



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## **Fellowshipping with God, Part 3**

In John 13 we read of John who according to practice reclined on Jesus' breast.<sup>1</sup> In Genesis 6 we read of Noah who "was a righteous man, blameless in time; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). In Philippians we read this:

Philippians 3:8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge [or fellowship] of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,"

Such is the privilege of everyone of us who have been saved by grace. Truly on account of Christ, we are ones who walk with God, and enjoy deep and abiding fellowship with God.

1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

What does this mean?

Are we talking about a subjective experience or an objective reality?

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<sup>1</sup> Compare John 13:23

How do we fellowship with Christ?

I want to answer these questions as we look one more time at the glorious theme of fellowshiping with God. And yet, I want to begin by summarizing in some detail what we've seen thus far.

## Our Highest Priority

Fellowshipping with God is our highest priority. It is something for which we have been created. And thus, there is nothing more moving in this life than to fellowship with God.

Psalm 16:11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

The testimony of the two disciples who fellowshiped with Christ after His resurrection said this:

Luke 24:32, "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

There is there an emotional element to fellowship. In fact, there is nothing more moving in this life than fellowshiping with God because we have been created for fellowship. However our fellowship with Christ is not just an emotional experience, it is only one element of it.

And yet on account of our nature, fellowshiping with God is something that we all will find difficult. After God delivered His people from slavery, redeemed them, and called them to Himself for the purpose of worship we read this:

Exodus 20:21, "**And the people stood afar off**, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was."

This is why we struggle so much with this fundamental relationship. We were made for the purpose of fellowship, and yet there is an aversion within each one of us when it comes to God/Christ.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, just like the eating disorder where the person opts to enjoy the taste of food but not its nutrition, so the inclination of fallen man is to endeavor to enjoy the consequence of fellowship void of the one and only living God.

As a result, the false religion of Babel was created.<sup>3</sup> This is a false religion wherein the worshipper endeavored to encounter the divine (without Christ) and ascend into a mystical heaven and so enjoy a religious experience. Again, I want you to listen to the words of Eugene Peterson as he described the religion of Baal (which was simply another expression of the religion of Babel):

"The emphasis of Baalism was on psychological relatedness and subjective experience... The transcendence of the deity was overcome in the ecstasy of feeling..."

"The distinction between the worship of Baal and the worship of Yahweh is a distinction between approaching the will of the covenant God which could be understood and known and obeyed, and

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<sup>2</sup> This aversion is often maintained through fear, apathy, lack of conviction, laziness, compromise, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Genesis 11:1-9

the blind life-force in nature which could only be felt, absorbed, and imitated."<sup>4</sup>

Do you see it? Do you see what was behind Baal, Babel, Dagon, and every other mystery religion inspired by the Devil?

## **An Encounter Without Christ**

What is behind every false religion is a subjective encounter with God... without Christ. It was an enjoying of what we might call the "fruits" of fellowship, without actually fellowshiping or being in God's presence. It is the confusing of the results of fellowship [feeling a certain way, being moved emotionally, etc.] with true fellowship.<sup>5</sup>

Thus if we are going to enjoy genuine fellowship with God, there are truths which we must ever and always keep before our mind's eye. Satan, the world, and even our own flesh will do everything they can to counter these truths! As sincere as you may regard yourself as a child of God, don't ever forget that your flesh is longing to flee from God.

## **God is a Person**

The first of these truths is that God is a Person and not a force. This is so important! Again, fallen man wants God to be a force so that the deity can be manipulated, accessed, and used at our will.<sup>6</sup> Thus the implication which is this: we must be careful in our walks. Today mysticism is alive and well in the church. Revelation 17:4-5 indicates that the false teaching of Babel will be propounded in the church in the last days. And thus in keeping with the religion of Babel the tendency will be to replace or exchange fellowshiping with the one and only living God for an experience roused NOT by the objective work of Christ on the cross on your behalf; or a growing understanding of the will of our covenant God; or the propositional truths which God has given to us in His word BUT by a genre of music; a stirring story; a feel good message all of which like candy taste so good, but in the end cannot sustain a true faith.

Brothers and sisters fight against this inclination. God is not a force to be experienced, but a Being to be loved, honored, worshipped, adored, obeyed and served.

