

Christian Fellowship

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to I John, Chapter 1 and verse 3. Last Lord's day we saw this verse, but only in part. We are desirous this morning of continuing the theme that you might recall what our general theses was. May I remind you that the fellowship of which John speaks in verse 3 was founded upon certain facts that had become foundational to our faith: the inspiration of God's Word, the virgin birth of His Son, His sinless life, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His glorious ascension into Heaven, and the reign and rule that He exercises; that these facts are without doubt or question essential for any kind of Christian fellowship. Challenged or rejected, there can be religious fellowship, or religious interest, but there can't be Christian fellowship. The very word Christian means that it is a fellowship in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ who is God come in the flesh.

But John further suggested and stated that this fellowship was not merely in the facts, but a personal relationship with the one set forth by the facts that Jesus Christ was God come in the flesh indeed, that He had been raised from the dead certainly, that He was enthroned at the right hand of the Father, but He could be known personally, by ones repentance and faith, he would be brought into a vital relationship with Christ wherein he would have been said to be a new creation, having passed from death to life. We thus stated that the foundation of Christian fellowship is not the facts alone, but of personal experience with God through Christ, wherein one knows that he is born again, God Himself witnessing to his believing heart. It is thus when you know by that knowing that the Holy Ghost, God in His Omnipresence gives to you, spoken of as the witness of the Spirit, that your fellowship with God is commenced, not concluded, but commenced.

Now if you have never had a certainty of your relationship to Christ by the Spirit of God, then the level of your fellowship is going to be in the Word of God. Allow, and I am not challenging this, that you are delivered from the fear of hell. You have been saved from the prospect of suffering in flames forever. But the grounds of your knowing this is the Word of God upon which truth you stand, certain verses that you have taken assuring your heart of thus being in Christ.

This is good. And I personally would not certainly challenge the validity of your testimony; but I am saying that the level of your fellowship is going to be simply in the Word of God. Now no fellowship apart from the Word of God, certainly this we cannot challenge, but if the only way you know you are a Christian is that you have deduced it from what you have done toward what God said, then this is going to be the level of your fellowship. It will be a fellowship based upon what you have deduced from what God said, and in relationship to what others have deduced from what God said. But in the Book we discover that this fellowship began with a revelation of Christ, not only to, but in, and we find such a verse as this: "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that they, might receive the adoption of sons, and since they are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, crying Abba Father" (Gal. 4:4-6). And thus they have now this inferior testimony. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness within himself," and we are thus stating as an axiom of the faith the foundational aspect of our fellowship, that one knows, not only because they have read it in the Word and agreed to what is written; but, having read it, and having submitted, and having received it, they have received Christ, for salvation is in a Person (I Joh. 5:10). Salvation isn't something that a Person sends, apart from Himself; salvation isn't something the Lord Jesus died to give to people; He in Heaven, and you here, having salvation in some extra-essence apart from Him. Salvation is a Person. And this Person is Jesus Christ.

And thus the Word is, "He that hath the Person hath life. He that hath the Son hath life." The Son is not an extraction of verses about Him. The Son is not the sum of all the verses about Him. The Son is a Person. He is God, God the Son. And if you are a Christian, then God the Son is in you. And if God the Son is in you you know you are a Christian, because He has spoken to your heart and assured your heart, and you have an interior and an immediate awareness of God that enables you to know with a knowing that you can't be argued out of, and can't be denied. You have the witness, the certainty, the knowledge, the assurance within yourself. And this is the foundation of Christian fellowship. The Word, yes; but on the foundation of the Word, a foundational experience of repentance and faith that issues into an inaugural, or an initial relationship with God.

But we must recognize that as essential as this is, it is not the finishing point. It is the front door, and not the back. It is the threshold, and not the finished room. And when you have stepped across this threshold of repentance and faith, with the inner witness of the Spirit of God that you are born again, you have been brought into the room of blessing. At this point begins the testimony of I Corinthians, Chapter 2, and verse 9 and 10a and on where we read, "...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." So one aspect of the fellowship that we are to enjoy as Christians is being taught the Word by those whom God hath given for the blessing and benefit of His children.

