

It's good to be a part of a family, isn't it? To hear how God is at work in the brothers and sisters that we have, to be reminded again when our faith needs a reminder that he is the God who's working all things out for his glory and for our good, praise God. I want to invite you if you have a copy of the Scripture to turn to 1 John chapter 1 and in a moment I'm going to read aloud the first ten verses. I'm going to look at those ten verses of 1 John chapter 1 and make some comments, and then we'll respond to the meditation on God's word with a couple of songs, and then we'll come to the table together as a family. Before I read let me offer to you a sentence that I put together trying to prepare this. And I think that this sentence is what I find in this passage of Scripture. The foundation of true fellowship fosters true faith, which in turn fosters faithful fellowship, and faithful fellowship has two characteristics: the joy of Jesus and Christ-exalting holiness. I'm going to repeat that a couple of times. The foundation of true fellowship fosters true faith, which in turn fosters faithful fellowship, and faithful fellowship has two characteristics: the joy of Jesus and Christ-exalting holiness. We look at this idea of fellowship when we come to the table. We're family, we're a communion, we're a community of saints, a covenant family, we've heard discussed already tonight. The idea of fellowship is certainly in this passage. *Koinonia*. We've heard this Greek word tossed around. There's *koinonia* groups, used to be our home fellowship groups, our cell groups ministry. True Fellowship. What is that? We have this within us, don't we, if we search around inside ourselves a little bit. We bump into the desire to belong. We want to get picked for the kickball team before the last pick, right? We want to be inside of the conversation, not on the outside. We want tried-and-true friends on whom we can depend. And even if we say it's not the case, if we flip the picture a little bit we can see the root of the same longings, but from the underside. The sour grapes attitude when we're not part, when we don't belong. And these desires can be traced back to the way in which we were designed. We were made for relationship. God eternally exists in three persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we were made in his image. We were designed for relationship. We were built to relate. God himself said in Genesis 2, it's not good for man to be alone. We read Ecclesiastes 4 and the kids in middle school snicker. We read these words: Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil, for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together they keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand that man. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken." You see, we're designed to relate, to live in community, to have fellowship. But the curse of sin altered and corrupted the desire for relationships so that we go pursuing relationship in ways that God never intended those relationships to be pursued. And we don't pursue the relationship with our Creator and with each other in Christ. God designed us for relationship, and then he sent Jesus Christ in order to reverse the curse of the fall so that relationships would be glorifying to him again. True Fellowship. I believe the Apostle John, the one who was the one called 'the beloved disciple,' the one who reclined on Jesus at the Last Supper--he knew a lot about true fellowship. And in these first ten verses of his first letter I believe he shows us that the foundation of true fellowship fosters true faith, which in turn fosters faithful fellowship, and faithful fellowship has two characteristics noteworthy: the joy of Jesus and Christ-exalting holiness.

So hear God's word. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." May God add his blessing to the reading of his word.

So we see John describing the foundation of true fellowship. It's not this group, it's not us. It doesn't come from your sports club or the Rotary or Kiwanis or whatever organization you belong to at work or in the neighborhood. The true foundation of what real fellowship is union, communion, the perfect communion--is what we see with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. John says listen, this is what was from the beginning, and he goes on to expand on the

fellowship that he's discussing was first and foremost between the Father and the Son. The covenant between the Godhead that there was this rebellious creature, man, that the eternal Son of God was willing to go at the sending of the Father in order to save, in order to seek and save lost mankind. But that fellowship that is the true fellowship is that which exalts in the Godhead. The Father sends the Son because the Son willingly goes in order to exalt the Father, and a Holy Spirit exalts the Son in that in the Son's ministry he says of the Father, I do nothing on my own but only that which is pleasing to my Father. The interconnectedness of this communion is astounding. We don't have that kind of pure relationships with one another. Think of the closest friend you have. You're still a million miles away from that communion. And this is true fellowship. It's the foundation for this meal tonight. It's the foundation for us calling one another brother and sister. It's the foundation for us being first called 'Christians' in Antioch, followers of Christ. We would never follow Christ, we would never seek God except that he first sought us, because true fellowship wants to bring others into that fellowship. That's what John is describing: That which was from the beginning. John says we walked with the incarnate God, we've heard him, we've seen him with our eyes, we looked upon him, we've touched him with our hands. Concerning the word of life, the life that was made manifest--that true fellowship didn't stay in eternity, that true fellowship did not remain hidden from our sight. But in the revelation of God to man, the specific revelation of God to man, Jesus Christ came. And John said, we've seen this fellowship. We walked with him. We've seen what God is like as he interacts with the destitute, the fallen, the penitent. That's what true fellowship does--it always reaches out. And the truest fellowship reached out to us, praise be to God. Jesus in his earthly ministry emphasized the connection, so that if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. Just as the Father has life in himself, so he granted the Son to have life in himself, John 5. And John 5 goes on, the same writer of this epistle goes on to talk about the authority that was given to Jesus by the Father to execute judgment. Jesus described his relationship to the Father as being one of humble obedience. I can do nothing on my own, I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. The Son acted only in a way which was in perfect accord with the will of the Father. And the Spirit testifies to the Son through the word. Perfect fellowship reaching out to include others.

