

“How to Have Fellowship with God”
(1 John 1:5-7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

Lately, we've been considering the question:

Why we should obey God.

We've seen that we should obey Him

Because in His infinite love,

He had mercy on us –

When we were His enemies,

Helpless and on our way to eternal punishment,

He sent His Son to save us,

He sent someone to bring His Gospel to us,

He gave His Spirit to change our hearts and give us faith,

He removed our guilt and gave us the righteousness of His Son,

And He freed us from sin's power,

So that we *can follow* Him.

We should obey, first,

Because of the mercies He has shown us.

We've seen we should obey Him, second,

Because He's promised to reward us if we do:

If out of love,

And the desire to honor Him,

We live as He tells us in His Word,

He will honor us

And give us the ability to enjoy heaven even more.

B. Preview.

Today, let's consider another reason we should obey:

Because this is how we have *fellowship* with Him.

John tells us in His first letter

Something about God's character

That we should always remember:

God is light –

He loves what is true and what is right –

In Him there is no darkness at all (v. 5) –

There are no lies and no sin.

If we believe we have fellowship with Him –

That we're walking with God

In a close and intimate relationship:

Which is something every true believer does,

To one degree or another –

But we're walking in darkness –

If we're believing or promoting

Things that aren't true;

If we're doing things that are sinful –

We're only deceiving ourselves (v. 6).

But if we're walking in the light (v. 7) –

If we believe and love the truth,

If we're turning from our sins

And doing what He calls us to do –
 We have *fellowship* with Him (v. 6) –
 Because we're walking where He "walks" –
 We show ourselves to be sincere believers,
 Continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (v. 7).

John tells us,
 If we want fellowship with God,
 We need to be where He is –
 In the Light –
 And the closer we walk with Him,
 The closer our fellowship will be.

This morning, let's consider two things:

1. First, God gave us the Law to show us how to have closer fellowship.
2. And second, two errors we have to avoid with regard to the Law.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider

God gave us the Law
 That we might have closer fellowship with Him.

1. He really gave us His Law for three reasons:

First, to show us our need for Jesus –
 To show us our sins and what they deserve:
 This is the evangelistic use;
 We won't come to Him to save us
 Unless we see that we need Him –

Second, to show us what our sins deserve

Even after we've come to Him –

So we might be even more thankful

For His continuing forgiveness –

But third, He also gave us the Law

To show us how to have closer *fellowship* with Him.

Maybe we didn't notice this before,

But the Lord always *enters*

Into a *relationship* with a people,

Before He gives them His Law.

Adam was already God's son

When He first gave him His Law –

The commandment not to eat of the tree

Of the knowledge of good and evil

Was really a condensed version

Of the Ten Commandments –

When Adam broke that one command,

He broke them all.

The Lord had already called Abraham

Into a relationship with Himself,

Before He gave him the command:

“Walk before Me, and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1) –

Which again is a condensed version of the commandments.

Israel was already God's people
 When they were in Egypt,
 Because of His covenant with Abraham;
 But it also wasn't until
 He redeemed them from Egypt –
 Called His children out of that place –
 That He gave them His Law.

The same is true in the New Covenant,
 Except here the Lord gives us the Law in a more intimate way:
 When He enters into a relationship with us
 Through faith in His Son,
 He puts it in our minds,
 And writes it on our hearts,
 So that we'll want to walk in the light
 And have *fellowship* with Him.

2. Why these particular commands?

Because this is what pleases Him.

The question was once raised:

Whether the commandments are right

Because God ordains/orders them;

Or whether He ordains them

Because they're right.

It's the latter:

He has given us these

Because they're right;

Because they're the loving thing to do;

Because this is what He is like:

John tells us God is love (1 John 4:8) –

He's also many other things,

But this is the one attribute

He loves to glorify:

He tells us His love extends to all His creatures:

Jesus says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

He loves those who are His even more intimately:

Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:27, "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father."

If we want to have a *closer* fellowship with Him,

We need to be more like Him:

We need to love,

Even our enemies –

That's why He gave us His Spirit –

So we could love –

And that's why He gave us these commandments –

So we would know how to love:

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:35-36, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*. *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*"

Could we honestly say we loved God

If we didn't keep the first four commandments?

