

## Guarding the Fellowship.

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:1

John 15:1-17

Hebrews 10:19-31

Last week we finished up chapter 1 and started up chapter 2, this week we will continue on here in chapter 2 but I think we need to back track a little bit to get the full gist of the later half of this chapter. John's writings here are of the cyclical nature so as we go through we will be having some overlap, and some repeat of themes, and teachings.

So when we last were here, we talked about fellowship in Christ, and fellowship within the Christian community. John warned us to be careful who we have fellowship with, and to test to be sure that not only is our fellowship seasoned with Christ's love toward each other, but to also be weary of those who maybe unbelievers within the fellowship.

Just as we have seen in the writing of Paul, and the book of James we recently finished that this is actually an important issue to deal with because we need to test, to be weary, to be sure that there are not false teachers, or people who would lead those in the congregation astray like what we see here in John with the Gnostics, and what we saw in Galatians with the Judaizers who were trying to bring the Christian Gentiles under the Mosaic Law.

This idea of guarding the fellowship, or the church from false teachers, deceivers, and trouble makers is something that we see throughout the new testament. This is a concern of John, as it was of other New Testament authors when writing to the churches. It is interesting if we think about it, this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> book that we have started in this past year, and each one by different authors have dealt with some variation of false teaching.

As mentioned, Paul was dealing with a group of people who had come into the assembly in Galatia and was bringing in with them law, and Jewish traditions. Teaching that if you truly wanted to be a part of the family of God you needed to become one of God's people by becoming circumcised, and following the Mosaic laws, and Jewish Traditions. Reversely we saw in James a group of people who took a radical form of the free grace that Paul taught in his ministry and said that how you live doesn't matter because you have saved by grace. Sin does not matter because it has been covered and you have been forgiven anyway, or what we see here in John, that you can through knowledge and study transcend the flesh, and reach a point of sinless perfection through knowledge and spirituality.

James's entire argument was that it did matter what you do, when he said in chapter 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? Then he went on to give the example of someone in need of food, and the brother saying, go be warm, be filled, but does not give him any food what does that profit? Then he goes on to say, faith by itself, without works is dead. It is false, it is not true. Your actions, what you do matters. It does not save you, but it is merely the outward showing of the inward work of Christ in your life.

Paul taught heavily salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, by the free grace of God and that nothing you could do could merit that grace, nor are we capable of building up enough faith within ourselves to be saved. It took God adopting you as a child, and his only Son paying that price. There really is no difference between the teachings of Paul, James, or John.

And here now we see John dealing with another form of false teachers, And just as we saw in the other 2 books that we went through last year, he warns us about people with false faith within the fellowship, or assembly of believers.

So here we see starting out in Chapter 2 John addresses his readers as my little children. We can see John's affection toward these people, He is concerned for them, and desires them to stay on the right path, to walk in the light and avoid darkness and false teaching. He says, I write to you that you may not sin. He had just said that anyone who says that do not sin is a liar and the truth is not in them. Here is writing so that his beloved children, the churches to whom he sent this letter so that they would avoid sin. Not that they would become sinless, but that they would actively, and aggressively avoid living a life in sin.

The fact that he was dealing with the what would become known as the gnostics, it makes sense that he would be concerned that these people would be sinning for they would have likely been caught up into the idea that sin in the flesh is of little consequence if you have knowledge and spirituality.

All of this really goes back again to being in fellowship with God, and with other believers. Richard Hays says "The distinguishing mark of the community is not so much sinlessness as the willingness to bring their sins to the light, to confess them, and receive forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, Then the church must be a community of those who know themselves to be forgiven sinners.

This is why the fellowship of the saints is so important. It is here that we can find support in this life as we may be suffering, or going through trials. Paul tells us in Galatians that we are to bear one another's burdens. That is exactly what we are called to do as a fellowship, as an assembly of believers. And this is exactly why it becomes so important as to who it is that we talk to about our sin, our struggles, our trials and temptations.

This is also exactly why Paul said that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as some do. Scripture instructs us that we are to exhort, rebuke, and edify each other. How can we do this if we are not in fellowship with each other. The idea that some say that are closer to God when we are skipping the assembly of believers to go fishing, or hunting, or what ever excuse may be used instead of in any organized religion is false. Christ likens the church to the body, to which he is the head. If a member of the body is missing, they are not contributing, they are forsaking the rest of the body. Our hearts should yearn for the fellowship of the saints gathering around the throne of Christ, worshiping and praising him. All of scripture instructs us to love one another as Christ loves us. We can't do this from the couch on Superbowl Sunday, or on our boat, or on the beach while the rest of the us here is gathered together in worship.

We Christians are not called to a life of solitude as some religions practice, but we are to be a community of believers, gathering together, serving each other, encouraging each other, and correcting each other when one falls into sin. This fellowship of the saints is extremely important in the life of a believer.

