

## **Living the Fellowship of Joy: Reflections on 1 John**

### **Introduction**

I want to express thanks to J. D. for wrapping up the final verses of our study in 1 John last Sunday. After devoting 19 Sunday mornings to this important epistle, it is fitting for us to ask ourselves what we should do with what we've learned.

The theme of our study in 1 John has been, "That You May Know." It was the aged apostle's strategic response to the antichrist teachings already making inroads in the first-century church. Arrogant false teachers were claiming a higher knowledge that called for modifying the gospel from what Christ and His apostles taught.

Varieties of falsehood have swirled through the centuries that followed, but their pattern is much the same. Vaunted claims to have a better perspective on truth, diminishing of Scriptural authority, modification of the gospel message to suit whatever is passing for superior insight, catering to the appetites and philosophies of the times—these are clear and present dangers to this very day. Genuine Christians must be able to discern the errors and hold fast to the gospel truth.

So after 19 messages, we might well say, "Okay, we know. But what now? What difference should it make for us?" In this 20<sup>th</sup> message on 1 John we want to answer that "so what" question.

John gives many reasons for writing this epistle. "That you may know" shows up over and over again. But at the beginning he gives the reason he wants us to know.

1 John 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

The apostles' proclamation of the gospel was firsthand eyewitness testimony to the real, historical Jesus—who He is and what He did. Trusting the gospel they proclaimed brings a person into fellowship with the apostles and with God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Fellowship—to share, to have in common  
The fellowship of proclaiming and receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ makes our joy complete. "Our" refers not only to the joy of the apostles but to the joy of the entire Christian community, both those proclaiming

the gospel and those receiving it. We enjoy it together.

Hence the title for this morning. Living the Fellowship of Joy: Reflections on 1 John. This is the “so what” or the “what now” of what we’ve learned on our journey through this epistle.

As we travel on from here, let us be—

Living the Fellowship of Joy

1. The Joy of Certainty
2. The Joy of Forgiveness
3. The Joy of Divine Life
4. The Joy of Abiding
5. The Joy of Loyal Obedience
6. The Joy of Love
7. The Joy of Confidence

### **1. The Joy of Certainty**

Knowing for sure that the gospel is true

John starts with this theme. It is foundational. Everything depends on it.

1 John 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> 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— <sup>2</sup> 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.

The firsthand, eyewitness experiences of the apostles and their contemporaries verify the historical reality of Jesus Christ and the good news He came to bring us.

John reiterates the gospel's historicity and reliability toward the end of the epistle.

1 John 5:6-13

<sup>6</sup> This is he who came by water and blood— Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

<sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. <sup>9</sup> If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. <sup>10</sup> Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

## Testimony → Faith → Eternal Life

To say you can't know (agnosticism) requires ignoring or rejecting God's testimony. *In a postmodern world, it may sound humble and even wise to say you can't know, but given the testimony of God the Father, Son, and Spirit, along with that of the prophets and apostles, it amounts to calling God a liar.* It is not humble. It is arrogant and dismissive. It is not wise. It is foolish and rebellious.

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

True, true, true! God never lies. We can know for sure the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. We have eternal life through Him. Period.

As human beings it is natural for us to wrestle with doubt. Our feelings are fickle as the wind—so many sorrows, so many foiled plans, so many disappointments. Our experiences in a broken world can easily taint our faith. Get your firm footing on the bedrock of reliable, historical gospel testimony. Build on it. Don't change the foundation.

## **2. The Joy of Forgiveness**

Freedom from sin's guilt and stain

John's teaching on sin is not simplistic. It is realistic and nuanced. False teachers minimize the significance of sin. John does not. It is huge. Death-dealing. God-defying. Satan glorifying. Other false teachers teach that they were free from sin. John makes clear that sin plagues every one of us. He underscores that everyone of us has actively sinned. And he declares the only way to be forgiven and cleansed so that we can live righteously by the power of God.

1 John 1:8-10

<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 2:1-2

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus Christ is perfectly righteous, so His death on the cross for our sin was not to pay for His own sins, but for ours. His shed blood satisfied the righteous wrath of God—that's propitiation. And to this day He advocates for us before the Father. He is our mediator, our great high priest, as Hebrews taught us.

Further, every person in every place and in every time who trusts in Jesus receives this release from sin's guilt and power. No substitute will do, no so-called higher knowledge or mystical experience. Only Jesus. That's why we have good news to spread to every ethnicity in the whole wide world.

Jesus has accomplished this for you. It is not your doing, your earnestness, your using the right words, like waving a wand over your sin and saying "hocus, pocus" to make it vanish. You must take God's word on it. His promises. His faithfulness. Forgiven! Cleansed! No condemnation. You can't do this for yourself.

A person convicted of a crime can do a prison sentence to "pay his debt to society." But he can't pay enough to free his conscience of his sin debt. Only Jesus can do that. He has paid our sin debt in full. He has cleared our guilt completely—both objective and subjective.

### **3. The Joy of Divine Life**

## Children born of God

1 John 3:1-2

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:10

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.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

By work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit our faith in Christ, deeds of righteousness, and love for God and for our brothers and sisters in Christ mark us as having been born of God. We are His children—His born ones. His spiritual DNA



courses through us, and our lives display the transformation He has brought to our souls.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in  
John 3:3

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

We can sing, "I'm no longer a slave of sin. I am a child of God."

Revel in your family connection to God and His people. View all of life as one who is a child of God. Don't live your life as an orphan!

#### **4. The Joy of Abiding**

Abiding in God and God's abiding in you

1 John 2:24-27

<sup>24</sup> Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. <sup>26</sup> I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. <sup>27</sup> But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

## 1 John 3:24

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

## 1 John 4:13-15

**13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

There is an indissoluble link between our faith in God the Son, the Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit's abiding in us. Those who truly believe in Jesus and the Divine Savior sent by God the Father into the world are anointed with the Spirit of God and are thus empowered to keep God's commandments.

What John is teaching us about faith and living builds upon what Jesus taught.

## John 15:4-5

**4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he is

that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The anointing and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the means by which we abide in God and He in us. The fruitfulness of our lives comes from our abiding in Him and He in us. That's why Paul calls it the fruit of the Spirit.

We tend toward trying to fix our lives by adding this or subtracting that. God says, "Draw close to Me. Abide in Me and I in you. Then you will be motivated and empowered to live godly lives." *Godly living flows from closeness to God. It's living out who you really are because of your living connection to God Himself.*

Consistent with all of Scripture.

Unrighteousness comes from ungodliness (Romans 1:18ff). My sin problem is rooted in a worship problem. Get right with God. Get close to God. Let Him cleanse you and give you life. Treasure Him. Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Worship and adore Him. When you do, your love for sinning dies, and your love for doing right grows strong.

On a day-to-day basis, in what ways are you making staying close to God your highest priority? Apart from Him you can do nothing.

## **5. The Joy of Loyal Obedience**

Walking in the light, keeping His Word/commands, practicing righteousness, purifying oneself

1 John 2:3-6

<sup>3</sup> And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

<sup>4</sup> Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3:4-10

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.

Knowing God and being born of God, trusting in Jesus Christ the Savior from sin and Satan—these spiritual traits spawn righteous living. Or as John phrases it—“walking in the light, keeping His Word/commands, practicing righteousness, purifying oneself.” It is our joy to live this way. It’s our pleasure, our happiness to do so.

*We have come to realize that sinning brings guilt, shame, sorrow, and pain. Only a fool would want to fill his or her life with such suffering. Instead, we want to experience all the joy we can attain by living life as God designed it to be lived.*

J. D. Crowley: “Christians don’t sin.” Present tense. Family rule of pattern, the way we do things. For example, “In our family we tell the truth.”

Fools treat sin lightly. Believers engage in holy war against it. Not so much the sins of others—everybody naturally does that. Their own sin.

