

## THE TESTS OF FELLOWSHIP

### **TEXT: I JOHN 2:3--17**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. I have mentioned the emphasis on "fellowship" in this epistle (cf. I John 1:3, 6, 7).
2. I said the word here means "partnership." Paul wrote in Galatians 2:9, "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."
3. Another important word in I John is "know." It is found 27 times in the epistle (cf. 2:3, 4, 5, etc.).
4. At the time John was writing this epistle, a false cult had arisen which became known as "Gnosticism." The word "gnostic" comes from the Greek word *gnōsis* meaning, "knowledge."
5. The Gnostics professed to "know" the truth but they really did not. They were deceived, and were entangled in error.
6. When John says, "And hereby we do know," he means we know this as a fact, not by perception but as something self-evident.
7. Tonight we will consider both these key words, "fellowship" and "know." First John 1:3 says, "and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Do you enjoy this fellowship?
8. Tonight we will consider three tests of fellowship.

#### **I. THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE (2:3-6)**

1. In this epistle, John gives several marks of the true Christian (1:6-10).
2. Here is an important mark -- the mark of obedience (2:3-6).
3. Titus 1:16 says, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." They fail the test of obedience!
4. Our Lord said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).
5. Jesus said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).
6. Notice the repetition -- "He that saith..." (2:4, 6, 9). Many people say they are Christian but give no evidence that they are saved. When they leave this world and stand before Christ, He will say to them, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23).

7. During the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee sent word to Stonewall Jackson that the next time he rode in the direction of headquarters he would like to speak with him on a matter of no great importance. Rising early in the morning, Stonewall Jackson rode eight miles to General Lee's headquarters through a rough snow storm, and arrived just as General Lee was finishing his breakfast. Much surprised, General Lee asked General Jackson why he had traveled through such a storm. Stonewall Jackson replied, "But you said that you wished to see me. General Lee's slightest wish is a supreme command to me."
8. We should be just as obedient, loving, and loyal to our God as Stonewall Jackson was to General Robert E. Lee.
9. By keeping God's word (2:5) the love of God is perfected in us, and we know we that we are in Christ.
10. Walking "even as He walked" (2:6) means to live as Jesus lived. But it is more than that because we cannot properly do that in our own strength. It is only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can allow Christ to live His life in us and through us.
11. This is what the apostle Paul meant in Galatians 2:20, "Christ liveth in me."

*Once far from God and dead in sin,  
No light my heart could see;  
But in God's Word the light I found,  
Now Christ liveth in me.*

*Christ liveth in me,  
Christ liveth in me,  
Oh! what a salvation this,  
That Christ liveth in me.*

*As rays of light from yonder sun,  
The flowers of earth set free,  
So life and light and love came forth  
From Christ living in me.*

*As lives the flower within the seed,  
As in the cone the tree,  
So, praise the God of truth and grace,  
His Spirit dwelleth in me.*

*With longing all my heart is filled,  
That like Him I may be,  
As on the wondrous thought I dwell  
That Christ liveth in me. -- Major Whittle*

## **II. THE TEST OF LOVE (2:7-11)**

1. The test of obedience and the test of love are intertwined. The Lord Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Love and obedience are inseparable.
2. This is why John says in I John 2:7 that this is not a new commandment, but "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (of the Gospel).
3. In John 13:34 and 35, our Lord told His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."
4. Little children, fathers, and young men (2:12-14) all refer to Christians in various stages of spiritual growth. These distinctions should not be pressed too far because the apostle John often calls all believers "little children" (2:1, 13, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).
5. Regarding John's use of this term, Albert Barnes said, "Its use in this epistle may be regarded as one evidence that John had reached an advanced period of life when he wrote the epistle."
6. The "young men" are strong in the Lord because the Word of God abideth in them (2:14). Therefore, they were able to "overcome the wicked one" (2:14).
7. We need to let the Word of God abide in us. I heard about an older Christian who asked a young man if he read the Bible. The young man said, "Yes, I've been through it."
8. The older man wisely said, "You say you have been through the Word of God; **but now you need the Word of God in you.**"
9. Our Lord said in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

## **III. THE TEST OF SEPARATION (2:15-17)**

1. This is a test where many Christians fail -- they are not separated from the world. Here is a good definition of "the world" as it is used here in I John 2:15.

