pretty alarming. So how do you make sure your fellowship with God is not bogus? We already found back in verse four that the beginning point is to have fellowship with the Apostles. You have to be a partner with them in their mission, which means you have to be in agreement with their writings. (Their writings are what we call the New Testament.) If you are at odds with anything in the New Testament you are at odds with God. If you are not on the same page with John or James or Paul you are not on the same page with God.

So you have to accept the Bible. But one of the hard and painful lessons the Jews learn in Romans three is the fact that merely possessing the truth is not enough. It is the essential starting point, but merely having the truth is not synonymous with having fellowship with God. John is going to go on to tell us what else is required. Once you accept the truth of the New Testament, then what?

In this section, starting in verse six, John gives us three pairs of “if” statements. And in each pair the first one describes the wrong way and the second one shows the right way. So he says, “If you do this – that is bad. If you do this – that is good.” And there are three of those pairs - a wrong way then the right way, a second wrong way then the right way, and a third wrong way and then the right way.

Last week we took a look at the first wrong way – the first of the six “if”s.”

6 If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

That is the wrong way. Then he gives us the opposite of that – the right way. What is the opposite of falsely claiming fellowship with God and walking in darkness?

7 But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we...

And at that point you expect him to say, “...we do indeed have fellowship with God.” Wouldn’t that make sense? “If we walk in the darkness we *do not* have fellowship with God, but if we walk in the light then we *do* have fellowship with God.” That is what you expect. But John pulls out a literary technique that he will use more than once in this book, and puts in a word we do not expect. He says, “If we walk in the darkness we do not have fellowship with God, but if we walk in the light we do have fellowship with...*one another*.” One another? I thought we were talking about fellowship with God? Where did “one another” come from?

Fellowship with one another

Inseparable from fellowship with God

This is a literary technique John likes to use to make an emphatic point. In place of the word you expect he places a different word. (I believe the technical term for this particular syntactical linguistic structure is “the ol’ switcheroo.” At least that’s what I call it.) So, what do you think the emphatic point is? The point is that fellowship with God and fellowship with His people are so closely related that they are interchangeable.

Why no fellowship with people apart from fellowship with God?

The essence of fellowship – it must be mutual sharing in God

Another kind of switchero John pulls is also in verse six. He switches the metaphor about light. In verse five he says that God is light. In verse six he says God is in the light. How is it that God is light and He is in the light?

One of the most common mistakes people make in interpreting the Bible is the tendency to take a metaphor that is simply intended to communicate one specific idea in one specific context and universalize it across the whole Bible as an absolute statement. Let the metaphor be as fluid as the writer wants it to be.

Think about what John is saying in this switcheroo. In verse five he says God is light in order to make the point that there could never be a union between God and someone walking in darkness. In verse six John is trying to teach us how to walk through life. And the point there is we need to be like God in the way we live.

If we walk in the light as God is in the light....

It does not say, “as God walks in the light” because God does not walk. Walking is progression through life, and God does not progress anywhere. So John drops the word “walk” when he talks about God. We need to walk in the light as God is in the light.

Verse five is a statement about His nature. God’s nature is such that He cannot be connected with darkness in any way. Verse six is a statement about the way God acts. “He is in the light” means God always behaves in a manner consistent with His nature. God’s behavior is always in perfect harmony with His nature. And we cannot have fellowship with one another unless our behavior is in harmony with God’s behavior.

That gives us an important insight into what fellowship with another person is. Fellowship with another person is joining that person at God’s side. Remember, the word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) means “sharing.” Sharing in what? Sharing in God. You have fellowship with a person when you and that person share in the experience of God’s grace together.

Sometimes you hear people say, “Fellowship is not sitting around and chatting over coffee and doughnuts. True fellowship is when you get together one-on-one or in small groups and share your sorrows and joys with one another and encourage one another and help one another.” I agree with the first part of that statement. However I disagree with the second part. Getting together one-on-one or in small groups and sharing sorrows and joys and encouraging and helping one another is not fellowship any more than coffee and doughnuts are. In fact, by itself it is not even particularly Christian. Getting together one-on-one or in small groups and sharing sorrows and joys and encouraging and helping one another is something that takes place every single night in bars all over Denver. It happens at the Elks club, it happens at secular AA meetings, it happens at Starbucks, and breaks rooms at work and all kinds of places.

