

Fellowship through Revelation

Fellowship with God Part 3

1 John 1:3

Summary: Verse two emphasizes the fact that the Word was revealed by God (proves perspicuity). Perspicuity is attacked by the scholars (hermeneutic of humility), by popular speakers (ambiguity for unity and growth), and by ourselves (doubting God will reveal His will and guidance). The revealed Word is declared so we can maintain fellowship with the Apostles (not just Paul), which is essential for fellowship with God. The first of the three pagan errors is that fellowship with God bypasses or transcends the intellect. It does not. If God has clearly communicated, we should eagerly listen!

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life-- 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

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Introduction: Revealed, not Discovered

Glenn Seaborg has his name in history books because he is the one who discovered plutonium. Christopher Columbus is credited with discovering the Americas for the Europeans. Isaac Newton is famous for discovering and cataloguing the laws of motion. Lewis and Clark discovered 176 new plants, and Sam Phillips discovered Elvis Presley. Who is famous for discovering the Son of God? No one. The Son of God was not discovered; He was revealed. The reason He is now known all over the world is not because two explorers set out on an expedition and found Him. He did not get famous by making it to the final round of American Idol. The only reason anybody knows about Him is because God has revealed Him. And that fact is so important for

us to know that John interrupts the opening sentence of his epistle to emphasize the fact that God revealed His Son.

Review

The sentence begins in verse one where John highlights three things about Jesus Christ. He was from the beginning – before there was time. He was never created. He was a real, literal, physical human being who was seen and heard and touched by the Apostles. He was the Word of life – the one through whom the life of God can be experienced by us. He was never given life. He Himself is the source of all life. The Word of life became the Bread of life (Jn.6:35) and the Light of life (Jn.8:12). In other words, what God revealed to us became all that we need to have life. He feeds us, satisfies us, shows us the way to the Father, and gives us life. All that is verse one. Then, before getting to the rest of the sentence in verse three, he interrupts himself and sticks in a parenthesis.

The Revelation of the Life v.2

The Father Revealed Him

The end of verse three mentions the Word of life, and then John says, “Speaking of the Word of life.. **2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us**

The NIV says that the life “appeared.” The strength of that translation is that it brings out the visible, seeing aspect of the Greek word. The Word of life became visible. The weakness of that translation, however, is that it does not say anything about the action that was carried out by the Father that made Him visible. And that is the strength of the translations that use the word “revealed.” He did not just become visible; He became visible because God the Father revealed Him. The reason the Message from God was so clear – the reason there is so much empirical proof..., is because God revealed Him. John states that twice in the verse – God revealed the life, God revealed the life.

Definition of Perspicuity

So my question is this: If God tries to reveal something, does He succeed? There is currently a major assault being leveled at the doctrine of the clarity of God’s Word. The theologians have come up with a name for that doctrine. It is called the perspicuity of Scripture.

A century ago the liberals began to attack the inerrancy of Scripture. They said it is full of errors. Others attacked the authority of Scripture. They said it is not necessarily binding on everyone. More recently the Church has really stumbled in confusion regarding the sufficiency of Scripture. They think they need to add all kinds of human wisdom – secular psychology and scientific theories about origins. And now a new battle has arisen. Now instead of attacking the inerrancy of Scripture or the authority of Scripture or the sufficiency of Scripture..., they are going after the perspicuity of Scripture. They are saying the Bible is not clear. Which means God’s attempt at revelation failed.

Perspicuity under attack at three levels

This attack on the doctrine of the clarity of God’s revelation comes at three levels: the scholarly level, the popular level, and the personal level.

1. The scholarly level

At the scholarly level there are many today who are teaching that we cannot really know for sure what the Bible means by what it says most of the time. They say, “We need to be humble and admit that we just cannot be sure of our interpretations.” In fact, they even call it the “hermeneutics of humility.” That phrase is a big buzzword these days. Christian scholars want to be taken seriously so they can reach the world. Nobody wants to spend his whole life studying something and making a major contribution to his field, and then have that

contribution be completely ignored by most scholars because he is branded as a kook. The conservatives do not want to buy in to the liberal ideas, but they do not want to be shunned either, and so what they do is just say, “Well, on this point we just really ca not say *for sure*.”