We've received forgiveness and freedom from our sin. Why would we ever go back to slavery again?

## **6. The Joy of Love**

Loved by God, loving God, and loving His children

This naturally follows, because love fulfills the law. The commandments express love for God and love for others. Therefore love fulfills the law.

1 John 3:16-18

**16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **17** But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 4:16, 19-21

**16** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

**19** We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this

commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4:7-12

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Hatred is self-centered. Love is self-sacrificing. Love makes us happy to sacrifice for God and for others. It expresses that God's very life abides in us. It is intensely practical. And it is the hallmark of those who truly belong to God.

If love fulfills the law, then hatred is the essence of sin. Self-centered hatred for God and for others mars this world. It twists us and harms others. It is the polar opposite of joy.

Somehow human beings instinctively know this. *Nothing is more attractive to us than to love and to be loved. What so many fail to realize is that God Himself is love, and when we turn from Him we lose love, the very treasure for which our hearts were made.*

Love for a person makes whatever you sacrifice for him/her a joy. Love gives. Love is a joy to receive, and love is a joy to give. In what ways can you show love to those around you in the coming days?

## **7. The Joy of Confidence**

Confidence in the judgment (future) and in prayer (present)

1 John 2:28

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

1 John 3:19-22

<sup>19</sup> By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.



## 1 John 4:17-18

**17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

**18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

## 1 John 5:14-15

**14** And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

God's love reaches its intended goal when it flows out through our lives in practical ways—that's what love perfected is. And when love flows from us this way, we have all the confirmation we need that we truly belong to God, that His eternal life is in us, and that we have no condemnation to dread. There is no longer fear of divine judgment. We know we are safe.

And in that relationship of safety with the God who knows us better than anyone else and loves us more than anyone else, we have bold confidence to bring Him our requests. We

have the joy of praying not only for our own needs, but for the needs of others.

*Even as God chooses to use our proclamation of the gospel to bring the gift of life to others, He uses our prayers to do the same thing. The power is His, but the privilege is ours. We receive whatever we pray that conforms to His will. Only a fool what want what does not match His purpose and will. We become His instruments of light in a world of darkness. Servants of the Savior to rescue servants of the devil.*

There is inexpressible comfort in being safe with a person—infinately so when that Person is God, your Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.

If you are in Christ, you will never know the horror of hearing Jesus say, "Depart from me, I never knew you, you worker of lawlessness."

And in all the afflictions and aspirations of this life you are not alone. Call on Him, and He will answer you.

## **Conclusion**

Live the Fellowship of Joy!

1. The Joy of Certainty
2. The Joy of Forgiveness

3. The Joy of Divine Life
4. The Joy of Loyal Obedience
5. The Joy of Abiding
6. The Joy of Love
7. The Joy of Confidence

Closing Song: Ancient of Days

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Does John's stated purpose in writing what he does in this epistle—"that our joy may be complete"—seem audacious, even too good to be true? Why or why not?
2. Why is knowing for sure that the historical facts of the gospel testimony are true and reliable absolutely necessary to everything the gospel of Jesus Christ promises us?
3. Given the firsthand testimony given to who Jesus is and what Jesus did, what is the difference between "blind faith" (like a leap in the dark) and real Christian faith?
4. Why is complete forgiveness and cleansing from our sin and its guilt critical to experiencing joy?
5. What are some advantages of being a born-again child of God that can bring joy to your daily journey of life with all its ups and downs?
6. Why is God's abiding in you and your abiding in God vital to joy, and what are

some ways you nurture closeness to God through your day?

7. Given that all the things we suffer in this world trace back to humanity's fall into sin, why would walking in the light or practicing righteousness instead of sinning be crucial to our joy in living?
8. What are some reasons both receiving and expressing love bring such pleasure to the human heart?
9. Why would fearfulness of the final judgment or lack of access in prayer to God disrupt our joy?
10. Who made it possible for us to be confident regarding God's judgment and bold in our prayers to Him and how did He do it?