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## Sermon Meta Information

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## Sermon

### Introduction.

- a. The letter of 1 John was written to churches at a time when the heresies of Cerinthus were inflicting great damage on the church. His teachings confused many and even caused a number to stray from the truth. Cerinthus was his own authority as he rejected all the Gospels and the epistles written by Paul and Peter and therefore denied the deity of Jesus. From the Old Testament he accepted circumcision and the Sabbath and other traditions that suited his own purpose. He loathed the Apostles and used every opportunity to scandalise, undermine and belittle them in order to destroy their credibility. Cerinthus claimed that his opinion was as valid as the Apostles and as he kept some of the Old Testament ceremonial laws which were more authentic to the will of God. When it comes to religious matters our society in many ways gives equality to all opinions and promotes the idea that no one can really be certain that their opinion is true or authentic. On religious matters everyone is their own authority and their own opinions are equally as valid as those expressed in the Bible. How do you help Christians whose foundations and faith are being shaken by such thinking? How do you evangelise unbelievers who have an agnostic attitude towards Christ Jesus? 1 John is written to specifically address these matters.
- b. While 1 John is written to encourage our faith and equip us to counter the confusion in religious thinking that surrounds us it is not an easy letter to understand and apply. The difficulty is not in the substance as John deals with very basic doctrines and concepts. What makes 1 John difficult to understand is the unique and complex structure he utilises. The structure he uses is like an inverted cone. The basic proposition is laid out in **1 John 1:1-4** and then his thoughts move on upward and in widening circles. It's like a spiral staircase inside a stairwell shape like an inverted cone. Listen to the basic apex that John sets out in the first four verses of his epistle, *'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to*

*us- 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. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*' John lays down 4 vital issues in these verses which counted the confusion and uncertainty generated by the false teaching of his day and which continues to confuse believers in every age.

### **1. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of opinion but historical reality.**

- a. The religion of Buddhism is essentially the opinions or views of a man called **Siddhārtha Gautama** who lived in India around 500 BC. Is Christianity similar to Buddhism in the sense that it is the opinions or teaching of a man called Jesus of Nazareth who lived in Palestine some 2000 years ago? When John says that they have *heard, seen, looked upon and handled* he is emphasising that their message or witness is about that which took place in time and space in a physical manner and that it's the historical events of Jesus' life that are of supreme importance. The emphasis in the New Testament is on who Jesus was, what he did, and what he said. The Epistles of the New Testament focus more on who Jesus is and what he did than on what he taught. This is not to say that what Jesus taught was of lesser importance, but that his teachings rest upon the foundation of who he is and what he has done. Jesus taught that he is the Saviour and that *no-one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6)*. Had Jesus not been the sin-free Son of God and had he not died on the cross to be the propitiation for our sins (**1 John 4:10**) and had he not risen from the grave for our justification (**Romans 4:25**), then his teaching that he is the Saviour would have remained an opinion. The birth, life and death of Siddhartha Gautama are irrelevant to the set of teachings he left behind. In a very real sense Jesus' teaching are nothing without the uniqueness of his conception (and therefore his person), birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. When Siddhārtha Gautama died he left his views to mankind, when Jesus died he left the good news that in him God had reconciled the world to himself. Paul summaries this in 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 where he says, *'Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.'* It is what happened to Jesus during his earthly presence that effectually reconciles sinners to God. Who Jesus is and what he accomplished by his death and resurrection is the very substance and essence of the Gospel of the New Testament.
  
