

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Fellowship With God and Other Believers

That which we have seen and heard 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 1:3)

John makes the obvious link between what we believe and fellowship. Our modern world, even many professing Christians overly influenced by it, have no sense of what true Biblical fellowship means. You can wholly disagree with someone about God or the Bible, but the politically correct thing to do is to carry on unqualified fellowship with them just the same as if you agreed on everything. Amos emphatically reminds such folks that they are living in a world of fantasy.

*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?
(Amos 3:3)*

Fellowship means, among other things, being agreed. If two people have vastly differing views of significant Bible doctrines, they have no basis for walking together in a common bond of fellowship. In most cases where people try to ignore their differences and pretend to walk together, sooner or later their fantasy explodes and they no longer walk together.

This fundamental basis for authentic fellowship relates to a common "Epistemology," the authoritative source from which we draw our beliefs. If people disagree on their source or authority for what they believe, how can they have fellowship on anything? Example; if I believe that the King James Bible is the only valid authority for my faith, and you believe that the NIV is the only authority, we cannot hold true fellowship, can we? Sadly in our pseudo New Age world today, the populist Christian view of epistemology is that any translation of the Bible that you like is equally authoritative with any other. Supposedly, they are all the same, but students of Biblical text and translations will quickly remind us that all English translations of the Bible are not at all the same, either in wording or in meaning. The real epistemology for folks who hold to any and all English translations is each individual's own opinion. Don't miss the point. Instead of the Bible being the true source of authority, each person's opinion replaces the Bible. I like the King James; you like the NIV, someone else likes the ESV. We are all supposedly right, because we each hold a version of the Bible as our authority. What about those instances when one version differs, not just in wording, but in meaning, from another? In this populist view, personal opinion judges and thus

becomes the final "Epistemology" for the modern believer.

Perhaps the most common belief of our day among this class of Christians is even more insidious. Buy every popular version of the Bible. Read them all. Then as you study a given passage, you get to choose which translation you "Prefer." Thus, in fact your private opinion becomes your only real epistemological source or authority.

If the idea that an individual's private opinion or interpretation in fact is the final authority for our faith in God bothers you, welcome to a small band of people who reject personal opinion and seek to hold faithfully to the Bible as their only authoritative source for what they believe and how they live.

If any of these fantasy ideas were true, John might have written that he sought for his readers to have fellowship with him, but there was no real need for him to write anything about what he had seen and heard because those things were irrelevant to fellowship.

Let's put human sophistry and emotional fantasy on the shelf and examine Biblical fellowship. John identifies things that he has seen and heard as the theme of what he writes to his readers, as well as the basis for their fellowship with him and with the Lord. What was it that John saw and heard that was so vital to fellowship? The first two verses of this letter answer our question.

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; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) (1 John 1:1-2)

First and foremost, we are dealing with what an apostle and a God-chosen author of New Testament Scripture witnessed first-hand. If we accept the supernatural giving and preservation of Scripture as fact (Most populist Christians of our day hold to the first point and reject the second, again leaving them with no real authority beyond their personal opinion. If God hasn't preserved the Scriptures, you may read every translation and still have no sense of what God intended when He directed the original writing), we have a spiritual

basis for true fellowship. What if we join the contemporary idea that God did inspire the “Original autographs” of Scripture, but had no hand in preserving the accuracy of subsequent copies and translations? We in fact in this point see the thinking of the current populist idea, “I choose my favorite translation, and you choose yours. They are all the same.” There is no sound foundation for fellowship in this idea, so folks who hold to the idea follow the “Fellowship fantasy” that pretends fellowship despite no common faith or belief in many essential Biblical teachings and no final source for what they should believe. One person may believe that the new birth occurs with human instrumentality, and another person believes that the Holy Spirit exclusively produces the new birth with no human aid or instrumentality. Ah, but the modern fantasy fellowship says that we can pretend this difference doesn’t really matter enough to hinder fellowship. The more you examine this modern idea the more you will realize that Scripture is not at all the real basis for the pretense of fellowship that people follow; each person’s opinion and emotions are the real basis for their pretense of fellowship.

Each verb in this list from John’s first letter is a perfect tense verb. It relates to something that began in the past, but continues in the present. For example, John’s first point, “*That which was from the beginning*” emphasizes that which had no beginning, and that which continues in the present. That “*which we have heard*” identifies something that John heard in the past, but the words continued to echo in his mind years later when he wrote this letter. Think of this idea with each point that John makes in this list. It is a powerful truth. Carefully follow John’s reasoning in these verses.

1. *That which was from the beginning....* For John, and his inspired words, the gospel and related believers’ fellowship does not rest on the latest and most popular ideas, or on the most winsome personality who has “Such a winning and sincere way.” It must rest on something “*which was from the beginning.*” In John’s inspired writings, “*That which was from the beginning*” is in fact **He who was from the beginning**, as the remainder of this chapter will affirm. For confirmation, read the first eighteen verses of John’s gospel.
2. *...which we have heard....* For John and the other apostles, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ was not a second-hand idea that they learned from others, even other credible people. They were eye-witnesses of the things they reported in their writings. They didn’t write what someone told them about Jesus. They wrote what they personally heard and saw. They spent three intense years with Him during His public ministry and teaching. Many of them likely knew him long before this time. When someone states, “I only believe the red letters of the Bible. None of the other things written in

it matter,” they reveal naïve thinking that does not at all understand John’s point in this passage, a point clearly confirmed throughout the New Testament record.

3. *...which we have seen with our eyes....* A significant number of unbelievers with reputable legal training have, over the years, attempted to read the Bible from their legal training with the objective of disproving the Bible based on rules of credible legal testimony. Instead of disproving the Bible, based on their own rules of credible testimony, many of them discovered that the Bible is true and abundantly affirmed by eyewitness testimony. The Bible on the witness stand is the ultimate credible witness to the truth of the gospel. John was not reporting second-hand information when he wrote the gospel that carries his name, along with his other New Testament writings. He wrote about people and events that he personally witnessed.
4. *...which we have looked upon....* John further emphasizes his eyewitness relationship with Jesus and the things that Jesus said and did. Not only did John see Jesus and the things He said and did, but he was in a unique position to scrutinize and to ponder Jesus and His words and actions with careful scrutiny. He had such intimate personal exposure to Jesus and His life and teachings as to be able to ponder deeply what he had experienced and to reach a thoroughly thought-out conclusion. Yes, the Holy Spirit kept the memory fresh, so the Holy Spirit had no need or reason to lead John into fantasy. He kept true experiences and knowledge fresh and accurate in John’s mind till he wrote those words in his inspired--prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit--writings.
5. *...and our hands have handled, of the Word of life....* John did not merely observe Jesus and His teachings occasionally or from a distance. He lived intimately with Jesus for several years. He lay at the table right next to Jesus. He saw the detailed personal expressions on Jesus’ face as He taught His disciples and performed His miracles of love and merciful grace.
6. (*For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us*) John fully understood that this Jesus was not simply mortal, but eternal.

We should keep in mind the historical meaning of the “Fellowship” as used in first century Greek culture and in the early church. As John states, the early Christians viewed fellowship as beginning with the Lord and extending to like-minded fellow-Christians. In this letter, John identifies certain people who left the Christian assembly because they were “...not of us.” They did not agree with John’s teaching regarding the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, as stated in the above passage.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor