

Theme: Christian fellowship.

Scripture: I John 1:1-4. (RSV)

Text: I John 1:3 -- "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ."

Proposition: Christian fellowship is a fellowship with God through Christ, with other Christians, and with other people to bring them into this fellowship -- and it's fun.

Date written: July 24, 1959.

Dates and places used:

*July 26, 1956 Steamboat, Wyo., 10 am -
outside of church (picnic).*

Feb. 14, 1965 - Montrose, Colo. 8:30 - 11:00

Introduction:

1. A mother was telling stories of the time when she was a little girl. Her small son listened thoughtfully as she told of riding a pony, sliding down the haystack, and wading in the brook on the farm.

Finally he said with a sigh, "I wish I had met you earlier, Mother."
(Prochnow, The Public Speaker's Treasure Chest, Harper).

2. In having ^{church fellowship activities such as our supper} a church picnic such as this today we are doing something which almost all of our Methodist churches at least annually did a generation or so ago. Sharing food together in the outdoors in the summertime seemed to create a warm and friendly feeling. An outdoor service of worship at such an event was ^{it can be an} an enjoyable experience of christian fellowship with God and with others too. The games and visiting made the whole experience one of ^{dinner} real fun. As I think of such church picnics which I attended in my boyhood I feel sort of like the boy of our opening story, except that I have to change the tense of the verbs and say of the church picnic custom, "I'm glad I knew you early enough to do this today."

3. We hope that ^{tonight's dinner} today's picnic will demonstrate to many of us that christian fellowship, with one another and with God, is fun. The Scripture which we read helps introduce our thought today about christian fellowship.

I. The Scripture ideas on christian fellowship.

1. It is not known definitely who did write I John. In the New Testament are

I John 1:1-4

is done in

activities

3. ~~four~~ ^{four} books bearing the name of John: I John, II John, III John, and the Gospel of John. In tradition generally it has been held that the one who wrote the Gospel of John also wrote I John, and that this was the last of the disciples to die. As the aged last survivor of the 12 disciples, he gives in I, II, and III John his repeated and unvarying counsel to a new generation of christians, "Little children, love one another." Tradition has it that John was asked why he did not vary his advice. He is said to have answered, "Because it is a commandment of the Lord, and if it be done, it suffices." The poet Browning in his poem, "A Death in the Desert," deals with this concept of the last disciple, John, dying in concealment because it was dangerous to be a Christian. To the few adoring followers who attended him, themselves soon to be arrested and martyred in the arena by the beasts, John is saying, When my ashes scatter