The unity of fellowship with God and fellowship with the Church

We have seen in past studies that fellowship with God and fellowship with His people are tied inseparably together. If you think you have fellowship with God but you are out of fellowship with His people you are dreaming. And if you think you automatically have fellowship with God just because you are highly involved in church you are dreaming. Where there is not both there is neither. And the reason for that is that fellowship with people is nothing more than a sharing together in God. That is why John uses them interchangeably. The only time you and I are actually having fellowship with each other is when we are sharing together in the experience of God’s grace. At the end of 2 Corinthians 6 we have the command that we not be yoked together with unbelievers. We are never to put ourselves into a relationship with an unbeliever where we are so tightly bound to that person that he or she has a significant effect on the direction of our life. Why? Why not be yoked together with an unbeliever? Why are we not permitted to marry an unbeliever or get into too close a friendship or business partnership with a non-Christian?

2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness?

Now, up to that point it sounds like he might just be saying that you are righteousness and light, and they are lawlessness and darkness, and that is why you are incompatible. But look at the next verse:

¹⁵ What agreement does Christ have with Belial?

Obviously Christ and Satan have nothing to do with each other. But what does that have to do with you and a non-Christian friend? If you bind yourself together with some unbeliever, does that mean Jesus is somehow forced to have close communion with the Devil? I don't think so. There are a lot of Christians who have disobeyed this and married unbelievers, and I do not think in all those cases Jesus Christ is having intimate fellowship with Satan. He is pure light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

So then what does it mean? What does the opposition between Christ and Satan have to do with the fact that I am not to be joined together with an unbeliever? The reason that it is significant is because the heart of fellowship – the core of sharing together in love with another person, is sharing together in the great treasure and great joys of your life. And if the great treasure of your life is Christ, and the great treasure of someone else's life is Satan, then you cannot share in fellowship with that person.

¹⁶ And what agreement does God's sanctuary have with idols? For we are the sanctuary of the living God, as God said: I will dwell among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ¹⁷ Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing, and I will welcome you. ¹⁸ I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.

True fellowship is when you share in the experience of the presence of God with someone. It is when you share with someone the experience of His nearness and His walking among you. And it is impossible to do that with an unbeliever.

Galatians 2:9 When James, Cephas, and John ... acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas

Fellowship with Paul happened only when they acknowledged the grace that had been given to Paul. There could be no fellowship prior to that because fellowship is sharing in the grace of God together. If you are participating in the life of God, and I am participating in the life of God, then you and I can have fellowship together.

So where do the coffee and doughnuts come in? Or going to lunch together, or spending an evening together? Is that fellowship or not? It depends. If your time together is a sharing in the life of God – joint participation in fellowship with God, then you are having true fellowship with each other.

Coffee and doughnuts actually play a fairly important role. When we eat and drink together, or do some activity together, or drive somewhere together, that gives us an occasion to be with each other long enough for spiritual things to come up in conversation. Suppose Tracy and I go to some friends' house and spend a whole evening together playing cards or watching a Denver Nuggets' game, or whatever. At some point we might get into a conversation about one of the attributes of God that we have been meditating on in our devotions. Then it might be small talk for a while, and some laughter and joking around. Then some conversation about our lives – expressing love to one another through being interested in each other's lives (but not the same kind of love the world has for their friends. I am talking about love that grows out of love for God – liking your friends because of God's love for them, and offering gestures of love that are consciously intended as expressions of worship to God.) Then later in the evening we might get to talking about some spiritual struggle one of us is having. And the others might offer strengthening or healing words from Scripture, or pray for the ones struggling right on the spot- helping that one find strength in God like Jonathan did for David in 1 Samuel 23:16. That is fellowship – sharing in the grace of God together.

Another night we might go over there and the entire time do nothing but talk about temporal things without paying any attention to God at all. We might have a great time that night with Christian friends, but it is not fellowship. It is just fun friendship. John Piper: “I am biased toward ... ministry-oriented friendship as opposed to tea sipping at the kitchen table friendship. To which you should probably respond, “What’s wrong with sipping tea at the kitchen table?” ... Nothing – unless... three weeks go by – you’re still sipping; four weeks go by, and you’re still sipping, and four months go by, and you’re still sipping and talking about the kids. And four years go by and you’re still sipping. Then you don’t have a Christ exalting relationship; you have a tea exalting relationship.” Every Christian friendship (marriage, sibling relationship, business partnership, etc.) should be all about Christ, and making Him look more marvelous in the eyes of the other person.

If you are not currently working on building relationships with people in the church – outside of your own family, that is just flat out disobedience to God’s Word. That is rebellion against God. We have talked enough about the one another commands in this church that there should not be any surprise there. But when you work on those friendships – you have someone over for dinner, meet someone for lunch, chat on the phone, or just talk share prayer requests and pray for each other in your small group - let’s make an effort to move more and more toward making our time together real fellowship.

