

SESSION 1 – WEEK OF 17 JAN 2021

TRUE FELLOWSHIP: HAVE YOU TRULY SEEN AND HEARD?

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 1:1-4

Theme:

The question of true fellowship and that fellowship flowing from truly having seen and heard the message.

Key Verse:

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1John 1:3)

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. 1 John 1:1-4 is John’s prologue to his first epistle. In it he presents the basis for fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, the apostles and other Christians.
At vv.1-2, he proclaims a message. Why does John, rather unusually, describe the message as not just *heard*, but also *seen* and *touched*? What is the content of this message?

- God came in the likeness of man; Jesus who can be seen, touched and heard is contrasted with the false gospel.

- The first four verses deliberately reminded the readers that Jesus was not someone who was strictly divine (as those influenced by Gnosticism/Docetism believed) but He was also human. He was someone “heard,” “seen,” “touched.”

He did not “seem” like a man (docetic) but He was truly man and truly divine.

Who wrote 1 John?

It is a commonly held belief that 1 John was written by the Apostle John and that he also wrote the Gospel according to John and the book of Revelation. For a discussion specifically on the authorship of 1 John please see “Who wrote 1, 2, & 3 John?” <<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-1-2-3-john>>

John was addressing issues posed by Christians who had been influenced by Gnostic/Docetic teachings. Christians who had become too subjective in their understanding of their faith; too mystical in their approach to God; too “spiritual” to the extent of neglecting real life challenges. Audience was Jewish Christians around Ephesus who had encountered a form of false gospel. Aim was to emphasise fellowship with God and fellowship with one another (v.3) that our joy may be complete (v.4).

- The message is not simply a concept, idea, philosophy, or way of life. Rather the message is encapsulated in the very life of a living, breathing Person – Jesus Christ.
- Christ incarnate as witnessed by John and others. This is their testimony as eyewitnesses, who saw and touched the living Jesus Christ.
- Throughout history (including in our time) there have been Christians who have taken on “gnostic” views of their faith when they downplay, neglect the humanity of Jesus Christ, and played up the mystery and miraculous super-spiritual view of Jesus. John provides the correctives against any attempts to over-spiritualise the reality of the Incarnate Son of God – “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” – the Word of Life.

2. What is the reason for the proclamation of John’s message (vv.3-4)?

- So that the hearers would also have fellowship with John and other believers (v.3). And so that their joy may be complete (v.4).
- Later in the epistle, we will see that John may also have emphasised the incarnation of Christ to address false teachings.
(Definition: *Incarnation* describes the reality of God becoming fully human in Jesus Christ, without in any way becoming less than fully divine.)
- Jesus didn’t just come to correct right doctrine but came to give a new (renewed) kind of life. False gospels did not require change in behaviours but merely belief. The true gospel is not merely new belief but new life or true life in Christ.

3. John suggests that his joy, and the joy of the believers with him, remains only a partial joy, until the epistle’s recipients come into fellowship with them. Does this description surprise you (v.4)?

- Christian life can be better nurtured by looking at the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, and can be sustained by strengthening our fellowship, keeping Christians coming together as family. A more complete picture of Jesus – as preached by Christians who were there, hearing and learning from Him.
- We need to be in community with other believers to enjoy true fellowship.

4. In light of John’s prologue, what is the foundation of our fellowship as Christians? Why is this important? How would you respond to the title of this week’s sermon: Have you truly seen and heard?

- In the New Testament the term fellowship (*koinonia*) is often used to refer to a community, sharing, communion, and intimacy. Often also emphasising sharing of things in common. In verse 3, fellowship is founded on a common faith:-
 - i. in Christ, proclaimed by the testimony of those who were there with Christ.
 - ii. in the incarnate Christ, who was made fully human, could be touched and seen.
 - iii. in the divinity of Christ as the Son of God.

- Jesus establishes for us a new fellowship (with one another and with God) which is so close and intimate that it is a new family or a new genus (Suetonius quoted, "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians [Christiani], a class [genus] of men given to a new and mischievous superstition (Nero 16; Rolfe 1939)."
- A new type of person, a new family, a new genus (renewed humanness with God) is the essence of our fellowship.
- Therefore, there can be no genuine spiritual fellowship with any individual or group that does not share this common faith in Jesus Christ as the God-man.
- The evidence of our fellowship with Father and Son is joy.

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

5. *If you have time ...*

What comes to mind when you think of fellowship and what are some of the barriers you have experienced in deepening your fellowship with:-

- a. God?

- b. Other Christians?

Suggestions for Prayer

6. We could pray for:

- a. The fellowship within our small group, for the Holy Spirit to guide us into deeper relationship with God and with each other. Let us pray that we may all encounter the living Person of Jesus Christ, who is more than a concept, a philosophy, or a set of values.

- b. Other believers in our church many of whom are not in small groups. At a time when we are not congregating on-site in BRMC, let us pray for those who may be without community. Let us pray for openness in our current small groups to welcome those who are searching for a community in small group. Ask God to show you a person whom you could invite to your small group in 2021.