

Fellowship with God

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[0 : 00] We're taking a short hiatus from our sermon series in the Book of Proverbs, you know, to do a six-week sermon series through 1 John, John's first letter.

We decided to do this for a number of reasons in light of what is happening with COVID-19, and since we have been displaced from our usual meeting space, it's a great opportunity for us to hone in on some of the fundamentals of the Christian faith and discipleship in a more intimate setting.

The aim of 1 John is to reassure us in our faith by reaffirming the person and work of Jesus Christ, the gospel, and by emphasizing the importance of Christian obedience and love.

And so this series lines up really well with the upcoming Holy Week as well, with Easter and Good Friday. And 1 John is one of the three letters in the Bible authored by Apostle John, and the letters are known as the Johannine Epistles.

And specific and explicit personal references and historical references scattered throughout the letter suggest that this is a letter, but it's missing some of the usual characteristics of a letter, like an opening salutation or a closing remark.

[1 : 14] And that atypical structure suggests that maybe this was intended to be a general letter that would be circulated among the churches in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. And this was probably written in the late first century after Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John.

And the situation on the ground is that there were some false teachers that were denying that Christ had come in the flesh, and their theology promoted sinful living.

It condoned sinful living because they denied that as people who had true knowledge of God that they could be affected by sin, as we'll see in chapter 1. These false teachers were dividing the church, and some Christians had already seceded from the church, separated from the church.

And so Apostle John is addressing some of these issues. So turn with me to 1 John. And before I proceed, I'm going to pray for us, for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to be able to gather in Your name, in Your presence.

[2 : 29] Lord, we long to be with those who are not able to be here. We pray, Lord, that You would curb the spread of this virus, that You would protect our loved ones, our church family, that You would guard our city, so that soon we'll be able to gather all again face to face.

Oh, Lord, minister to us. Speak to us from Your Word. Lord, build us up as Your people. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

Impress upon us deeply the good news of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. 1 John chapter 1.

We'll go to chapter 2, verse 2. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life.

The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testified to it, and proclaimed to You the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was made manifest to us.

[4 : 04] That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to You, so that You too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things, so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from Him, and proclaimed to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with Him, while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you, so that you may not sin.

[5 : 20] But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for us only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

This is God's holy and authoritative Word. Apostle John begins this letter in much the same way that he begins his Gospel. He says, That which was from the beginning, you'll probably know in John's Gospel, it begins, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And that, of course, is echoing Genesis 1, verse 1, with the first book of the Bible, which says, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So, Genesis 1, 1 says, In the beginning, God.

And then John 1, 1 says, In the beginning, Word. So, John's making the point that before anything else existed, God was there, and with God, the Word of God was there, by which He created the world.

And there was never a time when the Word of God didn't exist. And in John 1, verse 14, Apostle John made a shocking statement. He said, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

[6 : 35] And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So, John told us there in his Gospel that the Word, the pre-existent, the Word became incarnated.

He took on human flesh and lived among us, and that this incarnate Word is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. And John's making that same shocking theological statement in a slightly different manner in the beginning of this letter.

He says, That which was from the beginning, God was in the beginning. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard. This implies that that which was from the beginning was a message.

It was the Word. Something you can hear. But then he continues in verse 1, Which we have seen with our eyes. Which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the Word of life.

So somehow, this Word of life, the message that we can hear, the Word by which God created the world, can be seen and touched. He's talking about Jesus' incarnation.

[7 : 39] It was made manifest physically and took on flesh. And this is really a shocking truth if you think about it, because the creator of the world became part of his creation.

It's like the author of a book becoming a character in the book. It's maybe like Stan Lee appearing in Marvel films.

Except he doesn't appear as a cameo. Jesus appears as the main protagonist of human history. And the creator who created it all became part of human history. And verse 2 continues, The life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

So John's proclaiming the message of salvation, the offer of eternal life. And this eternal life is not an abstract, impersonal thing, but it's a person. It's the word of life who was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That's why eternal life is found in the Son of God. John 3.16, as you know, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

[8 : 53] And John, along with Jesus' many disciples, personally, with His own eyes, witnessed this word of life. They saw Him with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands.

