

# Friends of the Father

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like you to turn with me this morning to the first epistle of John chapter 1 and the words of our text are in the third verse.

1 John chapter 1 verse 3 which reads, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And just that last sentence there, our fellowship, truly or certainly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Now the great word in that passage and the word which immediately arrests our attention is the word fellowship.

Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And the word itself in this sentence sets out the truth of Christian experience in an amazing way when it speaks of fellowship with God.

[ 1 : 28 ] Now the word fellowship is a favourite word of the Apostle John's. It's not exclusively his word because it is used by other New Testament writers.

You remember I think that we were thinking one evening when I was with you of how Paul uses that word and how much it's a key word at the beginning of the letter to Corinthians.

To the Corinthians, where he wrote that God had called us into the fellowship of his own Son Jesus Christ.

But Paul doesn't use the word very frequently. John does. And it's John's key word, if you like, through this letter and through the two very short letters which follow on.

Second John and third John. And you know, whenever one reads these letters, one has the feeling that John's whole concept of the Christian life at its best, and at its most tender and its most intimate, is sort of summarised and focused in that word fellowship.

[ 2 : 58 ] And you're probably well enough quaint now, either with one of your own or with hearing other people quoting the translation of the New International Version.

You're familiar enough with these new versions of the scriptures to know that the word fellowship is very frequently translated by the word friendship.

That essentially it means the same thing. And when we recall that, then I think, I do anyway, I feel that John's concept of the Christian life and of the relationship between the believer and the master was very powerfully influenced by those discourses in which he bade them farewell as he went to the cross.

It was there that Jesus said, and John seems never to have forgotten it. How could he? Henceforth, I call you not servants, but friends.

When the servant doesn't know what the master is going to do, but his friends do. John, I think, never forgot that.

[ 4 : 25 ] And it seems to be that the idea of friendship and fellowship was, as I say, central to John's whole concept of what the Christian life was about.

All that made friendship with God impossible had been taken away in Christ.

And to be the friend of Jesus was to be the friend of God. And so John can take up his pen and write. And we believe that he was an old Christian man when he wrote.

He takes up his pen and under the hand of the Holy Spirit he writes, Truly, verily, certainly, our fellowship, our friendship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And just before we go any further, it's noticeable in this letter that one concept which dominates the Pauline letters is completely absent.

[ 5 : 43 ] You'll have noticed that in reading these letters of John. You'll have noticed that John never anywhere in those three letters speaks of Jesus as Lord.

Nor does he speak of the disciple, the believer in Jesus, as servant or slave. That concept of the disciple, the disciple, the disciple, the believer, which is so frequent and so common and so regulative.

In Paul's concept of the Christian believer, it's absent from John's. Now it's not that John doesn't believe in the sovereignty of Christ. The sovereignty of Christ comes out very strongly in these letters.

And it's not that he doesn't believe in the slaveship of the disciple, the believer, because that comes out very strongly too. But it is that he looks into the heart of the fellowship and the relationship between the believer from a different perspective than Paul does.

And for him the central thing, the key thing is this, that we are fellowship. Now, having made that, I want to go on and say this, that the word which underlies fellowship here, and I'm sure you've all listened to enough sermons and to very clever men in the pulpits, to know that the Greek word that underlies it means quite a few things.

[ 7 : 23 ] The word koinonia or koinonia. It means a lot of things. It means, for example, common. Let me give you just some of the words by which that word koinonia is translated in the authorised version, not to go to any of the other ones.

Through the authorised version, we get this word that's translated here, fellowship, translated in so many ways that we see that it's a very rich and spacious word.

And it's a word that's, it's full, final translation, I think is almost impossible in English. Now, for example, it's translated fellowship.

It's translated in another place, contribution, meaning taking the money out of your pocket, sharing it to the needs of the gospel. It's the very word from which we get our English word koin, koinonia. So it means fellowship, it means contribution. Sometimes it's translated as distribution. The distribution among the saints was the koinonia, the sharing among the saints.

