



1. A Passion for Fellowship with God

(1 Corinthians 1:1-17, John 15:9-17)

You'll remember that at the end of last year, we had a series called Heart of Worship when we looked at the nature of worship. We saw that as a people we should be passionate about our devotion to Him as we come to worship.

This year I am taking us on from worship into what is the next area of our Christian lives - into fellowship. We saw this progression in the reading from John 15 this morning. Jesus starts with the Father's love *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."* And then Jesus says *12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

There is a trail of love here, from Father to Son to the disciples and then between the disciples. Our series over the next few weeks is going to be about the nature of fellowship one with another. We are going to focus on a few areas of 1 Corinthians because it's a letter about relationships - particularly relationships that had gone wrong and Paul has to correct them.

It would be easy to just plough straight into issues on unity, or relationships, or worship or gifts but Paul doesn't. There's a whole preamble right the way through chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians that talks about the relationship we have with God. It isn't there for the sake of politeness, but to put into context what fellowship with one another is all about. Why are we here this morning? Why do we have fellowship with one another? It is because we have fellowship with God.

Without going any further with 1 Corinthians I can tell you this about the breakdown in relationships that occurred in Corinth. Problems had occurred because they had forgotten who they were in Christ. They enjoyed their fellowship with one another in their factions, but what of fellowship with God?

Before we go forward into looking at what fellowship with God is all about, let me give you a little revision from the end of last year, particularly if you missed the evening series of 1 John. Jesus' words in John 15 summarise it all really - love *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Love each other as I have loved you.* God has loved us so we love. Remember, love in scripture is never the sloppy slush that people think of today, it's a self denying devotion for someone else. The measure of God's love in Christ and the way in which He gave His life for our redemption. That's the measure of love we should show to one another and to God. Do we love one another? Look around. Would I die for this lot? We are a fellowship brought together by God's love, but die for them?

When we looked at 1 John we saw the way in which we treat one another tells the whole world about our relationship with God. If we are the sort of person who backbites, criticises, judges, thinks we are spiritually superior and thinks the worse of our brothers and sisters in Christ, it tells everything about the fellowship we have with God - in fact it tells the world that we don't have much of a relationship with Him. We found that John stated this so strongly that he suggested that if there is dissension and lack of love between Christians, you've got to wonder whether one or more of them know Christ at all. Ouch!

As we look at many aspects of 1 Corinthians over the next few weeks, we are frequently going to come back to this notion. When we examine actions of various people on various issues we have to ask ourselves “where was the love Jesus commands in these actions? Where was God in all this?”

This morning I’m going to look at this the other way around. Let me read verses 9 and 10 again from the New Revised Standard Version which gets the essence of them much better:

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

What the NIV says “remain” actually translates better as “abide”. It’s the Greek word “meno”. It is not translated consistently in the NT as its meaning changes with context. In this context the idea is one of sojourning, not to depart and to be held or kept. Our desire is to just be with Him, to have fellowship with Him and don’t have a desire to be anywhere else.

And as we have that desire to be with Him all the time - and we are through His Holy Spirit - that relationship breakout and reflects in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. So again, our fellowship with God reflects in our fellowship with others.

As with worship, the nature and quality of our fellowship is controlled by the nature and quality of our relationship with God. That’s true as a church too. If we have problems with our relationships as believers, it says quite a lot about our devotional life as a church. Sounds tough - but unfortunately true.

The bottom line on fellowship - the heart of it - is that we have fellowship with one another because we have fellowship with God in Christ. Like worship, fellowship is borne out of motive and not law. That’s the mistake most people make with church. They think it is based on a formula and they look at letters like 1 Corinthians for formulas. But the problem is that it is based on relationship. And relationships aren’t regulated by law but by love - we love because H first loved us. The heart of fellowship like the heart of worship is Jesus. Real relationships in the fellowship of the church are driven by our relationship with Him.

Which brings us to this preamble at the beginning of 1 Corinthians where Paul affirms what GOD has made us in Christ. Look at verse 9 *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* Look at that wording; God has called us into fellowship with His Son. We have been called into fellowship: it was His move. He has made us all we are in Christ.