That fits right in to the spirit of our postmodern age. The world does not care if you do not agree with them – as long as you are not sure you are right about what you do believe. And if you ever do express something as a certainty, be so vague and ambiguous about the way you express it that it does not actually rule out any other view. In my view the Hermeneutics of Humility are really the Hermeneutics of Cowardice. It is good to try to win a listening ear from the world, but never through compromise.

2. The popular level

Another place this doctrine is under attack is at the popular level – preachers and writers who are in a love affair with ambiguity. They do not want to be too clear, because the more clear you are with the gospel the more people you alienate. If you stand up and preach that people need to “come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins,” and you never get more specific than that, you can gather a huge crowd. That sentence: “Come to Jesus for forgiveness through faith” sounds great to Protestants, Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Liberals, Conservatives as long as you avoid being clear about things like, exactly who Jesus Christ is, exactly what the nature of saving faith is, the role of repentance, whether or not water baptism is required for salvation, the nature of grace, what role the sacraments play, the definition of justification, the role of the law of God; etc., then no one gets upset. But the minute you make any kind of clear statement about those things people start leaving your church. Or your ecumenical organization starts falling apart. I used to be in an alliance of evangelical pastors in Boulder County. We would get together for lunch once a month and combine forces for big events. And one day I suggested that perhaps we should write up a statement of the gospel. Not a detailed doctrinal statement or anything like that – just the bare bones minimum of the gospel. I said, “If the purpose of these events is for us to reach people with the gospel, we should agree on what the gospel is.” That suggestion was met not only with rejection, but with anger. Faces turned red, and the guy sitting next to me stood up and said, “I think the worst thing we could ever do would be to get into doctrine.” They know that as soon as you are clear about the gospel somebody is going to be offended.

There are a lot of churches these days that are just ambiguous. You listen to the preaching and there is no false doctrine or serious error. But the teaching is so general and vague and imprecise that hardly anything is actually being communicated. It is just a big fog. It is funny and uplifting and affirming, but vague enough so that each person can interpret what is being said in such a way as to validate what he already thinks. So everybody goes home and says, “What a great sermon – that guy is right on!” And in a place like that if somebody teaches some doctrine, and some of the people agree and others disagree – the teacher gets rebuked for being divisive. They oppose anyone who teaches anything with clarity, because if you are clear about something, the people who do not agree with that view will understand what you are saying and disagree with it. We need to keep in mind the fact that not all division is bad.

1 Corinthians 11:19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

When John wanted to bring about unity and fellowship he wrote a book full of doctrine. Fellowship is not achieved by ignoring differences. It is achieved through mutual embracing of truth. How can we say to the world that the truths in this Book are the very words of Almighty God Himself, and that they bring us life, and renew the soul and show the way and are more precious than gold and sweeter than honey, and at the same time, instead of proclaiming and exalting them we avoid talking to much about them? The last thing we want to do is attract people to this church by concealing the very truth that brings life. Either we believe the gospel brings life or we do not. If we do, let’s be clear and explicit about it. To water down theology to the lowest common denominator of acceptability is to destroy the gospel, because the lowest common denominator is so low that it is less than the bare minimum core of the gospel. You have to throw out essentials if you are going to make everyone happy. We need to be like John. “**What we have heard ... we proclaim,**” so that people might come into fellowship with us and with God, and so that our joy might be full.

3. The personal level

A third area where this doctrine of the clarity of Scripture is under attack is at the personal level, and probably most of us are guilty at this level. Has God promised to guide us like a Shepherd guiding sheep, and to show us the way we should go in life? And yet how many times have we been guilty of assuming that His will is going to be impossible to discover in a certain context? We face one of those extremely hard decisions, and we are awake at night, unable to sleep, because we are fretting and worrying that we might make the wrong decision. We are afraid that even though we are seeking God's guidance to the best of our ability, we might not be able to find it. Isn't that a failure to believe that God is capable of clear communication? (I do not mean to say that it is wrong to stay up all night wrestling with a hard decision. Jesus was up all night the night before He selected the 12. Some decisions are really hard and God wants us up at night. But what is wrong is to be up at night unable to sleep because of fretting and worrying.)

