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1 John 1:1-3 – Fellowship Incarnate

1 John 1:1-3 “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Well, we come to a new book and this wonderful book is written by John who writes the Epistle of John, the 2nd Epistle of John, Third Epistle of John, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. So, we're well acquainted with him, and one of the things that he emphasizes really is that in faith there has to be that foundation of a relationship. So, it shouldn't surprise us as we start off within this particular book, that he's writing about fellowship with God. And in order for you and I to have confident faith, there needs to be a relationship. Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, if you really believe that somebody loves you, there has to be that relationship that strengthens that belief. And so, all the way through the book, he is emphasizing confidence. Oftentimes, people struggle with whether or not, you know, am I saved? Does God love me? How do I know? And this particular book was written for that specific purpose, that we might know, that we might have confidence in our faith.

We see that in particular in 1 John 5. So, if you come to the end, he actually tells us why he writes the book. And if you look with me in 1 John 5:13, he'll declare it this way: “These things I have written to you who believe...” So, we know his audience are believers, “...who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know...” There is the confidence. “...that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

Where do you get that confidence from? How can you know? And so, he's written these things that you might know.

If you look with me in 1 John 2:3, he'll make this statement, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”

Once again, he's reiterating why he wrote the book. By this, you know, if in fact you keep the commandments, you know there's confidence that comes from keeping His commandments by doing what He says. It's a confidence builder, so to speak.

And as you look in 1 John 3:14, it says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”

So, how do you know that you've passed out of death and into life? How do you know that you've gone into true salvation? How do you know you have eternal life? You love the brethren. All the way through the pages, he's going to give us these statements that will give us confidence in our faith and that we might have that confident faith. It is, once again, no surprise that he starts off in this epistle with the whole thing of the relationship. Also, it's not a surprise to us as well that he would start off at the beginning because if you remember, in John 1, the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So, he starts in the beginning there too.

As he starts off in this epistle, 1 John 1:1, "In the beginning", he's wanting to establish the grandeur of, I believe, this relationship as well as that God has created us for fellowship. That's a bizarre thought, isn't it? That He actually created us that He might have fellowship with us. And so, we begin to realize that any of the confidence that we have in the relationship with God has to be built upon something real. Therefore, what he's going to establish in chapter 1 is reality, real, genuine. I think one of the things that has oftentimes spoken to me, as you think about people coming to God and going, ok, God help me with this. God goes, wait, wait, wait. We got to start with being truthful with each other. You're a sinner, right? No, no, no, I'm not a Sinner. Ok, then we can't have a relationship. You're not going to be truthful about this.

The wonderful thing in 1 John 1 is, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

The wonderful thing about this letter is it takes us into reality, and I think what is important, especially in the church, is that we live in the realm of real. And so, John is going to be talking about this specifically and he'll use a word or two words that will literally describe the Word of God and they're very simple- "Word of Life". Think about that, the Words of Life. And those two words are really going to exemplify the reality of God's words. The wonderful thing about His word is He spoke, and it was done. Of course, we speak, and nothing really happens, but He speaks, and it's done, things are created.

It's not a mistake the way that he begins in this particular passage that he starts from the beginning, because what he's starting with is the Creator and he's put it in the context. So, the way it reads at the very beginning of the passage is, "What was from the beginning". Now, because it's in the genitive case, and because it is this particular word *archē*, the emphasis of that is- that which anything begins. And what he's emphasizing is the start of all things. The genitive case always focuses on ownership. So, he's declaring the one who created it is also the owner, and you begin to realize, ok, something miraculous has just been spoken here. To parallel it with John 1, he tells us "In the beginning was the Word".

He goes on and says in John 1:3, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

That's pretty cool.

Colossians 1:16-17 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

It goes on and says in Colossians 1:18, "He is the beginning". Did you catch that? "He is the beginning." So, the wonderful picture of Christ. We just recently went through Psalm 139, and it talks about how God is intimately acquainted with all of our ways. And of course, before there's a word in our mouth, He knew it, and He wove us in our mother's womb; and you begin to see this wonderful picture of God ordaining our existence and you realize that all of creation was out of love. Because you see this wonderful picture in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world". So why was it even created? Out of love and all of creation is that wonderful picture of His love. And so, you realize that we were created to have fellowship with Him. This is one of the reasons why life seems to be so meaningless to people, they don't get it. And the reason why you were created is to have fellowship with God. John's going to be emphasizing this wonderful point of it all begins with the beginning. God ordaining, God orchestrating, God's sovereignly creating everything that He does so that you and He would have fellowship.

