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1: I Have Fellowship with God

MATT BLACK, Wed, Sept 6, 2017
1 John 1:1-4, "Real Christian" series

Introduction: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are in a new series in 1 John called "Marks of a Real Christian." Tonight's study is the final study for us in is entitled: "Fellowship with God."

Christians are God's workmanship, literally His masterpiece. God's fingerprints are all over His children. One of the most important books in the Bible defending the need for every Christian to display a life transformed by God's touch is the book of First John.

This is a letter written by the Apostle John to churches who were confused about what makes a person a Christian, or "born again." John's encouragement in the book is that people can know during their lives that they truly are "born of God," and that they will be accepted by Him on the day when we see Him face to face (1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,3,18).

What is Regeneration?

What does it mean to be "born of God" or "born again"? Theologians call it "regeneration." Regeneration is a miraculous act of God in your heart where He imparts new spiritual life to us. This is sometimes called "being born again" (using language from the Gospel of John 3:3-8). John talks about those to whom Christ gave power to be-come children of God—they "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:13).

This sovereign work of God in regeneration was also predicted in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Through him God promised a time in the future when he would give new spiritual life to his people:

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Eze 36:26-27). This promise is for you, and it is essential if you are going to have any meaningful growth and change in your marriage.

There is a time and place in our lives when God wakes us up! He gives us a spiritual new birth, a new beginning, a new nature. St. Paul says likens regeneration to a spiritual resurrection from the dead. He says, "you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:1-6).

God's Spirit takes up residency in the human heart giving the person a new nature, a new way of thinking, a new perspective – indeed a whole new worldview.

John Piper says regeneration is “the spiritual transformation in a person, brought about by the Holy Spirit, that brings the individual from being spiritually dead to become a spiritually alive human being.”

St. John wrote his First Epistle (or letter) to give various marks or evidences that a person is really, truly a Christian. There were people in his day called the Gnostics who taught several erroneous things. They taught that Jesus was not God and did not become the Christ until just before he went to the cross. They taught that he was actually corrupt-ed with a sinful nature. They believed that the physical body could never be redeemed and that only the spirit or soul was good. They concluded that you could act however you wanted and still be a Christian.

John writes the letter of 1 John to demonstrate that there is a radical transformation that occurs in the life of all of God's people. His purpose is to give each of God's children joy and assurance in knowing the marks of God's work in their lives. There are at least fourteen of these marks or “fingerprints” of God in every believer's life.

Evidences of True Salvation

The essential point of 1 John is that there are certain evidences and marks whereby you will definitely know if you have experienced the new birth. John Piper summarizes the purpose of 1 John by compiling all the reasons John has said he has written this letter. Piper's synopsis is helpful:

“Summing up all the reasons for writing 1 John goes like this: I am writing because you are true believers, but there are deceivers in your midst, and I want you to be rock-solid confident in your present possession of eternal life as regenerate children of God, so that you are not drawn away after sin. And if this letter has that effect my joy will be complete. So at the heart of his reason for writing is the desire to help them know they are born again—that they now have new spiritual life. Eternal life.”

The marks that follow are evidences of the Holy Spirit. They are like “God's fingerprints” on our lives.

The clearest translation of our passage I found was the New Living Translation.

1 John 1:1-4, “We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. 2 This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.”

I. **Fellowship** is possible because of Jesus incarnation (1:1).

Fellowship produces a fullness of joy. We look for it in many ways, but the first distinction John makes about those who truly have experienced the new birth is fellowship. John says, “We proclaim him because he was revealed to us” (2:1). This was supernatural. The apostles were once just mere common fisherman who were kind of outsiders from Jerusalem. They lived so far north in Galilee, on the edge of dreaded Gentile territory. They were faithful in their synagogue according to the Jewish laws. Peter says in **Acts 10:14**, “I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean.” Yet they couldn’t have embraced Messiah when he came except by divine revelation. Their eyes had to be opened. God had to open the eyes of Lydia (**Acts 16:14**).

Jesus is the Eternal God

John says, “we lived with the one who ‘existed from the beginning.’” But John says he wants us to have the same fellowship that they had. Who is this one who “existed from the beginning”? “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:15-20). Jesus says, “if you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” (Jn 17:4-5).

