

I. Introduction

This morning we take a look at the practice of community, which is fellowship. In several ways, this message ties together all that we have said over the last month. Seeing the pattern of community in the Trinity we understand the special nature of our community together. Seeing the promise of community in Israel we understand the commitment of God to orchestrate and fulfill that divine pattern. And seeing the purpose of community as maturity we understand the aim of God at growing and sustaining His body for the sake of His name. All of this flows through and into our practice of community; that which is our fellowship together.

As we begin our time of study, I would like to get you thinking about fellowship. As we work through the passage this morning, the first thing I would like you to be thinking about is friendship versus fellowship. Are they the same thing? If not, how are they different? Does it matter within the church? Which is closer to the world's model of community? I believe it is important to define what we believe to be true about our community as a church. Is this a community of mutual friendships or is there something deeper and more important that defines and connects us? When it really all boils down, what is it you really truly want out of our community together? Is it friendships or fellowship? Keep this question in mind as we look at the passage this morning.

In 1765 John Fawcett was called to pastor a very small congregation at Wainsgate, England. He labored there diligently for 7 years, but his salary was so meager that he and his wife could scarcely obtain the necessities of life. Though the people were poor, they compensated for this lack by their faithfulness and warm fellowship. Then Dr. Fawcett received a call from a much larger church in London, and after lengthy consideration decided to accept the invitation. As his few possessions were being placed in a wagon for moving, many of his parishioners came to say good-bye. Once again they pleaded with him to reconsider. Touched by this great outpouring of love, he and his wife began to weep. Finally Mrs. Fawcett exclaimed, "O John, I just can't bear this. They need us so badly here." "God has spoken to my heart, too!" he said. "Tell them to unload the wagon! We cannot break these wonderful ties of fellowship." This experience inspired Fawcett to write a hymn. "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love! The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above."¹

You see Dr. Fawcett was able to look beyond the horizon of present fellowship and see the realities of fellowship on a spiritual plane. The second thing I would like you to be thinking about is the scope of true fellowship. What did Dr. Fawcett mean when he wrote that "the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above?" How does this change the way we think about our community? How does this change the way we think about fellowship and is there something beyond our visible community together?

Those of you who follow baseball may have heard of former major leaguer Cecil Fielder. Cecil played with the Detroit Tigers for many years and was known for his ability to hit the long ball. Chad sent me an e-mail this week on Cecil's son Prince Fielder. I'm not sure if Chad meant it to become an illustration in this morning's message, but it worked perfectly. Here is part of the article that Chad pulled from ESPN's web site.

"Prince Fielder didn't really want to keep his 50th home run ball as a souvenir. The one he really wants is No. 52. And while he's at it, he wouldn't mind winning an MVP award -- all in the name of sticking it to his estranged father. And he isn't kidding. "No," Fielder said. "That's serious." Fielder's reaction to becoming the youngest player ever to hit 50 homers in a season -- a feat he accomplished with two home runs in the Milwaukee Brewers' 9-1 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Tuesday -- provided a telling glimpse into his fractured relationship with his father, former major leaguer Cecil Fielder. Fielder said he wants to hit 52 homers in a season and win the MVP because his father never accomplished either. Doing that, Prince Fielder said, would "shut him up." "That's why I'm so passionate about playing," Fielder said. "I don't mind them comparing me, but I'm totally a different player. Hopefully one day, whenever they mention my name, they won't have to mention his.""

The last thing I would like you to be thinking about as we study this morning's passage is the impact of broken relationships or more accurately, broken fellowship. The broken fellowship between the Fielders is sad, but not uncommon in the world. But what about within our community as a Church? Should maintaining a right fellowship with one another be something we strive for? How should we handle broken fellowship? Is there an impact of broken fellowship with one another that extends to our fellowship with God? My hope is that the passage this morning will shape and inform our thinking about fellowship and the practice of our community here at Clearcreek.

[Pray]

[Read 1 John 1:1 to 2:2]

II. Christ Our Life (v. 1:1-4)

The first epistle or letter of John is widely attributed to the Apostle John, one of the twelve disciples, and also the writer of the Gospel of John and Book of Revelation. Evidence points to it being written during the period of 60 to 65 A.D. and may have been a general letter written to the churches growing throughout Asia Minor. Like many of the epistles, John was writing to a community of believers to respond to false teaching and doctrinal error that was harming their fellowship. While the recipient of the letter is not directly revealed, we note the purpose in the conclusion of this letter in 1 John 5:13 where he writes, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."* The essence of this letter was to strengthen and assure a doubting community around the truth that they were indeed secure in Christ. The basis for this important truth was found in their fellowship with Christ and their fellowship with one another.