You see, there are two kinds of preaching. There is the preaching of the Gospel to the unsaved, by which they discover how wicked they are and how holy God is, what God did that they might be saved, and how they may be saved. This everyone is to do. This you are to do. God's plan and God's purpose was that everyone that is brought into this relationship with Him should be a witness to Him. The whole concept of a professional clergy doing the evangelizing is Roman in its origin and not Christian at all. The Christian testimony can't be gainsaid, it can't be denied. He intended every Christian to be a missionary. And someone has well said, "You are either a missionary or a mission field." I think this is to be accepted also.

After that, "the Holy Ghost is come upon you; ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (Act. 1:8). Now to say that He doesn't intend you to be a witness is likewise to say that He doesn't intend you to know the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we will have to say that the One who said, "Come unto Me and rest," said to the very same people who came and rested, "Go and preach" (Mat. 11:28; Mar. 16:15). And to accept the Come and rest to mean me, and the Go and preach to mean somebody else is intellectual dishonesty. It can't be tolerated by you. You'll have to reject it. The Gospel is to be preached by you. You are to be the witness. It isn't that we have here an evangelizing center to which the sinners are brought by you to hear how they are going to be saved. I assure you of this you won't succeed in getting them in, by and large, unless they are family or friends who come out of courtesy.

But the old days when the evangelizing was done from the pulpit in America was in the days when there was no other source of information. Usually the preacher in early America after the Revolution in the pioneer communities had the best education of anyone, for all the Universities and Colleges in this country were established for the express purpose of training men for the ministry, including Harvard, and Yale, and Princeton. We must remember that. And consequently the best educated were in any frontier community to be the preacher. He would have any letters, for there were no newspapers, and certainly no radio or television, or magazines. A few small publications, including the original Saturday Evening Post by Benjamin Franklin, just a small gazette that was handed out, a few were printed by hand press and so on, so they were not distributed widely. And Sunday nights the people would come. There wasn't any other entertainment. There was nothing else doing. And so the people would come. Everybody would come, because in the service the preacher would say, Now Barge such and such will be landing at so and so, and the overland wagons will be bringing – let's see, they will be bringing 15 bolts of woolen goods, and 20 bolts of cotton goods, and 5 barrels of salt. And he would read the bill of lading for the Conestoga wagons that would be coming down from the canal and would bring the goods that would be distributed. And then he would say that there would be a political meeting. All the announcements were made in that service. Arguments were heard concerning various issues. And then because everybody was there a rousing evangelistic sermon would be addressed to the sinners who were captive and couldn't get away.

But it wasn't long until that changed, and sinners don't come Sunday nights any more. It is a little ridiculous you know. You have the evangelistic sermon Sunday nights when the best of the saints are there, and the sinners come Sunday morning. Well they are clever; they know that this is the time when the preacher is going to be talking to the saints, and so they feel good about that. And so they don't come Sunday night when the evangelistic... You find how hard it is to get the unsaved, admitted unsaved people into the church on Sunday night. And you will recognize that in America today it is practically impossible to have contact with the unsaved over the pulpit.

I was talking with a Pastor from Hicksville, Dick – Richard Grove, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, the Baptist Church of Hicksville, Long Island, who has been working with the Open Air Campaigners, and he said, "In one service with the Open Air Campaigners on the street, I spoke to more unsaved than I have spoken to in one year in my church in Hicksville." Now God's

intention is for every Christian to be a missionary. Not necessarily out in the open air. Those that are called to this ministry. But there are those that are called to gossip the Gospel. Others are called to witness in your home, and in the place where they work, and so on. But God intended you to be a witness for Him.