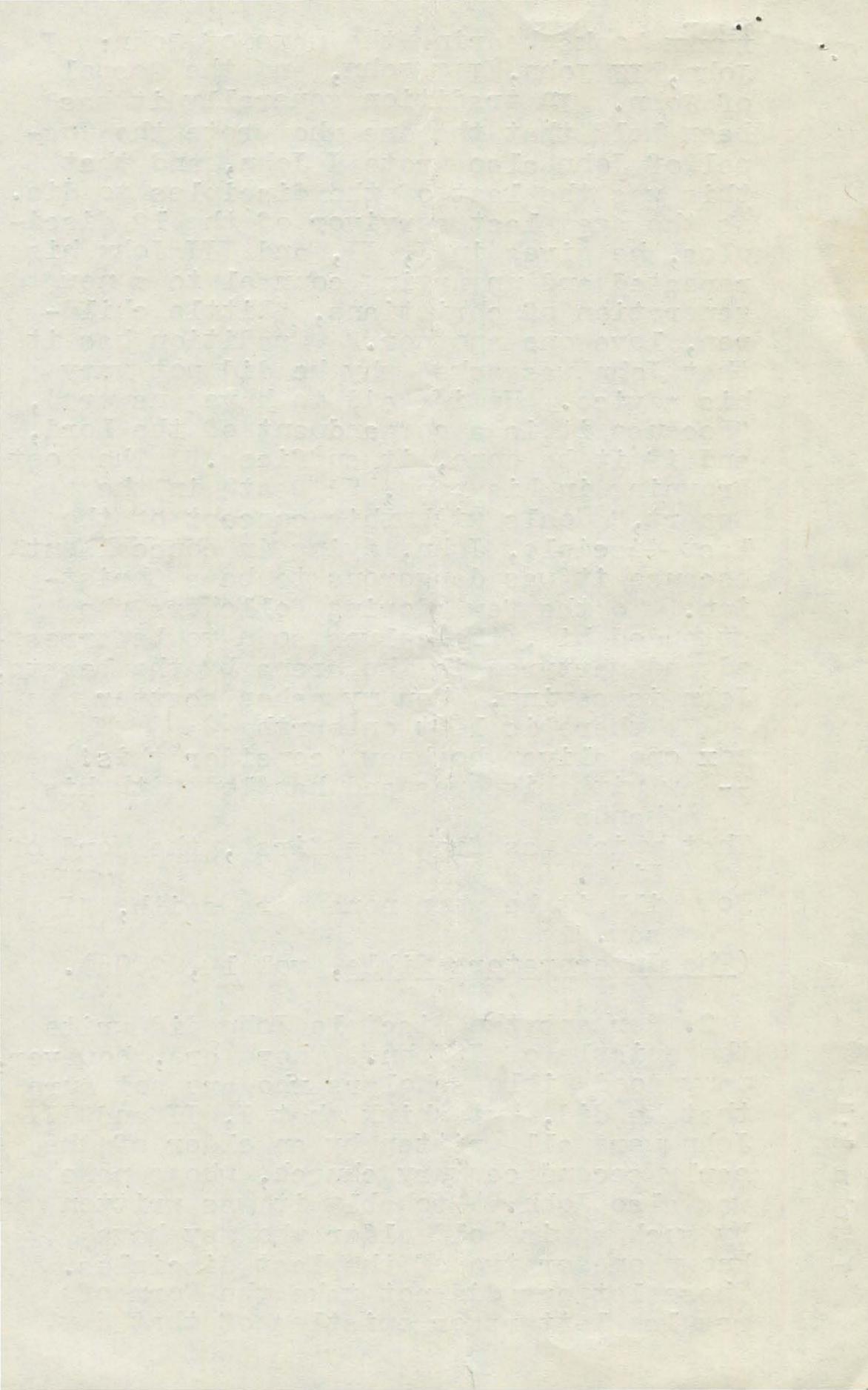
"there is left on earth
now one alive who knew (consider this!)
--Saw with his eyes and handled with his
hands

That which was from the first, the Word of
Life.

How will it be when none more saith, "I
saw."?

(The Interpreters Bible, vol 12, 209a).

2. Perhaps the disciple John did write the epistle of I John. There are, however, many good Bible scholars who are not sure that he did, but think that I, II and III John were all written by an elder of the early second century church, whose name was also John. ¹⁸⁵⁰ Probably it was written by such a wise old elder who may have known one or two of the last disciples. These letters did not take the form of regular letters or epistles of that day.



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They were in a rather general form, and probably were written to be carried by missionaries from place to place in their constant travel among the early churches.

