

The Kingdom and Communion of God

by Ward Fenley

One of the key dynamics within the thrust of the New Testament is the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Prior to the cross of Christ, the Israelites were familiar with not only their own empirical experience of the physical kingdom of God manifested through the Mosaic economy; they were also familiar with Old Covenant prophecies as they understood them. That is, they interpreted prophecies with a rather strict literalism. One of the surest ways we can see this is the response of the Jews to the miracles of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ performed what had never been done in previous Israelite history:

John 9:32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

Yet they rejected His testimony and person in spite of the miracles shown. He had to implore them to at least believe Him for the miracles He performed:

John 10:37-38 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. {38} But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

John 14:11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

In fact, beyond this, they crucified Him for His claim of deity and also His declaration of Himself as that bread, which, if a man ate, he would live forever:

John 6:41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.

In the mind of the Jews the message and miracles of Jesus Christ were not united but rather presented a contradiction. They saw the miracles, but could not reconcile the message which Christ preached, namely that He was the great I AM who claimed to have existed before Abraham, and that there was no other way to the Father but through Him. He not only claimed eternal life was accessible exclusively through Him; He also claimed to be that very life:

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Again, these messages were hard sayings for the Jews, as those disciples who were merely following Christ because their bellies were filled left Him upon His presentation of a similar message:

John 6:52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man

give us his flesh to eat?

John 6:58-66 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. {59} These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. {60} Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? {61} When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? {62} What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? {63} It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. {64} But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. {65} And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. {66} From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

In essence, Christ was proclaiming with the utmost clarity that His method of salvation was different than what seemed to be the common belief of the day (i.e. salvation through performance of the law, or the deeds of the flesh and nationality), and that salvation was strictly by the gift and grace of God. Also, we see the nature of the kingdom which Christ preached was entirely contrary to that which the Jews anticipated. It is highly likely the Jews anticipated a complete usurping of the empire of Rome. Certainly Daniel might lead many to believe this, in that his prophecy describes four beasts (or empires lived out through Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), the last of which was exceedingly dreadful and powerful—i.e. the Roman Empire:

Daniel 2:40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

Daniel 7:7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

It is also likely that the Israelites understood the history of these beasts (three of which had come and gone), and that they were in the middle of the rule of that fourth and dreadful beast. But Daniel makes very clear the fact that during the days of this fourth beast, God would set up His everlasting kingdom:

Daniel 2:44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever;

We must not be so surprised that the Israelites had a literal interpretation of the above passage. After all, this passage along with other Old Testament passages seems to be saying there would indeed be a time when a literal physical kingdom would be established with, and through, the Israelite people. And if we didn't have the revelation of Jesus Christ and His own interpretation of Old Testament biblical prophecy, certainly it would seem a literal and physical kingdom was in store for this people of God.

But we are not without interpretation or explanation of the kingdom. And more importantly, we have it from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Pertaining to the following study of communion and fellowship in 1 John, let us examine just a few statements of Christ which seem to clearly identify a kingdom nature vastly different from the traditional interpretation which existed in the minds of the Israelites, particularly at the time of Christ. Our focus on these statements of Jesus Christ will primarily be in the Gospel of John, since the epistle of 1 John seems to have been written by the same author.

Perhaps the strongest statement of Christ regarding the nature of the kingdom in the Gospel of John is that which He made to Pilate immediately preceding His crucifixion:

John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

Even Pilate recognized the implications of this statement:

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Pilate's own experience of kingdoms and rule was strictly empirical. Pilate understood that any who would follow this professed King would only be able to declare His rule based solely on a subjective and perhaps mystical appeal to this unseen kingdom. Granted, Christ performed the works as a testimony of the power of His unseen kingdom. But not all would believe even in spite of those works:

John 12:37-40 But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: {38} That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? {39} Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, {40} He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

Nevertheless, Jesus continued His proclamation of the spiritual nature of the kingdom. John 6 is perhaps the most significant chapter dealing with the real issue pertaining to the problem they had with Jesus' idea of the kingdom. As a result of the works, the Jews could not help but seek more miracles. In fact, they were enjoying His miracles to such a degree that they tried to make Him king:

John 6:15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

Jesus left them because it was never His purpose to become a physical king over the world. Not only this, but upon their pursuit of Him for more miracles, Jesus pinpointed their problem and flatly rebuked them for it:

John 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

The temporal provision of things like food and wine and even physical healing brought satisfaction to their carnal minds. This is understandable, since all of us have an inclination to satisfy our hunger, thirst and sickness, as we have physically experienced these things. But they were oblivious to the real reason for the performance of those miracles, which was to reveal and testify of the power of Christ to create from nothing everlasting food and water and healing:

John 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

John 4:11-14 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? {12} Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? {13} Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: {14} But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

So then, how does the knowledge of these aspects in the Gospel of John help us with our understanding of communion and fellowship as presented in the first epistle of John? Fellowship and Communion must be understood within the context of sacrifice and love. Those subjects are perhaps the two overriding and inseparable aspects of the message of 1 John. Several verses come to mind from at least four sources:

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

and,

Philippians 2:1-8 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, {2} Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. {3} Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. {4} Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. {5} Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: {6} Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: {7} But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: {8} And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Luke 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Finally,

John 15:13-14 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. {14} Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

In these four passages the theme is clear: love is testified or proven by the abasing of self, the covering of sins, and the exaltation of others. It is interesting to note that in the Proverbs passage, "love covers all sins." The word for 'cover' literally means 'to hide.' Solomon implores us to actually cover or hide the sins of others in order to show our love. Through Christ's love and denying Himself and taking up His cross, He was able to hide or cover the sins of His people. Through His death He estimated others as "better" than Himself and in due time He was exalted:

Philippians 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

But His own exaltation in due time did not leave His people without a similar promise:

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

As we consider this element so foreign to humanity (i.e. the abasing of one for the exaltation of others), we must understand the element of sacrifice as well. The ultimate goal in the abasing of self is the union or communion of God's people; hence the passage in Philippians is prefaced with this idea:

Philippians 2:1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies...

Paul says "if there is any...fellowship of the Spirit." Literally, if there is to be communion in the Spirit, there must be the exaltation of others to the abasing of self. He then proceeds to show the ultimate example of this, which is Christ. In other words, through the greatest attribute of love, sacrifice is made and union or communion is accomplished. In the Gospel of John this was a primary goal in the death of Christ:

John 11:51-52 ...that Jesus should die for that nation; {52} And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

Through the abasing of Himself He would gather together in one the people of God. This same idea is found in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:13-16 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. {14} For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; {15} Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; {16} And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Sacrifice, love, and union are the main subjects of these passages, as they are in the

epistle of 1 John.

After a brief prologue concerning the manifestation of the Logos from the Father, John declares the purpose of the epistle:

1 John 1:3 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.

Union or communion (Gk. *koinonia*) is the desired goal of John for the people of God. It is interesting that one of the definitions of *koinonia* is intercourse. The Greek word *koy* is that from which the Latin *coitus* is derived. Specifically there is a spiritual intercourse that John desires for the people of God—an intercourse that can only take place through love, which is accomplished through the sacrifice of self. This communion or intercourse was a great desire of Christ as demonstrated in His prayer that He would not only have this intercourse with His bride, the church, but also that the church would have this intercourse with its members.

It seems the great aim of not only Christ's prayer but also His eminent sacrifice on the cross was to accomplish the communion or intercourse of Him with His people and His people with each other.

So John expounds this theme in His epistle. In chapter 1 vs. 6, John addresses that of which Christ spoke so much in His earthly ministry, the *light/dark* contrast:

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

1 John 1:5-7 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. {6} If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: {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.