Now “He gave...evangelists, and pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:11-12a). And if I find, as we pointed out in the past, our place there is this, the evangelist is the missionary, the church planter, and the pastor is the elder, the multiple elders. In this church there are ten men who are elders, and the same Word that’s applied to elder is the word for Pastor, and it is the word for overseer. Then there were some of the eldership worthy of double honor, that is, freed for the ministry of the Word and prayer, because theirs was the responsibility of teaching. He said to the elders, “Be not many teachers, for theirs is the greater condemnation” (Jam. 3:1). Don’t seek to be a teacher in that sense. But He said, “Recognize that He has given some to be teachers,” and this would be the place where I would find myself, and any other one who accepts the name of Pastor would be in somewhat similar place. But the work of the ministry, “He gave evangelists, and pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry.” And the work of the ministry were to be done by the saints that were brought into that place called the end, were perfected, or the place of maturity if you please. So it is my responsibility then among others to tell you the heritage that is yours in Christ, to instruct you concerning it, to exhort you concerning it. But when I’ve done that I recognize there is someone else that must do the teaching. And this is the Spirit of God.

I can say the word, but only He can give the insight, and the illumination that will enable you to understand this relationship with Him. And thus in I Corinthians 2 verse 9, we read, “...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man...” And this is all that I can deal with. I can show you through your eyes what is written in the page. I can speak to your ears and communicate the truth. I can try and by every means of illustration and application give insight to your mind. But He says, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart, the mind of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.” And if all that you have is what you hear you have not heard enough to meet the need. There is another that will be the teacher, that will show you the nature of this fellowship, who will take the words. O yes, it is imperative that they be written. It is imperative that they be spoken, that they be shared, and this is the fellowship of the teacher and the fellowship of you, of everyone incidentally. For when you have understood truth, then it is your responsibility to share that truth with someone who is in need of it. But there is still the ministry of the teacher; that is in conjunction with the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Some months ago I asked a group to buy the book, An Alarm to the Unconverted by Joseph Alleine, a magnificent treatise written by one of the great Puritans. And we studied it on Sunday nights for some period of time. And only few months ago did someone come to me and say, “I see. I see now. Why it is just beginning to dawn on me what Alleine was talking about.” Well hadn’t he heard? Hadn’t what Alleine written been clear? Yes. Hadn’t what I had said about it been clear? Reasonably. Well why were they waiting so long to see? Well you see it was a matter of insight, and insight had not come from eyes and ears. By the same token, a few years ago we pressed upon the congregation the book, The Normal Christian Life, by Watchman Nee. And just within weeks someone said, You know, I read that book once because you said it was good. I didn’t think it was so good. And then I read it again, because I thought there was something in it that I remembered that I kind of needed. But just within weeks, just within days, have I seen what he is talking about. And now it has just changed everything. This is the work of the Spirit of God. Only He can do this. And I can’t. I give you the Book and try to tell you what it means, but only He can show you.

Now do you recognize that it is essential, it is absolutely indispensable then that this fellowship be on the basis not of what I say, however that is true and however necessary that truth may be, because then you are having fellowship in a teacher. You are having fellowship in a teacher’s explanation, and a teacher’s ideas, and this is quite easy. But John didn’t say that the fellowship was with him alone. He says, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that we may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (I Joh. 1:3). It is therefore incumbent upon you, if you want to have part in such fellowship that you ask the proper one to instruct you in it.

Here, for instance, is a choice. On the one hand is a Seminary professor, wise, scholarly, devout, and earnest. He has studied well and much. He can parse every verb in the Greek, and He can decline every noun in the Hebrew. And He is unquestionable an authority, and devout as well, and he knows the Lord. And he has written wisely and profitably. But you know, all he has is what he has gotten just by eye and ear, and a dedicated mind. Now that's good, and meets a need. But have you ever had a heart need that could not be met by a Greek verb? Have you? Have you ever had a hunger and a burden in your heart that just did not seem to be satisfied by a Hebrew noun? And you needed to know the Lord?

