

The First Epistle of John: Helping Us Know For Sure

by Bryan Gibson

Here's your challenge for the upcoming week: read 1 John. You'll be glad you did, especially if you read it enough to at least get the main ideas.

You won't have to read long to see that fellowship with God is one of the major themes: "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1:3). Fellowship with the Father and the Son—that's what we all desire and this book has a lot to say about it, and not always with the word fellowship. The thought or concept of fellowship is also seen in phrases like "knowing Him"; "abiding in Him"; being "of the truth"; being "of God"; "abiding in Him and Him in us"; etc.

How can we know that we have fellowship with God? How can we know that He hears and answers our prayers? (3:22; 5:14-15). How can we be confident in the day of judgment (2:28), and know that we will receive eternal life (5:13)? These are extremely important questions and 1 John has the answers.

According to 1 John, there are three ways we can know—three conditions of fellowship.

(1) If we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (see 2:18-28; 4:1-6). There were those who were trying to convince these brethren otherwise (2:26), and so this epistle was written to offer them further assurance that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God (5:13). There are certain religions who maintain that you can have fellowship with the Father without believing that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John clearly teaches otherwise (2:22-23; 4:14-15; 5:9-11).

(2) If we love God for what He has done for us through Jesus, and if we show that same love to others (see 2:7-11; 3:13-24; 4:7-5:5). In believing that Jesus is the Christ, and that He did lay down His life for our sins, we not only have the motive for love, but also the model. This self-sacrificing love is the very kind that we should show to others (see especially 3:16-18). We cannot claim to be in fellowship with God if we do not love as we should. "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (4:8). "...he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (4:16).

(3) If we walk in the light, or as it's described in other passages—keep His commandments (2:3-4; 3:22, 24; 5:2-3); practice righteousness (2:29; 3:7, 10); keep His word (2:5); do the will of God (2:17), do those things that are pleasing in His sight (3:22); walk as He walked (2:6). This one doesn't get as much attention as the first two, but it's emphasized just as much. "Now by this we know that we know Him (have fellowship with Him—BG), if we keep His commandments" (2:3). One of the purposes for writing this letter was "that you may not sin" (2:1). Those who are content to walk in sin are not in fellowship with God; they are children of the devil (3:7-10).

Are you in fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ? Do you know for sure?