One of the characteristics of true fellowship is that it seeks to include others in the fold. The Father sent the Son into the world. And then those who know the Son personally want to make him known to others as well. And that's what John's saying. All these things we've seen. He was made manifest to us. We've seen him and heard him and we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have this fellowship with us--the fellowship, and indeed it's not just with us, John says. It's indeed our fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We can be included, and we are included in the fellowship that is true. And John says that's why we proclaimed him to you. You see, our faith has a specific object. It's not just fellowship for fellowship's sake. It's not just getting together to have some pizza or whatever food of your choice. It's not just talking, it's not just gathering, it's not just busyness, it's not just programs, it's not just anything else that you can slide into that blank. True fellowship is fellowship through Jesus Christ our Lord, it's gospel-saturated, it's grace-based. It has everything to do with the Spirit's working out the person and the work of Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners. That's fellowship! That's true fellowship. Our faith has this specific object of the person and work of Jesus. John is saying that when we saw him we lived right alongside the word made flesh. We lived right alongside the gospel in person. The good news of the gospel is what brings us into fellowship with one another.

There must be a proper understanding of who God is and his perfection, and who his creatures are with all their flaws in view--that's what John is saying. That which was perfect from the beginning, we've seen. And as we encountered him we encountered a picture of our hearts. When we see what is holy, we see what sin really is. Our faith has a specific object in that there must be an understanding of why a Savior is necessary. We weren't rescued from Monday. We were rescued from the wrath of God to come, poured out fully against sinners. We were rescued by one who took our sin on himself, and God poured out his wrath on another so that we would never encounter the wrath of God. There must be an understanding of how salvation is accomplished. It's through the shedding of blood the forgiveness of sins occurs. It's not, 'I'm sorry, okay, let's move on.' Jesus Christ had to shed his blood. That's what brings us into fellowship with the holy triune God. We understand then this faith, it comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The disciples walked with the word, and we have the word that we proclaim. This is God's glorious and gracious revelation of himself to us. That's why John says, we proclaim this also, so that you, too, may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. We want you to be included in God's plan.

True Fellowship. That foundation of true fellowship, it fosters true faith in the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, and that true faith then works in turn to foster faithful fellowship. That's what we are. That's where we come in. We are a fellowship, a faithful fellowship. We're filled with the Spirit, we're walking in faith, we're exercising that faith which is a gift from God, but we call one another to greater faith, to deeper faith. These testimonies tonight do exactly that. We didn't all stand and talk about the loss of a loved one, but all of us feel that pain. And so when Betty describes our mourning with Matthew and mourning with Christina because Matthew's friend Casey passed away and Christina's friend Chris passed away, we enter into that. Because of Christ. We fellowship together. We fellowship around the gospel, the good news that death will not ultimately have the victory. It cannot, because Christ was not contained in the grave.

