

# ***FORMED FOR GOD'S FAMILY, 1JOHN 4:7-21***

CHURCH FOUNDATIONS #2

◆Intro: In his first book of The Fellowship of the Ring trilogy, JRR Tolkien describes the camaraderie of a diverse group, banded together by a common cause. Here you have a dwarf (Gimli), and Elf (Legolas), a human (Aragorn), a Hobbit (Frodo) and his two friends, a wizard (Gandalf), and another human (Boromir). They were the Fellowship of the Ring. Their quest was to destroy the power of the Dark Lord lodged in his ring. Though they differ in nearly every way -racially, physically, temperamentally - they are united in their opposition of the Dark Lord, Sauron. In a section of the book omitted from the films made by Peter Jackson, a heated conflict breaks out among the crusaders. Axes are drawn. Bows are bent. Harsh words are spoken. Disaster nearly strikes the small band. When peace at last prevails, a wise counselor observes, “indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him.”

## **◆1. What is Fellowship?**

◆Today we're looking at a second foundation of Christ's Church: fellowship. It's also one of the reasons you as a human being exist. (If you are a dwarf, elf or Hobbit, I venture this also applies to you.) What is it that made the odd characters in Tolkien's story a “fellowship”? Sometimes in churches fellowship is associated with coffee, red punch and cookies and talking in the halls of the church building. But in the trilogy there is no talk of this.

◆No, for Frodo Baggins and his strange crew, fellowship was facing crisis together, battling orcs back to back, pressing on to a moral and world-benefitting purpose without leaving each other behind. Have you lived fellowship like that?

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◆A. The Bible uses the term *koinonia*, which our translations render “fellowship.” *Koinonia* is far more than good coffee and a donut. Fellowship is actually the forming of a loving community. And it’s what we were meant for when God created us. Put it in personal terms and you could say, “I was meant to care and be cared for.” So strongly does God feel about this that he points out in his Word that life without love is really a worthless thing. Good deeds without love mean nothing. We are on the earth to produce a fellowship where people experience love and life together.

◆To paraphrase Paul in 1Corinthians 13, “I can prophesy, I can let people burn me, I can do mountain-moving miracles –but if I don’t love it doesn’t amount to a hill of beans.” (I’m not sure how much a hill of beans is worth but I think it’s not much.)

◆So you can tell then that fellowship is being defined in terms of care and compassion for each other. Lets take a look:

◆*Verse 20: “If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” 1 John 4:20, NIV.*

◆But don’t you see it all the time? It just sounds different.

◆“Oh, I think my religion in a private affair.” (The Christian religion isn’t.)

◆“Oh, I don’t have to go to church to worship God.”

◆“Oh, I love God. It’s just the Church I can’t stand.” One pastor is found of saying since the Church is the bride of Christ that’s like saying, “I like you, I just can’t stand your wife.” Or since the Church is

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called the Body of Christ, it's like saying, "Oh, I like you OK, I just can't stand you body!"

◆ "Oh, I follow Jesus. I just don't like organized religion." (And you think disorganized religion is a better choice?)

◆ Some folks think being a part of a church means merely sending in money every now and again. (We don't want your money. We want to love you.)

◆ There are some Lone Ranger people. They just ride on into church to do a good deed here or there and then disappear back to who knows where. Who was that masked Christian?

◆ Lets ask a question: how healthy would our body parts be if we constantly transplanted our organs from one body to another. Donated organs have only a matter of hours before they become unfit to be transplanted into another body. Kidneys don't do so well on the golf course alone. So why do we sometimes kid ourselves that we can be a spiritually healthy part of the Body of Christ as isolated organs? An eyeball apart from the body doesn't see all that well. No, if you want to be a follower of Christ, you need the fellowship of his family. You cannot be healthy in your spirit by yourself.

◆ B. Go back and read again verse 7-8, 11, 21.

◆ *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.*

*Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*

*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1*

*John 4:7, 8, NIV.*

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- ◆“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:11, NIV.
- ◆“And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” 1 John 4:21, NIV.
- ◆Have you ever noticed that all God’s Ten Commandments are about relationship? The first four are about relationship with God: no other gods; keep his name holy; remember to set a day apart to pay attention to him, etc. The second six are about relating to people: don’t kill anybody; don’t take her stuff, even if you want it more than she does; tell each other the truth; etc.
  - ◆Now whenever you see these Ten Commandments summarized in the Bible it keeps sounding like this: love God, and love people.  
Want to see?
  - ◆“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12, NIV.
  - ◆*“The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.” Romans 13:9, 10, NIV.*
  - ◆“The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”” Galatians 5:14, NIV.
- ◆Did you notice that Jesus in Matthew 7 didn’t say anything about doing something for “God”? Did you notice that Paul in Galatians didn’t summarize the law by saying we must love “God”? I mean, seems like the

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churchy answer to how to summarize God's law would mention him! Well, I don't think that Jesus of the Apostle slipped up. I think they know more than we do. Who of us can test the heart for whether or not we love God? Hypocrites frequently make the best "show" of it. On the other hand, loving your fellow man is harder to fake, so God makes that the tangible test of whether or not you love him!