It is vital for us to understand this in our approach to 1 John. Many have mistakenly associated walking in the light with Old Testament-law-abiding citizens. But after seeing the above contexts and corollaries, we understand walking in the light is synonymous with faith in Christ's love evinced by His ultimate sacrifice, and the demonstration of that self-sacrificing love to each other. It is then that the light/dark motifs found in 1 John are clarified. This is enormously significant when we consider what Christ's "commandments" are. Many associate "commandments" with abiding by Old Testament precepts. But John explains what "commandments" really are:

1 John 3:22-24 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. {23} And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. {24} And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Faith and love for one another prove union with Christ has truly taken place. John

says those who practice these things are those who are indwelt by Him and who dwell in Him. John testifies that through faith and love we are proving Christ abides or dwells in us, or has become one with us. Therefore we conclude that walking in the light and obedience to His commandments are nothing less than faith and love for Christ and love for one another; and in that light and love the communion of Christ with us and our communion with each other is proven.

John writes:

1 John 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Christ walked in love. He faithfully demonstrated love which did not condemn those He loved but rather freed them. Love does not accuse but instead excuses:

John 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Now, this was spoken to a woman caught in the very act of adultery. The Pharisees were quick to accuse her. But Christ was quick to excuse her. Granted, God in His holiness through the Old Testament judgments would have had every right to condemn her. But through the foresight of the sacrifice of His only Son He could excuse this woman and free her from the harsh accusations of the Pharisees. Christ in the most transparent way shows that love hides or "covers a multitude of sins." But fascinatingly Christ, after declaring the greatest words one could ever hear from Him, "neither do I accuse you," then associates with that covering of sins exactly what John would associate later: namely, that covering sins or hiding the sins of someone is the testimony of walking in the light. Consider the very next verse in the context of the adulterous woman:

John 8:11-12 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. {12} Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

It is as if Christ demonstrated the love, then testified of Himself as the light, and those who followed His example of love and covering the sins of others would be those who walk in the light. We must note the Pharisees walked away from Christ, showing the division between them and Christ. Yet it is Christ and the woman who are left alone in the end. So also it is with those who forgive and love one another. There is union and communion which testify of love and the faith we have in Christ. We cannot declare our love and faith in Christ unless we have love for one another as demonstrable proof. John adequately proclaims this:

1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

1 John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

It is not that loving one another saves us or makes us Christ's. But rather it is our love for one another which proves we are Christ's. Again, loving one another is chiefly demonstrated in hiding or covering one's sins, for again, Proverbs declares, "love covers all sins." We continue to find this theme in 1 John:

1 John 2:11-12 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. {12} I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

Here John clearly contrasts walking in darkness with what has happened to these brethren. They had been forgiven of their sins. They had been loved by God and would therefore love one another in the same way; thus they would walk in the light. But those who had a mere profession of faith and yet would accuse one another and judge one another would show themselves to be walking in darkness. In fact, it was those who seemed to be united with the brethren, yet went out from the brethren who would ultimately deny Christ:

1 John 2:18-23 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. {19} They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. {20} But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. {21} I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. {22} Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. {23} Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

It was not that these antichrists were once true brethren. Rather, the true brethren would continue walking in the light, believing Christ as God Who was manifested in the flesh, and continue loving one another and forgiving one another. Paul described the antichrists as false brethren:

2 Corinthians 11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

Galatians 2:4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

It is amazing how Paul describes what these "false brethren" do. He says they attempt to spy out the liberty of God's people to bring them into bondage. Christ declared to the judgmental Pharisees that if the "Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." This freedom is none other than freedom from sin. The Pharisees were the accusers of the brethren. They were the primary vessels through which the adversary worked. Yet Paul said: "Who shall lay a charge against God's elect?" The answer is that there are frequent attempts, and yet Paul confirms:

Romans 8:33-39 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. {34} Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. {35} Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. {37} Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. {38} For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, {39} Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is this profound love of Christ which continues to declare the people of God free from sin and free from the accusations of others who would attempt to bring us into bondage. And Paul explains it is because of the love of Christ, *through* His dying for us, which procures this freedom and security; that we will never be conquered by those false brethren who would accuse us. "Walking in the light" is the same as walking in love:

