

THE NATURE OF FELLOWSHIP IN 1 JOHN 1:3-10

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Following the growth of Korean Christendom in age and in size, a significant issue has been raised.¹ The Korean church has been eager to grow in size, but the situation has changed. There is now a new movement of church growth in Korea. The focus has shifted from quantity to quality. Though growth in quantity is still an important concern for every individual church, nowadays the Korean church in general has more concern on the growth in quality. The main reason for this trend is because of the stagnation of the Korean church.² In spite of a heavy percentage of Christians in Korea, their influence on society has not been comparable.

For the purpose of diagnosing the condition and then prescribing a solution for the Korean church, the First Epistle of John is one of the best texts in the Bible to apply concerning growth in quality. 1 John is a practical book for all believers that deals with how a believer in Jesus Christ should behave in addition to how one should confess his faith.³ That is why 1 John has been the most cherished book for nourishing believers throughout church history.⁴

Among the many significant themes in 1 John, to have true fellowship is a significant message for the modern Korean church in its current situation. Many scholars agree that this fellowship theme is the purpose of the epistle. This theme is the most intimate word for

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¹Protestant Christianity in Korea faces the fourth generation now since the first encounter with the protestant missionaries on the Easter day of 1885.

²After the great advancement in church growth in the 1970's, the Korean church is facing a plateau, if not a minor decrease, in church growth.

³Zane C. Hodges, "Fellowship and Confession in 1 John 1:5-10," *BSac* 129 (1972): 48, calls this brief single passage of Scripture the most "crucial and fundamental to daily Christian living."

⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of John* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 1, comments on this epistle, "First John is indeed a singular, irreplaceable gem among the New Testament."

believers and contains a deeper meaning that is crucial for all believers in Christ. The tests for true fellowship will guide the Korean church toward the right direction. The point of this study is to discover the nature of fellowship in 1 John. Why did the apostle use this theme? What does it mean to have fellowship among the believers? The first chapter of 1 John clarifies the nature of fellowship and the term fellowship appears three times in this first chapter (1 John 1:3, 6, 7). The related passages develop the concept of fellowship either in a positive or in a negative way.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

The purpose of the Gospel of John is clearly stated in John 20:30-31, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” The focus of the gospel is to lead people to Christ by showing who Jesus is and to challenge them to respond favorably to him through the means of miraculous signs, which Jesus had performed.⁵ Most scholars have no problem accepting this purpose as the main one for the Gospel of John. However, the purpose of 1 John is unclear and leaves much room for disagreement among scholars.

The Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John

To understand the purpose of the epistle, the relationship of the Gospel of John and 1 John need to be rethought. The gospel and the epistles of John are deeply related.⁶ Not only did the same author write them, but they also share complementing aspects, which facilitate a better understanding of both texts.⁷ 1 John has many similarities to the

⁵Concerning the purpose statement and some exegetical key points of the gospel, see my article, “Three Exegetical Key Points to Interpret the Gospel of John,” *Torch Trinity Journal* 4 (2001): 116-134.

⁶I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2, even recommends that 2, 3 John should be read first and then 1 John in turn before reading the Gospel of John, which is a “good starting point for the study of the Gospel of John” and will help readers to grasp John’s message more clearly.

⁷Concerning the relationship of the Gospel of John and 1 John, see Marshall, 31-42, and

Gospel of John in vocabulary,⁸ in key themes, and even in structure as well as in style. Most Johannine scholars agree with the illustration Brooke Foss Westcott suggested on the Johannine characteristics: emphatic monotony or simplicity, directness of the narrative, the circumstantialities of his style, and the frequent repetition of the subject or of the significant word in a sentence.⁹ These Johannine characteristics can be applied more or less directly to the study of 1 John.

Vocabulary

The simplicity of vocabulary and sentence form with solemn directness can be found throughout 1 John.¹⁰ One thing is to be added upon this simplicity of Johannine vocabulary. Even though each word is simple, almost every word is related to other terms and concepts.¹¹ The interrelatedness of vocabulary allows even simple words to carry a deeper meaning. Both books start with the prologue declaring the author's own eyewitness¹² of the Word (λο/γος) who is the preexistent Christ,¹³ the main theme of the writings. This Word is related to life and light, existing from the beginning (ἀρχῆ/) with the Father (πατὴρ) both in the gospel and the epistle.¹⁴

Since the gospel and 1 John were written by the same author,¹⁵ the

Hiebert, 6-11.

⁸A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, ICC (New York: Scribner's, 1912), ii-viii, lists no less than 51 references/parallels that verify common authorship between 1 John and the Gospel of John.