[ 8 : 44 ] And sometimes it means communication. Don't, says Paul, don't draw back from communicating with the saints.

And sometimes it means that lovely, rich, ecclesiastical, Christian word, communion. Sometimes it's, these are just some of the translations of this Greek word that we have in the New Testament. Fellowship, contribution, distribution, communication, communion. There are other ones, but we won't take time to go into them. Now, these words translate the Greek noun as it's used in an abstract sense.

But there's another word that's used, another form of the Greek noun that's used, the common form. And it's translated like this immediately.

Partakers. Companions. And partners.

[ 9 : 53 ] These three words are used to translate the noun in another form of it. Partakers, partners, companions. Now, do you see the kind of word it is?

It's a word that can be translated fellowship. Or contribution. Or distribution. Or communication. Or communion. It's a word when it's applied to people that says they are partakers. Or they are partners. Or they are companions. Now, all these words really are needed if we're going to understand the fullness and the richness of what John is talking about.

Now, I want for a moment yet to tarry just for a second or two and to take you back to the very simplest and perhaps one of the most basic meanings of the word in the New Testament.

We find it descriptive of the church at the very beginning, after the day of Pentecost, when Christians were full of the freshness of the power of God and of the fellowship in Christ together.

[ 11 : 05 ] And we read in the book of Acts that they had all things in common. And it's the same Greek word. They had all things in fellowship.

They had all things in friendship. They had all things in communication. They had all things in contribution and distribution and communion.

Here it is at its very simplest, translated for us. They had all things in common. What is it to have fellowship?

And the level of men in the New Testament says it is to have all things in common. The heart of the Christian relationship to one another.

It is believers having all things in common. With one another. And at the heart of our fellowship with God.

[12:08] One almost hesitates to say it, but the New Testament makes us say it. It is, what is a Christian in fellowship with God? It is a Christian who has all things in common with God.

And with whom God, through the blood of Christ, will have all things in common also. Have you ever thought of a Christian like that? One who has all things in common with God.

God's interests become our interests. God's concerns become our concerns.

God's purposes swallow up and invade our own purposes. God's plans direct our plans.

God's life fills and fulfills our lives. We have all, all things in common. God's plans direct our plans.

Now I want, in what remains of our time, to take two words.

[13:18] And just throw them out along two lines for a very short space of time. And the first word I want to take is the word communion.

Communion. It's probably the word with which we are most familiar in the thought of Christian fellowship in our denomination. Communion. Fellowship is communion.

This is one of the things I was stressing when I was preaching from 1 Corinthians 1 and 9.

Communion. And you need two to have communion, I said that evening. There's no one to be a repeat of that sentence.

But I want just to emphasize that communion fellowship means a spiritual rapport. Communion interchange between two individuals at least.

Then I want to take another word. The word partnership from the common noun. Now we use these two words and that's why I select them.

[14:22] And we use them today in two very different spheres of relationship. We use the word communion basically in the realm and area of friendship.

And we use the word partnership in the realm and area of business life. A partnership. And I want to throw our thoughts out. I want to draw them out for a little along these two lines.

First of all, communion. The word that brings us into the realm of what friendship means. What is friendship?

Well, how do we know when we have friendship? Well, I suppose there's many, various ways.

Three things have come to my mind when I think of my friends and what a friendship entails.

And what it centers around. And the first is simply this. When I, a friend, and a friendship. A friend is someone with whom I can sit down and I can talk without thinking about every word I say.

[15:31] Let me bring that into the spiritual, religious realm. A friend is someone with whom I can sit down and cease pretending.

Let me make it more religious still. A friend is someone with whom I can sit down and no longer have to be a hypocrite. I can take away all the pretenses and we all have them, don't we?

Even when we're alone with God on our knees by our bed. We have our pretenses. And we act a hypocrite.

And we come and we say, Oh God, I thank thee that I am not as other men. And we make a big Pharisee of ourselves. And when through the blood of Christ and the fellowship of Jesus we're brought into the friendship of God, that can go.