So we're a faithful fellowship. Those who have been truly saved long be a part of a faithful fellowship, a faithful fellowship consisting of God's people. A faithful fellowship defined as those who profess Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and as the Lord of their lives. That's who we are. We should be different. We should stand out from the world. Members of the faithful fellowship live in such a way that two characteristics of the faithful fellowship become clearly evident to anyone who has eyes to see. Faithful fellowship participants have the joy of Jesus, and they want others to share in it as well. When John says, we write these things so that our joy may be complete, the word 'our' can actually be attached to the word 'we' that he's just described. Our fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, and we are writing these things so that 'our joy...' So in other words, you could actually read this 'so that your joy would be complete, but when you're part of us, we have joy together.' This is what the body of Christ is supposed to be exemplified by-- a Jesus kind of joy. What's a Jesus kind of joy? You remember the high priestly prayer of our Lord on the night he was betrayed, hours before his crucifixion. In John 17 Jesus says this, but now he's praying to the Father, the fellowship about to be broken because of our sin--the Father turns his face away. But Jesus says this in communion with the Father, "But now I'm coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." Jesus wants his people to have his joy, the joy of the glory of God. The joy that knows that it's not about an ice cream cone or a hot fudge sundae or a Coca-Cola or a baseball game on a July night—albeit great things. But that true joy is when we see our Savior face-to-face in that day when he claims his bride. And that's what Jesus is praying for. "I've given them your words." What kind of joy is Jesus joy? "I've given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world. Just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. So sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Jesus wants our joy to be that which is God-glorifying. God-glorifying joy. Notice how the joy of Jesus is not lived out by transporting us to some kind of Christian version of Disneyland. He doesn't remove us from the pain and the suffering and the sorrow of this world. He places us in this world with his joy so that others might be brought into that fellowship of the joy that we have in Jesus. You see how that works out? It is a glorious, profound mystery. He says, I don't want to take them out of the world. I want you to protect them from the evil one. And the world that hates me, will hate them, but I want my joy to be fulfilled in them. That's a prayer, that when Jesus prays to the Father, we can almost—can't we?--bank on, that will occur? It's a guarantee. So it's joy in the midst of sorrow. It's joy that demonstrates that there's more to this life than the material. It's joy that's rooted in the relationship that the creature can now have with the creator, because the creator has taken on the creature's flesh--a fact that we celebrate when we hold the bread and drink the cup.

So John goes on to elaborate on the other characteristic of the faithful fellowship. The faithful fellowship has the joy of Jesus in this world of suffering, but the faithful fellowship has Christ-exalting holiness. Now this is just a meditation, it's not a full-blown dissertation or month-long sermon series. But let me go to define holiness. Holiness is not an adherence to a set of rules, but holiness is obedience to Christ's commands. Holiness is not trying to go back to the good old days of yesteryear but rather it's a Spirit-filled straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal that God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus. Holiness is not about merely being real, per se, but it is about rather being Christlike. Holiness is not a generic sense of being good, either, but rather it's a life that is marked by a distinctive set of parameters marking out what is good and marking out what is evil, and clinging to that which is good and hating that which is evil. That's a life of holiness. That's what we are being called to. That's what John is saying. This is the message we've heard, this is what we proclaim to you. God is light. And in him there is no darkness. There is no evil. There's no shadow. There is no vice. If you want to look up all the vices you can go to Mark 7:21 -22, Romans 1:24-31, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians 3:5-9, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, and in Revelation 21:8. If you want those later, I'll give them to you. I have people come and sit in my office all the time. What does it look like to live a

godly life? I say, come on, you've got to be kidding me with that question, right? You just don't want to know. Right? Because it's clear. Those are the vices. That which is good: Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:12-15, 2 Peter 1:5-7. God really does want us to get this definition of holiness down. It's clear, and then that's what you and I call one another to. Deeds of the flesh? Uh-uh. Through the Spirit, that which is pleasing to God? Yes, yes please. That's how we fellowship with one another. That's the correction. So here's the reality check for us. John says, listen, you can use these parameters to discern your heart. John's a real black and white kind of guy. I love it. There's no gray with the Apostle John. And in fact, he says, listen, God is light--in him there is no darkness. If we say we have fellowship with him, true spiritual fellowship, and we walk in darkness, then we're liars. We don't practice the truth, it's not in us. But if we walk in the light, he is in the light, and we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves--the truth is not in us. And if you feel the heavy burden of that--you say, I don't know what to do, then, because I know my heart, I know what I'm capable of, and I know what I've done this week, I know what I've done this afternoon, I know what I'm thinking right now. And John says, I know because I think the same things. I walked the same planet. And he says, listen, if we confess our sins, he is faithful, he is just. If we confess, if we acknowledge, Lord, I'm a sinner--then he is the faithful one, he'll only punish sin once. He is the just one, he won't go back on that punishment. And Christ, who has taken your sin on himself cleanses you from all unrighteousness. That's the promise of the word of God. You can't make up something so glorious as that.

Praise be to God. He's given to us true fellowship with the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit of God--true fellowship with one another now, to where we come to this table and, as a communion we hold one another to walking the walk of faith. The faithful fellowship marked by the joy of Jesus and Christ-exalting holiness. Let me pray for us. Help us, please. Help me, Lord, help my brothers and sisters here to understand more of what you've accomplished for us. We'll never bring ourselves holy before you, but you make us holy by forgiving our sins completely in Christ, by cleansing us from all unrighteousness, by demonstrating your great and marvelous love for sinners, by showing us the cross. Lord, help us to commune with you now, to commune with one another through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.