

Call to Obedience #267
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Every sin, spiritual neglect, and excuse is a result of a lack of passion for God.

JOHN'S CALL: FELLOWSHIP

By Reimar Schultze

The purpose of the incarnation is to restore man's fellowship with God.

"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, of the Word of life...declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." —1 John 1:1, 3

There are two powerful reasons why the apostle John gave us his first epistle. The first reason was for doctrinal clarification, and the second was for spiritual enrichment. Let us look at each of these subjects separately:

The Early Church Was Threatened by Doctrinal Heresies.

The first doctrinal assault on the early church came from the Judaizers. These Judaizers were Messianic Jews or Jews converted to Christianity who attempted to bring outmoded Jewish religious teachings, rituals, and practices into the new faith called Christianity. The apostle Paul deals extensively with these problems in his thirteen epistles.

The second doctrinal assault on the early church came from the Gentiles, from a group called Gnostics. Gnosticism was a religious belief that had combined oriental religions with Greek philosophy, and it now attempted to add Christianity to its mixture. Many Gnostics believed that Jesus really did not come in the flesh.

It is this rapidly growing number of people that John had particularly in mind when he began his epistle with, "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, of the Word of life."

In other words, John said, "Listen, don't tell me that the incarnation of Jesus was fake. I was there. I saw Jesus with my own eyes, I heard him speak with my own ears, I touched him and he touched me. Jesus, in every way, was all man and all God! And anyone who does not believe that Jesus came in the flesh is a liar and has an anti-Christ spirit (1 John 2:22; 4:3)."

This then brings us to reason number two why this epistle was written:

We Can Have Intimate, Daily, Personal Fellowship with Jesus.

John is saying to us, "You can have the same intimate, daily, personal fellowship with Jesus as we, the apostles, had when he was on earth and that we have had even more intimately with him since his ascension to the Father. I want this fellowship to be yours that 'your joy may be full' (1 John 1:4)." Oh, that wonderful word, "fellowship"!

Friend, do you have fellowship with God? Do you want it? Well, since the apostles had it even forty years after the ascension of Christ, why can't you have it?

Heart Purity: The Path to Fellowship

To have "Holy Ghost fellowship," as the old-timers used to call it, is to walk in the light. John says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), not even the tiniest speck of it. He also says, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie...But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..." (vv. 6–7).

Fellowship with God and with Jesus or Holy Ghost fellowship one with another can only be experienced in light—in perfect light. **Therefore, he who wants to enter this fellowship must have an intense, overarching desire for purity.**

The fact that this supreme desire for purity is missing in the lives of most modern Christians is obvious by the way they dress, by what they watch on television, by the kind of music that gets played in church sanctuaries, by the joking, jesting, and lightheartedness heard in our Sunday schools, and by their priority list, which does not even include a desire for purity. The lack of purity in Christianity is evident by the many preachers and television evangelists who show a greater desire to get more recognition, to build bigger sanctuaries, to sell more of their books and tapes than to be pure—glistening pure. There are so many impure motives.

Oh, can you hear the voice of John whom Jesus loved so intimately (John 13:23; 20:2) call the church to purity that she might be a holy bride to fellowship with her beloved Bridegroom?

Friend, unless you move your goal of purity of heart to the top of your heart's desires, you will forfeit fellowship with God, the very thing you are born-again for!

God wants us to be pure. Unless we are pure, we shall not see God. That is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). We must have pure hearts, pure thoughts, and pure motives. Purity of heart brings us into walking in the light, which in turn brings us to fellowship with God and his Son Jesus Christ, and that prepares us to see God. How beautiful are the words of John Keble's hymn in this context: Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see our God, The secret of the Lord is theirs; Their soul is Christ's abode.

How to Come to Purity.

Like in most areas of spiritual advance, there is a place both for the work of man and for the work of God.

