

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Expository Sermon

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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AND THE FAITH

Scripture Reading – 1 John 1:1-10

Introduction

John was an old man when he wrote this letter. His letters reveal a maturity which had been molded in the fiery trials of personal experience and adversity. He had come to see what was of first importance in the church. He was a man who sure about what he had seen and about what he believed. He was a rock in a world, which had been invaded by every wind and doctrine. He was acutely aware of the dangers that faced the church. Filtering through his letters is the note of conviction and firm belief in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a strong conviction in his teachings. There is no hesitancy in his proclamation of the truth. When you study his letters, you will discover why they are called the letters of certainties. In addition, there are key words, which make this clear. These words are **“love,” “know” and “fellowship.”** **There is an authority in the way he declares the truth of the Christian faith. These truths project what is vital in the proclamation of the Gospel. They convey thoughts that are interlocked or interdependent.** One thing is evident, John is certain of the truths about which he writes. The recurring words he uses that come through are **“WE KNOW.”** In 1John 5:18, He says, “We know anyone born of God does not continue in sin.” Moreover, in 1 John 3:14, “we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers”; and then in I John 3:24 “And this is how we know that He lives in us. We know it by the Spirit He gave us.” The phrase “we know” consistently leaps out at us from the pages of his writings. He is underscoring the certain trumpet sound of the Christian message. The true preaching of the Christian

message is never hesitant or timid. The gospel is not conjecture it is confession. It is not postulation but proclamation. It is not debate but declaration. And it is so because of the certainty of its truth. One has written that the “position of the Apostle John, indeed of all of the Apostles, is that they have something to declare, something to say.” What John is telling us in effect “I am writing not because I am looking or seeking for the truth, but because I have found it. I would not be writing if I had not found it, and I want you to experience the same thing.” (Martin Lloyd Jones). He had something to say. He tells us that he knows and it is because he knows, and because of what he has experienced, that he is writing about these magnificent truths. You catch this spirit in the opening verses of the first chapter of I John. They make clear that John had seen something and that something was so amazing that he could hardly contain himself. One has pointed out that in a sense there is no introduction to this letter. There are no greetings or salutations; John does not even say who he is. You find it out as you read his letter. “Here is a man who has something amazing to say; he knows that these people have to hear it and so without any introduction, he plunges them into the heart of the mighty message he wants to deliver.” (Lloyd Jones).

There is an unshakable conviction about his message. It is proclamation which has a passion and authority behind it. Jones wrote pointedly “A man standing in a Christian pulpit has no business to say ‘I suggest to you,’ or ‘shall I put it you,’ or ‘On the whole I think,’ or ‘I am almost persuaded,’ or ‘let me share with you.’ There was none of this anemic approach. John said these things “we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.” One has said the “the preacher of the Gospel, according to the New Testament, is a herald; it is like a man with a trumpet who is calling people to listen.” There is nothing tentative about what he has to say; something has been delivered to him, and his business is to repeat it.”(Lloyd Jones.) Jones is saying, “I have an amazing thing to reveal,” and now I proclaim it to you.

Now verses 3 and 4 define the purpose of the proclamation of the Gospel. It is summed in two words “fellowship and Joy.” In this message, we will highlight the truth of fellowship. When this fellowship is proclaimed, it includes the full meaning of salvation, as we shall see as we expound on this. The word fellowship is specifically a Christian word, and it covers the whole range of the meaning of salvation. The Gospel declares that man can be brought into fellowship with God through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ but it also includes fellowship with the children of God. John Stott wrote that, “Our fellowship with each other arises from and depends on our fellowship God.” This Christian fellowship about which John is concerned is first,

1. CONDITIONAL. 1 John 1:3, 6-7.

It is conditioned on,

a. What God has done for us. 1 John 1:7. It is conditioned on what God has provided for us in and through the death of Jesus. The basic need of man is God. Not simply a recognition of who He is, or acknowledgement of who He is, and the fact that He exists, but it is a personal acceptance of what He has done for us at Calvary. Christian fellowship begins at the Cross-. The foundation of fellowship is the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Its root goes into the atoning death of the Son of God. Jesus died to bring us back into fellowship with the Father. He came to restore the fellowship that Adam had with God in the Garden of Eden. For man walked and talked with God in the cool of the evening, and it was man who chose to walk away from that relationship by deliberate disobedience. In that, moment fellowship with God ended, and they were thrust out of the Garden of Eden. From that hour, man separated himself from God because of his sinfulness. The Old Testament writers were concerned about this break in fellowship. This concern came out in their writings “Even from birth,” they wrote, “the wicked go astray, from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Psalm 58:3. The New Testament writers were also conscious of mans separation from God. Paul wrote clearly in his letter to the Ephesian church 2:12. “Remember,” he writes, “Remember that at that time you, and were separate from Christ....without hope and without God in the world.” He reminds the Christians in his letter to the Colossians 1:21. “You were alienated from God and were enemies in your mind because of your evil behavior.” Sin separates man from fellowship with God. It created a gap to wide to bridge – to extensive to span –too deep to cross. Man in and of himself is utterly powerless – totally helpless to extricate himself from this disturbing and desperate dilemma. There was no human ability whereby he could help himself and restore his fellowship with God. He needed help outside of himself. He needed a helping hand to bring him back to God. He needed and certain some thing or some power outside of the reasoning of the human mind. The reasoning of the human mind comes to a dead end when faced with the problem of man’s separation from God. The restoration of fellowship with God is a deeply spiritual and eternal problem and requires a supernatural solution. Only God can bring about the restoration of this fellowship with man. The Cross is God’s answer to this fundamental broken relationship. A.M. Hunter describes a picture at the Cattanernchit army camp that shows a signaler lying dead in no man’s land. He had been sent out to repair a cable that had been broken by shellfire. And there he lies, cold in death, but with his mission accomplished, for in his stiffened