◆ *"...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40, NIV.*

◆ How many of you have ever heard of Mother Teresa? She spent her life working with the poorest of poor in Calcutta, India. She did not live in a 2 level house with a pool. She did not drive a Yukon. She did not go out to eat at the Olive Garden. Rather, she stood amidst death and disease every day. Once asked how she handled all the death and disease on a daily basis, and how she could do the tough things when it came to serving she answered, "Every person I bath, every person I bandage, I imagine seeing the face of Jesus, and I do it for him!"

◆ "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." 1 John 4:21, NIV.

◆ This means that true worship or love for God without love for his family is impossible. It's just not the real deal. We can not be spiritually healthy by ourselves. We were formed for God's family.

◆ It's like trying to play the bass drum all by itself.

◆ It's like being a wide receiver without the rest of the team.

◆ It's like being a one man army. It only happens in movies. It's not *real!*

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## **◆2. What's so great about Fellowship?**

◆What's so great about Reese's Peanut Butter cups? Some things just go great together. There a number of things.

◆A. Christian fellowship is the best place to experience God. (v12, 16).

That is to say, all the beauties of life lived in the presence of God are made real to me in his family. The Bible tells us that God is merciful. But how do you know what that is? We can talk like that all day long, but when you flat out do something bad, or hurtful to someone, and they absorb your evil, and forgive you, and love you anyway, -God has become tangible in that person. Let me share another example.

◆We know that God's love is authentic and honest, a giant step beyond pretended interest that we call gossip. Gossip is interest without love. Everyone knows his breath smells like mothballs, but nobody tells him. They just tell each other. People can sense that her condescending tone stings her children's hearts, but "It's not our place to say anything." They just say it to each other. He truly did a good job, but lest he get a big head we won't tell him, even if we do say it to each other. Who will be authentic?

◆Possibly only family, or maybe life-long friends, the kind you've known since grade school. If you have these you are blessed. Well, you know what you get when you are a part of a healthy church family? You get family-level, life-long friends in a fraction of the time because of a united fellowship of the King.

◆"Communion is strength; solitude is weakness. Alone, the free old beech yields to the blast and lies prone on the meadow. In

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the forest, supporting each other, the trees laugh at the hurricane. The sheep of Jesus flock together. The social element is the genius of Christianity.” -Charles Spurgeon.

◆B. In America the common sentiment is “mind your own business.”

Sometimes we Christians take the same approach, and feeling ourselves to be both biblical and tender we say “I don’t want to know your story.” But I suggest that this is neither tender nor biblical. Our stories are our pains. It takes the work and pain of fellowship to share our stories. Furthermore, healing for a hurting person comes through the telling of their stories, even the sordid ones. Who will care enough to carry the pain of hearing it?

◆James 5 urges the sharing of sins with each other.

◆Ephesians 5 urges the forgiving of sins with each other.

◆Galatians 6 puts it...

◆*“Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2, NLT.*

◆C. One of the best places to experience authentic Christian fellowship is in a small group of believers that share life together. Did you know that for the first 300 years of Christianity there were no church buildings? All church meetings were held in homes. All of them. There were no buildings. And that, by the way, was the fastest period of growth for the church.

◆I am genuinely excited about the value Sunrise places on Life Groups. And I sincerely hope that if you have not taken advantage of being a part of one, that you will consider it. It’s a built-in place where when you are tired, lonely, confused, suffering – there are people who know you well enough, if you have done the work of being open and

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honest with them, that they feel your pain and are brave enough to ask you why your eyes look wet around the edges.

◆ In one of the churches I served a young lady named Julie was talking with a friend of hers named Amy, not a church attender, about needing a ride somewhere. As an after thought she said to herself, “Oh I’ll just call someone from church.” Amy was amazed. “You mean you can just call people from your church and they’ll help you? That sounds like something I want to be a part of.” Today, Amy with her family, is both a member and a children’s leader in that church.

#### ◆ **Conclusion:**

◆ “So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22, NLT.

◆ I’ve counted 35 times in the New Testament that God gives a “one another” command. Here are a few samples:

◆ “love one another deeply, from the heart.” 1 Peter 1:22, NIV.

◆ “live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic” 1 Peter 3:8, NIV.

◆ “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” 1 Peter 4:9, NIV.

◆ The pictures you see below are of a sequoia tree named the General Sherman, found in Sequoia National Park. My brother Tim worked there for

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a summer. It's estimated at about 2700 years old. That means it was around when Israel was 27 story up! It's 36' California 6' in diameter branch alone largest trees in



Isaiah was prophet in Judah, and deported by Assyria. It's as tall as a building. Its first branch is 13 floors base would cover a three lane highway! In 1978 a single branch, and at least 140 long fell off. This is would have been one of the most of the

US! Sequoia trees have a surprisingly shallow root base. But they also have a secret strength: they grow together, and they intertwine their roots with one another! They have a fellowship that makes them last.



◆ In John 13:35 Jesus says that people will know his family by the love they have for one another. He says that will be a sign that we follow him, because that is how God is. We were formed for his family. We were made to create this beautiful thing called fellowship.