⁹Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, ed. A. Westcott (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), lxvii-clxxviii.

¹⁰In spite of common terminology in both the epistle and the gospel, Hiebert, 7, emphasizes that the repetition is not stereotypical.

¹¹A good example is that the fellowship concept, which is the main topic of this writing, is explained in relation to many other terms such as faith, love, hate, dwelling, and so on.

¹²The witness theme can be found throughout the books of the gospel and the epistle even in the prologue. The main difference on witness is that the gospel focuses on the witnesses of John the Baptist and that of Jesus as the true witness while the epistle focuses on the witness of the apostle John with other first eyewitnesses.

¹³Concerning the nature of the λο/γος see J. H. Bernard. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), lx-lxi.

¹⁴Westcott, cii-ciii, points out three pairs of ideas, witness and truth, glory and light, judgment and life, as the characteristic repetition and development in the structure of John's Gospel.

¹⁵Concerning the common authorship of these two books, see Brooke, i-xix and F.F. Bruce,

three key exegetical words in the purpose statement of the gospel may be used to bridge the gospel with the epistle. The term, sign (*shmei on*), as the first key word,¹⁶ does not appear in the epistle but its concept does. As Leon Morris points out in his commentary, “sign” has an aspect of “witness.”¹⁷ This witness aspect of sign sheds light on the purpose of 1 John as well as other related themes.

In the gospel, sign is focused on bearing witness to the divinity of Christ together with the witnesses of John the Baptist, of the disciples, of the Holy Spirit, of the Old Testament, and of God the Father.¹⁸ The epistle has another aspect of witness in addition to the witness of God the Father to His Son. It focuses on both the witness of God’s love for mankind and the believer’s love for God.¹⁹ In the gospel, what Jesus has done, and what he has said functions as signs for witnessing to Jesus’ messianic status. On the contrary, in the epistle what believers are doing in love and showing in correct behavior, and what believers are saying function as signs for their love for God.²⁰

The second exegetical key word relating the gospel to the first epistle is “belief in Jesus.”²¹ In the gospel, John focuses on having a right response from the readers through the miraculous sign materials. The same response or the result of the response is prominent in the epistle as well. Both books emphasize the incarnation of the Son of God from a different aspect. On the one hand, the gospel is a book concerning the life *of* the incarnate Word. On the other hand, the epistle is a book concerning the life *in* the incarnate Word.²²

The Epistles of John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 30-31.

¹⁶Concerning the nature and significance of miraculous sign in John, see Kim, 118-122.

¹⁷Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 855.

¹⁸Concerning the witness idea in the Gospel of John, refer to Bernard, xc-xciii and Morris, 90-91.

¹⁹1 John approaches this witness concept in a judicial situation, “We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son” (5:9).

²⁰Urvan C. von Wahlde, *The Johannine Commentaries: 1 John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 93, describes this love emphasis: “This love has a witness value similar to the witness value for one another as commanded in 13:35.”

²¹Concerning the role of belief in the Gospel of John, see Kim, 122-128.

²²John 1:14 and 1 John 4:2.

Theology

The third exegetical key word is “life.”²³ Even though they cover basic faith in Christ, their contexts are very different. The main reason for the differences of these two books of John comes from their differences in emphasis. As the historical situation implies, the epistle was written to readers who had believed in Jesus as Lord and Christ.²⁴ Thus, while the gospel challenges non-believers to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, the epistle deals with post-gospel events. The epistle challenges those who have accepted Jesus and already have life eternal. John challenges believers not to commit sin, but enjoy the life eternal, into which they had already been received. The emphasis of the gospel is Christ “the one who has been sent from God.” The relationship between Christ and the believer is the focus of the gospel.²⁵ However, the epistle moves its emphasis from Christ to believers “who are born of God.” The relationship of believers with God in Christ is the focus of the epistle. For this reason, the first epistle emphasizes on correct belief on the person of Christ rather than on simple confession of their faith in him. The level of their understanding of Christ is different. The gospel focuses on the incarnate Christ, the eternal Word of God, but the epistle focuses on Christ the eternal life. The epistle does not mention the miraculous signs of Jesus’ earthly ministry for the purpose of challenging readers to accept Jesus’ messianic status, which is the key theme of the Gospel of John.

Tests of Life

Assurance of Eternal Life

The main difference between the epistle and the gospel is the purpose of writing. John’s purpose in his first epistle is for practical edification and exhortation of his readers.²⁶ Scholars are divided into

²³See Kim, 128-132.

²⁴Cf. 1 John 5:13. For more details, refer to Brooke, xix-xxvii and Marshall, 31-42. Concerning different views of the priority of the two books, see Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 9-14

²⁵Westcott, clxxvii, calls the gospel a history and the epistle an application.

²⁶Some suggest a polemic purpose together with a practical one. See Hiebert, 20-22. Brooke, xxvii, points out the possibility of a polemic purpose in the sense that “the writer never loses sight

two major views on the message of 1 John.²⁷ The first and older view sees the purpose as to encourage his readers and to assure their salvation.²⁸ This view is based on the apparent purpose statement in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” To reinforce his purpose, John uses “knowledge,” “assurance,” and “eternal life” frequently throughout the epistle. John wants his “children” to have true faith and enjoy life as believers. For this purpose, John provides a series of tests of love, confession of faith and behavior to encourage and stimulate their spiritual growth. According to this view, all the key words in this epistle contain soteriological meanings. Even “fellowship” should be understood soteriologically. “To be in fellowship” is equivalent to having eternal life, or being saved.²⁹

Realized Eschatology

In the writings of John, eternal life is not an eschatological event, which will start at the time of Jesus’ second coming. Rather eternal life in John starts at the very moment when one receives Jesus Christ, and when God bestows sonship on the new believer as a member of the divine household (John 1:12). God-given eternal life starts at that moment and lasts forever in the Johannine writings. D. C. Allison is right when he applies C. H. Dodd’s concept of realized eschatology to John.³⁰ John emphasizes realized eschatology both in the gospel and the first epistle.³¹

altogether of the views of his opponents in any part of the epistle,” in contrast to the practical purpose for his “children.”

²⁷Concerning the two major views in detail, see Gary Derickson’s article, “What is the Message of 1 John,” *BSac* 150 (1993): 89-105. Also refer to his Doctoral dissertation, “An Evaluation of Expository Options of 1 John,” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993).

²⁸Derickson, “Expository Options,” 16-48, call this “tests of life view.” Brooke, 10, uses different terms for two purposes. He illustrates two theses, one “ethical,” and the other “christological.”

²⁹James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 31.

³⁰D. C. Allison Jr., “Eschatology,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 206-209.

³¹Eschatological things as future event in the writings of John are mentioned but without specifics such as “last day” (John 6:39). Rather “eternal life,” “living water,” even resurrection can be experienced now: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even

Tests of Fellowship

The second view sees fellowship as the purpose of 1 John.³² Some books in the New Testament have no direct purpose statement, which causes difficulty in interpreting them. However, in 1 John the problem is that it suggests more than one purpose statement. In this epistle, the apostle John suggests three additional purpose statements besides 1 John 5:13. The first three telic clauses clearly support the second view of a sanctificational purpose.³³ Fellowship, abiding, eternal life, and knowing God are terms deeply related to this purpose. In contrast to the Gospel of John, which emphasizes the lordship of Christ, the first epistle emphasizes the post-belief condition of believers.

Fellowship (κοινωνία) is a special word to show a unique relationship among believers. Especially in 1 John, the apostle emphasizes the significance of this fellowship of the divine household who have eternal life. Fellowship and life eternal are two sides of the same coin. They cannot be separated. In this sense, Derickson's attempt to delineate "either-or-purpose division" is faulty reasoning. Even Boice, whom Derickson puts under the group who supports the fellowship view, does not take either of the two views. Boice suggests both views and mentions a twofold objective.³⁴ In addition, John G. Mitchell, whom Derickson puts under the fellowship view as well, suggests a threefold purpose.³⁵ Both views have weaknesses and strengths. As is the natural result of the discussion, one single view on the purpose of the first epistle cannot stand sufficiently. As Derickson himself confesses and concludes, "the author's overarching purpose is not found in either purpose clause [fellowship or eternal life] ..[and] allows each passage in the epistle to be interpreted without undue

though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26; cf. 1 John 5:13).

³²Concerning those who support this second view, see Derickson, "Expository Options," 2, n. 4.

³³1 John uses four telic *i°na* clauses: "so that you also may have fellowship with us (*i°na kai« uJmei B koinwni+an e¶chte*)" (1:3); "to make our joy complete (*i°na hJ cara» hJmw n hØ™ peplhrwme+nh*)" (1:4); "so that you will not sin (*i°na mh\ a ma;rthte*)" (2:1); "so that you may know (*i°na ei dhvte*)" (5:13).

³⁴Boice, 30-32.