## **God Initiated**

The second presupposition we must keep in mind is that as a Person, God has initiated a relationship with us! This is the complete opposite of the religion of Babel. Genesis 11 describes this religion of Babel as a religion of ascendancy whereby man enters into God's presence. In this case man sets the terms and the conditions of the relationship. Man dictates how best to climb. Man determines what is the means whereby to experience God. Man chooses the music, the songs, the beat, the language, and the medium.

Contrast this religion of Babel with Christianity. Christianity is a religion of condescension whereby God has deigned to enter into the presence of man. As such I hope you see that God sets the terms. He dictates how we are to fellowship. He determines the means/medium.

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson, "Baalism and Yahwism Updated," *Theology for Today*, [July 2972], pages 139-141

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that as Christians we are not exempt from this desire. We all try to satisfy our need by the path of least resistance. This is why the "feeling" associated with fellowship is often confused as fellowship.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Genesis 11:4, and Romans 1:21

## Prophet vs. Priest

And once again we must be very careful here! A prophet speaks to man on behalf of God and a priest speaks to God on behalf of man. So, if God gave a message in Hebrew to a prophet and the prophet was called to speak to a Greek crowd, the prophet translated the message for his audience. He would have to preserve the truth and intent of God carefully while speaking in the language of man. \*\* And likewise\*\* if man intended to give a message back to God (which is the intent of worship and part of fellowship), it would behoove the priest to accurately represent the man to God- yet NOT in the language of man BUT IN THE LANGUAGE OF GOD!

From this I hope you see the point: If we are going to fellowship with God we must NOT use our language, BUT His! We must NOT do so on our terms, BUT on His!

And what are God's terms? How had God deigned to fellowship with man?

John 14:7 teaches us that one must fellowship with God in the same way the disciples came to know Christ.

How did the disciples come to know Christ? They

- Walked with Him.
- They talked with Him.
- They observed His works.
- They asked questions.
- They listened to His answers.
- They endeavored to follow Him.
- In contrast to the religion of Babel, they related to Christ as a person!

From all of this that we saw what Fellowshiping with God is all about. It is NOT the endeavor to

- Experience Him.
- Ascend into His presence.
- Or to feel a certain way about Him.

Rather fellowshiping with God is

- A participation in the relationship HE established through the cross.<sup>7</sup>
- Coming to know His character and responding appropriately.
- Walking with Him.
- Dialoging with Him via His word.

In other words, fellowshiping with God will be akin to any healthy relationship on this side of the grave wherein the participants

- Communicate with one another.
- Are devoted to one another.
- Genuinely love each other and so seek the other's good.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare 1 John 1:3

The only difference is that because we are fellowshiping with an infinite, eternal, and unchanging Being, He will not be changed by the relationship, only we will be.

And yet questions still abound. For in the cautions that I have raised in light of the false religion of Babel, I have been critical of things which you may have associated with fellowship. In fact some are wondering how to fellowship with God if the focus is not on the emotions, then what ought to be our focus?

The focus of our fellowship with God revolves around the parts of a healthy relationship with God. These elements will help us to enjoy genuine fellowship with God.

## Dialogue

The first of these elements is dialogue.

While there are many texts we could examine which delineate what is involved in dialoging with God, Luke 24 is perhaps the best for our purpose because the result of the disciple's encounter.

Luke 24:31-32, “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, **Did not our heart burn within us**, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

Truly Christ's fellowship had a profound impact upon these disciples: Their hearts burned with passion for their Lord. And yet, what brought about this burning? Was it simply sincerity in their belief? Was it the right song at the right time?

No! It was the word of God uncovered, explained, and proclaimed. Look again at verse 32.

Luke 24:32, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and **while he opened to us the scriptures?**”

In fact, the entire context is one in which the word of God was read, explained, and understood. Recall, that the disciples were walking on the road in blindness.<sup>8</sup> Christ approached and began walking with them.<sup>9</sup> And immediately questions were raised in which Christ then explained parts of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the text climaxes in verse 27.

Luke 24:27, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

It was this dialoging between these men and God, whereby God's word, His plan, and His character were demonstrated, explained, and revealed which was the basis of the disciple's fellowship. This, brothers and sisters will be a large part of the basis of your fellowship with God. You must take the word of God, read it such that you come to learn more about the Person and work of Christ, and then begin asking questions of God like these:

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Luke 24:13-14

<sup>9</sup> Compare Luke 24:15

<sup>10</sup> Compare Luke 24:17-26

- What does this mean?
- What are You saying here?