Has God promised to give us insight so that we can understand His Word? And so when we decide we will never be able to understand it and so we give up on Bible study, is that not a failure to believe in the doctrine of the clarity of God's revelation? So whether it is you and I worrying that we cannot be sure of God's guidance or cannot understand Scripture, or the church growth folks preaching in a fog of ambiguity, or the scholars and their hermeneutic of humility and cowardice, it seems like fewer and fewer people are sure about anything these days.

John is sure

This is a good time to study 1 John. Because John is really sure, and he writes so that we will be sure. 36 times in this book you are going to read the word "know" ("*I know*" "*you know*" "*we know*"). John is not into maybe's. You are not going to find any equivocation in this book. He would not be popular in our day. He knows for sure what the truth is and he's writing so you will know for sure what the truth is.

Biblical argument for clarity

God has promised to be clear.

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

The life and ministry of Jesus did not take place in a corner (Acts 26:26) or in a cave.

John 18:20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. ... "I said nothing in secret."

There are many passages we could point to in support of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. But really if we want to prove that God's revelation to us is clear and understandable we do not have to look any further than the word "revelation" itself. If God sent some encrypted message that is unintelligible, then it is not revealed! If it is revealed then by definition it must be understandable to us. Otherwise it would qualify as revelation, and John would have said "The Word was concealed" rather than revealed.

God is a capable communicator. He is not limited by our intellect, or by anything else.¹ That does not mean everything in Scripture is easy to understand. But it does mean that the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things, and if you want to understand the essence of the gospel you will be able to if you seek after it diligently.

Fellowship with the Apostles

¹ He has not promised clarity to those who are unwilling to believe, but for the willing it is promised.

Okay, so now that John has made the point that Jesus was from the beginning, observed empirically by the Apostles, and that He is the Word of life in verse one, and that this eternal, physical Word of life was revealed by God in verse two, he is finally ready to get on with his sentence in verse three and tell us the purpose is – why he is declaring this message.

3 what we have seen and heard² we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship with us

The CSB inserts the word “along,” so it says “you may have fellowship *along* with us.” But I think all the other translations are correct to translate it “fellowship with us.” That is the most natural way to take it.

Spiritual partnership

The “we” in v.3 refers to the ones who saw and heard and touched Jesus - the Apostles. And so their purpose in proclaiming Jesus Christ as the eternal giver of life from God is so that the readers might have fellowship with the Apostles. Now, if you have been going to church all your life you might be wondering – *why would John have to write this epistle in order for the readers to be able to have coffee and doughnuts with the Apostles?* Evidently, John’s idea of fellowship is something a little bigger than coffee and doughnuts. So if fellowship isn’t coffee and doughnuts, what is it?

The word fellowship (Gr. *koinonia*), literally means “sharing” – sharing things or sharing in experiences in such a way that brings you into a relationship of closeness or union with the one with whom you are in fellowship. It is sharing that brings about union or relational closeness. Sometimes the sharing part is emphasized more and other times the union is the main idea. So as Christians our fellowship with one another is oneness and unity of purpose and experience, that comes through partnership and mutual sharing in the work of the Kingdom of God. That is why it can come about through John writing a letter full of doctrine.

No fellowship with Apostles, no fellowship with God

And here the idea is not about fellowship with other Christians in general (that comes in verse seven). Here he is talking specifically about fellowship with the Apostles. And if you wonder what the significance of fellowship with the Apostles is, just read the rest of the sentence.

3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The implication is that if you do not have fellowship with John, then you do not have fellowship with God! There is no fellowship with God, no knowledge of God, no communion with God, no love for God that does not rise out of the revelation of Jesus Christ that came through the Apostles. God can only be known through the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was revealed through the writings of His Apostles (which make up the NT). So if you are at odds with the Apostles you cannot know God.

