

True Fellowship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 July 2025

Preacher: Kenneth Douglas

[0 : 00] So let's turn back to 1 John 1. What does it mean to truly know God?!

The word for that reality is fellowship. But that word can feel thin to us today. We often reduce fellowship to tea and coffee after a service or to polite conversation and casual connection.

But in scripture, fellowship is far more than that. It is deep spiritual communion with the living God.

The living God through His Son by the Holy Spirit. It is being brought into a shared life. A life of truth, love, holiness and joy.

A shared life with God and with His people. And yet fellowship can be lost or misunderstood even in the church.

[1 : 28] We live in a time when some people claim to know God but are walking in darkness. Others claim a connection with Christ but deny who He truly is.

And still others try to walk with God while cutting themselves off from His people. And yet fellowship...

So how do we know if we have true fellowship? What does that look like? And how can we be sure? That is the burden of 1 John.

This letter was written by the Apostle John, likely in his old age, to a group of believers in or around Ephesus. The church he's writing to is unsettled.

It's been shaken by false teaching, by division and by doubt. Some had left the fellowship altogether.

[2 : 34] And others were teaching a distorted view of Jesus, denying either His humanity or His divinity. And the result was confusion.

Not only about who Christ is, but about what it really means to be a Christian. So John writes like a spiritual father, with affection, clarity and authority.

He's not offering speculation. He's calling the church back to be certain. He's calling the church back to what is certain, to what is true and what has been revealed from the beginning.

The letter is pastoral and practical. It's not arranged like a step-by-step argument, like many of Paul's letters, for example. But more like a series of tests or marks or signs.

The words of what real Christianity looks like. Right belief. Genuine love. And holy living. Tonight we're going to walk through this chapter under one central theme.

[3 : 51] That is true fellowship. And we'll look at this in three parts. The certainty of true fellowship. Our shared life of God is grounded in the real historic coming of Jesus Christ.

The character of true fellowship. That it is personal, shared and transformational. And the condition of true fellowship. How our fellowship of God is maintained through humble confession and his cleansing grace.

So as we begin, ask yourself, do I know this fellowship? Am I walking in the light?

Is this shared life of God and with his people shaping my own? So let's turn to our first heading.

The certainty of true fellowship. So we'll look at verses one and two. That which was from the beginning. That which was from the beginning. Which we have heard.

[4 : 52] 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. At the heart of true Christian fellowship is certainty.

Certainty. Certainty about the one in whom we believe. And certainty about the truth that binds us together as God's people.

We live in an age that celebrates doubt and dismisses certainty. Our culture tends to say, well who's to say that what, what's true for you isn't true for me.

Show me my truth. Even within the church, there can be hesitancy to speak confidently about the person of Jesus.

[5 : 55] And the foundations of our faith. But John begins this letter with a thunderclap of assurance. He's not offering a theory or an idea.

He's not giving us a mystical vision or an inner spiritual experience. No. He is testifying to what he has heard.

What he has seen. What he has looked upon. And what he has touched. In other words, what he has experienced with all his senses in real history.

So let's consider three key truths that make these verses clear. Firstly, Jesus Christ is eternal.

That which was from the beginning, we read in the first verse. John echoes the opening of his gospel here. In the beginning was the word.

[6 : 55] He wants us to know that Jesus didn't come into being at Bethlehem. But that he is the eternal son of God. From the beginning. Before all time.

This matters greatly for our fellowship with God. If Jesus is not eternal, he is not God.

And if he is not God, he cannot bring us into communion with the father. Our fellowship with God depends not on a good example or a wise teacher.

But on the work of the eternal son. Who has always existed in perfect unison with the father. Secondly, Jesus Christ is historical.

We heard. We saw. We touched. But this eternal word does not remain distant. He entered into our world.

[7 : 57] He was heard, seen and touched. John is stressing the physical reality of the incarnation. This is the direct rebuttal to the false teachers in John's day.

Particularly those who claim that Christ was some kind of spiritual operation. That he was not truly human. They believed that spirit was good and matter was evil.

And so they could not accept that God had taken on a real body. But John says, We touched him.

We sat with him. We saw him eat. We watched him weep. We saw him die. And more.