Try to have such wonderful times with God in your devotions that when you see your friends again you have something besides trivia to talk about. You can talk about the marvelous experiences with Christ you have had since the last time you were with this friend. You can talk about the things He has taught you, and the new insights into the wonders of one of His attributes.

I am trying to learn in my life not to squander my time with the saints. Just think of it – a *saint*. A saint! If you are going to go have lunch with a Christian you are going to be sitting across the table from one of the holy ones of God! One of the elect from before the foundation of the world! The greatest possible joy in this life comes from fellowship with God. And there are a lot of different ways to have fellowship with God. The greatest of all is loving a saint as an intentional, conscious expression of your love for God. That means there is more potential for happiness when you go to meet with a saint than there is with any other activity in this world, but only if you make your time together a time of sharing in the grace of God.

What do you suppose the marriages would be like if we stopped worrying about getting our spouse to treat us better, and starting seeing them as walking opportunities to share the deepest spiritual fellowship? When we get together with Christian friends and have coffee or a meal, let’s not behave as though the most glorious, marvelous, beautiful, spectacular, awesome being in existence isn’t right there in the room with us. Let’s behave as we would if we really believed such a being is present there with us at the table. Let’s point to Him and talk about Him and talk to Him and enjoy Him together.

And if coffee and doughnuts, or a meal, or going shopping together, or going for a walk, or watching a ball game, or playing cards, or whatever activity helps you spend enough time together for spiritual things to come up in conversation, then let’s be committed to doing those things for that purpose. And when we carry out our ministries in the church, let all our ministry to one another flow out of our experiences with God. Let all our teaching and service and love and encouragement and giving and every other ministry spring out of our experiences of His presence. That is what will keep our ministry from becoming dry or burdensome or ineffective or phony.

Why no fellowship with God apart from fellowship with people?

Because God loves people

Okay, so now we understand why you cannot have fellowship with people unless you have fellowship with God. But what about the other side of the coin? Why can’t you just have fellowship with God without having fellowship with people? It makes sense that we cannot have fellowship with one another if we do not have fellowship with Him, because fellowship with one another is a mutual sharing with Him. That makes good sense. But why is my fellowship with God dependent upon my nearness to you? Why can’t it just be me and God – one-on-one? Why can’t it be that the greatest experience of love for God is just getting lost in the

ecstasy of being alone with Him in His presence? Why can't the greatest joy come from that, instead of being so dependant upon fellowship with other people?

The answer to that is very simple – God loves people. We have talked about this many times – you cannot be my best friend if you hate my wife. We cannot be close if you care nothing for the love of my life. I cannot be close to God if I am at odds with the very people He so dearly loves.

God is so concerned to express love to His people that He sacrificed His own Son. He put in place the entire plan of redemption. He sent His Holy Spirit to live within them. He gave them the Scriptures. He revealed Himself to them. He forgives their sins and draws near to them. He cherishes them and guides them and teaches them and nurtures them and feeds them and heals them and supplies His very life to them and is preparing a place for them in heaven. That is what His love for them is like. And so if I am not on board with all of that - if those things are not my main priorities and main desires and main loves, how can I claim to be close to the heart of God? If I care little about that which He cares most about, how can I claim to be in fellowship with Him? If I am going to share with Him in what He is doing and feeling then I am going to be consumed with love for the people He loves.

What a marvelous thing that God requires people to love me in order to glorify Him!

How important is it to God that you love His people? Here is how important it is to Him: It is so important to Him that He has actually tied His own glory to loving His people – so you cannot glorify God without loving His people!

Romans 15:5 Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. ⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.

You cannot glorify God without loving His Church. The more you care about the glory of God the more you will pursue closeness with His people in the Church, because it is our unified hearts and acceptance of one another that glorifies God.

Think of what a wonderful truth that is. There are two important implications. One is that it is really, really important that you love us, right? If you want to glorify God you cannot do it without loving us, so the first implication is that you have a huge, huge responsibility to love all of us deeply and profoundly.