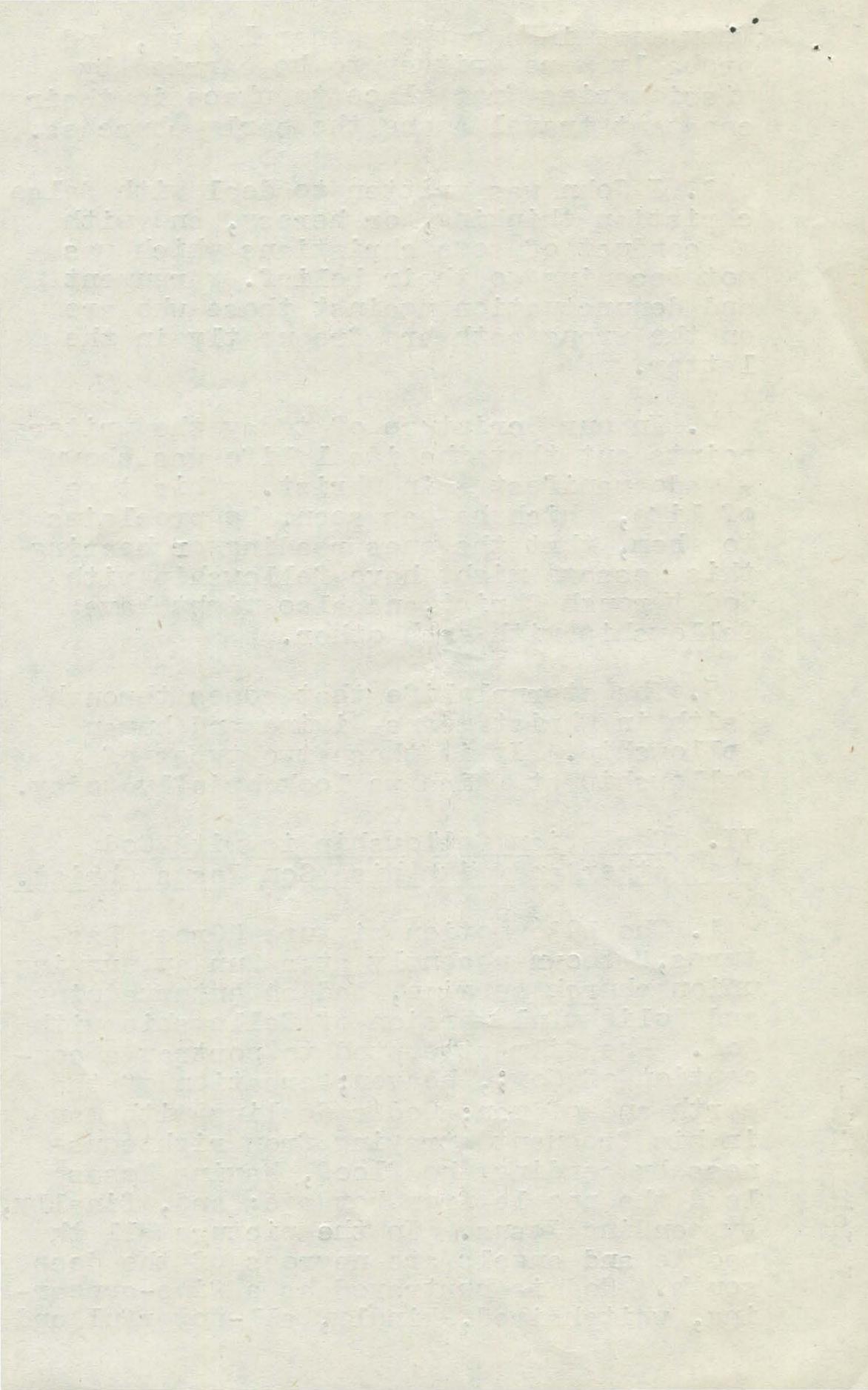
3. I John was written to deal with false christian thinking, or heresy, and with misconduct of some christians which was not becoming to their belief. Argument and denunciation against those who are on the wrong path are frequently in the letter.

4. In our Scripture of today the writer points out that the ideal life was shown - made manifest - in Christ. This type of life, which he has seen, he proclaims to them, that the ones reading of hearing this message might have fellowship with God through Christ, and also might have fellowship with each other.

5. The eternal life that comes through faith in Christ means divine and human fellowship. It is these two types of fellowship at which we look briefly today.