1 John 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Walking in love is walking as Christ walked. Christ did not accuse the adulterous woman, but rather the dialogue was clear:

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? {11} She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Christ's method of operation for His people was to consider their frailty, consider His own sacrifice, and then restore them. So Paul encourages the Galatians:

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. {2} Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

How is the law of Christ fulfilled? By restoration. It is fulfilled by those who are spiritual in actually considering their own weakness and restoring (not condemning) the people of God. We are called to walk as Christ walked, which is to walk in love, restoring one another. Again, Paul makes the inseparable connection between love and sacrifice and forgiveness:

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

The chief characteristic of love is demonstrated by giving of ourselves, or denying ourselves for others by forgiving them. How do we deny ourselves? When people hurt us or offend us, we are called to forgive them or cover their sins. We cover

them by "esteeming others as better than ourselves" and restoring them. This is what Christ has done for us. He considered us, sacrificed Himself for us, covered our sins, then restored us to Himself, thus accomplishing communion:

Colossians 3:12-14 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. {13} Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. {14} Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Again, the association is astonishingly clear. Through love and forgiveness, we establish the bond of perfection, or the binding of everything together in perfect harmony. The order seems evident: Through the love and sacrifice of Christ, He has accomplished communion, restoration and harmony between us and Himself. This is the unbreakable spiritual union in heavenly places. So likewise, to prove that union, we practice the same love and sacrifice, which in turn will promote communion, restoration and harmony between each other.

We now come to what is an enormously difficult passage in 1 John:

1 John 3:4-9 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. {5} And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. {6} Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. {7} Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. {8} He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. {9} Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Some have interpreted this passage to mean that if one is a true Christian, he will be in outward practice and inward thought perfectly obedient to the Ten Commandments. Still others affirm the same thing, but add that it is a gradual process. In either case we could refer to those beliefs as the doctrine of Perfectionism. Well, not to base Christianity on experience, but if all of us are honest, and Perfectionism is true, no one ever has been born of God or ever will be born of God. But considering what we have already established, is this really the idea John is trying to convey? It seems the context is certainly saying that the Old Testament law is in mind when John writes, "sin is transgression of the law." Therefore the verses following verse 4 must be kept within the macro-context of the author's intent. At this point it is imperative for us to understand the theology of the cross versus the law. Paul writes in Romans:

Romans 8:2-4 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. {3} For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: {4} That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The law is fulfilled in us. How? Solely through the work of Christ. It is not something

that must be repeated, for the author of Hebrews writes:

Hebrews 7:27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Hebrews 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Hebrews 9:26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Hebrews 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Therefore if the offering was a one-time offering, and the result was a one-time fulfillment of God's righteousness to be accomplished in us by the Spirit of God through that offering, then we are exactly as Paul declares us to be:

Colossians 1:21-22 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled {22} In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:

We are once and for all holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable in the sight of God. In other words, we cannot sin in the sight of God as it concerns transgressing the law. So when Paul says the righteousness of the law is fulfilled, that is no different than John saying that he who is born of God cannot sin. We simply cannot transgress the law because we are cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ. Granted, it is important to understand that the transforming work of the Spirit was changing the first-century believers into the perfect and holy image of Christ:

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

They were awaiting the consummated salvation which would take place through Christ's appearing:

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Therefore they were to continually be confessing their sins, not as we confess today. That is, we confess our sins today to claim that in His sight, salvation and deliverance are completely accomplished through His death, resurrection and presence among us. The first century believers, however, were undergoing a transforming process that would, through the Spirit, change them into the New Covenant glory and image of Christ. Therefore complete holiness and righteousness would not be accomplished until His presence at the time of the destruction of the Temple or Tabernacle or Tent:

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

Hebrews 9:8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing.