Beware of Paul-Onlyism

Beware of any who tell you that you do not have to listen to John or Peter or James or any other Apostle. There are people who teach that Paul’s letters are the only part of the Bible written to Gentiles,³ and so as Gentiles we do not need to accept what John says as being directly applicable to us in the same way Paul’s writings are. Beware of that sort of thing, because John taught that if you are not in fellowship with him and the other Apostles you are not in fellowship with God. And what does it mean to be in fellowship with John? Well,

² He starts by repeating the key words from verse 1. After the rabbit trail of v.2 he wants to let you know that he is back to talking about this one who was seen and heard by the Apostles.

³ It is called “Mid-Acts Dispensationalism,” and it is the teaching of Berean churches. They believe that the Gospels and the Epistles of Peter, James, Jude, and John are Holy Scripture, but not addressed to Gentiles. They say they are kind of like the Old Testament – they have principles that apply to us, but they are not directly applicable to us. And usually the people who teach that do so because they have complaints with some of the doctrines in some of those books. They don’t like Peter’s emphasis on repentance, or John talking about confession of sin, etc.

if the reason he wrote what he wrote was so that we might have fellowship with him, then fellowship with him happens through learning and accepting what he wrote.

The people who teach that only Paul applies directly to us very often also teach there are two separate gospels – one for Jews and a different one for Gentiles, and they look at what Peter, James, and John wrote and they see a different gospel that is not sufficient to save Gentiles. But fellowship with the Father comes when we are in harmony with the writings of the John. And so if there are doctrines in John’s writings (or Peter’s or James’ or any other New Testament writer) that you don’t embrace (like repentance or baptism or obedience to the Law of God, or confession of sin), that is a very alarming danger sign.

There is only one gospel, and it is exactly the same for Jews and Gentiles. And it is Paul himself who teaches that as clearly as anyone! He wrote that the separation that used to exist between Jews and Gentiles has now been destroyed. In Ephesians two he said that Jesus is called “our peace” because He

Ephesians 2:14-22 has made the two (Jews and Gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace ... 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

So there is only one gospel for all mankind. Peter, James, John, Jude, the Gospel writers, the writer of Hebrews, and Paul all taught the exact same gospel. And Paul said if anyone comes up with another gospel – even if it is an angel from heaven or Paul himself, let him be accursed (Gal.1).

Strong warning to persevere

So John is delivering a very strong warning to the readers here. If all we had were this opening paragraph we would assume that the readers were unbelievers. It sounds like they have not yet entered into fellowship with God, because John is writing so that they might have fellowship with God. But as we keep reading we find that all through the book John refers to them as believers. He uses the inclusive “we” to refer to them and himself together. And in 5:13 he explicitly states that they have eternal life. And so what this opening statement amounts to is instruction not about how to enter into fellowship with God, but about how to remain in fellowship with God.⁴ Their perseverance is in jeopardy. False teachers are trying to lead them astray, and John is writing to keep the readers from being led astray.

1 John 2:26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

And if they go astray what is at stake is nothing less than fellowship with God.

Fellowship with God

So what is fellowship with God? If the whole purpose of the proclamation of the gospel is for us to have fellowship with God, it is pretty important that we understand what fellowship with God is.

Refuting the pagan view

It is almost certainly true that the reason John brings up the word “fellowship” here is because it was a word the false teachers were misusing. Fellowship does not appear to be a word that was part of John’s preferred vocabulary. He uses the noun in this passage and nowhere else in his epistle (which is uncharacteristic – John likes to repeat key words all through his writing). Also, he uses the word zero times in his entire gospel and zero times in Revelation. So evidently it was a word used by the false teachers in a wrong way.

⁴ I. Howard Marshal, 105, Raymond Brown, 186.

And we know of at least three wrong concepts of fellowship with God that were being taught in John's day: the stoic idea, the Dionysian idea, and the Gnostic idea. The stoics talked a lot about fellowship with God (using the word *koinonia*), but their concept of God was that He was an impersonal force or concept. So by "fellowship with God" what they meant was a particular standing before God only. They thought that if they had an affinity with and agreement with the truth then they were in an ongoing state of "fellowship" with God. It was merely a condition they were in. They did not think of it in terms of a personal, subjective experience or relational interaction with God.

