The Church, part 14
(1 John 1:1-8; Acts 2:41-47)
(preached Pine Grove 9/24/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

I grew up in a home where my father never grilled out.

It wasn't until college that I began to learn the fine art of cooking a steak on the grill..

Now, grilling out has become something that I enjoy very much…

In my early days of grilling out, I was a little dogmatic…

I only used charcoal…

I made fun of people who cooked over gas burners…

I called them names and made fun of their steaks, but now that I am older and busier, I too cook over gas..

But If can return to the subject of charcoal for a moment, I think it serves as a good illustration of the subject of he message tonight..

You see, when you get ready to light your charcoal, you need to pile it together before you light it…

They even make large cylinders today where you dump the charcoal in, add the fire, let it burn and then dump the cylinder into your grill when it is ready…

And the principle of piling your charcoal together is this….

The individual coals burn better and hotter and brighter when they are close together…

And so it is necessary to peel them up to get them burning hot and bright red….

But then once they are all hot, you take them and spread them out under the grill…

And once you do, the red color leaves and they cool off so they are at a good cooking temperature…

For charcoal, close fellowship is necessary to get the fire going but to cool the coals off, all you need to do is separate and spread them out….

Now, that is a perfect picture of the role of fellowship in the church…

Churches in close fellowship burn bright and do much for the body of Christ…

Churches that lack close fellowship cool off and may even go out in their service of Christ…

For that reason, a 6th characteristic of an effective church is genuine fellowship…

Churches that invest in one another and spend time together with one another and truly love one another are churches that are on fire for Christ…

Churches that don't get to know one another and don't spend time together and dont really care about one another are churches that are losing their fire for Christ…

So, let us take some time tonight to look at the word fellowship and understand why churches can enjoy fellowship….

And then we will look at some things that can enhance fellowship in the church…

Let's begin this…

I. Why Fellowship Can be Enjoyed (1 John 1:1-7)

In 1 John, the apostle John is writing to the church to verify the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ…

John had been an eyewitness of the life of Christ…

He had spent 3 years with Jesus during his earthly ministry…

He had watched Jesus be arrested, crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven…

And now he was writing to affirm the testify about what he saw…

Look at verse 1 of 1 John 1…

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is

Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

What John is saying is this…

I saw Christ…

I touched Christ…

I heard him teach and proclaim eternal life to all who believe in His name…

And John simply says in verse 3 that he is proclaiming the truth of Christ to the world so that others can have fellowship with him…

And the idea is this…

The belief in the truth of the gospel is the basis for fellowship…

Now the word for fellowship simply means togetherness…

Fellowship is the idea of community and togetherness that implies a strong bond between people..

And the bond of fellowship and togetherness in the church is a common belief in the gospel of Christ….

You see fellowship can be enjoyed because two people share a common trust in the gospel of Christ…

For instance if you belong to a fishing club, you are tied to the other members of the club by a common love of fishing…

If you part of a book club, you share a common love of reading with other members in the club…

The fellowship we enjoy in the church is because we share a common love of Jesus Christ…

We dont all have the same size bank account…

We dont all have the same level of intelligence…

We dont all have the same things we do for fun…

We dont all have the same taste in clothing or entertainment.

We dont all have the same culture or family upbringing…

No, the basis of fellowship in the church is our common belief in the gospel and love of Jesus Christ…

And that is what John is saying here…

God made me an eyewitness of the life of Christ, and what I write, preach and proclaim to the world is how to have fellowship with God through Christ…

And when we have fellowship with God, you will have fellowship with his people…

Now, John also includes a warning here in verses 5-6…

If a person does not have a love of Christ, he does have fellowship with God and fellowship with the people of God…

If a person walks in the continual darkness of sin, he reveals that he has never been in fellowship with God and with the people of God even though he or she may come to church…

Fellowship is not a matter of attendance but a matter of love of Christ…

And true believers are bound together by one another not because they see each other often or come to church often but because they speak of their love of Christ often…

This is why the church is not a place to come talk about the weather or current events or the latest piece of gossip..

Church is a place to come take about the work of the Lord in your life…

And how you are growing in the Lord…

What you are learning about the Lord…

How you are serving the Lord….

Now clearly people talk about all sorts of things at church…

I talk about the weather and current events at church, but the majority of my talk with others must center upon the glory of the Lord…

And the simple reasons is this…

I am with people who love the Lord as much as I do and therefore our conversations are about His work in our lives in the world…

Ever notice how some people come to church and hang out with the church but never talk about the Lord and his church?

The reason is this…

The love being with other people, but they lack a love of the Lord…

People who love the Lord talk about the Lord with one another…

And that increases our fellowship with one another and with the Lord..

Now the reason we can have fellowship is because we share a love of Christ and salvation in his name…

Then the question becomes what is the reason for fellowship?

In other words, why do we need fellowship?

Can't I just be a loner?

That is my personality..