And our soul can relax and we do not have to pretend to God that we are something we are not.

And the veil and the veneer of hypocrisy is rent away by the grace of God.

[16:46] And then we say to him, Oh God, Be merciful to me, the sinner. You see me as I am.

You see me as I am, even as I never see myself. My friend, to be there, sitting in the presence of God and to know that God who knows you through and through as your friend and to have had every barrier to friendship removed, that is Christian fellowship in one aspect of it.

And there we can say, because of the cross, truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And then I think someone has expressed that very, very, very powerfully and briefly. He said, With a friend I can sit down and say just what comes out and the friend will sort out the chaff from the grain.

And that's what God does. He does it even without prayers. They are filtered through a mediator, the man, Christ Jesus.

[18:02] And then there's another aspect, a second thing in a friendship. And I think it's only in very close friendship we feel it. A kind of return of thought.

I don't know how to express it even. We're sitting with a friend and we're just going to say something and suddenly the friend puts our thoughts into words for us and says it perhaps better than we were going to say it ourselves.

There's a very close communion there, isn't there? And we go to God in his word and we feel the need to unburden ourselves and to talk with them.

And we suddenly find that God has put all our aspirations and our desires and our sorrows and our failures, he's put them into words for us far better than we could ever put them into words for ourselves.

What a friend God is to his people. when you're down because of sin and darkness and ignorance. And you open the book, the old book of God in the Psalms and it's 130 and there God has put it all into words for you.

[ 19 : 16 ] Lord, from the depths to thee I cried my voice, Lord, do thou hear. You could never have put your aspirations into these beautiful words, could you?

God has done it for you. I don't know if you know what I mean, but you know how a friend does that for you? There is the friend of friends who has done it for us too.

One of the great titles of Jesus is this. He's a friend of sinners and he has them sup, eat and drink with him. And then there's a third thing in friendship.

not only that we can relax and say just what we think and be just what we are. Not just that we can feel a friend who can put our thoughts and our feelings into words better than we can ourselves, but this, my friend.

And perhaps this is the ultimate in friendship. There is a friendship in which we can sit down and just look at one another and not say anything at all.

[ 20 : 23 ] And that silence is the sternest but the surest test of friendship there is. When you can sit down in another's company and not say a word and yet have perfect harmony between their heart and your own.

No discomfort, no embarrassment. No sense of alienation. You're at home then. Just think of what an uncomfortable place your home would be if all the time you were having to make polite conversation to those who live in it with you.

Just think of how uncomfortable it would be to sit for a whole evening if you felt that a two minute silence was putting a strain between yourself and your family. It wouldn't be our family at all would it?

This was brought home to me by one of our own children recently. She said, oh she said, I hate going out for my dinner. It's lovely that people ask me out for my dinner. She said, wait for more. Better not say which one it is.

And she said, I hate going out just for one reason. She said, some of these places you go to it's an awful job to keep the conversation going. And if you're in a place where you've got to keep the conversation going, it's a fearful strain.

[ 21 : 47 ] You come away and you say, oh thank goodness that's over. And you know there are many people who go into the presence of God and it's a strain for them. And they don't know what to say and they've got to keep the conversation going.

And out comes a rabble of words that has hardly even passed through their own minds. It's pouring out. That's one of the things I notice about that glassy and our family and my own daughter.

When I'm with her and she's trying to keep the conversation going, I'm on edge because I never know what's going to come out next. And when we have fellowship with God and Christ, we don't need to be like that.

Are there hours and moments, perhaps even days in your Christian experience when you literally have nothing to say to God? Then my friend, if you're really the friend of God, you sit down in his presence and you just look at him and you say, I've got nothing to say.

And there's a harmony between his heart and yours. And do you ever have to go through days and hours when you feel that God has had nothing to say to you?

[ 23 : 12 ] And can you again sit down in his presence and just look up at him and say, I'm glad that it's so. But still, although he's not speaking the way he wants to, perhaps, that is not a bad thing or a lesser thing, but a good thing and a greater thing because he's now giving you his trust.