The first four verses of our passage this morning form the introduction to John's letter. In these verses, John immediately establishes himself as an eye witness to the life of Christ and one writing with apostolic authority. To our ears it is not obvious, but this would have been an important reminder to those hearing it read aloud, as the letter made its way from church to church. It is this apostolic authority that is being set against the false teachers of whom John writes of starting in verse 18 of Chapter 2. This is John the Apostle, who had heard, seen, and touched Jesus the Messiah, and who is warning them of those who were teaching them to deny essential truths. There is a sense of urgency in this short introduction that reveals John's love and concern for these churches who were beginning to believe lies and many were doubting what they had been taught and should hold on to as truth.

John's letter omits the traditional greetings and openings and jumps immediately to point and purpose. The essence of these verses is this. Jesus Christ is real and He is our life. It is through Him that we have fellowship with one another. It is through our fellowship with Him that we have fellowship with the Father. And it is through this fullness of fellowship that we have a fullness of joy. The ending thought of John's introduction is this. Christ alone is the source and object of our joy. We were created to commune with our God and with one another. John wants his readers to see that if you want true and lasting satisfaction, you must come to Christ and have fellowship with and in Him alone.

a. His Life Witnessed (v. 1-2)

[Read 1 John 1:1-2]

In these first two verses John points us to Christ and His life witnessed. John was a personal eye-witness to the life of Christ. The beginning of the John's first letter bears a striking resemblance to the beginning of the Gospel of John, which in turn mirrors the beginning of Genesis. John's gospel starts with "In the beginning was the word". Here we have, "That which was from the beginning". Both of these phrases point us back to Genesis and that the presence of the eternal Christ was there "In the beginning..." with God at the formation of all that was created.

Not only was Jesus the Son there at creation, but 2000 years ago, he was present among men. John confirms that he has not just heard or heard about Jesus. It is likely that he points this out in contrast to those who were deceiving the church. For who should they believe, those who had only heard, or the witness of one who had heard, seen, and had even touched Christ, who was and is the very Word of life. The perfect tense of the Greek verbs is hard to see here in English. But what John is saying is that what he had heard and had seen was a continuing and abiding reality that was not just a part of the past, but also continued into the present.

John also establishes that Christ is literally the personal incarnate Word of God. Jesus did not just speak the words of God, He fulfilled them and is literally the message of eternal life to us from God. And it is the manifested message of life, or more simply, the perfect appearing of the incarnate Christ that John bears witness to. John then ends this thought by affirming that he is proclaiming that which he witnessed and takes us back to where he started. Namely, that Jesus Christ is the message of eternal life that was with the Father and was made manifest in the flesh to us as the Son. We should not miss John's testimony here that Jesus is God's word personified, and that in Christ is the message of eternal life. No matter what the deceivers were teaching these churches, John contrasts it with the truths of the pre-incarnate Christ and his witness to the incarnate Christ. And for us, no matter what new ideas or recent books are popular today, we must also hold firm to the reality and centrality of Christ in our fellowship with God and one another.

b. His Life Shared (v. 3-4)

Let's move on. [Read 1 John 1:3-4]

In the last two verses of John's introduction he points us to Christ and His life shared. As a community of believers we share a common fellowship in Christ. John now shares his purpose in writing this letter. His proclamation and witness is to establish their faith so that they may have fellowship together. John's witness is that there is a shared or common unity to our fellowship that connects and uniquely distinguishes our fellowship. That shared bond is our common fellowship with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for fellowship here is "Koinonia", which most of us are familiar with. You could literally interpret this word as "to have community with." While there is one sense of this word that lends itself to our gathering together around food and conversation, there is more than just a social quality or aspect to this word. I believe the proper sense of this word is a shared nature and essential communing together. What is John saying here? That we are in Christ and He is us. There is something to our being in Christ that is much grander and deeper than just a social relationship. In Christ we possess the gift of eternal life. It is a shared element of our community that unites and "super glues" us to Christ. He is our identity. And in our koinonia with Him, we have koinonia with one another.