Now if you want to have fellowship with verbs and nouns, go to him. But here is something that just doesn't seem to be met by a verb or a noun. He can tell you the tense, but it is — you are too tense to enjoy its tenses any longer. There is just too much problem in this for you to submit to it. Well on the other hand there is Auntie down in Georgia, lives on a side street. Little never paved it. No. Just, just, that is all, just a sand street in Georgia. And all the other houses are [Tape jumps] unpainted, and hers is painted, and she has got a picket fence, and vines growing by the gate. You know, if I have got a hunger, and a burden, and it is a choice between the seminary professor friend, and Auntie, do you know where I am going to go? I have told you, haven't I? I am going to go down and swing that little picket fence, and go up and sit down on the porch, as she is usually seen there, with her Bible in her lap, and a great big glass in her hand, and she has one tooth in the front and keeps rolling her tongue around it. Don't know where the others are gone, but one is left. Proved she had them. And she sits there with that one tooth, and with the glass. Oh, she can read, but just the Bible. She said, The Lord taught her, and she isn't going to waste His gift with anything less than His Book, and so she just sounds it out, syllable by syllable. And when she gets enough so that she can chew on it, a word or two words, and a clause, or a verse, and she will sit back and fold her hands and say, O Lord Jesus, you know I'm just a poor old ignorant woman, and I haven't had no learnin' or education and I don't know what that means, and would You teach me. And then He takes that verse, and He ties it in with this verse, and He takes those two and He ties it in here, and He takes those three, and ties it in there. And pretty soon she says, Well bless the Lord, I see. I see. Because something has come to life in her heart. Now I'll go and sit down as I say on the porch and put my head against the post, and look up into her face and say, Auntie, what's Jesus been saying that will meet the need of a hungry heart? And she is going to take Bread that is fresh out of the oven of God's grace, and share it with me. Because you see she has a Teacher, and the Teacher is the Spirit of God, the same Teacher you can have. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the mind of men the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him; but God hath revealed it unto us by His Spirit." By His Spirit.

And the Spirit of God is going to be the Teacher of the saints in the things of God. Now if my professor with all of his Greek verbs and his Hebrew nouns will rock back in his chair and close his eyes, and say, Lord, I thank You that You have given me these tools, but now teach me what it means. I will get far more from him than I will from her. But if he is just going to give me what he has gleaned, and she is going to give me what He has breathed, I need that which has in it the breath of life. Do you see?

And so it is with you. It isn't just what you hear over the pulpit. It is what you do with what you hear. If something is stated about a privilege of a Christian, a privilege you haven't enjoyed, and you say, Well, well. I wonder when God is going to hit me with that? Well, my friend, He isn't. You say, Well I'll just listen and agree, and maybe sometime God will get good hearted, and He'll just hit me with a bolt of lightning and He'll bring this to me, and He won't. He won't, because the Scripture says, "Give attendance to reading," "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," and then it says, "Meditate in these things" (I Tim. 4:13; II Tim. 2:15; I Tim. 4:15). And meditation is the rumination of truth that is taking it out of your memory, and chewing it over and thinking about it, and finally the Spirit of God can dissolve it down to the place that He can join this to that, and those to the other, until there is something that will feed your heart. You don't go to the kitchen, and take, and eat — the recipe says, a half a cup of flour. So you sit there and spoon up. And then it says, half a cup of butter. You don't eat that way. You put them together, until there is something come out of it that is palatable and digestible, and it meets your need. And all that is there. And so it is that you have the truth tied together, and blended together, and put together, until it becomes a palatable, digestible truth, that He builds into your Christian life and experience. And then you go and say, This is what the Lord has done. This is what the Lord.

I can give you outlines. I can give you definition. But you see only God can quicken outlines and definitions, until they become part and parcel of your experience, and your fellowship is with Him, and not with me. How easy it is to set up a formula. I have been criticized, because they have said, You talk about a life in Christ, but you have not showed us how to get in. I have showed them how to get in, haven't gotten in for them, that it all. You have to go alone. It is like saying, Now there is the tunnel, and at the other end is the Lord. And if you go through that dark tunnel on your hands and knees He will meet you, and when you... And then someone says, No, I want to meet Him here. Well, I am sorry. I told you where the tunnel is. I cannot go through it for you. Bend through, but I cannot go through, you see. You've got to go through, and when you come out there is a smile on your face, and a light in your eye. And someone says, Wasn't the Lord wonderful to so and so. He was. But wasn't she wonderful to the Lord. She took His truth, and believed Him when He meant what He said it, and sought Him with a whole heart, and an open mind, and gave Him thanks for what He was going to do, but before He had done it and rested and rejoiced and received from Him that which the Spirit of God had shown here was her birthright in Christ. And this is the privilege of the children of God.

