

# Living in ***Koinonia*** with God

1 John 1:1-2:6

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Pastor Jim Rademaker

Susan grew up in the church. If you were to ask her, "Are you a Christian?", she would say "yes". She reads her bible and says her prayers. She believes in Jesus. But that's mostly on Sundays. Even though God is important to her, the rest of her week she pretty much does her thing and lives like everybody around her. She fits in well and pretty much follows the norms of her culture.

How about you? Are you a Christian? A follower of Jesus? Do you have fellowship with God? How do you know? Like Susan, if asked whether you believed in Jesus, you'd say "yes". But what does that *mean*? Is there any correlation between what you *say you believe* and how you *live*?

When John wrote his letter, Christianity had been around for decades already. And in many parts of the Roman Empire, like here in the U.S., it had become an important religion and a powerful influence. Naturally, like in our day, all sorts of efforts were made to *combine* the Gospel with prevailing philosophies and systems of thought.

One such effort was the blending of Christianity and the philosophy known as **Gnosticism**, which comes from the Greek work "gnosis", meaning "knowledge". The form of Gnosticism that was troubling and disrupting the churches in John's day taught that human nature consists of two separate, irreconcilable entities: body and spirit.

Sin resides in the body (or "flesh") only. The human spirit occupied itself with the things of God, while at the same time, the body could do as it pleased. Whatever we do with our bodies, doesn't really matter. It's not that important to God. What *really* matters is our "spirit". It transcends the ordinary, everyday, mundane things of the body, to a higher, spiritual realm by acquiring knowledge that puts us in tune with God.

The physical isn't that important. What you do with your body doesn't really matter. It's the spiritual that counts. Thus, a lofty, elevated, mental, mystical piety or devotion, was entirely consistent, with a self-centered, please-seeking, sensual lifestyle. Indulging in any pleasure the heart desired! (from Halley's Bible Handbook)

Sounds so *American*, doesn't it? Today, we might put it in terms of being "*spiritual*, but not *religious*", which can mean a lot of different things. A writer from *Psychology Today* puts it this way, "Perhaps the most common basis of modern spirituality is just a mystical sense that the universe is somehow meaningful ... benign gods such as the Christian Father appealingly offer a being looking out for us in the face of everyday difficulties such as disappointment, disease, disaster, and death." (*Spiritual but Not Religious* - Paul Thagar 10-28-16)

Human nature consists of two separate, entities: body and spirit. The everyday and ordinary life, and the higher, extra-ordinary, spiritual life. How you live in the body doesn't really matter. Do what you want. The important thing is striving for an experience that brings you closer to God. A total divorce between the higher life and the lower life. Between what you *believe* and the way you *live*.

How does the Apostle John address such an understanding that was troubling and disrupting churches, both in his day and in ours? *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have koinonia* (Greek for "fellowship") *with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

How about you? Are you a Christian? A follower of Jesus? Do you have fellowship with God? How do you know? What's the correlation between what you *say you believe* and how you *live*? If you think you're a Christian, but do whatever you want, whatever everybody *else* is doing, whatever *feels* good, you're lying to yourself.

We hear this all the time, for example, from couples living together or involved sexually, outside of marriage. I've asked couples what they think God thinks about what they're doing. They've even admitted they know it's wrong, but they're going to do it anyway. If that were you, would you consider yourself a Christian? A follower of Jesus, in koinonia/fellowship with Him and His body, the church? Knowing what you're doing is wrong, yet doing it anyway?

Or we know lying is wrong, but we're going to do it anyway. Or bearing false witness against our neighbor. Coveting. Stealing. Any of the commandments. We know it's wrong, but we're going to do it anyway. Intentionally. Purposefully. Continually.

If you think you're a Christian, but do whatever you want, are you really a Christian? A follower of Jesus? In **koinonia**/fellowship with God and His body on earth, the church?

"But Jesus died for me, and I believe that." As if our attitudes and actions are totally disconnected from the spiritual realm, from our koinonia/fellowship with God.

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? ... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* (James 2)

**1 John 2** And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever **says** "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him ... By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever **says** he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.