So what are the implications for our fellowship and community together? First, the basis for our community is found in Christ. It is Christ that binds us together and not social experiences. It is the grace and gospel of Jesus Christ that has drawn us into fellowship and sustains our community together. We do not gather together because of a denomination, a common set of interests, our shared experiences, or even personal friendships. We gather together because we share a life in Christ and have true fellowship with one another. As believers, we enjoy a fellowship that the world can never know. Through the righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, God has imparted and enabled an everlasting fellowship with Him.

The second implication for our fellowship is to enjoy the communion that we have with Christ and one another. We see this in verse 4. There is a fullness of joy that can only be experienced as a result of the saving faith that brings us into fellowship with God. Manuscripts are equally divided as to whether this verse says "make our joy" or "make your joy" complete. But in either case, the implication is that there is a joy to fellowship with God and one another. It is a joy that is found in being part and seeing others as part of our fellowship with Christ. It is a joy of fellowship that proclaims the Gospel to the lost that others may hear the witness and be drawn into and grow our fellowship. And it is a joy of fellowship that proclaims the Gospel to one another that we may not forget that we are sinners saved by grace and given the marvelous gift of fellowship.

So we see in John's brief introduction that he is establishing the reality of the incarnation. And it is in His incarnation that we have eternal life and community with God and with one another. John defines this community as an everlasting fellowship found in and through Jesus Christ. This fellowship is a rich communion that joins us with God and with one another, producing a fullness of joy that is as real as Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection. David understood this joy when he wrote in Psalm 16:11, "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" Even as a local community, Clearcreek is to evidence a joy of fellowship that flows out of all that we share in Christ, and all that we share as a community together.

III. Christ Our Fellowship (v. 1:5-7)

In the next three verses we see that Christ is our fellowship. He is the cause and sustainer of the fellowship that we enjoy. As we saw last week, he has provided our access to God that we may fellowship in His presence and has united us in Christ through His Spirit that we may have fellowship one with another.

John, an eye-witness to Jesus' life and work on earth, begins his letter by declaring the message that he heard from the incarnate Christ. What we will see in these three verses is that John is making a simple argument of logic. Here is the basic sense of the argument. God is light. He is pure and right and there is nothing in him that is flawed or sinful. If we claim to have fellowship with Him but keep walking in disobedience, we are deceiving ourselves. But if we walk in obedience then we do have fellowship with God, and therefore with one another. And in this fullness of fellowship there is a purifying effect whereby we **have been** and **are being** cleansed by the power of the blood of Jesus, God's Son.

a. With Him (v. 5-6)

John begins these verses by connecting to his introduction. Christ, who was the Word and message of life that brought us into fellowship, is the source for the foundation of this argument. John, the eye-witness, is also an ear-witness, and declares the truth he heard. **That truth is that our fellowship is with Him.** So if we make claims to such a fellowship than we will walk in communion and obedience with Him.

[Read 1 John 1:5-6]

The message that John heard from our Lord Jesus Christ was that God is light. And light does not tolerate darkness. Light exposes what is hidden by darkness. Light does not abide with darkness because it destroys and eliminates it. One commentator writes, "There can be only one sphere of real communion with God—the light itself."² If we claim to have fellowship with God, than our communion with Him must be in the sphere of His holiness and light. God cannot abide or tolerate sin. Sin cannot enter into the sphere of communion with a perfect and holy God. And the Son, as the radiance or brightness of the Father's glory, is the manifestation of that light. If Christ is our fellowship with God, then we too must abide in the light and not in darkness.

John is very clear in verse 6. We cannot say that we have a true fellowship God and then walk in disobedience; denying the truths that we say we believe. There is a danger that John is warning about; that there were some, possibly the false teachers and their followers, who professed fellowship with God but did not practice a life of obedience. There are many in the church today, perhaps some among us, that put on a good spiritual act in front of others, but their hearts are far from communing and fellowship with God and His people.

Walking in self-deception is a dangerous place and we should heed the warning of Hebrews 6:4-6 that says, *"For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt."* Woe to those who have tasted the fellowship and community of Christ but fall away and never enter into its fullness and reality.

Now this is not to say that we are sinless. The point here is that we cannot go on willingly living a life of practicing sin or denying Biblical truths if we are truly in fellowship with God. The darkness of sin cannot exist in the bright light of communion with God. True communion with God can only take place within the pure and righteous light of His holiness. So let us give praise to God that we have access into the light of His fellowship through the righteousness of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross.

b. With One Another (v. 7)

In verse 7 John concludes this short argument. **If Christ is our fellowship and we have true communion with Him, than we have community with one another.** That is, if we exist in the sphere of communion with God, then we exist in that sphere together and have fellowship both with God and one another. Or as John puts it, if we walk in the light as He is in the light then there is a mutual fellowship that we share. We have fellowship with one another because we have fellowship with God.