And note the repetition of words that pertain to eyewitnesses. Three times John says, We have seen the word of life. In other parts of the letter, when referring to himself as the author of the letter, John regularly uses the first person singular pronouns.

I, my. But here, when he's writing about having been eyewitnesses of Jesus, he refers to himself in the first person plural, the we.

And that's intentional because he's communicating to us that he was not a lone witness. The person and work of Jesus Christ that he's proclaiming now to his audience and through this letter to us now is authoritative.

It's the authoritative apostolic message. Has the backing of all the apostles of Jesus Christ who witnessed Him behind it. It's the unified testimony of all people who witnessed personally the life, death, and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

[10 : 04] And John tells us his purpose is for writing in verses 3 to 4, So that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. The first purpose is fellowship. So that you too may have fellowship with us.

Keeping in mind that some have already strayed from the apostolic faith and have separated themselves from the church, this first century church, John wants to ensure that those who remain will persevere in faith and continue in fellowship with them.

And the word fellowship means a little more than, you know, time for snacks or chit-chat in some church circles, right? The way we think about it. Fellowship time or fellowship hall.

It's the place for refreshments. But it means so much more than that. Scripturally speaking, the word fellowship refers to how people are bound together relationally around the common cause or a mission.

[11 : 15] How we're bound together relationally around the common cause or a mission. It's similar to how in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, in the film trilogy, when the fellowship of the ring is formed.

It's called the fellowship, right? And people come together to destroy Dark Lord Sauron's one ring to save Middle-earth and representatives from all the races gather, hobbits, man, elf, dwarf, and wizard.

And they all swear to bond together as a brotherhood in order to fulfill this mission. Aragorn says, to Frodo, right? If by my life or death I can protect you, I will.

You have my sword. And Legolas says, you have my bow. And Gimli says, and my axe. The fellowship of the saints, likewise, is a binding relationship formed around a common bond, a common mission, God-given mission.

and church membership that is not like a gym membership or a club membership that you use at your convenience and leave when you don't feel like it.

[12 : 25] it's a fellowship. And amazingly, this fellowship with us, John says, is fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is described here as the Son of God. Apostle Paul uses the word Son to refer to our Sonship, our adoption as sons to God, the Father as well.

But Apostle John never uses the word Son that way. He never uses the Son to refer to children of God. That's the expression he prefers to refer to God's people, children of God.

Only time he uses the word Son is in reference to Jesus because He is the unique Son. He is the only begotten Son. He is the only Son that shares the divine nature of God, His Father.

And He is the Son of God and this Jesus is the Christ. And Christ means His Anointed One, the Messiah, the promised Savior King of God's people. And so that's the first purpose in John's writing so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ.

[13 : 40] That's a powerful statement. Remember again the context of the letter. Some people have already seceded from the church. And John is saying here that the only way you have fellowship with God is by having fellowship with us.

Those who proclaim the word of life. No one apart from the fellowship of people who hold fast to the apostolic faith in Jesus Christ can say to those who secede from it that they have fellowship with God.

It's only the local churches that hold fast to this historic apostolic faith that can say to people who secede from it there is no fellowship with God apart from fellowship with us.

Because we are in fellowship with God to be in fellowship with God is to be in fellowship with us. Just as a person cannot be united to Christ our head without being united to the church which is the body of Christ a person cannot be married to Christ our bridegroom without being part of the church which is the bride of Christ.

And this is why it's inconsistent and unbiblical for people to say I'm a Christian but I'm not a member of any church. I have a relationship with Christ but I don't really have relationships with Christians.

[15 : 12] I've committed my life to Christ but I refuse to commit myself to a church. That kind of thinking is completely foreign to scripture. So the first purpose in John's writing is that people might have fellowship with Christ and His church and that's why this gathering is so precious.

This is the fellowship with God. Apart from which there is no fellowship with God. That's how significant the church is in the way God views it.

And the second purpose is given in verse 4 and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. John feels such love and sense of responsibility for the churches to whom he is writing that apart from them continuing in this fellowship with him.