II. Christian fellowship is with God the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1. The 1936 motion picture "Green Pastures," ~~shown recently at a Sunday evening union church service,~~ had an entertaining and delightful version of fellowship with God. The film attempted to portray a conception of God, heaven; creation of the earth and of man; God's dealing with man in his frequent straying from righteousness by sending the flood, having Moses lead the people from bondage; and, finally, by sending Jesus. In ~~the~~ picture all the people ~~and~~ angels are negroes of the deep south. God is portrayed as a fine-appearing, whitehaired, kindly, all-powerful and



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wonder-working old negro gentleman. In roaming the earth in this form, God has intimate friendship with many people. Finally, when it becomes necessary for Him to send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die on the cross for men, God suffers too, but comes to understand that through this very suffering he has an even greater mercy, compassion, love and fellowship for people. "Green Pastures" is highly imaginative, and deals with a conception of God possibly held by a limited group of people, but it has truth in its message that if we are christians our fellowship is with God and Christ.

2. This fellowship is not a chummy sort of thing in which we play around familiarly with an equal. It is a relationship in which we respect the rights, powers and abilities of the Divine Father and Son; in which we know that the Divine loves and respects us too. We do not have this fellowship forced on us, but we can accept it or ignore it. If we accept it, we find a friend and companion who is with us in all of life, who helps us make the right decisions, who awaits us at death for a more glorious eternal fellowship.

III. Christian fellowship is that of one Christian with another, too.

1. The christian fellowship of another is often a refreshing and enjoyable thing. In the New Testament it is revealed that a great many of the friends of the apostle Paul failed him when it became dangerous to be a christian. The world's scorn and contempt of Paul, the probability that he would be thrown to a beast or covered with pitch and set on fire to illuminate the driveway of the emperor by night, never

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6. caused Paul's friend Onesiphorus to falter. It wasn't easy to find Paul, but he persisted in the search until he did. There was no excuse which he could make to his conscience for not finding his old friend and ministering to him. Paul says of Onesiphorus, "He oft refreshed me" -- literally, "made him cool," as if he had poured cold water on his fevered head and feet.

(Macartney's Illustrations, p. 132).

When one finds refreshment and enjoyment in the presence and ministrations of a christian friend, when one ministers to a fellow christian even at the risk of danger, true christian fellowship is present.