[Read 1 John 1:7]

True community and fellowship is lived in the light of God's righteousness and love. This is not a superficial obedience nor is it a façade that we put on for others. Walking in the light of God is living before the face of God. There is nothing hidden from Him. The light of God's holiness exposes our sin and convicts us. This is, in essence, the test of our fellowship with God and one another. Is there a pattern of willful disobedience in our lives? Do we shy away from the light of God's word? Do we hide and cover our sins, failing to confess and repent of our unrighteousness? If we answer these questions "Yes", than we do not have fellowship with God and we do not have fellowship with one another.

Our mutual fellowship has direct implications for our community as a local church. If the sphere of our communion together is in God's presence, than there must be an openness and embracing to the light of communing with Him. That is, the experience and practice of our community together will have at its aim a desire to be, and walk in, His light. There will be a willingness to do the hard work of "one-anothering" and a strong desire to acknowledge and deal with sin in our lives. And as John will later point out in his letter, a quality of love for one another that transcends worldly friendships.

And while John does not speak directly to this, I believe there is also to be a desire for fellowship with God and one another. There is an essential element to our fellowship that desires to commune with God and with one another. Can you think of a newly married couple where the husband and wife rarely if ever speak and interact with one another? I hope not. Instead, there is a greater level of sharing and dialog that is produced out of their desire to fellowship together. Now I'm not saying that we should all run around Clearcreek like a bunch of newlyweds. My point is that the quality and character of our fellowship will directly correspond to our desire for it.

John closes his argument with a surprising phrase at the end of verse 7; *"... and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."* We exist in the sphere of communion with God because we are cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ. But in this sphere there is an ongoing purifying effect that continues to be made by His blood. As John will note in the next verse, we are not sinless. So how can we continue to exist in the light of God's holiness? The answer is because of the purifying effect of Christ's blood in our daily walking in fellowship with God and one another. There is a constant and ongoing effect of Christ's blood that sustains and enables our communion with God.

So what is the difference between the saving effect of Christ's blood and its ongoing effects? The simplest way I can illustrate this is similar to how Jesus answered Peter in John 13. One who has completely bathed only needs to wash their hands before dinner. They are already clean except for that which has been dirtied. So we can be confident that our present sins will not cause us to lose our communion with God and one another. This is the sanctifying work of Christ's blood that has been applied by faith and trust in the effectual work of the cross.

IV. Christ Our Forgiveness (v. 1:8-2:2)

In the next few verses John seems to anticipate the questions that would have been asked. **Christ is not only our fellowship, but He is also our forgiveness.** For those who have communion with God and are walking in the light, there will be a natural desire to seek forgiveness and a restoration of fellowship. Yes, we are sinners. If we say otherwise we are liars. But the beauty of our communion with God is that even when we sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Even when we break fellowship with Him, he is always ready to forgive and restore the breach our sin has caused. Moreover, Christ's forgiveness is the example of the restoration of fellowship that we are to extend to one another.

a. Cleanses Us From Sin (v. 1:8-10)

[Read 1 John 1:8-10]

Note that verses 8 and 10 seem to parallel verse 6, and are nearly the same emphasizing the importance of what is between them. Each of these verses begins with the phrase "If we say..." Similarly, verse 9 seems to parallel verse 7. **The point in these verses is that Christ provides a forgiveness that cleanses us from sin.**

John is probably writing to counter the teachings of the false teachers whose twisting of truth introduced errors and doubt into the church. His point is that if we have fellowship in the light, in the brightness of God's holiness and glory, and then say that we have no sin, we are lying and deceiving ourselves. More importantly, in verse 10, if we open and expose our lives to the truth of God's word and then say we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar. In essence, in rejecting God's Word we are rejecting Him. But those who are in the light will desire the changing power of God's word and willingly confess their sin. There will be a humility of spirit and sincere repentance that enables and results in change.

