



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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### HG172 *Walking In The Light* True Fellowship

1 John 2:18-27

Home Group Study Notes

14 October 2018 - Rachel Orford



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

If you were making a documentary about our church, what things would you include that would encourage people to want to come here?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG172 *Walking In The Light*  
**True Fellowship**

1 John 2:18-27

Home Group Sermon

14 October 2018 - Rachel Orford

**True Fellowship** If you asked people what their main reasons were for belonging to a church, I am guessing that fellowship would be pretty high on the list. But to be honest “fellowship” isn’t a term that I use much outside of a Church context. As a new Christian I was even a bit wary of it. I guess I found it rather an archaic word, used only in academic or rather upper crust circles; a Fellowship was something you earned after long years of study or by making a major contribution. It was something that set people apart as an elite group, a bit of a clique in other words – something I would never usually belong to. In fact, I had often thought Christians were a bit intimidating in the same way – almost like they were party to a whole bunch of knowledge and secrets that I didn’t know about. When I came to Emmanuel for the first time and Paul talked about a time of “fellowship” after the service, I had no idea what this could mean. How did you do it? Was I invited? If I tried it and didn’t like it, could I leave? And of course it’s not just a thing -it’s a verb too! People can “fellowship” with one another. After drifting around in the foyer a bit after the services I soon came to the conclusion that it just meant Christians hanging out with other Christians, usually after church. Well that’s alright. I can handle doing this.

**Attaining True Fellowship** But it seemed to be connected in some way with this other mysterious expression that I never liked to ask about because everyone seemed to know what it meant. The bible talks about being “*in* Jesus” or “*in* the Father”. John says it a couple of times in the passage we have just read and Paul uses the expression no less than 164 times in his letters, so it is clearly important to know what it means. But how best to understand it? The bible version I like to read at home is the NLT (New Living Translation) which often has a slightly more expansive way of interpreting things than the NIV which we use in church. In this case I think it is quite helpful. In vs 24 of the NIV we read “...you [also] will remain in the son and in the father.” The NLT says “...you will remain *in fellowship with* the son and with the father.” And in vs 27 we read “...just as it has taught you, remain in him”. The NLT says “so just as he has taught you, remain *in fellowship with* Christ.”

So here is that word “fellowship” again, this time being used to explain the rather mysterious expression “in Him” or “in the Father/Son” etc. And here it clearly doesn’t just mean hanging out with God, it means to be united with him, almost organically, like a limb is part of a body or a branch part of a tree. In John’s gospel Ch 15 vs 5 he actually tells us that Jesus said ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain *in me and I in you*, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” So as Christians, we are inextricably linked with Jesus, we are part of the same body, we share the same roots.

4. There are great theological and moral disagreements in the wider church today. Why should this concern us in our local churches?

5. What are some ways in which we can maintain fellowship within our own church family?

6. Is it ever our job to convict or to judge? In what circumstances?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What do you understand by the term "fellowship"? Has studying this passage changed your understanding?

2. How does the idea that we are living in the "last hour" make you feel? Do you think it affects the way you live or what you believe?

3. Why is it important to identify false teaching in the church? How might we do this?

This is what true fellowship with Him means. And it follows doesn't it, that if we are in fellowship with God the father and with Jesus, then we must be in fellowship with one another. As believers in the truth, it is an unavoidable fact that we are united in fellowship with one another. It is not something that we need to strive to attain. And this fellowship is not the type of relationship with can have with people who are not Christians. We heard in the first of this sermon series that in 1 John 1:3 he says, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, *so that you also may have fellowship with us.*" In other words, if you hadn't heard and taken to heart the same things that John and his fellow disciples had, if you hadn't understood the good news, the true nature of Jesus then you could not share the same fellowship. Christians *are* united by common understandings and beliefs.

John tells us in vs 24 "See that what you heard in the beginning remains in you." In other words go right back to the beginning, to what you were first taught, back to basics if you like, and hold fast to this. Paul (Carr) told us in the first week that "shared doctrine is the basis of Christian fellowship". This means that we need to be sure that what we believe about Jesus is correct. Unfortunately, there are plenty of influential voices that think they can convince us we are wrong.

**Threats to True Fellowship** Which is what John is warning us about up front when he warns us about the antichrist. Now this is a word that has been much used in popular culture and can strike fear into our hearts, particularly because it comes up regularly in the genre of horror films and novels which tell stories of the end of the world and its accompanying horrors; it is usually the responsibility of one individual who has been set apart to destroy what is good and bring mankind to its knees. Although John's letters are the only place in the bible in which the term "antichrist" is used, it refers directly to the description in his book of Revelation of the vision of a beast that comes out of the sea as the end time draws near. The beast is given power and authority over creation and deceives us all into worshipping him.