So then when John writes:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

...he is very likely addressing the anticipated completion of the transformation. John even acknowledges the reality of this transformation they were experiencing:

1 John 2:8 Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

The darkness of the law of sin and death, and that existing system which allowed the conscience to be affected by the accusations of the adversary, were slowly being removed:

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Hebrews 9:9 This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,
Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The tense of the verb is clear. Their conscience would be completely purged once the first tabernacle or Temple was completely removed. Why? Because it was the existence of that Temple which in some significant and spiritual way reminded the first-century believers the darkness of the Old Testament and the weight it imposed upon the conscience had not fully passed away:

2 Corinthians 3:11 For if that which is passing away was glorious, much more that which remains is glorious.

Hebrews 8:13 In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

This was the darkness which John describes as "passing away." Indeed, it was passing away. Therefore, in order to assure the hearts of the first century believers they were owned by Christ during that transforming period, He admonished them to walk in the love and light of the New Covenant truth of forgiveness and freedom, by dying to self and forgiving others. This would be fulfilling the law of Christ, or rather showing the righteousness of the law to have been fulfilled. Therefore, the passage in 1 John clearly is referring to the fact that it is impossible for one who has been truly born of God to sin (transgress the law). The only way to transgress that law was to be in unbelief and by laying charges against God's people. If there was a

denial of Christ and His method of salvation by grace, and there was a spirit of accusation of His people (thus a denial of salvation by grace and His effective salvation in those people), those were the proofs they were still in transgression of the law. Those were proofs they were false brethren regardless of their profession. Forgiveness, faith in Christ, and love which covers all sins, were the fruits which identified the true believer in Christ, hence fulfilling the words of Christ, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

John writes of Christ:

1 John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

Christ loved. Christ sacrificed. Christ forgave. Christ covered sin. John proclaims: "God is love." Then John associates the two:

1 John 4:8-10 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. {9} In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. {10} Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Love is demonstrated by sacrifice. John calls the people of God to love as Christ loved. This is in harmony with Christ's prayer:

John 17:26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Above, it is obvious Christ associates love and His union with His people. Christ prayed for the love of God to be in them and for Him to be in them. This is the union with God through His love. This communion or intercourse manifests itself in the same way His love for us manifested itself, namely by forgiving us of sin:

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Laying down our lives for the brethren is forgiving them when they trespass against us. It is covering their sins, for again, "love covers all sins." By this love we show our intercourse with the brethren and our intercourse with God:

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. {8} He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

"Knowing God" is to be seen as our *koinonia* or intercourse with God. Christ said:

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

This type of knowledge is seen as intercourse in passages such as:

Genesis 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

Genesis 4:17 And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch:

Genesis 38:26 And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

Judges 11:39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

So when we consider the *knowledge of God*, or *knowing God*, of which John speaks, we should understand it as that intercourse by which God and His people have become one. He is the Husband and the church is His bride. They have consummated the relationship so that He communes or has intercourse with her eternally. Therefore, by this intercourse, the members of the bride will in turn be married to each other and have that *koinonia*

Isaiah 62:4-5 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. {5} For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

This all refers to the intimacy and communion of God and His people through the method of sacrifice and love, and that love is the prevailing theme in the epistle of 1 John. with each other. Isaiah prophesied of this:

Christ said eternal life *is* knowing God. That is, through the insemination of His Spirit, we are given new life. We are reborn or born again. In his epistle John says we know we have passed from death unto life when we love the brethren. John states it is by the laying down of the life of Christ that we perceive the love of God (1 John 3:16).

Because unity is that for which the body of Christ should strive, the method by which it is accomplished must be emphasized; for in the love which accomplishes unity, our communion with God is confirmed or proven. Many doubt their salvation as a result of a lack of performance of the Mosaic law. However, it was the Pharisees who boasted of their obedience to the Mosaic law, and it was through obedience that they believed themselves to be righteous in the sight of God:

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Paul makes clear the fact that righteousness is not based on law performance but rather, as we have seen (Romans 8:2-4), it is based upon the performance of Christ. Then, as a result of that performance, the believer in Christ trusts solely in Christ for salvation and forgives Christ's people when they are overtaken in faults.