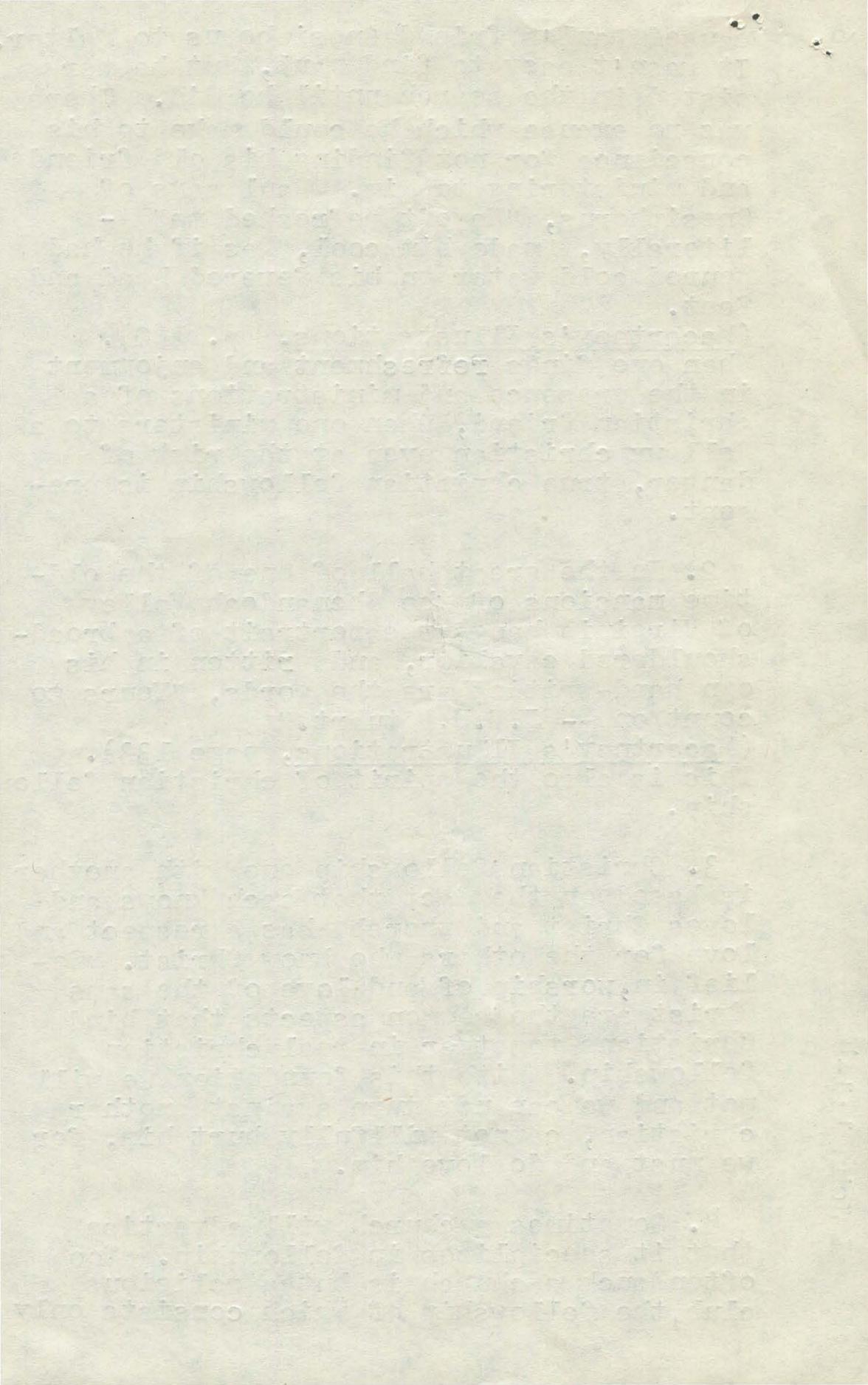
2. In the great hall of one of the old-time mansions of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia hangs the portrait of a broad-shouldered cavalier, and written in his own hand-writing are the words, "Yours to count on -- J.E.B. Stuart."

(Macartney's Illustrations, page 133).

This is also the spirit of christian fellowship.

3. Christian fellowship one with another is based on the fact that each knows and loves Christ and thereby has a respect and love for the others who know Christ. Belief in, worship of and love of the same Christ are the common aspects that bind Christians together in real christian fellowship. With this foundation we will not and we can not turn against another christian, cannot willfully hurt him, for we must and do love him. *whatever his race or nationality, a fellow christian is a friend.*

4. Sometimes a church will advertise that it specializes in fellowship. Too often such a church is but a religious club, the fellowship of which consists only



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of entertainments, friendly smiles, and being genial in general. The nature of the fellowship of a true church is portrayed in Jesus parallel of the vine and the branches to the closeness of christians; or in Paul's thought of the church and its members as the body of Christ. The true mark and test of the church's fellowship is self-sacrificing love manifest in mutual service, prayer, labor and helpfulness. (Interpreter's Bible, vol 12, p. 220).