It starts off this way in 1 John 1:1 "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life."

Not just words; but living words. You know, the "Words of Life, the picture is that the words become animated. If you ever heard somebody just read something monotone, you know, read this letter, "I love you. I miss you. I think you're so wonderful." When the words become animated, now the words became living, right? So, words that are animated, expressions, that you can see on a face, vivid expressions. Could you imagine John actually saw when Jesus said that He loved them? That John could see the expression on Jesus' face. "I saw that, I saw that." That would be a magnificent thing, that the Creator of all things and you're looking at His expression when He says that. He not only saw the expression, but he felt the touch of the Creator. So that when He washed their feet, he felt the care that was going into that, that it wasn't just an act of something that was being done, or something utilitarian in His efforts. But it was because He loved them that He was washing their feet and he felt it in the touch. So, when John begins to bring out all these things, it would be wrong for us to rule out the Gospel of John in reflecting upon what he's saying within the passage. Because when he writes the things in the Gospel of John that he writes, of course he kind of ends the book by saying, "Many other things I could have told you, but you know the earth couldn't contain everything If I wrote everything." But the point of what he says is, "but these things I've written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that in believing you might have life in His name. So, I've been very specific about the things that I wrote." But when you consider the things that he heard Jesus say. I mean, for instance, when he's talking to Nicodemus, we oftentimes read the wonderful words of John 3:16-17. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten

son," can you hear His voice saying this, "that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life"? "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

Now, just hearing those words is magnificent but you know what? John got to see it. Not only did he see the whole sense of God giving up His son on the cross, but he saw the salvation and the heart of Christ in saving people and he saw no condemnation.

John 3:17. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

He saw that God, Christ didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him would be saved. What does that look like? Do you remember in the Gospel of John this woman is brought to Him, caught in the very act of adultery. Do you think that those words began to take on a visual when Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you. He who's without sin cast the first stone." All of them scattered. Where are the ones that condemn you? He pushes them away. I could just imagine being a disciple and going, "He really doesn't want to condemn us." I mean that was pretty clear. She was a sinner. It was pretty clear that she had done things wrong and you walk away going, "Ok, this is it." I mean that He says He's the great physician, that He's a healer and you begin to see Him healing this guy at the pool of Bethesda; you actually see this happen. You see a blind man who's been blind over his whole life, and you see him see; and you go, He is the one that heals. What he's talking about is the reality, because once again, you know, organizations and people always tell you, like Peter, "I'll stay with you no matter what. Everybody else is going to leave you, but I'm going to stay with you." Let's see the reality of that, Peter. And there's so many things that organizations and companies and people do and say, and they just don't follow through on what they can. There's no reality to it. There's no truth in it. This is why when Scripture refers to the Spirit of truth coming within our hearts, we now become like Christ. It's sort of like the Psalm that says, a righteous man swears to his own hurt and does not change. So, we begin to operate in the realm of real; and when we say we love somebody, we love them. When we say we're not going to leave them, we don't leave them. All of these things are the spirit of truth that constrain us. It's the love of God that constrains us. So, the things that he saw, and he saw the woman at the well, being accepted. I mean, why does John write about this obscure event? It's just a woman at the well. She's an outcast. You know, the disciples go, "It's time to eat" and Jesus goes, "something is really important here." And I can imagine them stepping back and going, you know, "He says He loves everybody." He does love everybody and the reality of everything that is happening. He says, "I'm the bread of life" and He feeds 5000 people out of nowhere. He wasn't just saying it They were actually being fed and He actually cares for their needs, and they heard about a place that was in heaven reserved for them. You think they believed it after all the things that they were seeing? They knew that there was a thing called everlasting life, and then they see this guy named Lazarus come out of the grave. Wow, He wasn't kidding. Like Martha says, "I know

there's going to be resurrection someday," and we can all believe in something someday; but to believe in it today, something has to happen. And the reality of it starts kicking in and they go to the empty tomb. What do you think? "Well, He said he wasn't going to stay dead. I guess He meant it."