The other implication is that if you are a saint, then the rest of us cannot glorify God without loving you. Think about that. God loves you so much, and He wants all of us to love you so much, that He made it so that we cannot get close to Him without getting close to you! Just think about the benefits that come to you because of that. The reason we have cars and microwave ovens and cell phones is because people were trying to make money. But the countless spiritual resources we have have often come from people who did not profit financially at all – they just did it out of love for God's people. There are brilliant Christian authors who have sacrificed greatly in order to produce books that will help you know God better. In many cases they have had to struggle financially in order to provide these gifts to the Church. But they do it happily and eagerly and joyfully because they love you. They have not even met you, but they love God so much that they deeply love His Church and use all their gifts and abilities and resources to serve the Church. So as a result of God tying nearness to Him with love for His people, you can go to the Christian bookstore and pick up something that will profit you eternally.

There are other people who are doing that same thing with music. They are writing the worship songs that help lift your soul right into the heavenlies. Others are taking all their free time and instead of using it to go on vacations or do some recreation, they are going through the painstaking, arduous labor of developing Bible software so that you can have greater understanding of God's Word. Others are working long hours and going through painful ordeals in order to earn large sums of money that they can give to the Church, so that you can sit in a heated or air conditioned building, or listen to preaching on the radio, or have a pastor who can spend his full time in study without having to work a second job. We have microwaves because people wanted to

make a profit. But we have so many spiritual resources because so many of the saints have loved you, the Church.

That is why the blood that was spilled over the past 2000 years in order to get the gospel from Israel where it started to the people who finally brought it to you - that blood was willingly offered as countless missionaries, pastors, Bible translators, reformers, and ordinary Christians gave their lives for the furtherance of the Kingdom. That is why there was someone who presented the gospel to you, resulting in you being saved instead of going to hell forever. It happened because God tied nearness to Him with love for you. Nearness to Him is the most desirable thing in the world, and His people cannot have it without loving you. God made it so people could have great joy in Him if they love you. That is why people love you. And if that hurts your self esteem, fine, let it hurt your self esteem. But let it also generate great delight and thanksgiving in your heart to the One who turns the saints' desire to be near Him into the saints' love for you. What a gracious God we serve!

Watch out for fellowship-killing pride

So let's not allow our pride to contaminate the beauty of what God has done. When it comes to fellowship there are two kinds of prideful people. One says, "I don't have any close friendships and I don't need any and I don't want any thank you. I'm just fine coming and observing and going home with my family." The people who do not pour themselves out in love because they do not think they need friends care only about themselves. Even if it were true that you do not need friends (which it is not) what about your responsibility to provide friendship? It is prideful to imagine that you have no need for close friendships and never will, and it is prideful to think that the need other people have for your friendship does not matter if you do not feel the need. So that is one kind of pride.

On the other end of the spectrum there are those who desperately desire close friendships. And they say, "I want to have close relationships, and you owe me one, and it is your fault when my needs are not met." People like that are generally more consumed with a desire to receive love than to give love. They are always worried about whether they are being welcomed into the church properly, and if people are being nice to them, and showing love to them. They never seem to concern themselves with whether they are welcoming others and loving others.

If your greatest desire is to give love, it is not hard to find opportunities. You can pray for people and encourage people and give to people and serve people and be there for people when they have needs. And if you do that without worrying about how they respond to you - you just enjoy loving them because of how much God loves them - you will be full of joy. And eventually some of them will respond in love toward you in delightful ways - even if they are not the individuals you had in mind, or the exact responses you had in mind.

So it is pride that drives the people who say, "I don't need friendships." And it is pride that drives the people who desperately crave friendship but seem to think it is more blessed to receive than to give.

Conclusion: walk in the light!

Last week we talked about the fact that you cannot have fellowship with God unless you walk in the light. And walking in the light does not mean sinlessness - it means repentance. Those who walk in the light are people who eagerly embrace the teaching of the Apostles (the NT), live in a way that aligns with the truth, who confess their sin rather than cover it up or justify it or excuse it. Only people like that can have fellowship with God at all. And the degree to which you can enjoy fellowship with God is dependent upon the degree to which you are living that way. The more steps you take into the darkness the less you will be able to experience fellowship with God. And the longer you remain in the darkness when you do step into it, the less you will be able to experience fellowship with God. But the more you walk in the light, the more you will experience fellowship with God.

There are some Christians who have hardly any experience of fellowship with God, because they so frequently step into the darkness. They step out of the light and buy into some lie of Satan, and they remain in

the darkness for a long time, then they repent. And they are like Micah – they are sitting in the darkness and are banished from nearness to God for a time of chastisement. But instead of persisting in seeking after God during that time, before that time is even over they step right back into the darkness. And they keep that up so frequently that it is rare that they ever have any real profound experiences of the nearness of God. And that is why they cannot find very much joy in God through loving His people. They might spend a lot of time at church, but they never really have much actual fellowship with the saints, because they spend so much time in the darkness.

The more you linger in the darkness with regard to the truth about your sin - pretending to be something you are not, failing to confess your sins to brothers and sisters in Christ, the more you break fellowship with us and cut yourself off from nearness to God.

If we confess all our sins to God, but then we turn around and live a complete lie in front of everyone else, that is not walking in the light as He is in the light. That is just hypocrisy. You cannot be in the light with respect to God and in the darkness with respect to God's people.

And so I want to close by pleading with you – do everything you can possibly do to gain more and more victory over the sins in your life. It is so important. Those sins keep you from the fullness of joy in God that would greatly glorify Him and completely satisfy your soul. Those sins ruin your fellowship with us and forfeit nearness to God. They drain the joy out of reading Scripture, they turn prayer into a drudgery and chore, they take what God intends as a joyful feast, and turn it into a dry, boring, burdensome drain. Showing love to people becomes an annoying hardship rather than the source of the greatest kind of joy in God. God never intended for you to live that way.

Let the carrot of nearness to God and deep joy in sharing in His grace with His people be so tantalizing to you that you will be willing to do absolutely anything to gain victory over your sin. If it means coming clean and confessing the real truth and exposing yourself as a much dirtier or weaker or more foolish person than everyone thinks you are – so be it! It is worth it! If it means humbling yourself and seeking help – asking for biblical counsel from someone – do it! There is no reason to try to make people think you have all the answers already – no one has all the answers already. There is so much joy to be had in fellowship with God and His people – inexpressible and glorious joy. No sin is worth forfeiting that. No charade is worth maintaining that costs you that.

God is light. And He has called you into His marvelous light. Stop clinging to the darkness and run to Him, no matter what the cost. If it costs you your prestige among your friends, if it costs you your self-esteem, if it costs you your marriage or some other relationship, it is worth it. The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who found a treasure in a field and in his joy he sold everything he owned to get it. Let joy compel you to give up what you need to give up. He has called us to walk in the light with Him. Let's walk in the light.

Benediction: 2 Cor.13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Devotionals

Fellowship: The God who has fellowship with His people

1 John 1:6-7 Day 1

Ps 42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

What is wonderful about this attribute:

The psalmist specified that he longed for a living God. He did not just want some benefit from God; he desired an actual, direct encounter with a personal God. Those who long for their cherished idols long for whatever feeling or benefit they think they can get from them, but they never get fellowship. All idols are either dead, non-personal things, or they are lying demons with whom any supposed “fellowship” is a deception. The psalmist does not focus on an earthly benefit as the ultimate object of his desire. He wanted fellowship with the living God – interaction with a Person. He wants to appear before God’s face.

What criminal longs to appear before the judge? Even though God, in His holiness, is the greatest threat and most severe danger in existence for an unholy being; still the longing of His people is to be in His presence because not only is He the greatest threat, He is also the only source of joy and deliverance from that threat. God is such a joy that even though we fear Him as our Judge we long to appear before Him.

What an amazing thing that the King of the universe not only allows us to know about Him, and not only gives us countless gifts, but He actually *interacts* personally and directly with us as individuals!

Experiencing this attribute:

We sometimes think seeking information about God from His Word is the same as seeking after God. It is not. Information alone is not fellowship with God, it will not satisfy the soul, and does not have the power to rescue you from sin. Never be content to merely receive information from God’s Word without actually seeking a personal interaction with Him. Instead of seeking after a God who *wrote* – a God who communicated thousands of years ago; seek after the God who *is* – the God whose face is there right now in your prayer room for the seeking. What He wrote thousands of years ago was written to enable you to experience fellowship with Him now.

When is the last time you experienced the presence of God in a way that brought joy, peace, courage, etc. to your heart? Why not continue in your prayer time right now until you have that experience?

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who fellowships with His people

Promise to trust: He will grace me with His presence if I seek Him with all my heart

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, peace, courage, strength, security, fear, awe, and all the other benefits that come from being in the presence of God.

Fellowship: Nothing is more important than fellowship with God

1 John 1:6-7 Day 2

Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. 6 If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

Why would someone who is not having fellowship with God claim to have fellowship with God? Even unbelievers seem to intuitively know that fellowship with God is a desirable thing. God has planted in us a

desire to have fellowship with Him- so much so that even when we are not having fellowship with Him we invent ways to convince ourselves that we really are. Think about it – what could be greater than fellowship – personal, favorable interaction with God? If it is true that God is the Creator, then He is the only source of life, the only source of blessing, the only source of health, joy, safety, provision, salvation, forgiveness, meaning in life, strength, healing, power, happiness, wisdom, truth, delight, fulfillment, satisfaction. Everything you ever do all day every day is to obtain something in that list. And if God is the only ultimate source of those things, what could you ever do with your time that would be more important than seeking fellowship with God?

Our goal in life should be to please God. And what pleases God is when we have fellowship with Him. According to Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5 Enoch was so pleasing to God that God just took him right up into heaven. And the thing that made Enoch that pleasing to God was the fact that Enoch walked with God.

Walking with God is another way of describing close fellowship. The whole reason for the gospel – the whole reason for the New Covenant, is for us to draw near to God.

Hebrews 10:19-21 Therefore, brothers ... since we have a great high priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith

Paul summarized the whole Christian life in 1 Corinthians 1:9 as a calling into fellowship with Jesus Christ. The greatest commandment is to love God,⁵ and receiving love from God is better than life at its best.⁶

That relational interaction and mutual exchange of love in a personal, intentional way is described in the Bible in many different ways. Here it is called fellowship with God.

In other passages it is called nearness to God, or seeking God, listening to God, eating and drinking God, seeing God, walking with God, knowing God, remaining in God - all of those metaphors describe some aspect of drawing near to God and having a positive experience of direct, personal interaction with Him. Fellowship with God is everything. It is right up there with grace and love.

2 Cor.13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

It is the solution to all your problems – every one of them without exception. Are you sad? In John 16:22 Jesus said that after His resurrection He would come to us and our grief would give way to a joy that cannot be taken away. So the solution to being sad is the nearness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you in need of comfort and tender compassion? God's compassion and the tender love of Christ are expressed to us through fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Php.2:1,2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded

And that fellowship with the Holy Spirit gives you not just encouragement and compassion from God, but all kinds of wonderful benefits.

When you have fellowship with the Spirit, 1 Thes.1:6, Ro.14:17, and Gal.5:22 promise the result will be joy. Ro.15:13 promises hope. Eph.1:18 and 1 Cor.2:14 point to enlightenment as something that comes from fellowship with the Spirit. Ro.8:6 and Gal.5:22 promise peace from the Holy Spirit. In 1 Jn.3:24 and Eph.1:13 it is assurance of your salvation. In Acts 15:28 we see guidance resulting from fellowship with the Spirit. In 1 Cor.2:13 (and chapters 12-14) it is enablement for ministry. In Gal.5:17 it is power to defeat the flesh. In Ro.8:26, 1 Cor.14:15, and Php.3:3 we see help in prayer and worship as a result of fellowship with the Spirit.

⁵ Mt.22:37.

⁶ Ps.63:3.

Ro.8:15 identifies all the benefits of sonship as coming from fellowship with Him. And in 1 Cor.6:11 it is the entire sanctification process.

Do you have longings and desires that are going unfulfilled and unsatisfied? What is the solution to that? According to Jn.6:55, Ps.36:7-8, Isa.58:11-14, Pr.9, Ps.63:1,5, Isa.55:1-2, Jer.2:13, Jer.15:18, Ps.42:1, Ps.143:6, Ps.1:3, and Ps.34:8, the solution to that kind of hunger and thirst in the soul is fellowship with God - experiencing God in such a way that His presence satisfies those appetites of the soul in a way very similar to how food and drink satisfy physical hunger and thirst.

The pleasures of this world *sometimes* temporarily satisfy – other times they do not. But the experience of the presence of God in fellowship with Him *always* satisfies the soul – no exceptions.⁷

Psalm 145:18-20 The LORD is near to all who call on him ... He fulfills the desires of those who fear him

Are you struggling with some sin? The solution is fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Are you afraid or in danger? The solution is fellowship with God in which you experience Him as a refuge. No matter what need or desire you have the solution is fellowship with God. That is what life is all about.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God with whom fellowship is the most important thing there is

Promise to trust: He will enable me to have communion with Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Nearness to God, joy, love for God and people

Fellowship: Sharing in God together

1 John 1:6-7 Day 3

6 If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another

Enjoying coffee and doughnuts together is not necessarily fellowship. In fact, getting together one-on-one or in small groups and sharing sorrows and joys and encouraging and helping one another is not, per se, fellowship either. That happens at the Elks club, AA meetings, Starbucks, and breaks rooms every day.

True fellowship with people is a sharing together in God. The heart of fellowship – the core of sharing together in love with another person - is sharing together in the great treasure and great joys of your life. And for the Christian that is Christ. True fellowship is when you share in the experience of the presence of God with someone. It is when you share with someone the experience of His nearness and His walking among you. That is why it is impossible to have fellowship with an unbeliever.

Coffee and doughnuts actually play a fairly important role. When we eat and drink together, or do some activity, or play a card game or whatever, or distribute door hangers in the neighborhood, that gives us an occasion to be together long enough for spiritual things to come up in conversation. If you go to some friends' house and spend an evening together playing cards or watching a game, at some point you might get into a conversation about one of the attributes of God you have been studying. Then it might be small talk for a while, and some laughter and joking around. Then some conversation about your lives – expressing love to one another through being interested in each other's lives (but not the same kind of love the world has for their friends. Rather, it is love that rises out of love for God – liking your friends because of God's love for them, and offering gestures of love that are consciously intended as expressions of worship to God.) Then later in the evening you might get to talking about some spiritual struggle one of you is having. And the others might offer strengthening or healing words from Scripture, or pray for the ones struggling right on the spot - helping that

⁷ Jer.2:13.

one find strength in God like Jonathan did for David in 1 Sam.23:16. That is fellowship – sharing in the grace of God together.

Another night you might go over and do nothing but talk about temporal things without paying any attention to God at all. You might have a great time that night with Christian friends, but it is not fellowship.

John Piper: “I am biased toward ... ministry oriented friendship as opposed to tea sipping at the kitchen table friendship. To which you should probably respond, “What’s wrong with sipping tea at the kitchen table?” ... Nothing – unless... three weeks go by – you’re still sipping; four weeks go by, and you’re still sipping, and four months go by, and you’re still sipping and talking about the kids. And four years go by and you’re still sipping. Then you don’t have a Christ exalting relationship; you have a tea-exalting relationship. I am biased toward friendships ... becoming ministry oriented.”

Every Christian friendship (marriage, sibling relationship, business partnership, etc.) should be all about Christ, and making Him look more marvelous in the eyes of the other person.

Dear Lord God, Creator and Savior and Father of my brothers and sisters at church, teach me to love You enough to really love them in You. Protect me, dear Lord, from loving them the same way the people in the world love their friends. I fear, dear Father, that so much of my love for my friends is purely temporal. We talk about mostly trivia, and when we say goodbye after spending time together no one is strengthened in You. So many times I say or do nothing that makes it easier for them to see Your glory and to take greater delight in You. Oh Father, help me to love Your people with Your love for Your sake as a sharing in Your grace in mutual participation and delight in Your presence.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose grace can be shared among His people in fellowship

Promise to trust: He will give me joy as I share in Him with others

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Love for people, joy in fellowship

Fellowship: God requires His people to love you in order to be near Him

1 John 1:6-7 Day 4

Romans 15:5 Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. ⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.

You cannot glorify God without loving His Church. The more you care about the glory of God the more you will pursue closeness with His people in the Church, because it is our unified hearts and acceptance of one another that glorifies God.

There are two important implications to that. One is that it is vitally important that you love the Church. If you want to glorify God you cannot do it without loving the Church, so the first implication is that you have a huge responsibility to love your brothers and sisters in Christ deeply and profoundly.

The other implication is that if you are a saint, then the rest of us cannot glorify God without loving you. God loves you so much, and He wants all His people to love you so much, that He has tied the glory of His own name to our loving you. He has made it so that we cannot get close to Him without getting close to you!

Think about the benefits that come to you because of that. The reason we have cars and microwave ovens and cell phones is because people were trying to make money. But the countless spiritual resources we have have often come from people who had to sacrifice a great deal to develop them for us. But they did it because they loved God’s people. There are brilliant Christian authors who have sacrificed greatly in order to produce books that will help you know God better. They get very little money for it, and in many cases have to struggle

financially in order to provide these gifts to the Church. But they do it happily and eagerly and joyfully because they love you. They haven't even met you, but they love God so much that they deeply love His Church and use all their gifts and abilities and resources to serve the Church. So as a result of God tying nearness to Him with love for His people, you can go to the Christian bookstore and pick up something that will profit you eternally.

There are other people who are doing that some thing with music. They are writing the worship songs that help lift your soul right into the heavenlies. Others are taking all their free time and instead of using it to go on vacations or do some recreation, they are going through the painstaking, arduous labor of developing Bible software so that you can have greater understanding of God's Word. Others are working long hours and going through painful ordeals in order to earn large sums of money that they can give to the Church, so that you can sit in a heated or air conditioned building, or listen to preaching on the radio, or have a pastor who can spend his full time in study without having to work a job.

We have microwaves because people wanted to make a profit. But we have so many spiritual resources because so many of the saints have loved you, the Church. That is why the blood that was spilled over the past 2000 years in order to get the gospel from Israel where it started to the people who finally brought it to you - that blood was willingly offered as countless missionaries, pastors, Bible translators, reformers, and ordinary Christians gave their lives for the furtherance of the Kingdom. That is why there was someone who presented the gospel to you, resulting in you being saved instead of going to hell forever. It happened because God tied nearness to Him with love for you. Nearness to Him is the most desirable thing in the world, and His people cannot have it without loving you.

God made it so people could have great joy in Him if they love you. That is why people love you. And if that hurts your self esteem, fine, let it hurt your self esteem. But let it also generate great delight and thanksgiving in your heart to turns the saints' desire to be near Him into the saints' love for you. What a gracious God we serve!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who loves you so much, and wants you to be loved by people so much, that He has tied the very glory of His name to you being loved by the Church.

Promise to trust: His people will love you, and you will find great joy in loving His people

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Love

Fellowship

1 John 1:6-7 Day 5

Those who walk in the darkness (never come into the light – never repent) have no fellowship with God at all (they are lost). Walking in the light means eagerly embracing the teaching of the Apostles (the NT), living a way that aligns with the truth, and confessing sin rather than cover it up, justifying it, or excusing it. Only people like that can have fellowship with God at all.

And the degree to which you can enjoy fellowship with God is dependent upon the degree to which you are living that way. The more steps you take into the darkness the less you will be able to experience fellowship with God. And the longer you remain in the darkness when you do step into it, the less you will be able to experience fellowship with God. But the more you walk in the light, the more you will experience fellowship with God.

There are some Christians who have hardly any experience of fellowship with God, because they so frequently step into the darkness. They step out of the light and buy into some lie of Satan, and they remain in the darkness for a long time, then they repent. And they are like Micah – they are sitting in the darkness and are banished from nearness to God for a time of chastisement. But instead of persisting in seeking after God during that time, before that time is even over they step right back into the darkness. And they keep that up so frequently that it is rare that they ever have any real profound experiences of the nearness of God.

That is why they cannot find very much joy in God through loving His people. They might spend a lot of time at church, but they never really have much actual fellowship with the saints, because they spend so much time in the darkness.

The more you linger in the darkness with regard to the truth about your sin - pretending to be something you are not, failing to confess your sins to brothers and sisters in Christ, the more you break fellowship with us and cut yourself off from nearness to God. If we confess all our sins to God, but then we turn around and live a complete lie in front of everyone else, that is not walking in the light as He is in the light. It is just hypocrisy. You cannot be in the light with respect to God and in the darkness with respect to God's people.

Do everything you can possibly do to gain more and more victory over the sins in your life. It is so important! Those sins keep you from the fullness of joy in God that would greatly glorify Him and completely satisfy your soul. Those sins ruin your fellowship with us and forfeit nearness to God. They drain the joy out of reading Scripture, they turn prayer into a drudgery and chore, they take what God intends as a joyful feast, and turn it into a dry, boring, burdensome drain. Showing love to people becomes an annoying hardship rather than the source of the greatest kind of joy in God. God never intended for you to live that way.

Let the promise of nearness to God and deep joy in sharing in His grace with His people be so tantalizing to you that you will be willing to do absolutely anything to gain victory over your sin. If it means coming clean and confessing the real truth and exposing yourself as a much dirtier or weaker or more foolish person than everyone thinks you are – so be it! It is worth it! If it means humbling yourself and seeking help – asking for biblical counsel from someone – do it! There is no reason to try to make people think you have all the answers already – no one has all the answers already. There is so much joy to be had in fellowship with God and His people – inexpressible and glorious joy. No sin is worth forfeiting that. No charade is worth maintaining that costs you that.

God is light, and He has called you into His marvelous light. Stop clinging to the darkness and run to Him, no matter what the cost. If it costs you your prestige among your friends, if it costs you your self-esteem, if it costs you your marriage or some other relationship, it is worth it. The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who found a treasure in a field and in his joy he sold everything he owned to get it. Let joy compel you to give up what you need to give up. He has called us to walk in the light with Him. Let's walk in the light.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who has no fellowship with darkness, but who does have fellowship with those who walk in the light

Promise to trust: He will enable me to walk in the light

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Nearness to God, Love for people, joy in fellowship, progress in holiness