Saying we have fellowship in the light with God does not mean that we will never sin. In fact, John confronts such thinking head on. To say or even think this is self-deception and makes God out to be a liar. So if we are sinners where is our hope? It is in Christ. If we confess our sins, He is always ready and willing to forgive us and purify us so that we may again fellowship with God. Again, John sees that a natural product of our communion with God will be a confession of sin. When confronted with sin, true believers will confess their sin and repent before a holy God. And I believe in the same way, walking in the light means that we will acknowledge and confess our sin to one another.

But on another level, sin against God breaks the fellowship of that communion; just as our sin against one another breaks the fellowship of our community together. Even though we are no longer condemned by our sins, we still must deal with the breaks in fellowship that our sin causes both with God and one another. Our assurance of forgiveness from God is not an excuse to leave a trail of broken fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

You may ask, why should we confess sins that Christ already died for? Does praying to confess our sins and asking for forgiveness deny the work of the cross? I suppose to some extent it depends on what you are thinking when you are praying. But I believe that based on this text, there is a proper and right way to acknowledge our reliance upon the work of Christ on the cross and come to God with a grateful heart for what was done, while still confessing our sin and repenting of our unrighteousness. Walking in the light is our communing with God. Within this communion there is to be a constant conversation with God that includes the confession of present sins. This is not a daily score card that we confess each night before we go to bed. Although, I am not saying that would be wrong. But I believe it is to be more of an ongoing conversation that confesses sin as soon as we become aware of it. And once we have dealt with it with God, we deal with it with others as soon as opportunity will allow.

Just as confessing our sin to God restores our fellowship with Him, so our confession of sin to one another restores our fellowship within the community of Christ. One cannot have communion with God and ignore the community of Christ. One cannot go to God for forgiveness and then ignore those we have sinned against. If we believe our communion and fellowship with God has resulted in communion and fellowship with one another, then we will take any break in fellowship seriously and seek to be restored.

So what about unconfessed sin? Is it acceptable to privately deal with my sins and not confess them to God or those I have sinned against? Our sins, especially sins against others, create a break of fellowship. Yes, the penalty of those sins has been dealt with, but we must still deal with the break it has caused in fellowship. I believe that too often, we do not ask forgiveness out of pride and consequently have relationships that are hindered by our sin. Just as Scripture warns husbands in their relationships with their wives, unconfessed sin within the body of Christ hinders our prayer and fellowship with God. The only way to restore the broken fellowship is to confess our sin and ask forgiveness.

I doubt that any of us are so naive as to think this never happens here at Clearcreek. In fact, it happens every day between believing husbands and wives, parents and children, and even long time friends. It does not matter that these are sometimes family relationships. We are first a part of the community of Christ and our fellowship is in the sphere of communion with God. Maybe there are some who are like Prince Fielder, carrying the bitterness and anger of unconfessed sin and the long term effects of broken fellowship within their family. Maybe there are others who are trying to ignore the hatred or resentment harbored deep in their hearts. Brothers and sisters we live in the light. God is not unaware of our sin and broken fellowship; and it grieves Him. Let me call you this morning to deal with your sin and broken fellowship today!

b. Keeps Us From Sin (2:1-2)

So, should John's reminder of our sinfulness be a discouragement? Should it be an obstacle to holy living? Is He being harsh and unrealistic?

[Read 1 John 2:1-2]

In verse 1 John clarifies his intentions and motivation. His intention is that they will not sin and his motivation is that of love for a dear child. Here is the tenderness and affection of an Elder for his flock. Perhaps he is concerned about how they might react to what they have heard. **So he assures them that knowing Christ is their forgiveness actually keeps them from sin.** Knowing and recognizing how we are drawn to sin and the impact it has on our communion with God and others should cause us to guard against it. Understanding the nature of communion with God and our forgiveness in Christ, is not a license to sin; it is meant to keep us from sin.

But even if we do sin, we are blessed through Christ who not only forgives, but comes to our defense and is our advocate before the Father. To those who walk in communion and fellowship with God, Christ our mediator and High Priest stands before the Father on our behalf. And this is not a long shot or possibility of a human petition, it is the never failing hope that trusts in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are not condemned by our sin, for Christ is our righteousness. Jesus Christ our brother, our defender, or King stands in our place. Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord who has paid the penalty for our sin has, once and for all, satisfied the wrath of God. Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son, stands and intercedes for us.