His joy would be incomplete. He longs for them to remain in fellowship, stay with us, worship with us, love one another.

Only then will my joy be complete. Likewise, we too should long for this completion of joy that every single one of our church members would continue in faith, persevere in faith, that we might earnestly pray for one another to maintain this fellowship of the saints so that we might last till the end and that our joy might be complete.

[16 : 38] And so having spoken of the word of life in verses 1 to 4, John speaks of the God of light in verses 5 and following. He says in verse 5, this is the message we have heard from him and proclaimed to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

In the preceding verses, John said he is an eyewitness and a herald of the word of life. Now he defines the content of the message that he is proclaiming. And this is the message that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Many people have speculated about the metaphysical nature of God but that's not what John is after when he says God is light. The following verses show that John is concerned here not with the metaphysical nature of God but with the moral character of God.

God is light. That means there is no darkness in him at all. That's phrased in an intentionally emphatic and categorical way. There is no darkness in him, nothing at all.

Habakkuk chapter 1 verse 13 says of God, you who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong. James 1.13 says God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

[17 : 59] There is no darkness in God and God cannot sin. He can do no evil. God cannot lie. It's such a simple truth but it has far-reaching implications if we really believe it and live with it in mind because that means God has never done a single one of us any wrong.

God is not doing anything evil or wrong even in what's happening right now with the COVID-19. All the suffering in your life, all the tragedies in your life, all the difficulties and disappointments in your life, they were not evil from God.

We might not be able to see God's providence with the naked eye but we have to look with eyes of faith to believe that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

And another implication of the reality that God is light is that those who have fellowship with God who is light cannot walk in darkness. You can't carry a flashlight with you and expect to find darkness because it's going to light up wherever you go.

Likewise, no Christian persists in unrepentant sin because to do so is to prove that one does not have fellowship with God only those who walk in the light of God partake in the fellowship between God and His people.

[19 : 44] In the following verses, John fleshes out the practical implications of this theological truth by using a series of conditional statements. He mentions three false claims that the false teachers were teaching and after mentioning each one, he counters them with the application of the truth that God is light.

First one we see in verse 6, if we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. If we claim to know God, to possess the word of life, and yet simultaneously walk in darkness, we are guilty of two offenses.

First, we lie. We are hypocrites who lie about the fact that we have fellowship with God when we actually don't. Since there is no darkness in God at all, those who walk in the darkness cannot possibly have fellowship with God.

And notice how Apostle John doesn't say demurely, well, I don't know what's going on in their hearts, whether they have real faith or not, that's between them and God.

No, he doesn't say that. He says unapologetically and assuredly that those who say that they have fellowship with God while walking in darkness are lying because you cannot do that.

[21 : 09] It is impossible for you to do that while you are walking in fellowship with God. Either they're lying or God is and God cannot lie.

By no means let God be true though everyone were a liar. Romans chapter 3 verse 4. That's the first offense that we lie. The second offense in making such a claim is this, that we do not practice the truth.

This isn't speaking merely of not telling the truth. The phrase practice the truth is also used in the gospel of John chapter 3 verses 19 to 21.

And it says, And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. So the phrase does what is true is exactly the same phrase as practice the truth in 1 John.

[22 : 18] And those phrases are contrasted in John chapter 3 with doing wicked things. So to not practice the truth, not practice the truth, to not do the truth, is to fail to live in accordance with the truth.

It means to violate the truth by sinning. And then in verse 7 John counters this false conditional statement with the true one. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.

In verse 6 John said that those who walk in darkness do not have fellowship with God. So you'd expect him here in verse 7 to say that those who walk in the light will have fellowship with God.

But instead he says that those who walk in the light have fellowship with one another. Again, that reiterates what John said earlier, namely, that true fellowship with God is always expressed in fellowship with one another, with God's people.

But what does it mean to walk in the light? This verse is also informed by the passage from John 3 I read earlier. In that passage, to come to the light or to walk in the light means to receive the person and work of Jesus Christ, to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 41] It's the opposite of remaining in darkness in order to hide one's sin. To walk in the light therefore is to bring the light of God to bear upon our own sins so renounced.