And how did Jesus walk? How did He live? Not doing whatever He wanted. Not believing one thing, but doing another. **Philippians 2** So if there is any encouragement in Christ ... any **koinonia** in the Spirit ... complete my joy by being of the same mind ... Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who ... emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ... [humbling] himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Who said, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

Gnostics, like Cerinthus in John's day, taught that physical matter was evil, that you had to *ascend* from the *material* to the *spiritual*. And this secret "knowledge" made you "super-spiritual," advanced and superior, and really without sin.

Like so many others, Cerinthus had a problem with God being man. How could God, come in the flesh? How could God, suffer, and die, and rise from the dead? This didn't make sense to Cerinthus. And so, like others, he tried to explain it away.

He taught that the man Jesus was not really God. That he was just a man, born the ordinary way - but a really good man. At his baptism, the *spirit* of the Christ, came upon this man Jesus, and thus he was able to do miracles and teach about God and so on. But the Christ-spirit left Jesus, before he suffered and died, since of course God cannot suffer and die. Denying the deity of Jesus, Cerinthus claimed for himself inner mystic experiences, and an exalted knowledge of God. But his life, his walk, centered around the gratification of sensual desires. (Charles Henrickson)

John's response? *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have **fellowship** with us; and indeed our **fellowship** is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

Joy that are sins are really forgiven! Joy that we have koinonia/fellowship/communion with God once again. How? First John is all about a real crucified-and-risen, flesh-and-blood Savior for real flesh-and-blood sinners. It's not about *us* ascending from the physical to the spiritual. It's about the *spiritual* - namely, the divine, heavenly Son of God - *descending* to us and taking on our physical flesh and suffering and dying and shedding his blood for us. This is how we are saved. It's not by us, "super-spiritual" ones, attaining to some *higher* level of *secret* knowledge. It's by the blood of Jesus, cleansing us from our sins. (Henrickson)

*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we **walk/live** in the light, as He is in the light, we have koinonia/fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we **deceive** ourselves [we're lying to ourselves], and the truth is not in us.*

**1 John 3** No one **born** of God makes a **practice** of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot **keep on** sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Walking with God doesn't mean that we're without sin. We've sinned in the past, and we still have sin in our nature. None of us will ever keep all God's commandments perfectly, from the heart. It's not because we're sinless

that we have fellowship, a relationship, with God, but because of Christ's death for our sin. As one person put it, "The saintliest of men invariably have been most deeply conscious of their own sinfulness." (Halley)

Love, and the Church as a family, in fellowship with God and one another, are dominating themes of John's letters. He warns against those who would **divide** the Christian family from fellowship with the heavenly Father and His beloved Son. Many, were being tempted to walk away from Jesus.

You know the temptations. We face them every day. To follow the crowd, instead of Jesus. To follow our own desires, instead of God's desires. To do what we want to do, instead of what God wants us to do. To do our will, instead of His. To love ourselves, instead of loving God and others. To be served, instead of to serve.

**1 John 2** *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation [payment] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

*If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and just to **forgive** us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.*

As we say when partaking of the Lord's Supper, *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion (koinonia/fellowship) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a koinonia in the body of Christ?* (1 Corinthians 10:16)

From Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, April 27 ...

"Are you seeking great things for yourself, instead of seeking to be a great person? God wants you to be in a much closer relationship with Himself than simply receiving His gifts - He wants you to get to know Him.

... If you have only come as far as asking God for things, you have never come to the point of understanding the least bit of what surrender really means. You have become a Christian based on your own terms. You protest, saying, "I asked God for the Holy Spirit, but He didn't give me the rest and the peace I expected." And instantly God puts His finger on the reason - you are not seeking the Lord at all; you are seeking something for yourself.

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you..." (Matthew 7:7). Ask God for what you want and do not be concerned about asking for the wrong thing, because as you draw ever closer to Him, you will cease asking for things altogether. "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). Then why should you ask? So that you may get to know Him.

Living in *koinonia* with God. *Believing* in God the Son, come in the flesh to save you ... and *following* Him all week long. Living as He lived. Living in *confession* of sin and faith in the One who was from the beginning, who came down in the flesh, whom John heard, and saw, and touched. The Word of Life! Having koinonia/fellowship with the Father and the Son and one another. That our joy would be complete!

Relationship! That's what it's all about. Family. Eternal fellowship with God the Father and with one another as His dear children. All made possible, not by us *ascending* up to God, but God *descending*, coming down for us.