In verse 2 we see that Jesus is not only our successful advocate he is also our propitiation. He is our atoning sacrifice. God has shown us favor and has met His justice with the sacrifice of His only Son. God's wrath was poured out on His Son so that His love and mercy could be poured out on us. Let me briefly touch on the last part of this verse as well. At first glance it seems to say that Christ died for the whole world. First, if Christ died for everyone than all would be saved. Otherwise we limit the power and effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice. When John writes "not only for ours" he is referring to himself and the recipients of the letter. Therefore, his reference to "for the sins of the whole world" is best understood as the broader context of believers

everywhere. This supports the truth of God's sovereign grace and choosing and is consistent with other texts where we have a similar tension.

Both of these verses assure us that our communion and fellowship with God is secure. We stand secure knowing there is no longer any condemnation. We stand secure in knowing that Christ has given us access to communion with God and dwell in His presence. And as Romans 8 assures us we stand secure knowing that, *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* What a marvelous truth. Praise and honor to Jesus Christ our Lord!

V. Conclusion

Let me share a few thoughts in conclusion. This morning we have seen practical and helpful instruction that shapes our **practice of fellowship**; that we have communion and community with our God and that we have communion and community with one another. It is in Him, and through Him, and for Him that we exist and dwell in the sphere of His light. Christ is the builder, the foundation, and structure of our fellowship. By His blood we entered into community and fellowship with God and by Him we may be confident and secure that we will dwell in His presence forever.

From this passage, I believe we also have the basic elements of our fellowship. **First, there is to be a living in obedience that evidences our communion and fellowship with God.** Darkness cannot abide where light shines. Sin cannot share communion with the pure holiness of God. You cannot say you have fellowship with God and then deny the truth of His word. You cannot say you believe and then simply not care about sin in your life. You cannot say you have community with God's people and not express a love and concern for those you are connected to through Christ.

The second basic element of our fellowship is living in communion. I tried to find a better way to say this succinctly, but was not able to find the right word. Another way to understand this is that there is an important aspect to our fellowship that recognizes and values the connection we have in Christ. It is eyes of faith that see our community on a spiritual level as a part of our fellowship with God. It is a treasuring of our relationships that draws us together in lives of obedience and drives us to confess sin and restore broken fellowship.

At our flock last Wednesday night we were talking about community and sharing about some of the obstacles that we either create or encounter. What keeps us from community? One of the interesting observations made was that often times the tasks and activities of ministry keeps us from making community a priority. For me personally, it seems that ministry, agendas, and personal priorities get in the way of connecting with people when I am at church. Let me encourage you to carefully examine your Sunday list of things to do while you are at church. Are they keeping you from caring for others? Do they prevent you from introducing yourself to the new family that has been coming for the last two weeks? Is there another time or place that you could get these things done? I know it may be less convenient. But these are the kind of little changes that we need to increase our sense of community.

I know that this message hits us all in the everyday messy stuff of life. Relationships can be difficult. We have busy schedules and it is so easy to just let the hard parts of our fellowship go on without being dealt with. But this is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. This is where our hearts are exposed. Do we believe that our fellowship with one another is about our communion with God? Do we believe that our fellowship is hindered by breaks in fellowship? Do we believe that obedience to scripture means confessing our sin and the asking and granting of forgiveness? As our former teaching pastor John Street was fond of saying, now I've started meddling; so let's move one.

I believe that John has also given us the **essence of fellowship** here. **First, it is walking in the light.** There is a desire for obedience and hatred of sin that comes with walking in the light. It is living out who we are in Christ. It is a conforming to His image and our new identity.

Second, it is talking in the light. What I mean by this is that our communion with God will change our communication with self, God, and others. We will change from talk that is self-deceptive to talk that believes the truth of the Word and acknowledges our own sinfulness. We will change from silence in our talk with God to a humble conversation that confesses our sin and expresses gratefulness and praise at His forgiveness. And we will change from superficial chatter with one another to words of encouragement and care that lead us toward maturity.

One last aspect of our fellowship is the assurance that comes from our communion and fellowship with God. I stopped short of the full passage this morning, but let me read the last few verses found in John 2:3-6. *"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."* One of the blessings of our fellowship together is that as we walk in the light and have community together it brings the assurance that we abide in Him. So let our words to one another also be words that build up and encourage those who in trial or in blessing walk faithfully with the Lord.

In my introduction I noted the story of Dr. John Fawcett who wrote the lyrics to the song "Blest Be the Tie That Binds". In closing this morning, let me read those lyrics. Please listen carefully to the threads of community that are woven into this song.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives,
And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil and pain,
And sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

[Pray]

References

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