They saw him. And more. They saw him. Risen from the dead. Bearing the scars in his hands and his side. There was no doubt in their minds. The eternal son.

[8 : 55] Had truly become man. And he had conquered death. And he had conquered death. This isn't religious myth or poetic metaphor. This is history.

And our fellowship with God stands or falls on the truth of this incarnation. This is what sets aside Christianity from every man made religion.

We are not following ideas. We are not grappling with abstract truths. We are receiving a testimony. A message grounded in reality.

Confirmed by eyewitnesses. And centred on the real person. Jesus Christ. Fully God. And fully man. John also teaches us here that Jesus Christ is life.

The word of life. The eternal life. Made manifest. John calls him the word of life. And then says the life was made manifest.

[10 : 00] Christ doesn't just teach us about life. He is life. He is the source of it. The giver of it. And the substance of it.

In verse 2 John says that this eternal life. was with the Father. That is he dwelt in perfect communion with God. And was made manifest to us.

In other words. Jesus came not just to display life. But to share it. And this is the foundation of true fellowship.

Because the eternal word became flesh. We can be united to him. And being united to him.

We are brought into fellowship. With the Father. It's not possible to have fellowship with God. Apart from Christ. And it's not possible to have fellowship with Christ.

[11 : 01] Unless we believe. What the apostles have proclaimed. That he is eternal. That he came in the flesh. And that he is the source of eternal life.

This world offers many forms of false fellowship. Some seek spiritual experience apart from Christ. Some imagine they can know God through pure reason or intuition.

Others are swept up by teachers who deny Christ's divinity. Or his resurrection. But John says, We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.

The real risen Jesus. So that you may have fellowship. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. If your Jesus is just a moral teacher or a mystical guide or a vague presence, then you have no true fellowship of God.

[12 : 06] But if you trust in Christ of the scriptures, the eternal Son made flesh, crucified and risen, then you have a solid ground beneath your feet.

You can say with confidence, I know what I have believed. So let us rejoice in this. Our fellowship with God is not built on speculation.

It's not built on our emotion or tradition. It is built on a certain apostolic witness of those who walked with Christ, saw him, heard him and touched him.

And they proclaimed him as the eternal life who has been made manifest. This is a certainty of true fellowship, grounded in Christ, revealed in history and offered to us in the gospel.

So let's now turn to our second heading, the character of true fellowship, as we continue in verses 3 to 7. In verse 3 we read, That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

[13 : 26] And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Having established the certainty of the message in verses 1 and 2, that Christ is eternal, incarnate and the source of life, John now turns to the purpose of this proclamation.

And that purpose is clear. Fellowship. He writes so that we might enter into and enjoy true fellowship. Fellowship with God and a fellowship with one another.

This passage gives us a wonderfully full picture of what that fellowship looks like. Not just a feety, but a living, active communion with God and his people.

So, as we explore the character of true fellowship, I just want to highlight three essential features in these verses that show us this.

Firstly, the fellowship is personal. Indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Again, at the heart of Christianity, it's not simply a system of belief, but a relationship.

[14 : 52] Not a vague spirituality, but a communion with persons. The Father and the Son and the Spirit. Now, of course, we don't mean this in a casual or sentimental way.

We're not talking about being spiritual or feeling close to the universe. We mean a real relationship with the living God. Through Jesus Christ, we are brought into communion with the Father himself.

This is an extraordinary statement. That God, the holy, eternal, and all-powerful God, has brought us near. He has made himself known in his Son.

And through his Son, we now know him as our Father. The word fellowship here means more than friendship or association.

It's speaking of sharing, of participation in common life. It's the same word used elsewhere to describe how the early believers shared all that they had in common.

[16 : 02] So John is saying, we now share in the very life of God through Jesus Christ. This is not earned.

This is not achieved. This is a gift. And a gift that is freely given in Christ. And then entered into by faith. It's deeply personal.

It's deeply personal. And it changes everything. But notice something else. This fellowship with God is not individualistic. John doesn't just say fellowship with the Father.

But he also says, fellowship with us. True fellowship is shared. So that you too may have fellowship with us.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Fellowship with God brings us into fellowship with his people. You cannot have one without the other.