This is studying Scripture to arrive at an answer. This is the dialogue of fellowship!

### **What does the passage say?**

Now in this context, I want to take a moment and be rather practical. In your fellowshiping with God, you want to ask three questions of any text, two of which I will share with you now. The first is this: What is the passage saying?

For narratives, this will be quite simple. For didactic or poetry, this will be a little more difficult. Nevertheless the goal here is to understand what God's word is saying in a particular passage. And if that means using a commentary or some other Bible help, that's O.K. There's nothing unspiritual about seeking to understand what God is saying in His word.

### **What truth strikes you?**

The second question is this one: What truth strikes you?

In the process of studying Scripture you are going to uncover/discover multiple truths about God, His work, His Kingdom, and yourself. For narratives, this question will be a little more difficult since you are reading a story. For didactic passages or poetry, this question will be a little easier to answer.

Now with the truths before you, choose one of the truths which for whatever reason strikes you, or intrigues you. See this is my suspicion if God in His providence has ordained that I should read a particular passage, uncover a series of truths, and discover that one of the truths strikes me then I conclude that while every Biblical truth contains implication for my life, nevertheless God is setting me up for a specific exhortation if a particular truth strikes/intrigues me.

In a moment, I'll give you the third question. But for now, as it relates to fellowshiping with God, these two questions are what you are after as you dialogue with God. What is God saying about Himself, His Kingdom, this world, and the sinner? Of all the truths uncovered, which strikes/intrigues you?

Yet the goal here is not academic; it is participating in a dialogue with God via His word.

### **Commitment to Growth**

Part of fellowshiping with God will be dialogue. The next is a commitment to growth. And this is crucial to any healthy relationship. A healthy relationship involves the willingness to allow another person to influence you such that you grow/develop. This is also known as having a teachable spirit.

This also applies to fellowship with the Lord.

Matthew 7:24-27, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened

unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

From this text and others, we conclude that fundamental to fellowshiping with God is acting upon what He says. NOT ONLY does this show respect for the other person BUT it also reveals a vulnerability whereby we demonstrate a longing to be conformed to Christ.

Now practically speaking, this raises the third question which you want to ask of a passage. (Again the first two are these: What does the text say? Of all the truths found herein, which one strikes/intrigues you?) At this point you then ask the third question: What difference ought this truth to have in my life?

### **What difference does this truth make?**

Now to answer this, there is an exercise which I have found to be quite beneficial in my fellowship with God. What good is it if in a quiet time, sermon, or family devotion we are struck with regard to say... the holiness of God and then in answer to the question of "What difference ought this truth to have in my life?" we say, "I ought not to sin"? This is true, but quite shallow and dismissive of Christ's word.

So what ought we to do?

To answer this let me give you an analogy derived from driving a car. You know how when you drive a car there is a period of time spent looking in the rear view mirror? While ninety percent of a drive is spent looking forward, it nevertheless behooves us all to be aware of what is behind us.

This is my suggestion here. During a quiet time or sermon that is when we look in the rear view mirror. In fact it is during these times that we primarily look in the rear view mirror. See this is my observation/conviction the way I sinned/fell short of God's glory in the past will probably be how I will sin and fall short of God's glory in the future. Accordingly, as I discover truths from God's word, it behooves me to consider them in light of yesterday's errors, improper thinking, failings, etc.

As I do that, I have a platform on which to apply a truth quite personally. I then beg for God's intervention in my life and reach out to Christ by faith and say, "Lord! Save me!"

And so, "God is holy! What difference ought this to have in my life?"

The dismissive answer is, "I shouldn't sin."

Duh! You knew this before you sat down with Christ. As such I hope you see that this isn't helpful nor does it further the dialogue with the Savior. Ah, but if I consider where I have violated God's holiness this past week in my thought life; in my relationships with others; at my work; and in my play and there discover a specific transgression/weakness/propensity this is helpful. NOW I HAVE SOMETHING TO PRAY ABOUT AND APPLY for the sins of yesterday will probably be the sins of tomorrow in my life.

### **Integrity**

Now this leads me to a third part of fellowshiping with God, integrity.