What John was wanting to convey at the very beginning of this passage is you've got to get in touch with real. Either it's real or it's not. Either it's something that is visually true, audibly as well as you can touch and feel. And what he begins to talk about specifically, is the fellowship of the believers. Because once again, if in fact none of its real, then nobody's going to have any confidence that what God says is true. It's one of the reasons why you have to genuinely receive Jesus and you have to genuinely change; because as Scripture will say, if you don't love your brother, how does the love of God abide in you? How is this even true? So, if you're not going to be truthful, you're not going to be real, it's impossible to have a relationship. If you can't have a relationship, it's impossible to have confidence in any promise that is given to you. It's the relationship that brings stability in the words that are spoken. The unusual thing about all of this is it's fundamentally in the context of Gnosticism coming into the church and we know that this kind of esoteric thought of special visions and people having this, because you know, it's always easier to go into this realm of illusions and visions than it is to actually have a genuine relationship with God. So, you know why don't we invent religiosity, right? Why not just talk about it? Why not philosophy or write books about it? Have these opportunities to sell and make money? "But we are not like many peddling the Word of God", this is real stuff.

So, an interesting point that Paul makes in Colossians, if you'll look there with me. We'll see how this has infiltrated the church and one of the reasons why John is going to be so dogmatic about this particular point as we'll go on to see.

Colossians 2:16, it reads this way, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

Now what it's talking about is that you and I can celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving. We can do all these things, but do you really love Christ? That's the question, isn't it? I mean forget about whether or not you go to this event or that event or whatever. It's not about the event. It's about the relationship.

So, it goes on and says this, Colossians 2:18, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,"

I mean, there are people out there that are going, "Well, I had this vision, I had this, and I had this." Good for you but you know, Paul was caught up in the 3rd heaven and he wasn't allowed to talk about it, so I'm not sure why you're writing books because the whole purpose of anything is to bring us to a humbling and put our trust in Christ. Paul will say whatever was gained to me, I count as loss for Christ. In fact, it's good for me that I was weak, because when

I'm weak He is strong. God will most clearly be exalted more in my weakness than in my strength. And that's his declaration after sharing that he was caught up in 3rd heaven. What happens is that man wants to go in the realm of some kind of experience or some kind of vision that he saw or something and Scripture says, that's not where it gets real. Where it gets real is when you start serving one another, where it gets real is when you genuinely act upon your faith. And that's where it gets real, because on all these other things that are superficial, those things will never give you confidence in your faith and the reason why is: they're not real. It's an illusion. It's a vision. It's your own imagination. Start doing what God says. So, he talks in terms of "We saw, we heard. We heard these things and we saw the evidence of this, and we felt the intensity of it." You know, they not only felt the washing of the feet, but you remember, they come to Jesus after He was resurrected. And what does He say? I mean, He literally says, "Touch My hands and feel." In fact, His statement in the Gospel of Luke is, "Is this the Spirit? Is this not flesh and bones? That's what Luke says that the resurrected Christ is saying. He says, you don't believe when I said I was going to be resurrected that I meant it. You know, people like to bring up imaginative things. And the thing about Gnosticism is that it would separate the Spirit from the physical. It would say, you could have these experiences emotionally; but hey, you never really have to obey. You never really have to do the things that Scripture is talking about. And it's one of the reasons why John will write in 1 John 4:1:

He says in 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ..."

You might want to underline this. "...has come in the flesh is from God"

Our faith has no validity if it's just about us speaking in an ethereal world. But in fact, it's revealed in the things that we do in our flesh.

Romans 12:1 says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Present your bodies a living sacrifice which is wholly acceptable unto Him. Do you not know that your bodies are a temple of God? In all these things, Scriptures' revealing the reality of your faith and what the world would do is it'll get you in discussions. It'll get you in a lot of Bible studies. I mean, you can go to a lot of Bible studies. But if it's not changing who you are, there's no reality in it, see, and it's just rhetoric. It's the Greek coming out of you. "It's not your fault." It is your fault, but I don't know why I said that.

You go back to 1 John 1, and he begins with this wonderful introduction. This is real.

Verse 2, "and the life". See? The whole life of God was manifested to us. Once again as I was thinking about 1 Thessalonians, as we've just recently gone through it and in 1 Thessalonians 2, as he begins to write to the Thessalonians, he goes, "You know what kind of people we proved to be. I mean, we didn't just talk about it right? We actually were giving our lives and we

wouldn't take any money from you because we knew that it would hinder your believing. So, we wouldn't take any money. We would work, so as not to take any money because we felt like it was important for you to understand that we loved you regardless of whether or not you supported us." And in the things that he did, it revealed the reality of his faith, but it was always in the manifestation of the things that he did.