[17 : 08] To belong to Christ is to belong to the body of Christ. Christ. This was especially important in John's day. The false teachers were promoting a kind of spiritual elitism.

Secret knowledge that was only available to the few. But John rejects that entirely. There is nothing hidden. Nothing reserved for the spiritually advanced as they would see themselves.

The gospel is for all who believe. And those who believe are joined together in a shared life. And this fellowship brings joy.

John says, we write this so that our joy may be complete. That's not just poetic language. It's a statement of fact. Our joy as Christians is not found in isolation.

But it is a shared communion. With God. And with our brothers and sisters. So here's a question for you.

[18 : 11] How do you view the church? Do you see fellowship with other believers as essential to your life in Christ? Or is it something optional?

There's a danger, especially in our individualistic age. To think that so long as I have my personal faith. That the church is just a helpful addition.

Or even for some, a hindrance. But scripture teaches the opposite. Our fellowship with one another is not a distraction from knowing God.

It is a fruit of it. To walk with God is to walk alongside his people. True fellowship is personal.

True fellowship is personal. And it is shared. True fellowship is also transformational. Verses 5 to 7.

[19 : 09] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you. That God is light. And in him, there 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' Son cleanses us from all sin. Now John adds something essential. This fellowship that we've been describing, it's not just a status.

It's a way of life. It changes how we live. And that life, John says, is lived in the light. This is a profound and beautiful image.

Light in Scripture speaks of truth, of holiness, of revelation. God is light, perfectly pure, perfectly true, and utterly without sin.

[20 : 17] So John says, if someone claims to have fellowship with God, but continues to walk in darkness, that is, unrepentant sin or falsehood and self-deception, then that claim is a lie.

This is relevant for us today. There are many who claim to be Christians, who claim to know God, but their lives show no sign of repentance. No evidence of walking in the light.

The apostle says plainly, such claims are false. But here's the hope. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us.

Notice the balance here. Walking in the light doesn't mean walking in perfection. It means walking openly, humbly, and repentantly.

It means not hiding in sin, not living a double life, but coming into the light of God's presence, day by day, and trusting in his cleansing grace.

[21 : 35] And as we do that, we are not only cleansed, we are bound more deeply into fellowship with one another. So are you walking in the light?

Is your fellowship with God changing the way that you live? Are you growing in love for your brothers and sisters? Are you growing in love for the church?

Are you pursuing joy and unity in Christ? Or are you keeping others at arm's length? True fellowship with God draws us into his light.

And that light exposes sin, yes, but it also purifies, heals, and strengthens. It brings us out of the darkness and into a shared life with the people of God.

And it's all made possible through one means. The blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin.

[22 : 43] That's not just the past tense. This is ongoing, is present. As we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus continually cleanses us. We are never outside of our need for grace, but neither are we ever outside the reach of his grace.

So, the character of true fellowship, we've seen that it's personal, it's with the Father and the Son. It's shared, it's with the people of God. And it's transformational as we walk in the light of God's holiness and truth.

This is not something that we can create for ourselves, that we can do on our own strength. It's something given to us in Christ, through the gospel, by the Spirit.

The question for us is not simply, do I attend church, or do I call myself a Christian? The question is, am I walking in true fellowship, true fellowship with God, and true fellowship with his people?

Am I walking in the light of his truth? So, let's hold that question in our hearts as we move now to our final point, the condition of true fellowship.

[24 : 05] In verses 8 to 10, we read, Amen. 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. Having shown us the certainty and character of true fellowship, John now turns to what we might call its ongoing condition.

That is, what keeps this fellowship alive, healthy, and real. And he addresses it very directly, the issue of sin in the life of the believer.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. He's not speaking here about the world. He's speaking to fellow believers, and he's warning against the kind of spiritual denial that was common in his day, and it remains common in ours.

The false teachers in the early church often claimed to be sinless, either because they believed their physical actions didn't matter, or because they thought they had risen above the ordinary struggles of humanity.

[25 : 34] But John says clearly, if you claim to be without sin, you are living a lie, and worse, you are self-deceived. You've bought into your own illusion.

This is a temptation that we all face, perhaps not explicitly, but in more subtle ways. We compare ourselves with others.

We excuse or downplay our faults. We become blind to our own pride or bitterness. But John reminds us, sin is still present, even in the life of a believer.