A. Purity: the Work of Man.

In 1 John 3:2–3, John says that all who look for the appearing of Jesus will purify themselves even as Christ is pure! There are things Jesus cannot and will not do for you. Young lady, Jesus will not put away your ungodly dresses. You have to do that. Young man, Jesus will not break up the ungodly relationship you may have with a young lady. You have to do that. Jesus will not turn off the radio or television when unholy things come over the airwaves. You have to do that. Jesus will not shut the door to tempta

tions when they come to you. You have to do that. John says that every man that has the hope of seeing Jesus when he returns will purify himself even as Jesus is pure.

There is a work to be done on our part, the Lord being our helper. It is a work of excision, a work of cutting out every vile, foul, and evil thing that dwells in us. There must be a radical crucifixion of every worldly desire of the flesh on a continual basis, even as Paul testified of this necessity by saying, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 3:20). Our pursuit of purity must be continuous, for in seeking purity, we are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). In seeking purity, we seek fellowship with Jesus, the light in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

We must desire purity more than a spouse, a college degree, a house, an automobile, or a nice vacation. If our hearts are right, the most devastating thing that can happen to us is to lose our purity. If we lose our purity, God moves out of our lives and our fellowship with him is lost. Unfortunately, many Christians are more devastated when they lose their dog, their house, their son or their spouse than when they lose their purity, the very presence of God! One reason why King David was a man after God's own heart is because of his state of devastation when he lost his purity. When he came to that, he thought that he could not live another day. Dear one, can you afford to live another day without purity? Unfortunately, to most Christians, losing their purity of heart, losing fellowship with God, means nothing to them in exchange for the fruit of selfish desires.

When it comes to purity, not only is there a work that we are to do, but Christ also has a work to do in us. Purity is impossible without the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb.

B. Purity: the Work of Christ.

Once we have developed pure habits and have ceased to allow impure thoughts and motives to find residence within us, we begin to walk in the light and we begin to have fellowship one with another, and then, my friend, (a most marvelous thing will happen) the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all remaining sin, or errors as we read in Hebrews 9:7. Then we shall be so pure that we can see God! This is all given to us in 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Let me relate to you a personal experience. I can wash my own clothing. I can use the old scrub board and scrub my trousers on it with soapy water. I have done so in my youth. Or I can use a modern washing machine to clean my item of trousers. The other day, when my trousers came out of the washing machine, my wife called me. As she held my trousers in her hands, pointing to some stains, she asked, "Reimar, where have you been? What did you do? How did these stains get in there? What is it? They didn't come out in the wash."

Well, to make a long story short: I could not get the stains out. Somebody else had to do it. My wife has chemicals that can take them out, and she knows how to use them. My wife was able to get all the stains out. Hallelujah! She did what I could not do. I could take the cleaning so far, but I could not take it all the way. And so it is, that we can "purify ourselves." We can do a lot of house-cleaning, and Jesus is pleased with

our efforts. But there are stains of sin, there are spots, blemishes, and imperfections we have because of our Adamic heritage that only Jesus can take out. Only he can make us perfectly clean. Only he can make us whiter than snow. Only he can present us a chaste virgin to Christ, holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable (2 Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:22; Jude 24).

“As we walk in the light” means “as we keep our hearts pure.” As we keep purifying ourselves, we will have unbroken, blood-washed fellowship with the Father, the Son, and one another.

Indeed, this is what we were born-again for. This will lead us to thrills, romance, and adventures in the Christian life. Yes, “Walk in the light! So shalt thou know that fellowship of love; His Spirit only can bestow who reigns in light above” (Bernard Barton, 1784–1849).

Oh, my friend, despite all the Bible programs, most church members show no evidence that they have passed from death to life and are walking in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. The church needs to return to purity, without which there is neither Holy Spirit fellowship nor salvation.

Is having a pure heart on top of your list? If not, let it become so from now on, and it will not be long, and you will be in sweet fellowship with Jesus, and your joy will be full. It will be unspeakable and full of glory!