- b. Who Jesus was and what he accomplished in his death and resurrection is not the opinion of his disciples, but the truth revealed by God. Jesus was a very public figure. Using modern terminology Jesus was the celebrity of his time in Palestine everyone knew about him. What happened to Jesus did not happen in private, but on the public stage of life for all to see and hear. The crucifixion of Jesus took place in the capital city of Jerusalem when the city was filled to capacity by those celebrating the Passover. The reality of his resurrection was witnessed not by one or two but by hundreds. The miracles he worked were witnessed by thousands and verified as authentic. Perhaps the most poignant and amazing of all the miracles was the giving of life to Lazarus who had been in the grave for four days. Jesus' greatest opponents did not dispute the reality of the miracles he worked. Listen to what Jesus says about the miracles to the disciples in **John 14:11** *'Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works (miracles) themselves.'* The miracles Jesus worked were very public so that the miracles authenticated that he truly was God incarnate. The historic events in his life reveal that he was God in the flesh. The opening verse of John's Gospel says, *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'* Building on this in **1 John 1:1** he calls Jesus *the Word of life*. The truth about who Jesus is and what he accomplished in his life, death and resurrection gives life. John keeps in mind that there is a massive difference between historical reality and a person's opinion. In **David Irving's** opinion, the Holocaust did not take place, but the facts of history contradict his opinion, which do you believe? The good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is anchored in the reality of the facts of history not in the opinions of men and women. John wants all believers to know that the message of the Gospel of the New Testament is authentic according to the historical facts.

## **2. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of opinion but a personal reality.**

- a. After hearing that his obituary had been published in the New York Journal Mark Twain said, *'The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.'* In the opinion of many Mark Twain was dead, but his personal reality was that he was very much alive. Who would you believe the reporters of the New York Journal or Mark Twain himself? John does not tell us about reports he heard about Jesus, but what he personally saw, heard, looked upon and handled. In a very real sense John is asking believers of his own generation, *'Who do you believe Cerinthus who never met Jesus or Me who saw, heard and touched Jesus? Was John's purpose in writing this simply to establish that the things he said about Jesus were more authoritative than what Cerinthus said because he was one of the 12 disciples originally called by Jesus and Cerinthus was not? John's purpose was far greater than this. John declares the reality of Jesus' person and work according to **1 John 1:3** so that those who hear may have fellowship with us. What is this fellowship John is referring to? It is fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. What John is declaring has the power to bring you into fellowship with the living God. John tells others the Gospel so that they may personally have fellowship with the only true and living God. The Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 1:18** says this about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.'* The truth of the Gospel by the power of the Almighty brings you personally into fellowship with God.*
- b. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of opinion but the reality of having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God is a personal experience and the reality every Christian enjoys through the saving work of Jesus. John is calling upon believers to reflect on the reality that they have fellowship with God as an authenticating assurance of the Gospel he had declared to them. If you have had an experience it is a fact that is written onto your heart and locked into your mind. If you lie about an experience your heart and mind do not authenticate that experience. I have had the very unpleasant experience of being in a motor accident; a rear-end collision that left me with severe whiplash in my neck. Every time I tell the story my heart and mind authenticate it. If you have fellowship with God it's a personal reality your heart, mind and soul authenticate it and you know it is true and very real. If you have fellowship with God then it means that you know God personally; your life is shared with God. The question that we need to answer then is this; *"Is fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit the reality of your daily life?"* The question is not about an opinion but about reality.
- c. The experience of having fellowship with God is the same for every believer. The experience of having fellowship with the Lord that John had is exactly the same believers have today. The reason it is the same is because it is not primarily something that is subjective; it is the result of something which is based on an objective truth. It is the objective truth that determines the experience not the individual's subjectivity. John does not tell us about his subjective experience but declares the objective truth that gave cause to his experience. The experience of receiving the Gospel and having fellowship with God is the experience of receiving eternal life from Christ. The reality of fellowship with God is the same for everyone called by grace. Age, gender, race, culture, temperament, intelligence or health does not cause the experience to differ from one person to the next.

## **3. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of opinion but a transforming reality.**

- a. The experience of enjoying fellowship with God is a life transforming reality. What is fellowship with God? There are a number of aspects to the experience of fellowship with God. Fellowship with God means that you know God personally. You could not know God if he had not made you alive and enlightened your heart and mind to the reality of his existence and your need to be right with him. Jesus in **John 17:3** gives this definition of eternal life, *'And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.'* The very essence of eternal life; is knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ personally in a dynamic way. To have fellowship with God means you are already enjoying the most vital aspect eternal life. In heaven the fellowship we now enjoy will be greatly enhanced by us being sinless and

perfect, but it is essentially the same fellowship. Fellowship is communicating with God; you speak to him in prayer and he speaks to you through his Word by the Spirit. Fellowship means you walk with the Lord; he leads, guides and directs you in all your ways. Fellowship means you know he is always present with you; you are never on your own. Fellowship means that you are becoming more and more like him; his influence is causing you to put off the ways of the old man and put on God's ways. Fellowship means that the way you think, speak, act, love and feel responds to the reality that God is your Father who is always present.