So now there is something there. You have had fellowship with Him. It isn't just fellowship about Him. It is fellowship with Him. And this is what we must see, that this is a fellowship not only on the basis of what the Word says about God, but it is fellowship with God. This is union with Him, vital, constant experiential union with the Lord. And you are to be conducted into this union by teachers who explain to you as best they are able with mere words, which they have arbitrarily added to their vocabulary; and are equally arbitrarily using. Every word can be debated. It might be a better one can be employed, and so it is also an arbitrary matter as to whether you understand what the speaker meant to convey with the word. Words are a very, very poor way to communicate. We ought to develop something absolute like numerical symbols, you see. If we could just talk in algebra it would be wonderful. So then there would be no question as to what we meant. But as it is, we have to talk in words, which have definitions and areas instead of points of meaning. And the consequence of this is that many times there isn't communication.

But oh it is marvelous, just wonderful to find someone that has made his way through the fog of semantics and met the Lord, and comes out with a glow of Heaven. And you may say, he may talk about it entirely differently, and may not be able to express it the same way, but there is something that has happened. And this becomes instantaneous. This becomes an immediate arrival in a place and point of fellowship if you have met Him.

Has this happened to you? Is God making truth real in your life and your experience? Well, someone may say, Well I haven't, there is something that I haven't seen yet, that I haven't experience yet. Well that may be true. And obviously it is for all of us. But one thing I want to caution you, dear heart. Don't you ever neglect what God has done in anticipation of what God is going to do. If God has spoken to you heart one little, tiny, bit of truth that He has quickened, "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Mat. 5:12). Don't you pass that off, and don't you minimize it, because that is like the first step up the stairs, and if you neglect something you don't know, but what that something is essential to something further on. And so you should be so grateful to the Lord. Has He spoken to your heart? Do you know with that inner knowing you have passed from death to life? Oh, how grateful you should be. Has God shown you something? Whatever the Lord has shown you, let this be treasured by you. Whatever God has said, let this be held by you. Oh, do not, do not in anticipation of something that seems more wonderful tomorrow, neglect or forget what God did yesterday. It will paralyze your relationship with Him, because if it was important enough for Him to do yesterday, it is important enough for you to appreciate today. And it will become the foundation on which you are going to step further into Himself.

Now we see three things. First, the Word tells us what is ours. And the Holy Spirit tells us how what is ours is to become ours, but the matter then becomes your responsibility to lay hold of truth, to take it, treasure it, to love it, to meditate upon it. And realize that truth is not an end in itself, but it is but an unfolding of Him. The end of your desiring is not an experience, but a relationship with Him. And He wants you to want Him for Himself, not for some gift, not for some other means. I think we have made a mistake, I am sure I have, many of them; but one, particularly one I have tried to exhort people to understand that this relationship with God, called the fullness of God in Ephesians 3, is the relationship that was experiences by Finney, and Moody, and you see we are sort of getting endorsers to the Word of God when we talk that way, but unconsciously we are sort of saying to people, If you have what we are talking about, you'll become like Finney and Moody. And that isn't so at all. When