And there's no constraint on him in your presence. He's as at home with you as you are with him. You would think there's something terribly strange if you went into your nearest one in the family or

into your father and your father suddenly went off at a fearful spate of talk. And there was no silence and no room for you to get a word in edgeways. What I'm saying in this third portion of what friendship is, is this, that silence is the ultimate test. Silence on either side, on both sides is the ultimate test. Do you want to know if you're a Christian? Go and sit down in the presence of God and be quiet for half an hour and enjoy it. can you do it? And then there's the other word. The word not just communion in the realm of friendship, but the word partnership that we bring over into the realm of business. [ 24 : 45 ] Let's draw that thought out along that line for just a moment or two as well. Business and a business partnership speaks to me of basically three things.

I was about to enter into a business partnership when the Lord called me away to begin studying for the ministry. And so I had thought about it a good while.

It was a partnership with a brother. But that partnership, even with a brother, I suppose any business partnership involves these, it would have involved me at least in three things.

It would have involved him and me in three things, shall I say. And the partnership, the business partnership, the partnership of fellowship with God involves these three things. Mutual interests, mutual devotion, and mutual activity.

Mutual interests. My brother and I were going to run a forum together. And we had discussed it, and we knew that there would be no use going into partnership at all if the interests of the one were to outweigh the interests of the other.

[ 25 : 56 ] I can remember him saying to me, he said, in everything he said, we would need to have the same interests absolutely, and try and develop the place along the same line of mutual interests.

Draw that into our spiritual relationship with God. Take the whole concept of partnership. How wonderful that God makes us partners in his great business, and he does.

I call you no longer servants. I call you friends. And one of the ways in which that word friend can be translated, I call you partner.

partner with God in the greatest enterprise under his throne, the greatest enterprise in the whole of the universe, bringing many sons unto glory, spreading the gospel.

Then we must have mutual interests. Our interests must be his interests. And then there must be this thought. God. I must be interested in God.

[ 27 : 13 ] I must be interested in all that God is, in what makes him tick, if I can use the word without offence. In what his plans are, and in what his objectives are, and his aims are.

And then this word tells me that not only am I interested in God once I'm a Christian, but that God is interested in me. And he wants to share his objectives, and to share his aims, and to share his purposes with me.

And so he gives me his word, and there he discloses what these objectives and aims. He tells me, he gives me a broad outline of the greatest enterprise in which he is involved, the redemption of sinners to the glory of the Son.

And he gives me a share in that business. Mutual interest, mutual devotion, how devoted is each partner? That's one of the critical questions in any partnership.

If one is less devoted to the task, going in there to a business and farming with my brother, if he had been willing to give it ten hours a day, and I was only willing to give it eight hours a day, he would have felt a grievance, an injustice, he would have every right to.

[ 28 : 34 ] We had worked together for a long time while my father was in charge of everything. We had known what it was to work sometimes from half past six in the mornings to half past eleven at night.

And one couldn't walk off the fields and leave the other, could they? Or mutual devotion to the tasks, it wouldn't have been mutual devotion at all. And it's the same with God.

God, we must be as devoted, or we can't be. You say there's such an inequality in the past. We have to acknowledge the inequality. We do.

And we have to acknowledge our own weakness. And we have to bow before his powerfulness. But then we have to remember this, that his strength is made perfect in my weakness.

We have to remember that the psalmist said, thy gentleness hath made me great. Many people, when they think of gentleness, probably think of a woman.

[ 29 : 41 ] Perhaps a woman with a child. They can be very gentle. And yet, for myself, when I think of gentleness, I think of one of the strongest men probably I have ever encountered.

He was one of the champion men in the heavyweight division of the Highland Games circuit 30 years ago, when some other people that we'll not mention were interested in it also. He was six foot five and a half. He was beautifully built. He wasn't fat. And he weighed eighteen and a half stone. And he had huge hands.

And once, I saw him pick up a little boy. A little boy who had wandered out from the crowd where they were safe, wandered out onto the field where a sixteen pound hammer thrown with all the might of one of these great mighty men was going to land.

And this huge man saw the danger. And he sprinted for about six yards. And he picked up the wee boy in those huge hands.

[ 30 : 48 ] And you felt as soon as he had picked him up, the little boy was safe. Even if the hammer had landed on Jack Hunter's shoulders, the wee boy was safe. And that was gentleness.

He did it so swiftly, he used all the power in his muscular frame. And that wee boy wasn't hurt one inch. Not a bit. He was carried over and he was sent down at his mother's side and he hardly knew he had left it.

That was gentleness. Strength controlled in tenderness. Used in tenderness. My friend, that's God. Thy gentleness hath made me great.

Mutual interests mean this too, that all the resources of each partner has to be pulled. They have to be pulled and made available to one another. And what has God given us in Christ?

Paul says that he has made ours unsearchable riches. All the resources of Godhead are ours. Therefore, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

[ 31 : 59 ] And then, mutual activity. Perhaps I've touched on that already. God accommodating himself to our weakness.

God working with us. I still think of the, when I think of a partnership and two people or two powers working together. Do you know what I think of still?

I still think of two big Clydesdills pulling a plough together. I don't know if you, some of you will know the way horses were hitched to a plough.

There were things that we called swiggle trees or swear trees. There was one big one tied to the plough and then there was two little ones. So that made a combination of three. And you could always tell when the two horses were pulling equally.

and that's the way every ploughman wanted his horses to pull. To pull equally. Mutual activity. When one horse slapped off the least little bit, the two front swingle trees were no longer held in balance.

[ 33 : 05 ] One went ahead and the other went back. And you could always tell which one was a lazy horse. And you know, that's a partnership. When the two swingle trees in front were pulling and they were dead straight and the big swingle tree tied to the plough, when it was dead straight too, you knew that both horses were both doing their work.

And you know, when it comes to partnership with God, I think we're the ones. God does the pulling, the real pulling. Our swingle tree often falls away behind.

But to have the grace and the power on the strength of God, that's marvelous. That's what made Paul say, I can do all things through Christ.

That's what Paul was told, my grace is sufficient for you. Now, there we are, friendship, fellowship, communion, friend of God.

You are a friend of God. Let me ask you another question, or put the question in a different way. Is God a friend of yours? One of the nicest titles by which Abraham is known in scripture, and he's known by quite a few, the father of the faithful, and so on, one of the finest, nicest titles attached to him is this, he was the friend friend of God.

[ 34 : 44 ] Some people say, oh, but God doesn't speak now, the way he spoke to Abraham. I'm afraid the real thing is this, that men don't listen now, the way Abraham listened.

you are my friends. If you've trusted in Christ, if you're following Jesus, then my friend, that's what you are.

You're a friend of the friend who is the friend of sinners. You're a Christian believer.

Let us pray. Oh, gracious God, we thank thee this day and you for the blessings and privileges which have been given to us through faith in the Lord Jesus and we thank thee for the friend who

sticketh closer than a brother, who comes closer and who is nearer our hearts and our minds and our very breathing than any outward fleshly brother could be.

We thank thee for the one who dwells in our hearts, for that one who did what few friends who do. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

[ 36 : 06 ] And we thank thee that at the very heart of the friendship extended to us by God in Christ, there is the mystery of death.

And yet we thank thee, O God, that when we come in our deadness and sin, to that death of Calvary, we find that instead of it being a cold and bleak thing, it is a friendly death that holds out the warmth and the promise and the reality of life, and that makes us friends of Jesus.

Bless us, each one in him, and open our hearts and our understanding, and give us, O God, to rest in the communion of the fellowship which is fellowship with thee and with Jesus Christ.

Help us, O God, to take up our share of the fellowship which is partnership and which makes us workers together with God. Bless each one of us and take away of sin.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.