

Dear Friends,

Only in recent years has a key trait of our chief adversary dawned on my thinking. (2 Thessalonians 2:4" "***Who opposeth....***") If Satan can convince us to turn our minds and energy, especially our emotional energy, away from Jesus and in opposition of something we magnify as supremely important, he has succeeded. In making what--or whom--we oppose our chief aim, we more imitate him than Jesus. While Paul characterizes Satan as defining himself by opposing, Scripture characterizes Jesus as going "***...about doing good.***" (Acts 10:38 KJV) Therefore, if we seek to imitate Jesus, let us occupy our lives "Going about doing good," helping those who cannot help themselves, encouraging the disheartened, and comforting those who grieve.

John's stated audience for 1 John is believers, old or young, believers who are already saved, but who need, as you and I need, to learn about fellowship, and to redirect our lives toward seeking that fellowship with God, with Jesus, and with our

brothers and sisters. When I was a young man in my faith, I marveled when I noticed a number of respected preachers who seemed to abandon friends instead of strengthen and build friendships. Because I was younger than they, I had the sad experience of observing them till they left this world for a better place. To a person, they died bitter and lonely men. In short, they died with little "Fellowship" toward the Lord and toward their fellow-believers. Perhaps for good reason John singled out older believers, "**fathers**," in 1 John 2:13-14. "Fathers" need to work at maintaining their influence and fellowship with other believers, a good and godly example for young men who need to cultivate the habits that grow fellowship, not destroy it. In the end, John will remind his readers in this letter that, whatever attitude we foster toward other believers we also foster toward the Lord. We may profess that we love the Lord. However, if we criticize and break fellowship with other believers, John warns us that we also break our fellowship with the Lord.

To round out my personal youthful observation in those early years, I observed a striking difference between older preachers--in fact, older believers in the pew as well as in the pulpit. Some grew increasingly loving and gracious, and their circle of friends, of 1 John kind of "Fellowship," grew wider and more precious with time. Those who allowed their hearts to turn bitter, had the opposite experience. Over time, they broke friendships and became lonely, a sad indication of the state of their diminishing fellowship with the Lord.

We need John's message on godly fellowship and how to maintain it. Stay focused on Jesus, including a strong and clear anchor in His Incarnation, when He became a real flesh-and-blood human like us, except He had no sin. Imitate Him in a life focused on Jesus and "Doing good," and avoid--at all cost--defining your life by what you oppose.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

1 John

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:3-7 KJV)

Other than the legalism threat which appears in Paul's Galatian letter (Which often leads to a belief in salvation by works, as it did in this case, Acts 15:1 KJV), early gnosticism was likely the next major attempt to corrupt the faith of the gospel. A central gnostic belief is that all things material are inherently evil and corrupt.

Therefore, gnostic teaching advocates various forms of asceticism as a form of man's salvation. You see this idea in Paul's warning against an extreme ascetic avoidance of all things material, "*Touch not; taste not; handle not; **Which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men.***" (Colossians 2:21-22 KJV, emphasis added. Anything physical or material "perishes with the using.") Because basic gnostic teaching rejects all things material, gnostics often reject the Incarnation. According to their teaching, God could not possibly condescend to inhabit a physical human body. Most commentaries I've checked suggest that John wrote 1 John to oppose "Docetic gnosticism," a teaching that what appeared to be Jesus' physical body was a "Spirit body," a mere appearance of a real body, but was not. Given John's emphatic focus on authentic faith acknowledging that God in fact did condescend to inhabit a literal human body, we cannot dismiss the idea that he wrote against this early heretical idea and so strongly in favor of the Bible truth of God Incarnate in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: **And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist,** whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:2-3 KJV; emphasis added)*

Words could not be written that more directly refute and undermine ancient gnostic teaching. It is my belief that John's emphasis in his gospel on the deity, the godhood of Jesus ("**...was with God, and the Word was God.**" John 1:1b), was intended to affirm the full deity of Jesus, God Incarnate, no less than 1 John. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, affirms that the Greek word translated "*with*" in this reference means "**...a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other.**"

While Scripture teaches that believers in Jesus are to deny their sinful appetites and desires (That inevitably lead to sinful actions),

there is no basis in Scripture for the extreme idea that the physical world which God created was a cosmic mistake. Or that it is all inherently evil because it is material. When David wrote by the direction of the Holy Spirit, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork,*" (Psalm 19:1 KJV) he refuted this basic gnostic belief. Scripture likewise refutes this gnostic error in every passage that affirms the image of God in man. (Psalm 8 as a beautiful example)

Marcion, early second century gnostic, accepted only a highly edited version of Luke's Gospel and ten of Paul's letters as inspired. Convenient to his ideas, he rejected all other writings as not inspired canon.

Let's pause our review of gnostic error and study John's stated purpose in writing 1 John. Knowing what John obviously rejected in his strong anti-language is important, but our task of learning the truth of Jesus is far more important.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. John did

not write his personal ideas or opinions. He wrote first-hand knowledge about Jesus, God-Incarnate.

*And the **Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us**, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 KJV, emphasis added)*

Why did John write such a focused letter to godly believers (He described his audience as young and old believers in the second chapter, “***I write unto you....***”) John, along with Peter and James, were blessed by Jesus to witness some of Jesus’ most unique moments during His time on earth; for example, the Mount of Transfiguration and the raising of Jairus’ daughter. John was blessed to experience this intimate “*Fellowship*” with Jesus during those three and a half years. He wrote this letter with the hope of motivating his readers, including you and me, to understand the high privilege and the high obligation believers in Jesus to live our lives with the single focus of discovering and

maintaining that same close fellowship with Jesus and with the Father. Contextually, John's surfacing the dangers of gnostic teaching, specifically its denial of John 1:14 and other passages that teach that the Word who was with God, and who was God, became a man and inhabited a literal human body, warns us. To embrace these ideas breaks our fellowship with Jesus and with the Father. John urges us; don't allow that to happen. Discover and maintain your fellowship with Jesus, with the Father, and with others who believe in Jesus above all other ideas and pursuits in this world.

*This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God is not a cosmic grandfather type who dotes on His children, indulging them in whatever belief or conduct they choose because "He loves us too much to chasten us." No! **He loves us too much not to chasten us!***

*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
(Hebrews 12:6 KJV)*

Light and darkness are polar opposites. So is the moral and spiritual reality that Jesus embodied—and embodies. It allows no compromise, no alternative belief, and no competition from our carnal or philosophical favorite notions or people who influence us away from Him and His glorious light. Our lifelong task is to strive to discover more of that light and to grow ourselves, thought, word, and deed, closer to Him and His light, this thing John calls “Fellowship” in our study passage.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. John warns us. Jesus knows what we think, say, and do. We cannot deceive Him by saying the right words while our hearts are chasing our private windmills. Authentic fellowship with Him builds on the rock-solid foundation of what we “do.” We either “Do truth,” or we “Do darkness.” To the extent we choose to do darkness we abandon our fellowship with Jesus. In this context, John associates our fellowship with Jesus and the Father with our fellowship with other godly believers. When we abandon our

fellowship with God, our fellowship with other believers cannot survive. Folks who choose this path of darkness often fall into the habit of fault-finding other believers instead of working for fellowship with them, of regarding self above other believers, not servant to them. Inevitably, when we choose this path of darkness, as John warns us in our study passage, we also lose our joy. A pastor's deepest heartbreak is to witness a believer who once exuded zeal and joy for Jesus now going through the motions, but with no joy or peace of heart. I am so thankful. John reminds us that our bad choice into joyless abandonment of our fellowship can be reversed. Instead of fault-finding other believers, we must turn our thoughts to self, confess our sins to Jesus, and cease them. What happens when we take that brave course-correction?

*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 that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:9-10 KJV, emphasis added)*

Remember John's identifying his original audience for this letter in the second chapter. John did not write this letter to lost sinners, but to children of God. These two verses remind us of the daily cleansing we need in our Christian pursuit of wonderful fellowship. As born again, blood bought children of God, we remain vulnerable to slip into any number of sinful habits and attitudes. If Satan can't entice you to fall into sins of the flesh, he will attempt to trick you with the opposite. He will convince you that you are the most godly, informed believer in your church, nudging you to look down on your brothers and sisters as ignorant. Whenever they express any idea different from your thinking, the adversary will persuade you that you are correct and they inexcusably ignorant and wrong. Beware. If we fall to his subtle ways, either way, he wins, and we lose our fellowship both with Jesus and with our fellow-believers.

What is this thing called "Fellowship"? Many years ago, a friend who was born and raised in the British Isles shared a tradition from the rural culture in the area where he grew up. Many

families made their living raising and caring for sheep. Sheep require much attention and care, so, whenever a shepherd needed to leave his farm for any time, he would ask his neighbor to care for his flock. The neighbor would gladly agree, knowing that, sooner or later, he would need to be gone from his flock and need his neighbor's help. To describe this neighborly support, a term developed over time. You always gladly took good care of your "Fellow's sheep." Thus, for these people, it was no stretch to think of "Fellowship" in terms of watching out for another person's best interest. "I have your back" describes what it means to practice true "Fellowship" with another believer. Likewise, "Fellowship" with Jesus means that you order your life and your energy in the interest of Jesus, your "Fellow," your senior brother in the family of God. We learn how to live for His interest by studying the Scriptures and striving to practice what we learn above any other ideas or imaginations we might consider.

No surprise, John affirms this idea of "Fellowship."

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? (1 John 4:19-20 KJV)

When we understand that “Love” in Scripture refers to action, to what the “Lover” does toward the object of his love, this passage shines brightly to show us the way of authentic Bible fellowship. Thank the Lord for John’s message. We need it so much.

Elder Joe Holder