John says that even in the days in which he was writing "many antichrists have come". In fact, this is how we can know we are living in what is popularly called "end times". Jesus himself warned us about them in Matthew 24. He said "...for false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you in advance." By the time John wrote his letters, many leaders with this spirit of deception and falsely claimed authority were rising up and using persuasive arguments to get people to follow them instead of Christ. And the reason they were able to do this with relative ease is because "they went out from us" (vs 19). In other words, they came *from us*, they used to be members of the church, or at least outwardly so, they had seemed to be followers of Christ and claimed fellowship with us. But John continues "but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

**Losing True Fellowship** John tells us the key thing which makes the antichrists different from us. He says in vs 22-23 "...whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist – denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father." This is John's message to us. This is the fundamental thing which bind us together in fellowship – Jesus is the son of God. We must be sure of His divinity. If we are, and we trust in it, we can remain in fellowship with Him.

Part of John's message in today's passage was to explain that denying the divinity of Jesus while claiming to believe in God was impossible. The two are inseparable. False teaching is a very real and dangerous distraction for us today and it can be deceptive, because in the most part those who spread their ideas are not directly opposing Christ, but redefining and re-imagining him. They strip him of his divinity – which is the centre of Christianity on which everything else turns.

But even beyond these basic beliefs the interpretation of scripture is not easy and needs to be undertaken carefully and with a recognition of the culture and times they were written. Scripture has been used to justify all kinds of things which are no longer up for debate – slavery, racism, degradation of women to name a few. Today there huge disagreements between sections of the church about whether women should be ordained as priests or even speak in church. Most but not all of the Anglican church accept these things now, but the Catholic church do not. There is of course a significant theological debate which rages today over the acceptability or not of same sex relationships and marriage. These topics can be painful and feelings on both sides run high, so it is undeniably difficult to maintain global fellowship in the face of such fundamental disagreements

**Maintaining True Fellowship** And fellowship is something we need to take care that we do *maintain*. And we have much to help us. We have already heard John's clear message. Follow what you heard in the beginning, go back to the teachings delivered in the very beginning of the Christian faith and we know we have fellowship with the Father and the Son and by extension, with each other. And John also reminds us of the "anointing" we received when we first came to believe. The Holy Spirit who reminds us of what is true and guides our hearts, so that we are better placed to discern what is false. So, we have plenty of resources at our disposal – we have God's word, we have the Holy Spirit and we have the teachings those who have gone before us, those who set out for us our Creed that we looked at recently; a simple step by step reminder of our beliefs, of those fundamental truths which bind us together.

And we have each other. We may not be able to "proclaim what we have seen and heard" as John could, but we can proclaim what we know and encourage each other. At the beginning of the series, Paul recommended a book "Faith in the Time of Crisis" by Vaughan Roberts. In it, the author reminds us that "The Bible's focus is not on dioceses, denominations, commissions or committees that are established to discuss or promote organisational unity between different groups of churches.....The New Testament encourages believers to fight the daily fight against sin *within their local churches*, and to maintain the unity of the Spirit *within their local churches*." He goes on to suggest that our spiritual health should be concerned with the interests of others rather than us pushing our own agendas – building real relationships as an expression of Christian faith. He describes a type of fellowship where church members find out what each other need. We may be pleased with the fantastic worship, great kids' clubs, warm and welcoming home groups and it's right that we should be. But what about the shy, new, single person with no kids who can't sing? What would help them get more from their time in church? What would instil in them a feeling of belonging? Maybe that's a challenge for us to find out when we next "fellowship" with each other?

**What True Fellowship is NOT** Whilst we have spent a bit of time thinking about exactly what true fellowship is, how it is attained, what might threaten it and even break it and how we might maintain it, I just want to finish by looking at what it is **not**.

We may feel that our fellowship with others has been broken because of departures in theology and understanding, we may not approve of the lifestyle of others or the choices they make. It is only right that we should speak out against sin and remain steadfast in our beliefs even if they are not popular. In Matthew 18 Jesus gives clear instructions about dealing with sinners who refuse to repent and come back to God which can culminate in them being excluded from the church, and this can be undeniably difficult with hard decisions to be made. Billy Graham said "*It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love.*" What a great reminder to us not to get our roles mixed up. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Whilst we might despair of the sins of others, our ability to show love, mercy and compassion are things which set us apart as follower of Christ. God wants us ALL to be in fellowship with him and with each other and as his representatives on earth it is our mission to help bring people into this fellowship – whether they are meeting Him for the first time or have strayed away and are lost. How can we do this if we give the impression that we are an exclusive club with judgemental attitudes towards "outsiders"? How much better to share our beliefs in a positive, encouraging way, to live by example and to demonstrate what true fellowship looks like.

Tom Wright sums it up in his book *Simply Christian*. He says "*The church exists primarily for two closely correlated purposes: to worship God and to work for his kingdom in the world ... The church also exists for a third purpose, which serves the other two: to encourage one another, to build one another up in faith, to pray with and for one another, to learn from one another and teach one another, and to set one another examples to follow, challenges to take up, and urgent tasks to perform. This is all part of what is known loosely as fellowship.*"

And I want to end with a prayer that Jesus Himself prayed to his Father in the Gospel of John 17:20-23. It is a prayer for His disciples just before He was arrested, but I imagine He is praying it now for all of us to encourage our fellowship. "*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*" **Amen.**

## Emmanuel Church Text for 2018

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship.  
And by him we cry 'Abba Father.'*

Romans 8:15