2. "It is the satanic system which man has built up in an effort to make himself happy without the Lord Jesus Christ. It may include the world of culture, the world of art, education, sports, music -- any sphere in which the Lord is not loved and welcomed."
3. Someone else defined the world as "human society insofar as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, egotism, greed, fleshly pleasures, deceit, and vulgarity."
4. A more concise definition: the world is the organized system headed up by Satan which is in opposition to God (cf. James 4:4).
5. First John 2:16 breaks down "all that is in the world" into three broad categories:
  - (1) "the lust of the flesh" – sensual bodily appetites that proceed from within our evil nature.
  - (2) "the lust of the eyes" – this refers to such evil desires as may arise from what we see, resulting in lust or covetousness.
  - (3) "the pride of life" – an unholy ambition for self-display and self-glory; the desire for prominence and adulation.
6. Andrew Murray said, "The world is now an organized kingdom of evil," ruled by Satan, the god of this world.
7. We are to be separated from the world because the world pulls us away from the love of God. The apostle Paul said in II Timothy 4:10, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."
8. Galatians 1:4 says the Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."
9. Andrew Murray said, "The development of evil, now in its slow growth, then again in its sudden outbreaks, is no blind evolution, but the result of a deliberate systematic war of an intelligent power of evil against the rule of God. Whether in the grossest forms of heathenism, or amid the refinement of art and culture, or even under the guise of a nominal Christianity—everywhere the world lieth in darkness, and is in its principles and aims the very opposite of the kingdom of God and of heaven. The pursuit of the visible, the assertion of man's will against that of God, the pride of man's wisdom, are its distinguishing characteristics, in contrast with the will, and the love, and the service of the invisible God."
10. William MacDonald said, "God is not interested in improving the world, or making men comfortable in it, but in delivering men from it. Our priorities should coincide with His."
11. Notice I John 2:17 says, "And the world passeth away..."

12. First Corinthians 7:31 says, "The fashion of this world passeth away."
13. Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed to this world."
14. Satan is referred to three times in the Gospel of John as "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); and he is called "the god of this world" in II Corinthians 4:4, which says, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."
15. Satan blinds people's minds, and he uses the things of this world to do it. Satan deceives people into thinking that material things and temporal things are more important than spiritual things.
16. When men become engrossed in material things, they become more and more worldly and more materialistic, and they get further and further from God.
17. "Lust" (I John 2:16, 17) refers to carnal cravings, and "the pride of life" refers to worldly ambition, selfishness, the craving for prominence, the display of worldly honour and recognition, and worldly titles, etc.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish pastor, professor of theology, mathematician, and a leader of the Free Church of Scotland. He has been called Scotland's greatest nineteenth-century preacher.
2. One day, Thomas Chalmers was riding in the Scottish highlands and he was sitting in a carriage that was coming around a sharp curve.
3. And as they came around this dangerous curve, there was a steep cliff. The horses became frightened and began to pull at their traces, the straps by which the carriage is drawn.
4. It looked like they were going to be plunged over the cliff to their deaths. The driver of the carriage reached back and pulled out his whip and began to beat the horses unmercifully. Fortunately, he managed to get the carriage safely around the curve.
5. Thomas Chalmers then asked him, "Why in the world did you beat those horses so unmercifully?"
6. The driver said, "I had to give them something else to think about."
7. And as he was going home, Thomas Chalmers thought about that, and how it also applied to spiritual things, and he conceived one of his greatest sermons.

8. He entitled it, "The Expulsive Power of a New Attraction," and in this message he talked about how the love for Christ is the answer to love for the world.
9. When an individual Christian is so occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ then the attraction of the world are weaned from him.
10. The hymnwriter said that when we turn your eyes upon Jesus, "the things of earth will grow strangely dim" (Helen Lemmel).