you have everything God intends Himself to be to you, do you know what you are going to be? You are just going to be you in the right relationship with God. You won't be a Finney, or a Moody. You will just be you. That's all. You'll just be the you that God intended you to be, the you that by His grace you can be, the you that you ought to be. You are going to be you, in a full, wonderful fellowship with God. You may still have the same job. The people next to you won't notice that anything has happened, but you will know. There will be joy and peace in His Presence. It isn't going to mean that you are going to have a halo on your head and a light on your face and people will have to turn away when they see you, as they did in the case of Moses, but it is just going to be that you are going to be what He wants you. You see? We've got to understand that God has things that are important to Him too. And we must deal with this matter of using God as an end to some other means, to some other end. He must be desired for Himself. That fellowship of which John speaks is fellowship with the Father, not for the sake of John, or the sake of the people to whom he writes, but it is for the sake of the Father as well. Maybe the Father wants you to know Him in His fullness, because there is going to be arising from the altar of your heart an incense of worship that will satisfy Him and glorify Him, and not a soul anywhere around is going to smell the fragrance. But after all this is between you and the Lord, and if He is satisfied, that ought to satisfy you. That ought to be enough for you. And the idea that God is going to have to give you some evidence that He is satisfied with you so that others will become satisfied with you so that's impossible. He sent His Son who had the fullness of the Spirit of God without measure, and miracles without number, and do you know what they said about Him? Beelzebub. Do not think for a moment that your unsaved neighbor, your unsaved friends would believe if there were something done. You say, Well if we could just see this dead person raised, or if we could just see this blind person with eyes open, if we could just see this, and so and so. That wasn't so when the Lord was here. They crucified Him in the midst of those that were the living testimony of His power.

No, God is going to fill you with Himself, not for any bi-product, but just so that He is satisfied with you, and you are satisfied with Him. That ought to satisfy you. That ought to be enough. And you ought to recognize that God has something that is very precious. You see He is love, and He has loved you from eternity past, and when there wasn't anything lovely about any of us He loved us. Isn't that wonderful? He loved you when He knew the very worst there ever is to know about you, about me. And then He died out of longing for you. He died out of love for you. And now that you have heard of His death, He loves to be longed for, and He wants to be wanted, and He waits to be sought. Oh, what I am trying to press upon your heart is that you seek God for Himself and not any byproducts, that He becomes the glorious end of your being, and not some means. And this is going to do so much to help you in your relationship with Him when you understand that, that your fellowship is with the Father, not so that anybody else will know about it, but so that He will know about it, and He will be satisfied.

Isn't it strange after Pentecost you only find four or five people mentioned in the New Testament. Someone says that after Pentecost everyone was like Peter. There was only one Peter in the group. You never hear of Mary, the mother of our Lord. She was filled with the Holy Ghost, but you never hear of her preaching, you never hear of any...120 people, and we only hear of four or five of them. You see, they did what He wanted them to do, but He gave evidence by this that everyone that satisfies Him is not going to satisfy the populace. And you ought to long for the Lord, not for any other thing than just what He wants in you. And so fellowship with the Father, on the basis of the Word, taught by the Spirit, sought by you, for no other end than that He becomes satisfied with you and see in you of the travail of His soul, and He be satisfied. Then, having fellowship with Him, there's the grounds now for fellowship with others in Him, and with Him.

You can have fellowship now in your hunger. There are many here that are in that state, And you can have fellowship in what He has done for you. Fellowship in going on, year after year an enlarging expanding relationship with the living God. Hear it again, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Let this be true of us.

Shall we bow in prayer. Our Father, should there be those among us this morning who do not know Him whom to know is life eternal, might this be the day when, throwing down the arms of warfare, with which they have been in battle against Thee the Living God, they sue for peace, at the nail pierced feet of Thy Son surrender all they are and have to Him, and receive Him as Savior and Lord. Grant Father, that Thy children that know that they have been born of Thee shall also know that there are "rich blessings Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee," with all their heart shall seek Thee, not just to have for themselves, but that if it was important enough to Thee to provide, then there must be something in it not only for us, but for

Thee, and for Thy sake to want all that Thou hast intended and provided. Grant our Father that as a people we shall understand that the true fellowship that we seek is fellowship that is first with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Lead us on, therefore, Let the instruction and the exhortation of the morning be remembered and become profitable to the hearts of They people, and early bring us into all Thou hast for us, because we ask it in the Name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. "Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

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