- b. You cannot have fellowship with God and not have your life transformed by the power of his character and the influence of his presence. Living in fellowship with God is dynamic and active; he is your constant companion in life, who interacts with you in every step you take. God, to those who have fellowship with him is not an abstract concept or a force but a living being whom they love and who is always with them. A life of fellowship with God is the more abundant life, it is life to the max and it is a life filled with wonder and joy. The wonder and joy does not flow from a memory of a past experience but by the ongoing experience of fellowship with the Lord. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of my opinion, but the reality of my life transformed.

#### **4. The truth about Jesus is not a matter of opinion but joyful reality.**

- a. Listen again to what John says in **1 John 1:3**, *'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.'* Why does John refer to fellowship on the human level before fellowship with God? I think John does this because it is in the ability to have fellowship with another person that reveals the truth about the other person's fellowship with God. If a stranger phoned me and introduced himself by telling me that we have a mutual friend, it would not take long for me to determine whether that person really knew my friend or if he only knew about my friend. The intimate knowledge of knowing another person goes beyond the knowledge of information. When you talk to another person about walking with the Lord it soon becomes clear whether or not the other person actually knows God personally. It is as we share in fellowship with one another that our sense of being brothers and sisters in the Lord becomes clear. As I talk to you about my heavenly Father and Jesus Christ my Lord and the Holy Spirit as my comforter I determine whether or not you know my God.
- b. Why should we evangelise? Some may answer, *'So that others can be saved by Jesus.'* Others may answer and say, *'We need warn others of the terrors of hell so that turn to Jesus for salvation.'* John would tell us, *'You evangelise so that others may enjoy the same fellowship with God as we do.'* Evangelism is really telling others about the fellowship you enjoy with God and how you came to know God so that you could fellowship with him. If you do not have fellowship with God you really do not have good news to share, all you have is an opinion. Your fellowship with the Lord ought to bring you such joy and meaning and purpose to life that it makes your life wonderful. Enjoying this abundant life and seeing others who do not have fellowship with God and therefore know nothing about true joy and true life ought to fill you with great compassion for them. That compassion should be fired by a joy in the Lord that fills you with praise because God has told and commissioned you to tell others how they can have fellowship with God. Sharing the gospel should be a delight, for at least four reasons:
  - i. A delight because you are obeying your Lord.
  - ii. A true joy because you are talking about the one you love above all things.
  - iii. A delight because the person you are sharing the gospel with could also enjoy fellowship with God as you do.
  - iv. Joy is contagious among those who fellowship with the living God and with one another. The truth is quite simple, the joy of the Lord lies in fellowship with him and his people.

#### **Conclusion.**

Is Christian fellowship the forgotten jewel of the Christian life? When last did you have an Emmaus Road experience? By that I mean, when last were you able to say *'Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us on the road, and while he opened up the Scriptures to us.'* (**Luke 24:32**) When last did your heart burn within you because you knew his presence and felt the power of his word flooding your mind with glorious light? Has your fellowship with the Lord this past week been dynamic, has it put praise on your lips, and a new song in your heart and filled your mind with gratitude and appreciation for Christ Jesus and his cross and crown? Have you given yourself to fellowship with your brothers and sisters in the week, have you shared with the wonder and joy of knowing and belonging to the Lord? Has fellowship with others sparked joy in your heart? It should. The Christian life without fellowship is like this land without rain, it dry, dusty, hard, and unattractive. May the Lord cause us to ponder over the matter of fellowship with him and others and restore it to the proper place of importance in our lives.