

The True Nature of Fellowship

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1 John 2: 3-11

In the time that we have spent with Pastor John and Kelley and our visit with you all last Sunday, it is both clear and encouraging that The Church at Perry Creek is a Church on mission. And for any church to be on mission, it is critically important that three realities exist within any community of believers in order for it to be the presence of Christ on earth:

- 1) There has got to be an acute sense of Christ's redemptive work on our behalf.
- 2) This translates to a love for God, and
- 3) A love for one another.

Today's message is entitled "The True Nature of Fellowship." This morning we are going to look at:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

- 1 John 2: 3-11

We can have fellowship with God and one another, not because of our sinlessness, but His faithfulness. Now let me quickly explain what's going on here contextually. There were people, Gnostics, who were teaching a message contrary to that of Jesus and the Apostles, people who claimed that it didn't matter how one lived because Christianity is not about the flesh, it was about the spirit. And so they taught that you could have fellowship with God whilst living however you wanted. The Apostle John comes along and says "You're wrong, you can't." Some even claimed to have some "higher knowledge" than most and, on the basis of that higher knowledge, they believed that they could be perfect, without sin. The Apostle John comes along and says, "You're wrong, you can't."

And so throughout chapter 1 and the first 2 verses of chapter 2, John has been teaching what Jesus has done in order to make salvation possible for sinners. To understand the context, get a hold of the first two verses of this chapter:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

- 1 John 2: 3-11

John is saying “Don’t have a poor and incorrect view of sin as the Gnostics do; we must understand our sin problem, realizing what Jesus has done for us through His Great Redemptive work, and through that, made true fellowship possible.” As we come to our key text this morning, there are four claims that John is going to challenge:

He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

- 1 John 2: 4

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked;

- 1 John 2: 6

He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

- 1 John 2: 9

The point that John is going to make is that if we are in fellowship with God, if we understand the fellowship into which God has brought us, what we say and what we do have got to be harmony with each other

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

- 1 John 2: 3-11

The Apostle John says here’s how we know that we know Him: It’s not according to the Gnostics who claim to have some special knowledge and revelation. It’s not according to those who are ruled by legalism. This is not the knowledge that I’m talking about. This in many ways is like the people of whom the Apostle Paul spoke when he wrote to Titus:

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

- Titus 1:16

Not “by this we hope,” or “we think,” or “we wish,” but we know. The irony here is that John uses the Greek word ‘ginoskó’ (from which we actually get the word Gnostic) which speaks of a past action with continuing result. It’s the Apostle Paul’s heart to the church at Philippi:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Philippians 3: 7-11

We don't simply know God by uttering what many call "the sinner's prayer" but then living like we want. No. Our knowledge of God ought to have ongoing implications in the life of the believer. John is referring to what he said in chapter 1 where he talked about how true fellowship finds its authenticity and commonality in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. So, how do we know that we know Him?? It shows up in the way we live. We do not know God until it shows up in the way we live. This knowledge moves us toward living a life that is in line with the character and nature of God.

So how do we know that we know Him??? By keeping His commandments. Now to 'keep' means to guard or watch or keep as in the case of something we consider to be precious. It is to continually exercise a guardianship of the commandments because you consider them to be precious. So we know that we know Him when there is a constant guardianship of what Jesus taught, and we practice and live what He taught.

There are those strong words again as we saw back in chapter 1:6 where John said "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Now he says "If we say we know Jesus and yet do not live according to His commandments, we are liars and the truth is not in us. But we can be sure that we know Him when we keep His Word, and John says, "when this happens, truly the love of God is perfected in us" (verses 4-5, paraphrased). The more we surrender to God in obedience, the more His love is made complete in us. The Apostle John says "This is how we know that we are in Him."