If we loved someone or something more than Him?

If we worshiped Him in the way He told us not to?

If we broke our promises to Him?

If we spent His day doing something else

Rather than spending it with Him?

Could we honestly say we're loving others:

If we dishonored our parents?

If we took someone's life?

Or their purity?

Or their belongings?

Or their reputations?

Or if we didn't take these things

But wanted to?

God has given us His Commandments

Because they reflect His character,

Because they are "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12);

Because they're the definition of what's right

And of what's loving:

Paul writes, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. For this, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law” (Rom. 13:8-10).

When we obey Him –

When we walk in the light –

When we love as He loves;

We’re honoring Him by reflecting His character;

And we’re having closer fellowship with Him.

3. And this brings joy.

There’s really nothing

That gives greater happiness,

Than walking with God.

Sometimes it takes a while

For us to understand this in our Christian walk,

But this communion with God

Can make us happier and more fulfilled

Than anything we could ever experience

From the things He’s made –

Whatever brings us happiness here

Soon grows old –

Can you think of anything

You’ve ever wanted,

That you grew tired of once you had?

The things God made are limited.

But He is unlimited:

There is no end to His beauty and perfection,

And so no end to its discovery,

And so no end to our joy.

If we really want to be happy,

We must have closer fellowship with Him –

And that's what we'll have

If we walk in the light –

If we yield to the Spirit,

As He leads us in the Word –

To the degree that we do,

To that degree we will experience it.

B. But we also need to avoid two mistakes:

The first is to make our *relationship* with God

Depend on our obedience;

The second is to see the commandments

As somehow getting in the way

Of our relationship with God.

The first error we call legalism,

The second antinomianism.

1. Legalism is when we misunderstand

How the Law works in our relationship with God –

When we see it as the way

We enter into this relationship,

Or the way we maintain it,

Rather than as a rule of fellowship

In the relationship we already have

Through faith in Jesus.

God doesn't say to us as Judge:

Live up to this standard,

And then I will accept you –

That's the Covenant of Works He's delivered us from (Gal. 3:12).

It's true Jesus told the rich young ruler

That he needed to keep the Ten Commandments

If he wanted to enter into life:

But Jesus did this only to show him

That though he thought he had kept them,

He really hadn't –

He needed to trust in Jesus.

This is the evangelistic use of the Law

We talked about earlier.

God also doesn't say to us

Once we come into His family,

That our continuance in that family
Is based on how well we keep His commandments –
He doesn't throw us out when we fail.

Our relationship with God
Doesn't depend on our obedience:
It depends on Jesus' obedience.

If we don't understand this,
One of two things will happen:

We'll either see ourselves
As never really reaching the mark –
As continually falling short,
And so never able to enter or stay in God's family –
Which will lead us to despair.

Or we'll deceive ourselves into thinking
We've reached the mark –
That we're better than everyone else –

This is what the Pharisees fell into
And the reason they looked down on everyone else –

This is the self-righteousness
We're warned against everywhere in the Bible.

2. The other mistake is antinomianism:

In a way,
It's just the opposite of legalism.

Legalism sees the Law

As the way we come into relationship with God;

Antinomianism sees the Law

As standing in the way of our relationship with Him –

Antinomians believe

If you say you need to keep the Law in any sense –

Even to have *fellowship* with Him –

You've added works to salvation

And destroyed the Gospel.

3. We need to see our way

Through both of these errors:

a. We need to avoid antinomianism:

And see the Law is for our good.

b. And we need to avoid legalism:

God accept us in Jesus,

And He will never abandon us.

It's true that God favors those

Who take Him seriously,

And are careful to walk in His ways –

But we need to remember

That our *relationship* with Him

Doesn't depend on what we do,

But on what Christ has done.

We also need to remember

That when we've done everything He commands –

Which we never do –

We're still unprofitable servants –

We've only done our duty (Luke 17:10).

c. If we want to have fellowship with the Lord,

We need to trust Jesus for our acceptance –

For our relationship with God –

And then walk with Him in the light –

Obey Him;

Pursue sanctification –

The closer we walk with Him,

The more we'll experience

The blessing and joy

That fellowship with the Lord brings. Amen.

<http://www.gcmoesto.org>