hands he holds the broken ends together. The connection was made. Beneath the picture is one word **“through”** The message got through. So too, by His once and for all death on Calvary, Christ has brought God and man together in reconciliation and fellowship. Note what Paul says in Romans 5:10. “...when we were God’s enemies we were reconciled to Him through the death of the Cross.” John latches on to this great act and provision of mercy and grace and writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” The barrier to fellowship is removed. There is truth in the African proverb that “He who forgives ends the quarrel.” When God forgives our sins for Christ sake, the quarrel between God and man comes to an end. That once impossible breach between God and man has been bridged through the Blood of Jesus, shed with such great price on the Cross, and in that moment the veil in the temple hiding God’s presence was rent in two, split from top to bottom, signifying that the way to God was now open, and we can have fellowship with Him. John rejoices in this fellowship when he writes and “our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” This provision is a revelation of what God has done for us, so that we can come into this glorious fellowship. Because God has done this for us note,

b. What God has done in us. I John 1:3, 6-7. His Blood can cleanse us inwardly from all unrighteousness.

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may also have fellowship with us with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.” In verse 9, “If we confess our sins He is a faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” And in verse 7 he writes if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will forgive us our sins walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.” From these magnificent words of hope and grace, there are three basic aspects of the work that God does within us in the power of the Cross. First,

i. When we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins. 1 John 1:9.

ii. If we walk in the light as He in the light...the Blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.” Again, in verse 9 He will “purify us from all unrighteousness.”

iii. If we walk in the light v.7 two results take place

a. We will walk in fellowship with Him. v.3,7.

b. We will walk in fellowship with each other. What God has done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus opens the door for God to enable us to appropriate these three basic privileges and blessings. **These things are what God has done in us, and they are only possible because of what God has done for us.** Not only is this fellowship conditional it is,

2. EXPERIENTIAL. 1 John 1:3.

This fellowship about which John speaks is not theory or conjecture for it can be “personally experienced. It is not a new religious fad. It is based on the restored relationship between God and man. And John talks about the two aspects of fellowship in the Christian faith. He is concerned that men and women come into fellowship with God. “We proclaim to what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us.” In addition, he adds, “And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” John Stott points out “that fellowship with each other arises out of fellowship with God.” You cannot have one without the other. Fellowship with each other depends on fellowship with God. What does this fellowship mean? It means reconciliation to a Holy God. Paul said that once we were “enemies of God, but know we have been reconciled through the Blood of the Cross.” Again Paul in I Corinthians 1:9 reminds us that “God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful.” We who were the enemies are now in fellowship with Him. Fellowship implies friendship. In Christian fellowship we become a friend of God. Jesus said to His disciples on one occasion “You are my friends if you do what I command... I no longer call you servants.....instead I call you friends, for everything that I learned from Father I have made known to you.” Therefore, this fellowship with God assumes there is a basic

a. Friendship with God. I John 1:3. There can no be fellowship without friendship. In John 15:14-15 Jesus underscores some truths about this unique friendship. Firstly there is,

i. The Declaration of a Unique Friendship. John 15:14-15. This friendship moves beyond the friendship of the world. Jesus said, “You are my Friends.” It is friendship with the Son of God. It is a unique friendship. Secondly there is,

ii. Certainty in this unique friendship. John 15:14-15. "You Are my Friends." This is a not a suggestion of friendship it is affirmation of it. The certainty of this friendship cannot be stated any clearer than this. Thirdly,

iii. The Conditions of this unique friendship. John 15:14-15. "You are my friends IF you what I command." Obedience sustains and strengthens this friendship. Disobedience destroys it. Adam and Eve forfeited their friendship with God because they disobeyed God. That single act of disobedience resulted in a destroyed friendship with God for the Human race. There is one fundamental condition to maintain friendship with God and it is unconditional obedience to His commands. Note further,

iv. The Privileges of this unique friendship. John 15:14-15. Jesus said, "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know His masters business. Instead I have called you friend, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." There is a level of intimacy in this friendship, which cannot be known on the human level. Its secret lies in obedience, trust and a full surrender to Him. We know that it is safe to be open with Him. He will never take advantage of our vulnerability. We can carry everything to God in prayer. We sing that hymn we know so well. "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our grief's to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." This is the privilege of friendship with Jesus. Such is the fellowship that is made possible through the sacrifice of God's Son. There is another significant truth contained in the word fellowship. It is translated in various ways. The idea of,

b. Partnership is contained in it. I John 1:3. "And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. " Our partner ship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The believers possess a vital and meaningful partnership in and with Christ.