6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (v. 6) –

And how did Jesus walk?? In love, humility and kindness (amongst others). It's a case of walk the talk! What we say must be aligned with what we do and how we live. The Apostle John then breaks up the three statements of "He who says..." and there's a kind of transition before going into the third statement:

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

- 1 John 2:7-8

These verses are moving us from the general requirement of obedience to Jesus' commands (2: 3-6) to the specific command to love one another (2: 9-11). The Apostle John says to his recipients "Not only are you to obey the commands of Jesus, but you are to pay close attention to the command to love one another which you have had from the beginning."

The beginning of what?? The word 'beginning' refers to the time when John's readers first heard the Gospel. The 'old message' was the Gospel message by which they were made children of God through the command to believe in Jesus Christ, and then that command has implications on how one ought to live. But I believe that John is most likely also thinking about the commandments we find in the Levitical Law that speaks about showing concern for others. John is saying, "the Message does not change. If you are a child of God, and if you are in true fellowship with God, then live according to the commands of Christ. This has always been the message."

So why is it that John then seems to contradict himself in the next verse (v. 8) where he is now speaking of a new commandment?? How can he say, "I'm not writing you a new command" (v. 7) and then, "yet I am writing you a new command" (v. 8). What's the deal??

The point that John is getting across is that the commandment must not be viewed as "old" in a chronological sense, but rather, Jesus makes this commandment real and because of that there is a newness, and freshness, and relevance to it. Though it is a command that dates back in time, it always has a newness, and freshness, and relevance. Here's what I believe is going on here: I believe that the Apostle John is recalling the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John where Jesus is announcing His departure and He says:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- John 13:34-35

The Apostle John is referring to the new commandment of which Jesus spoke, which was obviously now no longer new for John's readers, and saying to them "The importance of obeying the command to love one another has not changed. It never will change. If you are a child of God, it must always hold relevance in your life."

So I believe that John uses this striking juxtaposition/comparison in order to show his readers that this is no new message. This message is the message from Jesus Himself. John is saying "This new commandment – the commandment to love one another – finds its truest and fullest expression in the life of Jesus, and so it should in the lives of believers" (v. 8).

Having stopped briefly to share this transition with his readers, John then comes to the third claim of our text this morning:

He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

- 1 John 2: 9-11

What the Apostle John is saying is clear: One cannot say that they have professed faith in Jesus Christ – cannot say that they are a believer – whilst not being concerned for his or her brother or sister. John says that if this is happening, such a person is still walking in darkness. The love of God has not been perfected in him or her.

So, how do we know that we know God??? By loving our brother and sister in Christ. This doesn't mean that we won't differ at times. It doesn't mean that we won't disagree. But even if we do differ and even if we do disagree, God's love for us and our love for one another will overcome our differences.

The believer who loves is in the light, and there is nothing in them that will cause them to stumble. The believer who hates is in darkness and not light, in sin and not in fellowship with God. So the way we will know that we are not walking in darkness but in the light will be by the love we have for our brothers and sisters. But not only will we know this, but those watching us will know that we are children of the light. A watching world will know!

As we gaze into the mirror of God's Word this morning, it requires that we examine our hearts. The basis of our fellowship with God and one another is not our sinlessness, but His forgiveness.

A few questions I need to ask myself: Do I really know God? Do I simply know Him in profession but deny Him in lifestyle? Do I keep His commandments? Do I walk the talk? Do I have a genuine love and concern for my brother or sister in Christ? Is there perhaps a strained relationship in my life? How I respond to these questions will determine whether I am walking in light or in darkness.

As we measure ourselves against the standard of God's Word, so His Word qualifies the authenticity of our faith. God, through Jesus, enables us to have fellowship with Him and with one another, based not on our sinlessness but on His forgiveness. If you're here today and you don't know Jesus, He desires nothing more than for you to know Him. He came to earth to make Himself "knowable" and to seek and save the lost. That's every one of us until we come to Jesus.

Will you surrender your life to Jesus and trust Him? Will you come into fellowship with Him? Because of God's redemptive work for us and great love toward us, we can enjoy the fellowship He has made possible with Himself and others.