The religion of Dionysus was the opposite extreme. They were the pagan mystics. Fellowship with God for them was a state of ecstatic frenzy. They called it *enthusiasmos*. That word comes from *en* (in) and *theos* (God). "In-Godism" You get into God and He gets into you and the result is ecstatic, uncontrolled, craziness that they called "sacred frenzy." They spoke of being "drunk" with divine inspiration. And they really did act drunk.

A third approach was the approach of the early Gnostics. They had the idea that through attaining special knowledge certain elite, especially enlightened people could ascend into a higher sphere (that is detached from the physical realm) and attain a special oneness with God that was inaccessible to the common man. This could only be attained through the teachings of special "anointed" teachers, who were highly enlightened. They used terms like "abiding with God" and being "children of God," and "knowing God." One of the ancient Gnostic writings that may have been around for a good 200 years by John's time (called the Hermetic writings) speaks of being born again.⁵ The mystic achieves regeneration (rebirth) through a vision in which he becomes detached from the impression of the senses. The vision reaches its climax and the mystic says, "I am in heaven, on earth, in water, in the air...everywhere...Father I see the All and myself in Mind." It is a pantheistic idea in which the mystic becomes identified with the deity by breaking free not only from the senses, but also breaking free from meaningful, sound, logical thought. That is why you get sentences like, "I see the All and myself in Mind."

Forcing false ideas into compliance with the truth

Now, remember what we are supposed to do with ideas and arguments that lift themselves up against the truth of God? Any idea or doctrine that is lifted up against the truth is called a "stronghold" (2 Cor.10:5). And what are we to do when we encounter those strongholds?

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

You kidnap those arguments and ideas, and force them into obedience to the truth. And that is exactly what John is doing here with the false teachers of his time. He rips the very phrases they use to describe their doctrines right out of their hands and uses them in proper ways to correct their false teaching. He kidnaps the idea of fellowship with God and uses that very phrase in a way the refutes the errors of the false teachers. This is a good time for us to study 1 John, because the same three errors of John's day regarding fellowship with God are still prevalent today.

The anti-mind error

The Gnostic error is still very much alive and kicking. People think fellowship with God can be attained by bypassing the intellect. Or they think communion with God somehow "transcends" the intellect. You see this in those meetings where the leaders work the crowd into a frenzy. They do all they can to get everyone to focus completely on feeling and not to think rationally. That was a big part of the Toronto "blessing" and Brownsville "revival" where the people were laughing uncontrollably and barking like dogs, etc. Rodney Howard-Browne would urge people over and over, "Stop praying. Some of you are praying – please, stop praying. You can pray later." Prayer ruins the whole thing because it engages the mind.⁶

⁵ The Hermetic writings have been variously dated. Some date them as early as 200 B.C., others in the first Century, and others later. See the Wikipedia article on Hermeticism. The section in question is the 13th Hermetic Tract.

⁶ One such instance is available from <http://www.bible.ca/tongues-audio-video-documentation.htm>

In an interview Browne said that in his mind the content of what is preached is “almost irrelevant.” “One night I was preaching on hell,” Howard-Browne said, continuing, “and it just hit the whole place. The more I told people what hell was like, the more they laughed, and when I gave an altar call, they came forward by the hundreds to get saved.”⁷ They have fallen in love with anything that has the appearance of being supernatural. You can spot these people because they talk about miracles as if they were something far greater than providence. They get real excited about a miraculous healing, and they hardly care at all about a natural healing. They love what they call “manifestations.” (By that they mean anything that is unusual or bizarre.) Browne even said, “I’d rather be in a church where the devil and the flesh are manifesting than in a church where nothing is happening because people are too afraid to manifest anything... and if the devil manifests, don’t worry about that, either. Rejoice, because at least something is happening.”⁸

Just the other day someone was telling me about a church he visited where they were telling him, “Don’t use your mind – your mind is your enemy.” The techniques that work a crowd into a frenzy are well known techniques that have been used by stage hypnotists for years. These preachers do exactly the same things that the stage hypnotists do. And it has the same effect. It puts people into an altered state of consciousness that feels like a profound religious experience. But it does not work very well if people are thinking rationally, and so they discourage that.