John in His fifteenth chapter of his Gospel describes how the branch, the believer, is grafted into the true vine who is Jesus and that believer shares the sustaining, nourishing vitalizing cleansing life of the Vine. Nevertheless, the scriptures make quite clear that the believer not only shares His life and fellowship but they are partners in His work. We are workers together or as Dr. G Campbell Morgan wrote, "Fellowship with God means that we have gone into business with God and that His enterprises are to be our enterprises, His will our will, His vision our vision." Jesus said, "I no longer call you servants but friends."

While communion with Him on this level is **the privilege and joy of this friendship**, partnership with Him is **the responsibility of this fellowship**. Finally this fellowship with Him is,

3. RELATIONAL 1John 1: 1-3, 7.

What do I mean by this? Christian fellowship not only touches our relationship to God but our relationship to other believers. John underscores this truth in verse 3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus, Christ.” He adds “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, purifies us from all sin.” Two dimensions of this relationship are the heart of Christian fellowship. They are inseparably tied together. You cannot have one without the other. The first dimension is

i. Fellowship with God. 1 John 1:3 “We have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ...”

ii. Fellowship with other believers. 1 John 1:3, 7. Christian fellowship is distinctly different from any other kind of fellowship. It is so because there is,

a. Common Ground for this Fellowship. 1 John 1:7-9. There are four pillars of truth, which make up this common ground for this fellowship.

i. It is Jesus Christ Himself. 1 John 1: 1 - 3. John sets this truth before us. There is no debate here. What he said is unmistakably clear. “We proclaim...the Word of Life....which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. It is the Word of Life. Jesus is the common ground of Christian fellowship. Secondly,

ii. The Cross or the supreme sacrifice that Jesus made on that Cross, is the common ground for Christian fellowship. 1 John 1:7. “but if walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” Thirdly,

iii. The personal experience of forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of our hearts from all unrighteousness is also common ground for Christian fellowship.

1 John 1:7. “We have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” Fourthly,

iv. The continual sensitive obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ is common ground for Christian. 1 John 1: 7. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” And so Jesus Himself – **The Cross of Calvary – the Shed Blood of Christ - Forgiveness and the cleansing of our hearts from all sin and obedience to Christ make up the common ground for Christian fellowship.** This common ground knows no ethnic prejudices or social barriers, no class distinction, no social snobbery. We are all one in Christ Jesus! This is the authentic fellowship of the Christian church. Jesus also pin points,

b. The Conditions for Fellowship with Each Other. 1 John 1:7-9. The conditions of fellowship with God lie in the assurance of His forgiveness, and the inner cleansing from all sin. The Psalmist David wrote, “God desires truth in the inner parts.” (Psalm 51:6.) The New Testament writer tells us that we have confidence with God if our consciences condemn us not. A clean heart and a clear conscience are the bases of fellowship with God. The Psalmist writes, “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart! Psalm 24:3-4. The continuing response of obedience to light or the truth of God ensures and maintains a relationship with God. It is openness, honesty, and transparency that are necessary for an intimate and growing relationship with God. Intimacy with God is rooted in honesty with God. This fellowship with God in the church should nurture Christian fellowship. Just as forgiveness is a condition for fellowship with God, so the mutual forgiving spirit is a vital condition for fellowship with other believers. At the same time, if we harbor an unforgiving spirit towards others there will not only be a break in Christian fellowship, but we will also lose God’s blessing of forgiveness. **Jesus made this clear “...if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive you.” Matthew 6:14-15.** How can anyone

who accepts personal forgiveness from God, which was bought at such a high price even to the sacrifice of His Son’s life, refuse forgiveness to anyone who has injured him? This at its best is a gross ingratitude to God and destroys Christian fellowship. The spirit of forgiveness is indispensable to Christian fellowship. A break in relationship with another Christian means break in fellowship with God. To say that we can have fellowship with God, and be out of the scriptures do not support fellowship with a child of God, and it is the

height of self-deception. Put another way John wrote, "We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God, "yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." This love is the heartbeat and therefore the lifeline of Christian fellowship. It is love that is held in focus in an old rugged Cross. A love that will not let us go, but also a love that must pervade the hearts and minds of those who claim to have yielded to the one who loved us and gave Himself for us. Jesus, who commanded us to love one another as He loved us, is the motivating force and compelling power in Christian fellowship. His love is not only a power within; it is the standard by which we gauge the depth of our fellowship with fellow believers.

Conclusion

In our fractured world beset by divisiveness and strife - a lonely world that is looking for something somewhere that will bring healing and redemption to the divisiveness and hurt all around us. The answer, I believe lies in a genuine Christian fellowship exemplifying the dynamic love of Calvary, an inner constraint that will attract a floundering and wounded society to the saving healing Christ. The world is not going to be impressed by a cold divided people in the church. Moreover it will not be attracted to Christ by a loveless people, for Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples when you have love one for another." This love is the heartbeat of authentic Christian fellowship. Let us love one another!!