The same thing is true in 1 John 1:2, "and the life was manifested". The life was made visible. Let's put it another way, the words that He spoke were made visible in the things that He did. The things that we felt, and life was manifested, and we have seen and we bear witness and proclaim to you that bear and witness. Of course, that's where we get our word martyr. I mean, you're got to be convinced of something if you're going to be willing to die for it.

"And we have seen and testify to you the eternal life,"

This is real.

"which was with the Father and was manifested to us-" Has always been.

We realize once again that there's a lot of information going on about all kinds of things about our faith and there's a lot of studies going on and there's a lot of philosophy going on. Man gets on his high horse and "He's so wonderful and he's so smart," but you have to remember, 1 Corinthians 8:1.

1 Corinthians 8:1. "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies."

And what the apostles saw was the reality of God's love for them. And they saw it in very tangible ways. People are going to be asking you about your faith if you live it. If you don't, then you're going to have to push it in, and they're not going to believe it, see. What he's talking about are the Words of Life. We oftentimes use the phrase that "none of this was ever meant to be dead Orthodoxy." It was meant to be a living word. And that's why Paul says to the Corinthians, "You are a tablet. Not written on stone; but are written in our hearts."

So, this is the living word, and the life which was manifested. We saw, we bear witness, and we proclaim to you eternal life which has existed in the relationship with God the Father, and I.

You know, we read the prayer in John 17; wouldn't it have been amazing to be the disciples? We know that because of their sorrow, Luke tells us they started falling asleep. It'd be amazing to catch some of the words like "Father, I desire them to be with Me forever." Can you imagine the wonderful prayer there in John 17? We begin to hear the words of Christ and His love for us and His Father and those things that have existed forever. He says, I want them to be a part of this forever stuff.

John interjects that here within the passage, 1 John 1:3. "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us,"

Now the whole passage begins to get clear that the whole reason all these things were manifested was for fellowship. That we might have this common bond, *koinōnia* is the phrase that he used, that we might have this common bond that we may have this intimate relationship with God that He wants you to have. This is what we were called to have. He's going to demonstrate to us that once we have that relationship, we'll be very confident in our faith; but without the reality of a relationship, there's no way that we could have any confidence in our faith.

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

The reason why we gather together for anything and everything is to be around Christ. It's one of the reasons why we've tried to stay away from having baseball teams or band practice or anything like that because our fellowship isn't in that. Once we start going down that path, then the people that gather together start having fellowship in those things. Well, those things aren't strong enough to cause me to love you. Those things aren't powerful enough to cause me to be devoted to you. But I can tell you this, my love for God and my relationship to God, if it's real, and if we foster that, if we cultivate that kind of relationship, then all of our relationships would be real. And that's why we figure anytime we're together, let's open up the Bible. Let's talk about the Lord. Let's celebrate Him. Let's point to Him. Let's think about Him and let it be about Him, because that's where strength and confidence of relationship is going to happen, and this is where we're going to build up the body and this is what we were meant to do.

So, it's a great way to open up a book and if nothing else, we're going to walk away with, in order to have fellowship with God you've got to be real, and people need to see the reality of your faith. You can't just talk about it. These are Words of Life. So, it needs to be the way that you minister, the way that you care for people. They need to see it even in the inflection of your eyebrows or whether or not you're you seem welcoming, or you don't. People are looking at body language as well, don't you think? And you know the thing especially I love is that oftentimes and clearly not all the time, but oftentimes we'll be embracing each other and hugging each other, and you feel a second pull back, they hold you a little bit longer. And you go this is, this is a, this is a close moment with this person, and we felt them wanting to be with us. We felt it. What we have heard, what we have seen, we felt concerning the Word of Life.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before you today and we ask that you'll create in us a genuine, sincere faith. And so, Lord, let it begin with the reality of our fellowship. Work within this body. Unite our hearts to sing Your praise. May it always be around You and around Your Son. Your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I'm asking you just to get real with your fellowship and love one another not because they're necessarily deserving, not because they're going to do something for you; but because this is a child of God, and you get to minister to God by embracing them.