



3. A Fellowship that shows (1 John 2:7-17)

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. 9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Who is John writing to? We don't really know precisely but we are going to get introduced to some groups tonight. What we do know is the purpose for writing

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete.

It's a question of fellowship - to have fellowship with one another and to have fellowship with God. It's in two directions.

This is one of the reasons God has established the local church. You can't be a Christian alone... a person can not live the complete, developing and maturing life that God intends unless he is in fellowship with God's people.

The reason I say this as we come to our passage in chapter 2 is that John starts mentioning some people

- *dear children*
- *fathers*
- *young men*

Why are these people mentioned? Well, quite clearly they are the people John is writing to that he has or might have fellowship. By implication if he had fellowship with the Father and the Son, by having fellowship with him, these people would be deepening their own fellowship with the Father and the Son. John's aim was therefore to take his listeners into deeper fellowship with the Father and the Son

■ *dear children*

Who were the children. Were they his converts? It's not clear but what is obvious is that they were the young in the faith

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name

I write to you, dear children because you have known the Father.

That's the start point of the faith - forgiveness. They have know the Father - they have because they have become God's children. They have entered into that relationship. They've started and now this letter is there to help them grow and mature in their faith.

■ *fathers*

Down to the other end of the spectrum - the old men in the faith. Fathers suggests that they were both older in the faith and bringing others to Christ or nurturing people in the faith . We expect a maturity in fatherhood don't we.

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

John repeats this twice. You have known Him who is from the beginning. That doesn't say much more than that to the little children, except if we compare this to the way John uses from the beginning in John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1 and we see that the relationship he is referring to is with the Son. Where the children have come into relationship with the Father as His children, these fathers have walked in their faith for years and have walked with Christ over those years. They have seen the effectiveness of their advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). And John says no more than this. I'll come back to the significance of this in a minute.

■ *young men*

Young men - those younger in the faith but full of zeal and energy. John reserves two different comments for them

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

He first comments on their overcoming of the evil one and then comments on thier strength and the word of God living in them. These were people growing in their faith and heading towards maturity. They had overcome the evil one. In what way? The devil is there to stop is growing in our faith. I've often commented how in Britain our churches have many old Christians but few mature ones. Here were men who had resisted the devil and all his schemes to prevent their growth. His second phrase gives some idea of why - they were strong and the word of God lives in them.

They are strong. How are you strong as a believer? Let's look at a few verses.

Ephesians 6: 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

This is a famous verse and on the same theme about standing against satan. How did the Ephesians get to be strong - because they put on the armour of God - they equipped themselves with what God had provided and it was all done in His power.

2 Cor 12: . 9 (C) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 (C) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong .

2 Tim 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Here are two verses that have the same theme. Paul was strong and Timothy was encouraged to be strong in the grace God gives. We get to be strong because God gives us the grace to do it. At conversion we became Christians by the grace of God - by grace through faith. Grace is something that has to be received. Paul was strong because he accepted the grace God gave him to be strong. He didn't rely on his human resources but on what was given him.

Why were these growing believers strong? Because they were learning to rely on Him. However it wasn't just this but the word of God lives in them. This could mean that the word of God - the Scriptures - was living in them. They lived what God was requiring of them. This follows the idea of Jeremiah about the laws being written on men's hearts. But in John word often refers to the everlasting Word, the Son of God. God's word is always more than a book. God's word becomes God's word because God's Word lives in us. As we learn and live that we overcome the evil one.

But this is an aside to the real purpose of 1 John 2. As John purposes to take these people into deeper fellowship with the Father and the Son we see that his comments are directed at all three groups. He might commend them for all the things that have happened to them, but they all need to bear in mind the words that God is bringing to them through him. And it is all based on their relationship - fellowship with one another and fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Why? Because we can easily start to see our faith in worldly terms. In the world, the longer you are in something, the more experienced you get, particularly where knowledge is translated into maturity. Not so with relationships and maturity in Christ is determined by relationship, not experience and knowledge alone. Here were these young men and fathers with experience but the implication is that they needed to work on their relationships - who did they love and what did they love?

The trouble is that we don't often equate spirituality with loving relationships. We see it in terms of Bible knowledge, or regular church attendance but our relationship with God and with one another may be a disaster zone. And our history doesn't matter. You can backslide from any point in the Christian life. And when you backslide, you don't have to backslide out of fellowship in the church. You only need to backslide far enough to be of no use to God. That warning is to all Christians.

Our spirituality is evidenced by our relationships with others. Want to know how mature someone is in Christ? Just see how they treat their fellow believers. It says it all and it says it for everyone to see. It's painful to see someone you know has a wealth of Christian experience but has a critical spirit towards others. Let's all examine ourselves as John gives us these rather strident words
Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him

stumble. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

Agh! Tough stuff. If you hate your brother it's just like if you weren't a Christian. Remember that this is the word agape - a love that is not self seeking, a love that keeps no account of wrong, a love that is forgiving even if it only in one direction and a love that would make you die for your brother. In fact these sort of loving relationships are part of the evidence of the fact that we walk in the light.

You think you're a strong Christian then look at your relationships. What about that person you've never forgiven? Or that person you don't get on with? Or maybe that person you don't like because they don't share your theology? Or you don't approve of the way they worship? Or the way they dress? Or their attitude?

Walking in the light means you are in fellowship with God, your relationship with him is hunky dorey. But... it is impossible to be in fellowship with the Father and out of fellowship with another Christian at the same time. You can't enjoy the experience of walking in the light if you're out of fellowship with a brother or sister.

But John also tells them what they should definitely not love:

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

It's funny isn't it? John has to tell us to love one another and he has to tell us not to love the world. It doesn't matter what level of our spiritual maturity, it's really easy to fall back in love with the world and it's difficult to love our brothers and sisters in Christ - all of them!

And there's a difference between the two. Loving one another is selfless love. There's no "I" in love. But if we love the world John makes it clear what that entails *For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.* It's all about I - me.

The bottom line is, that our spirituality - our maturity in Christ, our fellowship with the Father and the Son is determined by and evidenced in our relationships with one another - how we love one another. But more telling, our relationship tell us about our relationship with God. And it's there for all to see.



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