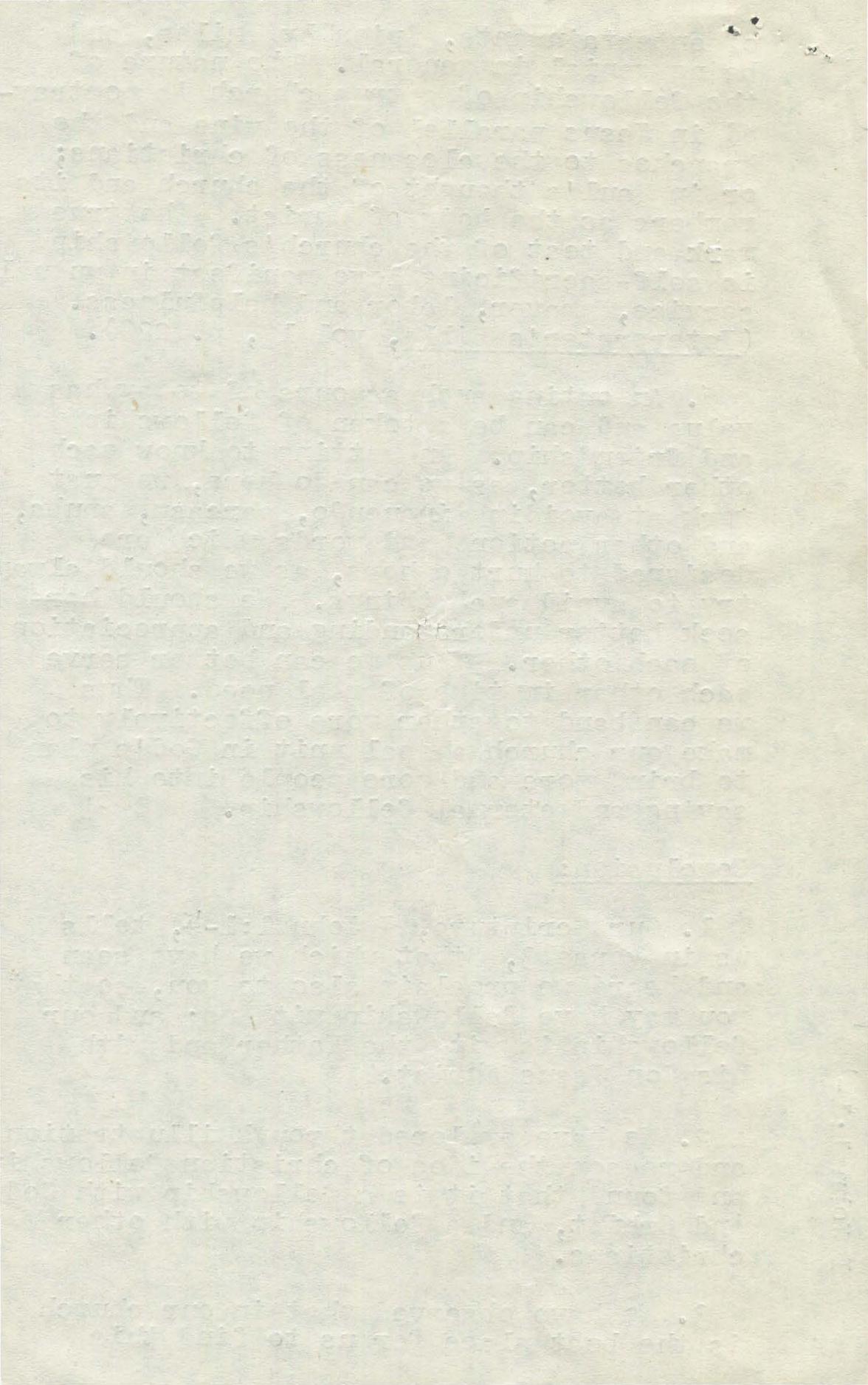
5. An ^{supper}outing such as ours of ^{tonight} today has value and can be a token of fellowship and friendship. In getting to know each other better, ~~as we can do here~~, we must work at avoiding innuendo, sarcasm, snubs, and other actions and words which are designed to hurt others, as we should always try to avoid such things. We should ~~here~~ seek better understanding and appreciation of each other. Thus we can better serve each other in time of real need. Thus we can band together more effectively to make our church a real unit in God's plan to bring more and more people into his saving and eternal fellowship.

Conclusion:

1. Our Scripture, I John 1:1-4, tells us in verse 3, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

2. We have explored through illustration and reason the idea of christian fellowship and found that it is a fellowship with God and Christ, and a fellowship with other christians.

3. We have observed that in our church is the best place for us to find this



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fellowship, provided we realize it is
a lasting sacrificial and growing exper-
ience.

4. Christian fellowship is with God,
with other christians, with other people,
and it is fun.