I think I've told the story to some of you. When I was in college, I led an investigative Bible study for some non-Christian friends. I had a friend who would consistently come to every Bible study and then stay long after to have some intense debates, philosophical debates, theological debates.

I would reason with him and plead with him for hours. And one day, I thought maybe one day he'll come to faith, but after one of these long debates, my friend said to me, Sean, I understand what you're saying and understand all the Christian arguments, but the crux of the matter is this, I like girls and I like sleeping around with them.

And if I become a Christian, I have to stop doing that and I am not about to do that. I was speechless. Because he's so brutally honest.

But that's actually more honest than a lot of people who reject Christ. Because according to this passage, at the heart of every rejection of Christ is a stubborn refusal to conform to God's ways and to insist on one's own ways.

[25 : 17] People reject Christ because they don't want to renounce their ways. They don't want to follow Christ. they don't want to bring their lives into the light of Christ.

And we see the second false claim made by those who have succeeded from the church in verse 8. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

This is a slight variation of verse 6. Some people claim that they have no sin, meaning they claim to have not sinned. what they probably mean is that they have not sinned since the time they came to have this so-called knowledge of the truth or the knowledge of God they claim to have.

But to claim such things, to say that I have not sinned, I do not sin, is to deceive ourselves, it says. It's to lie to ourselves. Those who claim to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness lie to others.

Those who say that they have no sin lie to themselves. Because no one can claim to be without sin, without deceiving themselves, without either minimizing or masking sin, or denying sin altogether, that sin is sin.

- [26 : 37] For example, people commit fornication and adultery, and then they say that it's true love. People live selfishly, in a self-centered way, and then they say that that's self-care.

People abuse others in the home, in the classroom, in the workplace, and then they say it's maintaining discipline and order. People are lazy, and they call it being laid back.

People cast their lack of faith as reasonableness and wisdom. people are envious, and they pass it off as righteous indignation.

People are pridefully and sinfully judgmental, and then they call it moral courage. They call cowardice humility, and meekness.

They call gossip concern. they pass off being a mocker as being witty. They excuse permissiveness and licentiousness as progressiveness and tolerance.

- [27 : 50] They call selfish ambition and greed drivenness, industriousness. We deceive ourselves, that we have no sin.

But when we do, the truth is not in us. And that phrase is parallel to verse 10, His word is not in us. To claim that one has no sin is to give evidence of the fact that Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, is not in us.

That the word of life, the Jesus Christ, is not in us. In contrast, it says in verse 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What's in view here is confessing our sins to God, who alone can forgive sins. But in the same way that fellowship with God is necessarily expressed in our fellowship with one another, our confession of sins to God also involves confessing our sins to one another.

That's why James 5, verse 16 says, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

- [29 : 16] Only those who declare themselves sick can be treated. Only those who declare themselves dirty can be cleansed. only those who declare themselves sinful can be forgiven because God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God's faithfulness refers to His trustworthiness that He will fulfill all of His promises that He will always be true to His word. And God's justice elsewhere translated as righteousness refers to the fact that God always does what is right.

And then in verse 10 gives us the final conditional statement which seeks to correct the misconception of the false teachers. If we say we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

You probably noticed this is very similar to verse 8. The only difference between this and verse 8 is that in verse 8 He's saying we have no sin in the present tense indicating an ongoing achievement of sinlessness and then in verse 10 it's in the perfect tense it's saying we have not sinned indicating the condition of being innocent of not having sinned a state of innocence.

So verse 8 is saying I do not sin verse 10 is saying I have not sinned but if we say I have not sinned John argues we make God a liar and His word is not in us.

- [30 : 47] Verse 6 said that if we claim to have fellowship with God but walk in darkness we lie to others. Verse 10 tells us that if we claim to be without sin we make God out to be a liar.

Verse 8 says that if we claim not to sin we lie about ourselves. Verse 10 says that if we claim to not sin to have no sin we make God out to be a liar because God says in His word that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Having addressed the fallacies of the false teachers John transitions in chapter 2 verse 1 to addressing the recipients of his letter in very personal terms. Instead of using we and are and including the apostolic witnesses along with him in the collective as he has done up to this point he says in chapter 2 verse 1 my little by this point probably in the 90s this letter was written so Apostle John would have been quite old by this time and he is as an elder of this church writing very affectionately as a spiritual father and exhorting the churches and he is telling them lest they think that all this talk about we all sin we need to confess our sins to one another lest they think that that means sin is okay.