Now, we have considered John 4:23-34 on numerous occasions over the past five years as a church. Accordingly, I'm not going to spend much time on it here. Yet Christ is speaking to the Samaritan

woman about worship and says this:

John 4:23-24, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The contrast that is being made here is worshipping God in Spirit, which we have seen refers NOT to the Holy Spirit BUT to the human spirit. Christ is teaching that we must worship God with our whole heart, OR as we have discovered, "WITH INTEGRITY." \*\*And\*\* we must also worship God in truth, which as we have seen refers to a worship governed/dictated by His word.

Both elements are necessary when it comes to fellowshiping with God. We must fellowship according to God's will laid out in His word which as we have seen is the basis for any dialogue between God and us. And we must fellowship with integrity and honesty. This means that when we engage in a fellowshiping activity with the Lord, we must be brutally honest and real.

- Are we there to get a blessing or to get to know Christ better?
- Is it our desire to honor the Lord or honor ourselves?
- Are we harboring sin in our hearts toward another person?

If you were to meet with Christ when He walked the earth and yet had anger in your heart toward another, what do you suppose He'd say?

- How can you say you love me and yet hate what I love?
- You're not open to anything that I might teach you; first be reconciled with your brother.

Brothers and sisters, now that Christ has ascended into glory, why should fellowship with Him be any different? This is what James wrote:

James 1:21, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

Now truthfully speaking, honesty/integrity will be almost impossible as sinners on account of our default program. We want to relate to God on the basis of our works/deeds.

As such when it comes to fellowshiping with God we will play games. We will lie- even to ourselves. We will think that we are someone we aren't. We do this so that we might come to the opinion that we aren't so bad; truly God can and should love us.

And thus we see the need for the gospel. It alone will enable us to be genuine and real in our walks. It alone will allow me to fellowship/worship "in spirit." Because knowing the forgiveness of sins and that no matter what I discover about myself while fellowshiping with God is forgiven. I no longer have to play the "righteousness" game where I endeavor to prove to God and myself that I'm not so bad. Now I can approach God with this assurance:

- I am ever and always well pleasing in His sight.
- He loves me no matter what I discover about myself.

This "honesty" opens up my relationship with God such that I no longer stand at a distance. Rather, I run



to the shaking mountain, the burning bush, the thunder and smoke without fear of condemnation- for I am standing on a Rock which cannot be moved, Jesus Christ.

## **Walking with Christ**

This brings us to walking with Christ.

Galatians 5:25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

This was such an important exhortation for the Galatians. For them salvation boiled down to a point in time where God had redeemed them. And as such they did not walk with God. Rather they spent their life endeavoring to perfect their salvation in the flesh, by their works.

Paul corrects them by teaching them that as they were saved by faith so now they ought to live by faith. Paul here said, "Walk by the Spirit!"

While there is much that we could say as to what this means, practically speaking it would include living moment by moment in light of the Spirit's presence. Imagine if one of your closest and dearest friends could accompany you throughout your day on your way to work, in the meeting, at the ballgame. What would this be like?

You'd see that arrogant co-worker and say, "That's Bob- the one I told you about. See how he treated me? Pray that I would not respond in anger." You'd receive the phone call from your ailing mother. And as she told you about the latest battle, you might motion to your friend to pray for your wisdom. You'd go to the garage and when they told you what needed to be done in order to fix your car, you'd look to your friend for wisdom and advice.

This is what walking with the Spirit or fellowshiping with Christ is. It is simply living in light of the reality of His presence. It is knowing that He is with you as you go. It is ever and always fellowshiping with Him on the basis of His word such that when that co-worker walks by, you talk to the Lord as you would a dear friend. When you find yourself in a situation requiring wisdom and guidance, you ask it of the Lord as you talk.

Now there is nothing magical or mystical about this. God is a person and as real as your best friend. Accordingly, while you may not see Him, nevertheless He is... "with us always, even to the end of the age." As such as you pray and talk to Him as you go He will speak with you in return. He will not speak to you by an inner impression or feeling BUT by the word of God which you have come to know as you have spent time studying it and learning it.

Such is the glorious blessing that is ours as individuals saved by the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

- Dialoging.
- Being molded and shaped by His grace.
- Being honest and open with Him.
- Walking with Him at all times.

May God grant us the grace to flee from the mysticism propounded by so many today, and instead engage in that for which we have been created: Fellowshiping with Christ.

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and the these notes can be found at [A Buring Heart](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 26, 2006. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.