James and John and the rest of the disciples lived, ate, slept with Jesus for three years. They heard his teaching. They hugged him. They wept on his shoulder. They saw his miracles. They “saw him with our thier eyes and touched him with their own hands” (1:1). And here is John’s verdict: “He is the Word of life.” John is proclaiming a fellowship with the one who is called “the Word of life.”

So we have to ask, “In what way is Jesus Christ the eternal God”? Well, first we can say that Jesus Christ is not the Father. He is from the beginning with the Father (Jn 1:1-3), but Jesus is *not* the Father.

What is Fellowship?

What is fellowship? The Greek word is *koinonia*. It means “communion, joint participation, to share.” It has the idea of celebrating our mutual partnership or union with Christ. It means sharing in God, in his person and his nature. John proclaimed the Word of Life **so that** (*hina*, “in order that”) all believers would realize they have **fellowship** (an authentic partnership) **with** Jesus Christ and fellow believers (1:3; “We

proclaim to you... [JESUS] ...so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"; cf. Acts 1:14; 2:42, 44–47; 1 Cor. 12:26–27; Eph. 4:1–3; Heb. 10:25; 12:22–24). The word rendered **fellowship**, the familiar Greek term *koinonia*, signifies a mutual participation in a common cause or shared life (cf. Gal. 2:9; 6:6; 1 Tim. 6:18; Titus 1:4; Philem. 6; 1 Peter 4:13; Jude 3). It is far more than a mere partnership of those who have the same beliefs and are thus drawn together. Rather, it is the **mutual life and love** of those who are one in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; cf. Eph. 5:30–32).¹

Why Fellowship? We are in Rebellion

Why do we need fellowship? Because we don't have it by nature. In our fallen humanity we are in rebellion against a holy God. C.S. Lewis, author of the Chronicles of Narnia, said, "Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.... This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie ... It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death."²

The Incarnation Makes Fellowship Possible

What is the message that John brings? The eternal God has become incarnated so that we can have fellowship. "We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life" (1:1).

John says, "we've all heard of the eternal God, right? Well this one who existed from the beginning, we heard the eternal God with our own ears. We've seen him with our own eyes. We touched him with our own hands. He is the one in Genesis who spoke and all things came to be – the Word of life. The eternal God has been made man so we could have fellowship.

Fellowship a Mark of the New Birth

How do we know this is a mark of the new birth? He says, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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" (1 Jn 1:6-7).

Fellowship is linked to union with Christ in his holiness. If you don't have holiness which eliminates from fellowship, you don't know him. You "lie and do not practice the truth" (1:6). Fellowship is a mark of regeneration.

¹ MacArthur, J. (2007). *1, 2, 3 John* (pp. 18–19). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

² Walls, D., & Anders, M. (1999). *1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude* (Vol. 11, p. 152). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

II. **Fellowship** ought to increase (1:2-4).

Real joy emanates from our union with Christ. This is true kingdom life. Complete joy comes through witnessing personally to our fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus told the apostles in the upper room, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (Jn 15:11; cf. 16:22, 33; Lk 2:10).

The apostle Paul explained, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17; cf. Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16).

In verses 2 and 3, John says, *“I want you to have the same fellowship with the Father that we have had when Jesus was living on earth. You can have the same authentic partnership and union.”*

“This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy” (1 Jn 1:2-4).

Fellowship is a Gift from God

Fellowship, like all the marks and evidences, are a gift from God. He says Jesus “was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us” (1:2). Fellowship comes with the new birth. He says, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” That’s a gift because we are an unworthy people. This fellowship is a gift that comes from our salvation.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8-9).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

Realizing your relationship with God is a gift should bring you joy.

Lloyd-Jones Definition of Joy

Martin Lloyd-Jones says we must not go to the dictionary but to the NT for our definition of joy. “Joy is something very deep and profound, something that affects the whole and entire personality. In other words it comes to this; there is only one thing that can give true joy and that is contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He satisfies my mind; He satisfies my emotions; He satisfies my every desire. He and His great salvation include the whole personality and nothing less, and in Him I am complete. Joy, in other

words, is the response and the reaction of the soul to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³

Real Joy Comes from Fellowship with God

John wanted his readers to experience the **joy** that comes from understanding the reality of Christ, the saving truth of the gospel, and the fellowship that each Christian has with God and fellow believers. It is then that all true followers of Jesus will have His “joy made full in themselves” (Jn 17:13; cf. 15:11; 16:24; Psa 16:11).⁴

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Life in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 28, 30.

⁴ MacArthur, *1 John*, 20.