This doesn't mean we're no different to the rest of the world. It means that we are in a lifelong battle of the flesh. And the condition of true fellowship with God is not sinlessness, but it is honesty about our sin.

John gives us one of the most comforting and powerful promises in all of Scripture. In verse 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[26 : 55] This is not about a ritual or formula. Confession here, as Thomas taught us a few weeks ago in his Cool Greek Word series, means to agree with God, to name our sin as he sees it, without excuse and without minimizing it.

And notice the two things that God does in response. He forgives us. That is, he lifts the guilt. He removes the penalty.

Not because we've made up for it, but because Christ has paid the price on the cross. And God cleanses us. This speaks of renewal.

God not only forgives the wrong, but he begins to purify the heart. This is the ongoing work of sanctification. The more we walk with him, the more we are cleansed from unrighteousness.

Unrighteousness. But why does God do this? Well, because he is faithful and just. He is faithful to his promises.

[28 : 08] He never turns away the repentant sinner. He is just, not because he overlooks sin, but because justice has already been satisfied through Christ.

The cross of Christ ensures that every sin confessed is fully and finally dealt with. What an encouragement this is for struggling Christians.

God does not ask us for perfection. He asks us for truthfulness. The condition of true fellowship is not a spotless record, but a heart that is truly humbled and cleansed daily by grace.

John closes this chapter with a repetition and a somewhat sharper edge. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

It's one thing to deceive ourselves, but here John says that denial of sin is essentially calling God a liar. Why?

[29 : 25] Because God has clearly declared that all have sinned and fallen short of his glory and to deny that is to reject his word entirely.

So here's the stark choice. Either we confess our sin and receive his mercy or we deny our sin and we reject God's truth.

But praise God because if we do confess, there is a full pardon, there is cleansing, and there is restored fellowship. So let me ask you, are you honest before God about your sin?

Do you confess regularly? Not only in general, but specifically? Do you trust that he is faithful and is just to forgive you?

There are two great errors that we must avoid here. Minimizing sin where we pretend it's not there or that it's not that serious. or on the other hand, despairing over sin when we think that it's too great or that God's grace cannot reach us.

[30 : 43] The gospel frees us from both these things. It tells us the truth that we are sinners, but it also tells us the greater truth that Christ has died for sinners and through him we are brought into true fellowship with the living God.

So then, what is the condition of true fellowship? It is not sinlessness. It is not spiritual superiority, but it is a life of humble, regular confession met by God's abundant mercy.

That is the rhythm of the Christian life. We walk in the light. The light reveals our sin. we confess that sin and God forgives and cleanses us.

And then, we can continue in joyful, holy fellowship with him and with his people. So, as we come towards the end of our time, let me summarize what we've seen tonight in this passage.

We have seen what it means to live in true fellowship with God and with one another. and that we have seen the certainty of true fellowship.

[32 : 03] Our fellowship with God is not based on vague feelings or abstract ideals, but on the real historic person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who became flesh, who was seen, who was heard, and who was touched by the apostles.

This is the solid ground of our faith, that the life was made manifest and has been proclaimed to us with clarity and authority.

If we are trusting in Christ, the Christ of the Scripture, then we can be certain that we belong to God. we have seen the character of true fellowship, that true fellowship is not private or passive, it is personal and we are brought into relationship with the Father and the Son.

And it is shared as we walk united with each other, walk with those who are in Christ. And it is transformational as we walk in the light, not in our perfection, but in honesty, in humility, and in growing holiness.

True fellowship shapes how we live, how we love, and how we relate to God's people. And we looked at the condition of true fellowship.

[33 : 32] Fellowship is not maintained by our performance, but by confession. God isn't asking for perfection, but for truthfulness. When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse.

This is the ongoing rhythm of the Christian life. Sin exposed, grace received, fellowship restored. Lord. So I ask you again, do you know this fellowship?

Are you walking in the light? Are you confessing your sin and trusting in the blood of Jesus? Are you living not only in communion with God, but in love and unity with his people?

If not, or if you've drifted, then come home, come to the light, come to Christ, come in confession and in faith.

He will forgive, he will cleanse, and he will keep you in true fellowship today and for eternity. Amen.