I don't like being around people…

I would rather worship God at home and do my own thing and be left alone…

Well, the answer to that response is simply this…

God clearly stated in the very beginning of the book of Genesis that it is not good for man to be alone…

That is why God created marriage, but there is a need for fellowship even beyond the institution of marriage…

That is why the world has other clubs and social events and social functions…

We are made in God's image as social creatures…

To be antisocial is stand contrary to the way that God designed you…

Now certainly some people are more social that others and that is fine, but to be totally antisocial and refuse to be in fellowship with others works against the plan of God for your life…

You and I need other people in our lives…

People who withdraw from fellowship with others find all sorts of problems like secret sins, depression, anxiety, doubt and all sorts of other issues…

The basis of fellowship is salvation in Christ and the need for fellowship is to remain encouraged in our salvation…

Fellowship is a must in the life of a believer…

It is not optional…

Generous folks give of their time and spend it in fellowship with others…

Selfish people withdraw from fellowship and eventually hurt themselves spiritually…

So, those are some reasons why fellowship can and should be enjoyed…

Now, let's take a minute to look at how fellowship can be encouraged….

II. How Fellowship Can be Encouraged (Acts 2:)

Take your Bibles and turn to Acts 2 to finish out our night…

In Acts 2, we get a picture of what the church did in the very beginning of their existence…

Once Jesus was crucified, resurrected and ascended to heaven, the church was established to take the good news of the gospel to the world…

And the book of Acts gives us a good picture of what the church did in those early days…

And one thing that the church did from the very beginning was fellowship with one another…

Now for many of us, we have our idea of what fellowship is…

In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, there was an explosion of churches building fellowship halls…

And the purpose of these building was to have a place for the church to gather and enjoy a meal or activity…

For me as a kid around the church, fellowship halls meant red kool aid, stale cookies and the smell of mothballs…

Because that is what fellowship was in the church I attended with my grandparents…

We played on the playground and then came into the fellowship hall to have a snack while the adults talked…

For many of you, that is probably your idea of fellowship as well…

And truly this is fellowship…

Yet, that is not all that fellowship entails…

So, let's read Acts 2:41-47 to get a better picture of fellowship is…

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand [an]souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and [ao]to prayer.
43 [ap]Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and [aq]signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed [ar]were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.
46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread [as]from house to house, they were

taking their [at]meals together with gladness and [au]sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding [av]to their number day by day those who were being saved.

First off, fellowship is the idea of the church simply being together…

It can be stale cookies and red kool aid or covered dish or a game of horseshoes or a skating party….

The activity is not the issue, the location is not the issue, the issue is that the people of God are together…

Now in the early church, they were together doing 3 important things…

You see them in verse 42…

Listening to the apostles teaching…

Breaking Bread…

Praying…

Though the basis of our fellowship is our common salvation and the ways to fellowship are numerous, these 3 ways should form the core of how we fellowship…

The first is the fellowship we enjoy around the teaching of the word of God…

Look, part of your conversation with others in the church should concern what you are leaning and how your life is being changed by the word of God in Sunday School and through preaching…

It is a strange thing that the people in the church rarely talk or feel awkward talking about what God is doing in their life through the work of the word…

That shouldn't be the case…

First of all, you need to be coming to church to get the Word and then you need to enjoy fellowship with others by talking about how the word is at work in their life…

Try this…

Ask people, “what are your learning in Sunday School and preaching that you find interesting and how is it changing you?”

You may be surprised that people are willing and even want to talk about these things if you only ask…

Healthy churches fellowship around the word of God by listening and talking about it’s work in their life…

A second aspect of fellowship is the breaking of bread..

This is the idea of the church being together around the Lord's Table taking part in the Lord's Supper…

The early broke bread daily in their homes…

Today, some churches only do it once or twice a year…

I enjoy celebrating the Lord's Supper with each of you as often as possible…

We will do it 6 times this year, and I hope to increase that number as I am here longer…

WE may do the Lord's Supper on Sunday nights in the future..

It is not an event that has to be confined to Sunday mornings…

Now I think some believers lose the significance of it if it done too often…

But more is better than less…

Now why is the Lord's Supper a foundational part of church fellowship?

Well, the Lord's Supper is a celebration of who Christ is..

It is a celebration of his death in the place of guilty sinners like us..

The Lord's Supper reminds us that any fellowship we enjoy with one another is not possible apart from the work of Christ on the cross…

The Lord's Supper also reminds us of our equality before Christ…

Fellowship is ruined when people feel they rise above others in the church, and cliques of people begin to form…

The Lord's Table demolishes inequality in the church..

Because the cross of Christ levels the playing field…

The rich need Christ.

The poor need Christ.

The smart need Christ.

The dumb need Christ.

The healthy need Christ.

The hurting need Christ..

And every time, we fellowship around the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of our equality before Christ…

A third way the early church fellowshipped was in prayer with one another…

It has often been said that you never know a man or woman's heart until you pray with them…

It think that is often true…

Prayer reveals our true character…

Famous Scottish pastor, Robert Murray McCheyne, said this…

"What a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more."

When people pray together, they fellowship together in the most real way possible…

Talking to the Lord with others will make everything else be secondary..

You forget about how they are dressed, what they are wearing, and you simply get to hear their heart before God…

Praying together as a church encourages true fellowship and prevents superficial relationship and fellowship..