The Gnostic ideas of the time held that there are other pathways to fellowship with God. There were people claiming to have a special anointing, so that you could only find fellowship with God through their special teaching. (ch.2) They had a system in which enlightenment had nothing to do with morality. Truth about the historical person and work of Jesus Christ was not considered essential. They thought you could be ignorant about that and still have access to fellowship with God.

All those errors exist today. There are a lot of Christians who think they can bypass the hard work of studying and properly interpreting God’s Word, and skip directly to an experience with God apart from doctrine. Or they get caught up with some teacher whose teaching is nonsense. And if you point out that it is nonsense they say that is just proof that you are not enlightened. You are still operating on normal logic and reason, and this teaching transcends all that.

Don’t ever fall for that. There is no truth that transcends logic. By definition that which is not logical is meaningless. Sentences that do not make sense are not higher than reason – they are lower. People who use nonsensical language to describe what they think are transcendent truths are really just reverting back to their days as a one-year-old when they were unable to express their thoughts in coherent sentences. It is not a sign of spirituality or enlightenment. It is just a sign of a foggy mind that does not have clear understanding.

The role of the mind

So John writes about fellowship with God in a way that exposes the error of the Gnostic teaching. Rudolf Schnackenburg: “To this mystery piety, with its strong focus on experience, its wallowing in the inebriation of divine inspiration, there can be no greater contrast than the piety of the Johannine writings, with its emphasis on faith, its lucidity of mind, and its ethical sobriety – and, on the other hand, its fervent love.... Fellowship with God is attained through faith rather than through ecstasy.”⁹

John points out that the truth appeared in plain, clear form that could be touched and heard and understood and clearly communicated in ordinary language. And fellowship with God is attained through the doctrines of the book 1 John.

You never see biblical descriptions of experiences with God that say anything about bypassing the intellect. Just the opposite. It is always through understanding truth (doctrine) that you gain access into the presence of God. When the psalmist wanted to enter in to the presence of God he asked God to send him truth.

Psalm 43:3-4 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy of all my rejoicing.

⁷ Julia Duin, “An Evening with Rodney Howard-Browne,” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1995, 43

⁸ Rodney Howard-Browne, “The Coming Revival” (1991), page 6

⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, 67.

Hosea said the same thing:

Hosea 6:3 Let us know. Let us press on to know the LORD. His appearance is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring showers that water the land.

Experiences of the presence of God come through knowledge. When the Disciples failed to understand something Jesus taught, Jesus said it was a sign of little faith.¹⁰ In the parable of the soils Jesus said that lack of understanding is the cause of the seed of the gospel being snatched away from a person's heart. ¹¹

Paul prayed for the Philippians to experience blamelessness, purity, and righteousness by means of increasing knowledge, depth of insight, and discernment. (Php.1:9-11) The book of the Bible that focuses most heavily on personal, subjective experiences with God is Psalms. And the Psalms are as cogent and intellectually rigorous as any part of Scripture.

Information, by itself, is not enough to have communion with God. Knowing a person is a lot more than just gathering facts. You can have awareness of thousands of facts about a person and still not know them personally or love them. Love is a lot more than knowing information. But it is not less than knowing information. If I claim to love my wife, but I don't know anything about her, I am kidding myself. If you do not recognize a person when you see them, and you have no idea what that person loves or hates, or what that person is like, then you can not love that person with any meaningful depth of love.

A couple years ago I was thinking about this, and it occurred to me how little I really know about God. I tried to see how many of His attributes I could list off the top of my head. I don't remember how many I came up with, but I remember it was a pretty short list. And so I began studying and praying through the Psalms, and each time I came across an attribute of God I added it to my list. So far I have gone through just 24 psalms, and from those 24 psalms (plus a few individual verses) my list is up over 150 attributes now. And I guarantee that little study does not even scratch the surface of what God has revealed about Himself. We worship a God whose wonders are unfathomable and innumerable.