● We are sanctified in Christ and called to be holy

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours

When we came to Christ, we were sanctified. What does that mean? It means to be made holy, set apart, consecrated, purified for God’s service. In Christ, as a result of His death on the cross and the forgiveness and purification that this brings, we are fit to be in the presence of God and part of His family. It is God who makes people holy and fit to be in His presence. He made us who we are. Right at the outset our fellowship with one another is determined by Christ.

And we are called to be holy. Some translations put this as saints. Saints are holy people who live holy lives in obedience to God. They aren't special people the Pope decides should be called saints - we are all called to holy lives. Holy living is something that should characterise our fellowship with one another.

- We are linked to all who call in His name everywhere

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours

Paul was writing to the Christians at Corinth but the letter was written to all who call on His name. We are linked to all those who call on His name. We all have the same status, the same calling. Therefore, we are brought into relationship to all believers he is their Lord and ours. But how many times do we hear the words - we don't have fellowship with them because they are different to us. "We can't have fellowship with them because we don't like the way they worship because WE don't think that it honours God" "We don't have fellowship with those because they are in a different denomination - and you know what that denomination is like don't we?" We don't have fellowship with them because we think that we are superior believers". We won't have fellowship with them because they don't see belief in quite the same way that we do". We don't have fellowship with them because they use a different version of the Bible to us". We don't have anything to do with them because..."

You know what? God isn't picky at all whom He saves. He's not picky about whom he gives His blessings to. He's not picky about whom He pours His Spirit out on. He doesn't appear to be too bothered that they are in the "wrong" denomination either. He doesn't seem to be bothered that people are saved in churches that use drums in worship. He doesn't seem to bother that some churches use the Living Bible when he brings them to salvation. He doesn't seem to bother about all the controversy about whether or not Alpha should be taught in RC Churches when he brings people to salvation through Alpha.

The truth is we are more interested in what PEOPLE who we don't agree with are doing to even notice what GOD is doing. And you know what, what any other believer does is just as fallen as everything we do. Yes, you heard right. We are just as imperfect in our evangelical glibness as any other church or person that owns the name of Christ. And God uses us still in our sin and failure. That brings us nicely to our third point.

- We are what we are by God's grace

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

We are only what we are by God's grace. We can only stand before the presence of a holy God this morning because of His grace. We are only enriched as Paul puts it because of that grace. Whatever gifts we have are from God and we will only be kept blameless to the end by His strength. How dare we think that we are better or superior to any other believer.

We come from lots of different backgrounds here - different places, different denominations, different traditions. And I have heard lots of things in the 18 months I have been here as people have said to me "you shouldn't do this because.." or "do this

because we did it in my last church” or “my last church was much better” or “ you don’t believe that do you - my way is much better”. The truth is that we are no better than one another - we are here because of grace.

And the truth is that God isn’t picky about who He uses - we are all fallen and have sinful natures. The only thing that makes us righteous before God is Christ. One of our themes over Christmas is that we are all special to God. We are called into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ. He calls us. We are all fit - equally fit - to be in His presence this morning in Christ. as we go through 1 Corinthians we will find that some people thought themselves to be “super-Christians”. There are no such thing as “super-Christians” There is such a thing as a mature Christian and they are always characterised by love and humility - you’ll never hear destructive stuff coming out of their minds because they can see where Jesus is in everything. Why? Because they have a passion for fellowship with God.

It is a most important truth that we all need to grasp as we commence 2004. We are all the same and my desire is the same as Paul’s

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

I believe that starts in fellowship with a holy God, who in Christ has made us holy. We have fellowship with a Saviour who calls us to abide in Him, to love one another, care for one another, die for one another. We need to be a people with a passion to fellowship within God in doing so we will see where He is in every situation we come to and every relationship we have - to His glory.

*Father, we thank you that we are in fellowship with You
We thank you that we are in fellowship with Your Son
We thank you that we have your Holy Spirit within us.*

*Father, build up within us a passion for fellowship with You.
Give us a passion to abide in Christ
Give us a passion for one another.*

*Father, save us from that human desire to judge
And that urge to think ourselves superior even though we’re not
Help us to love one another truly
And not judge and make stupid generalisations.*

*For the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ
May our walk close to You be reflected
In our walk with those you have called us to have fellowship with*

In Jesus’ name

Amen



Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 4/1/04. Scripture Quotes NIV