He tells them no I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. Yes sin is a reality yes we should confess our sins but that does not mean we should condone sin or turn a blind eye to sin or minimize sin.

No we to bring sin into the light of Christ is to expose it for the heinous evil that it is and ask Christ to deal with it because we are unable to.

[32 : 42] But because John does acknowledge the reality of sin in the lives of believers he is quick to remind us but if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous.

we now he's referring to we John and the people that are receiving his letter we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous we have an ancient enemy Satan right his name means the accuser he accuses us condemns us slanders us but fear not because it says we also have an advocate the one who takes up our cause defends us in the court of God's justice the one who speaks for us when we are stumbling for words and are unable to defend ourselves because Jesus has ascended to the heavens and is at the seated at the right hand of God the father and he's interceding for us he's advocating for us defending us and that's why Hebrews 4 16 says let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need but let me ask you how can

Jesus advocate for sinners for people who are guilty people whose verdict is guilty how can Jesus advocate for sinners in front of an impartial just judge there's something that I glossed over earlier in chapter 1 verse 9 he said if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness the word just there means righteousness it's the same word it's the adjectival form of the word righteousness so then there's a contrast there a word play there God is righteous to cleanse us from all unrighteousness but how can it be righteous to clear the unrighteous x exodus 34 verse 7 when god reveals his character to his people he spoke of his righteousness and justice and he said he will by no means clear the guilty he commanded his people in exodus chapter 23 verse 7 do not kill the innocent and righteous for

I will not acquit the wicked it is inconsistent with his character to acquit the wicked to clear the unrighteous so how is it just for god to clear the unrighteous how is it righteous of god to cleanse the unrighteous the answer is in this verse because of Jesus Christ the righteous it is the righteousness of Christ that pleads for us verse 2 explains this he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world just to clarify that not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world that doesn't mean that everyone in the world automatically is saved because of Jesus that blatantly contradicts other parts of scripture and even things that John says later in his letter chapter 5 what he means here is that

Jesus pays for the sins of the whole world without distinction not without exception meaning he does this for all peoples Jews and Gentiles Asian people African people European people American people Australian people God does it for all peoples Jesus his atonement is sufficient for all though it is only efficient for God's chosen people John 3 16 also captures this idea right for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins means that Jesus was the atoning sacrifice for our sins by dying on the cross

[37 : 35] Jesus paid the penalty of our sins and he satisfied in doing so the righteous wrath of God towards sinners that's the meaning of propitiation satisfying the wrath of God David Wells a Christian theologian puts it this way in his book the search for salvation man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from man by wrath it is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear sin is expiated and God is propitiated this doesn't mean that God the father hates us he only loves us after Jesus dies for us no God the father loves us that's why he himself makes way for reconciliation by sending his son

Jesus Christ to die for our sins but there is still simultaneously the love of God and the wrath of God towards sinners it is that wrath that is propitiated in the atoning death of Jesus Christ and because Jesus the righteous one he's the one that should have lived forever but he died so that we the unrighteous ones who should have perished forever can now live Jesus that's why he's the word of life he's the righteous sacrifice he's the one that secures God's mercy on the cross as the propitiation for our sins and then he now pleads God's mercy on our behalf as our advocate for sinners in heaven that's what Romans chapter 3 verses 21 to 26 speak of that we read for the assurance of pardon but now the righteousness of

God has been manifested apart from the law although law and the prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus in a real sense Jesus came to die for us in a real sense Jesus also came to die for

God to vindicate his justice to prove that God is not an unfair unjust judge because we deserve to be condemned we deserve to be cast into hell we deserve to be damned but to prove his righteousness in showing us mercy that's why Jesus had to die on the cross for us and it's by believing that by having the word of life the son of God that we have fellowship with him with God and with one another let me pray for us