Psalm 106:2 Who can declare the LORD's mighty acts or proclaim all the praise due Him?

Psalm 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

Job 5:9 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, wonders that cannot be counted.

Job 26:14 And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and untraceable His ways!

Just the things about Himself that God has clearly revealed to us are no doubt too many for any one person to catalogue in a single lifetime. And every single one of those attributes is a galaxy of delightful and awesome truth that could never be fully comprehended or appreciated by a finite creature. Even if God had only revealed one of His attributes to us it would be enough to keep us busy studying and learning for all eternity. I have made my little list that is so far up to 150, and one of those 150 that John emphasizes in this passage is that He is a self-revealing God. That's one of His attributes.

If God has clearly communicated, we should eagerly listen!

We will look more next time into the meaning of fellowship with God, but for now let's just savor the sweet taste of this one attribute. God has revealed Himself to us in a way we can understand. As we will see next time, fellowship with God takes place when you consciously enjoy the experience of one of His attributes. So how do we experience this one? What should be our response to the fact that He is a self-revealing God? Obviously, that attribute is experienced by us when we study about Him and learn all we can of Him for the

purpose of knowing Him and loving Him more. When you study what He has revealed of Himself you place yourself into a position of being able to experience this attribute. And you can enjoy the experience of being tutored by Him.

If your best friend opened up her diary to you and let you read her most private thoughts, or someone close to you came and poured out his heart to you with complete honesty and transparency, lack of interest on your part would dishonor that person. Great, intense interest, combined with admiration and delight in what you read or hear – that would greatly honor that person.

We have to have enough balance in the way we spend our time so that we do not neglect any essential things. If a person spent all his time studying, and no time in ministry or loving his family or prayer or earning a living – that would be wrong. So it is possible to study God's Word too much. However, my guess is if I asked for a show of hands of those who are spending too much time in the study of God's Word, not many hands would go up. But if I said raise your hand if you know for a fact that you study too little, my guess is quite a few would go up. If you are one who studies too little God has opened up His diary and revealed the deep and marvelous secrets of His heart in Scripture, He has spoken to you life-giving, soul-satisfying truths, He has exposed to you His very thoughts and affections and desires, and your response has been to glance at it, yawn, and be on your way; or if you look into what He has revealed with a sense of resentment that you have to endure this painful chore of listening to God's voice, I urge you to make 2008 a year of listening to God.

Some of you could increase your study simply by getting a good study Bible, like the NIV Study Bible (which has notes that explain what the verses mean). Or maybe you need to save some pennies and get your hands on a good commentary. Or maybe you need to invest a month or two into learning the principles of hermeneutics (how to interpret the Bible). I taught a class on that. It has 16 parts and you can download the mp3s and the notes for free on TreasuringGod.com. Others of you need to start listening to some good preaching during the week on the radio or online. Once a day turn on R.C. Sproul or James Kennedy, or John MacArthur, or Alister Begg, or James McDonald, or John Piper, or Ravi Zacharias, or Ed Taylor, or James Boice. Any one of those you can listen to for free any time of the day on OnePlace.com. Or some of them you can catch on the radio on 94.7 KRKS.

More Bible study is not the solution for all of you. Some of you, I would imagine, are already studying as much as you can, and the main thing you need to focus on is how to get from that study to greater intimacy with God. And that is what we will talk about next week. But for now let's all resolve to honor God in the way we receive what He has revealed. I am going to close by misquoting Acts 17:11.

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they ... examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

That is almost always the way you hear the verse quoted, and yet that is not what it says. It does not say that the Bereans were more noble because they searched the Scriptures to check if what Paul was saying was correct. Sometimes people think of the Bereans in Acts 17 as being skeptical and slow to accept what Paul was saying until they could verify it. That is the opposite of what the verse actually says. Here is the correct quotation:

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Examining the Scriptures, by itself, does nothing to honor God. What honors God is the eagerness in your heart to receive what He has revealed. If God has revealed something it is a greater treasure than anything in this world, amen? So let's all have eagerness of heart that matches that "amen."

Benediction: Php.1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God