This Fellowship of the saints is not to be taken lightly, or taken for granted which is why it is so important to also guard it from false teachers. . This is the purpose that I believe membership rolls in the local assembly serve. Yes, It is a man made system, you won't find any records in the new testament of church membership rolls, it of course will not be flawless but it is a tool used to protect the fellowship from false teachers, deceivers, and those who seek to cause harm to the local flock. It is

setup as a hedge of protection around the flock to help to keep the wolves at bay.

Imagine going to one of the Judaizers in the book of Galatians in times of struggle, They would steer you toward the Old Covenant, and away from Christ's free grace. They would say the reason why you are struggling here is probably because you have yet to be circumcised, or maybe it was that bacon you had this morning, and while we are on this subject, you really should not have stopped by the store real quick on your way here breaking the Sabbath, that is why you are suffering!

Or there is the other side of the equation if you are struggling in temptation and seek help only to be answered by those we see in James, or even this letter from John, who would tell you not to worry about it because in the end you are God's child, and really there is nothing you can do, no sin you could commit that would change that. Once saved always saved, God will forgive you in the end.

This is why it is so important to guard ourselves against those who would deceive, or even maybe they are not actively deceivers trying to cause dissension, but rather they have been lead astray and are just saying what they heard from some else. This is why we must be careful, and guard the flock. This is why we must be in fellowship and gather together so that the body may grow, and be strengthened through the teaching, preaching, and worshiping of Christ.

Well, the recap of last week ended up being a little longer then I intended, but that's ok I think that it is an important issue that should be taught. Today there seem to be so many churches that are seeking to find ways to bring people in, and once they are there they try everything to get them to stay. They offer all these programs, special events, special speakers, or try to make church entertaining. When the reality is that they should be focusing on the proper teaching of scripture and the fellowship of the saints around the cross of Christ. The effect I think would be much smaller churches sure, but they would be vibrant, living bodies who come together to worship, to edify, and guard each other against the sins and temptations of this world. You would not have to entice congregants, to attend because those who truly love Christ, and love the brethren will be there.

So starting up here in verse 7, John says something rather confusing. Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again , a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

Ok John, which is it...an old commandment or a new commandment. It seems that most theologians believe that John was dealing with people who were claiming that he was adding to the teachings of Jesus. To simplify it a bit It could be understood this way. I am not writing to you anything new but rather it is the same thing you have heard before, the same teaching you heard from Christ himself. But then John gets confusing because in the following verse he says that he writes a new commandment.

If we actually look over real quick to 2<sup>nd</sup> John, verse 5 he says pretty much the same thing here, he says And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I write a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This goes back to the very teaching of Christ that John recorded in his Gospel, and is something we see echoed throughout all of scripture, even in the law as we read in Leviticus last week.

John 15 that we read this morning, verse 12. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. And again we see it in chapter 13 of the gospel of John, verse 34. Christ says, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

This new commandment of Jesus here in John 13, would actually have been an old commandment to the readers of 1<sup>st</sup> John, but it is this same new commandment that John is referring to here. John applies it in the following verses when he says, He who says he is in the light and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. but he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going, because darkness has blinded his eyes.

IF we walk in the light, we are walking in fellowship with Christ, John says in verse 6, He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. What we see here in these verse's is another one of John's tests that he puts forth to examine if we have true faith. This is John's test of Love. Do we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, if you do then you are walking in the light, if you do not then you are walking in darkness and the truth is not in you.

It is apparent that John is saying here that he who loves his brother won't stumble because they are walking in the spirit, they have their priorities straight, they are in the light, but a person who does not love his fellow Christian is lost and in trouble

Now this all comes around full circle, and goes back again as to why we should not forsake the fellowship of the saints, if we love the saints, if we love our brothers and sisters in Christ then we will gather together and worship together.

Lastly here, we will look at verse 12- 14.

There is not a whole lot to unpack here because it is pretty simple and straight forward. John is pausing here, after coming down rather hard on his readers about who is, and who is not walking in the light, he writes here to encourage, and to assure his readers. Through these verses, John is addressing all believers. He uses a rhetorical writing style here to indicate qualities that are in all stages of the life of a believer. He writes, to the children, to the young men, and to the fathers, covering 3 main stages of life

This is ought to be an encouragement to all of us, for he writes these things, warning his readers, testing his readers, but here we see he has confidence that what he has written will be accepted because If everything he set forth is true, then he is confident that, our sins have been forgiven, That we know the Father and we have overcome the wicked one, because we are strong, and the word of God abides in us.

Do not forsake the gather of believers, this is not a solo journey. God desires that his family gather, to journey through this life together, to aid, to guard, to encourage, and even sometimes rebuke if necessary. So today I leave you with these questions that John asks here....do you love the family of God? Truly, love, as Christ loves. Are you involved with a local gathering of believers, or do you only attend when it feels convenient, or maybe on big holidays like Christmas and Easter. Ask yourself, listen to what John says here...are you in the light, or are you in darkness.

If you find that you are in darkness, repent, turn from your self gratifying, selfish ways and seek Christ.