So, those are a few foundational aspects of fellowship but lets talk about a couple more we see here in Acts 2..

Verses 43-47 give us a few more insights into what the early church did to encourage fellowship with one another…

Verse 44 gives us two things to consider…

44 And all those who had believed [ar]were together….

Needless to say, fellowship is encouraged by the church being together….

And though you may think that 3 times a week is enough, the reality is that it is not…

The church needs to be together as often as possible…

Now I understand that people work and have families to care for…

And I also understand that it takes work to be with each other, but I can't stress enough the need for the church to be together….

#1 - Being together gives us a chance to know each other…

In our fast paced world, we rarely get a chance to truly know people other than a "Hi, how you doing?"

And this is certainly the case in the church where we pass people once a week at best and only have time for a few words…

That is not true fellowship…

True fellowship requires you to get to know more about a person that just their name….

So true fellowship takes time, and let's face it, Sunday morning doesn't allow a lot of time…

Sunday School is better for fellowship than big church, but even Sunday School isn't enough..

So make fellowship a priority to be together with the church by being here consistently…

And make fellowship a priority by taking time to have church folks over to your house..

Obviously, you cant get to know everyone at the same level, but you can get to know everyone better than you do now…

So being together is a way to encourage fellowship…

A second way to encourage fellowship is to invest in others…

Look at the end of verse 44..

44 And all those who had believed [ar]were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need

Fellowship grows as people take care of one another..

The early church never used the phrase, “Well, that is mine!”

Instead they used the phrase, “What’s mine is your and what’s yours is mine.”

And the reason they said that is that they invested in each other’s lives…

Now, this was communal living or communism, it was living with a heart to help the church…

To invest financially in the lives of your brothers and sisters in the Lord…

This kind of fellowship costs you something…

But this kind of fellowship is true fellowship because it makes you a part of the lives of others…

Another way to encourage fellowship is to encourage unity…

Look at verse 46…

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread [as]from house to house, they were taking their [at]meals together with gladness and [au]sincerity of heart,

There is nothing more dangerous to true fellowship than disunity and disagreement among the people in the church…

The early church had one mind….

Now this is not to say that there were never disagreements among the people..

I am sure there were…

But true fellowship can disagree and still eat together and worship together….

I am sure there are people that disagree with me and I am sure there are people I disagree with here…

But unless it is a matter of salvation and the truth of the gospel, I can disagree with you and still dine with you…

Unity is more important than me being right when it comes to smaller less important matters of preference…

I would rather allow for freedom in Christ than to ruin our unity in Christ…

Churches that quarrel over small matters kill fellowship…

People that have to be right and have their way are fellowship killers and not the peacemakers they are called to be….

Unity in the church encourages fellowship and leads people to eat together with, according to the end of verse 46 with gladness and sincerity of heart….

And those things lead to fellowship in worship…

Look at verse 46-47…

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread [as]from house to house, they were taking their [at]meals together with gladness and [au]sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding [av]to their number day by day those who were being saved.

When people are able to fellowship in gladness, their worship is enhanced…

If you have ever had trouble worshipping the Lord, many times that it because you are having trouble with fellowship with another member of the body of Christ…

Where unity and fellowship are lacking, worship suffers…

But where gladness and sincerity of heart exist, worship is encouraged…

By not only is worship easier, it is more well received by God..

In fact, God loves unity and fellowship that he rewards it with more people…

The end of verse 47 says that the Lord was adding to the number of people in the church…

It is no coincidence that bitter fighting churches never grow..

Why would God send one of his precious children in a place of bitterness and anger?

Instead, God sends his people to places that are unified and fellowshipping and worshipping together….

I pray that we will be a church like that…

Conclusion

What does all this mean to us?

#1 - We can't fellowship enough.

Though we get together often, you can't do it too much as a church…

The Bible is clear..

We don't need to forsake fellowship…

Instead we need to fellowship all the more as we see the Day of the Lord approaching..

And the reason for that is this…

As the return of Christ approaches, the persecution of the church rises…

We need each other as the world continues to bully us…

Fellowship around the word and around the Lord's table and around the dinner table is a great blessing…

#2 - We can't make everything.

It needs to be said that not everyone can come to every church function…

And there should be no guilt in that for anyone who misses occasionally..

It must also be said that some fellowships will be attended better than others…

That is just the nature of a fallen world…

Don't take things personally in regards to who comes to what fellowship…

Show grace because you may need grace when you can't make it…

#3 - We can't wait for the unbroken fellowship of heaven.

There are times when I hate to see people leave after a church fellowship…

Though I am tired, I so much enjoy being around people that it hurts to leave them..

And that is a good thing…

Though we must go our own way in this world, there is coming a day when we can enjoy unbroken fellowship with the Lord and with His people…

It is not good for man to be alone….

That is why heaven won't be me all by myself on my own cloud…

But rather, heaven will be me in a community of other believers enjoying the Lord together and each other together for all eternity…

Unbroken fellowship is a day I am looking forward to, but until then, let us enjoy the fellowship that the Lord has given us on this side of heaven…

Let us pray.