This brings us to the question of assurance. How do we know? The acid test of Christianity is love, which manifests itself by forgiving each other. When John speaks of a brother seeing another brother in need, he is referring to his need of restoration. Christ spoke of "doing it unto the least of these, My brethren." He spoke of clothing them, feeding them, quenching their thirst, visiting them in prison and when they were sick. Particularly, these all are referring to the comfort of the Gospel in the eternal forgiveness accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ. Isaiah prophesied, "Comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished." That is, the greatest objective of the Christian is to love God and restore believers by reminding them of the comforts of Christ's Gospel through the forgiveness of sin. This is what brings restoration and communion. Accusations and judgment bring division and guilt. James said:

James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

God delights in mercy. Mercy rejoices against judgment. For us to judge someone upon whom God has bestowed mercy is to prove ourselves to be those upon whom there will be no mercy. For even Christ said:

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

But that mercy we demonstrate is always a fruit or result, as opposed to the cause of, obtaining mercy. Even as Christ said to the sinner in Luke 7:

Luke 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

Just as John wrote:

1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

All mercy and love and forgiveness demonstrated in the people of God are the results of God first loving us, forgiving us, and having mercy upon us. But we must understand those characteristics are an *inevitable* result of God's initial work toward us.

1 John 3:19-21 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. {20} For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. {21} Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Assurance comes through the resulting fruit. A tree must be planted, but in order to determine what kind of tree it is, there must be fruit. Once that fruit appears, it is then that the identification of the tree is manifest. Verse 20 of chapter 3 is not so much a passage confirming our salvation. Rather it is a passage letting us know God is greater than the heart which has deceived itself into thinking it is righteous in the sight of God without the fruit which supernaturally flows out of a regenerated heart. Verse 21 explains that confidence toward God is when we continue believing Him

alone for our salvation and have mercy, love, and forgiveness toward His people.

Continuing this great theme of love and intimacy and communion with God, John writes:

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Again, our communion with God is manifested by our love for God. And of course that is manifested by our love for God's people.

1 John 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

In chapter 5 John relates the inseparable attributes of faith and love:

1 John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

As believers (i.e. those who have faith that Jesus is the Christ), we will also love those others who are born of God. This is crucial to understanding the relationship between our communion with God and our communion with each other. In other words, when the people of God claim their faith and trust entirely in Him for the forgiveness of sins, they are reminded of their own need for Christ's love. Therefore, as a result they respond in humility and love toward other believers when they are overtaken in a fault. It is a fruit or a supernatural outgrowth of the born-again experience. Sadly the "born-again" experience has often been trivialized into a mere individual experience which is exclusively between the individual and God. However, God's word, particularly in 1 John, seems to make it clear that our being "begotten" of God has significant effects on the entire body of Christ, with which a person becomes one upon true faith in Jesus Christ. The manifestation of that faith will be a love which sacrifices and restores one another.

John concludes his epistle with these words:

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Eternal life and knowing God are descriptions of that inseparable union consummated through faith in the sacrifice and love of Christ. We are in Him who is true, and we understand that we know Him and experience eternal communion with Him and His people. This is the testimony of the kingdom of Christ on earth. The apostles were admonished to pray for the kingdom of God to come. Through love and forgiveness we emphatically demonstrate the reality of the work of Christ and the Spirit of God in our own lives. By that love the world will know we are His disciples.

The love and kingdom of Christ give purpose in life. Our world lacks purpose because it lacks the love of God. When the love of God is lacking, the universe revolves

around the individual rather than the Creator and His community. True purpose seeks to establish the greater objective of the benefit of Christ and that community. The peace which Christ gave was a peace which would break down the walls of partition between races. The blood of Christ strips away pride and division not only between God and man, but also between man and man. The extension of the blood of Christ weaves its way into the lives of those to whom it is applied. That love results in a continual operation of self-denial in order to achieve the ultimate purpose of the exaltation of Christ and His body, the church or communion of believers. May that communion, kingdom, and love continue to spread through our families, friends and world.