³⁵John G. Mitchell, *Fellowship: A Devotional Study of the Epistle of John* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1974), 14-17.

influence from either sub-purpose.”³⁶

FELLOWSHIP WITH US

Witness Brings the Fellowship

Regardless of the result that whether or not fellowship is the only purpose, this concept takes a key role in understanding of the whole discussion on the purpose of this epistle. The possible translations of the Greek word *koinwni÷a* are “fellowship,” “participation,” or “impartation.” This noun is derived from the verb *koinwne/w*.³⁷ P. T. O’Brien characterizes two aspects of Pauline fellowship, “having a share in” and “giving a share in,” which can be applied to John as well.³⁸ The basic concept of this Greek word group, which is different from the contemporary understanding, is having something in common with someone.³⁹ John challenges readers to join in the common belief that they have heard, seen, even touched and dwelt amidst. Both the gospel and the epistle start with this witness theme in the prologues.⁴⁰ In the epistle, the beginning of fellowship is the moment of accepting the proclaimed witness, which the apostles have seen and heard. The gospel had been private, owned by a few limited eyewitnesses, the disciples and followers of Jesus. By sharing what they owned to other people, the private became the common. This is the beginning of fellowship in the epistle. This is the process of “giving and having fellowship” started by making the gospel common.⁴¹

³⁶Derickson, “Message of 1 John,” 105.

³⁷Brooke, 8, points out that this verb is “always used of active participation, where the result depends on the co-operation of the receiver as well as on the actions of the giver.”

³⁸P. T. O’Brien, “Fellowship, Communion, Sharing,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 293-296.

³⁹There were various things they were sharing: shared partnership (Luke 5:10), common mortality (Heb 2:14), the total life of the tree (Rom 11:17), and the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 10:16ff).

⁴⁰“We have seen his glory” (John 1:14), “we have all received” (John 1:16), “which we have heard,” “which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (1 John 1:1), “we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim” (1 John 1:2), and “we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard” (1 John 1:3). Cf. “And we have seen and testify” (1 John 4:14).

⁴¹A. Casurella characterizes the early Christian teaching of fellowship as “receiving and giving fellowship” in the article, “Fellowship,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 373-374.

Signs for Horizontal Fellowship

Two Dimensional Fellowship

The unique point of fellowship in 1 John is that it has two-dimensions. It has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Fellowship exists between man and man horizontally. Also vertically it has a relationship “with God the Father and with his Son” (v. 3). In the gospel, John uses miraculous signs to prove the divine sonship of Jesus Christ. In the first epistle, John illustrates some signs for proving the divine sonship of believers.

Fellowship Contains a Sign of Eternal Life

The first sign for divine sonship is eternal life. As the result of receiving the word of life (τοὺν λόγον τῆς ζωῆς in v. 1) they are to share the eternal life with Christ who has eternal life in him (1 John 5:13). In this sense, life and fellowship are not to be separated purpose themes but should be the twofold purpose for this epistle. There are many signs of life in the epistle. All the other products mentioned in relation to this fellowship functions like miraculous signs in the Gospel of John. The application of sign to each individual is different in both books. In the gospel, it is a subjective response. Each individual needs to respond to the miraculous signs either positively or negatively. In the epistle, it is an objective response. Signs are not waiting for each individual's response. Signs that are brought out from each individual's life are to be proved by other people positively or negatively.

Fellowship Establishes a New Relationship with God

The second sign for believer's divine sonship is “born of God,” as well as “children of God.”⁴² To be a divine son, one must be born of

⁴²Judith M. Lieu points out in her monograph, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33-34, that John uses a different term for believers. In contrast to Paul, John uses τεκνία for Christians, and υἱοῦ for the Son, in contrast to Paul who prefers υἱοῦ for both Jesus and the Christian.

God.⁴³ This spiritual relationship comes from God through the agency of the Word and the Spirit.⁴⁴ Those who are born of God join the family of God corporately with legal birthrights. All the family members share every family matter in common, even the likeness of God,⁴⁵ which provides another characteristic of fellowship. Family rights and responsibilities are bestowed on them and become family tradition. Through this spiritual begetting, fellowship literally occurs between family members. It also creates separation from the outsiders of the divine family. The phrase “of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ)” tells their divine origin and offers separation from the world. Another phrase in 1 John 2:19 “of us (ἐκ ἡμῶν)” shows clearly the boundary of family fellowship. “Born of God” is a clear dividing edge for the divine family from their opponents. Corporate joy is the product of this divine fellowship. John says, “We write this to make our joy complete.”⁴⁶

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Fellowship Signifies the Unity in God

The most significant contribution of the fellowship idea in 1 John is that it points out the vertical aspect of Christian fellowship. Horizontal fellowship among the believers is to be based on the vertical fellowship with God. The vertical fellowship is described as that with the Father, and that with His Son. Without the vertical relationship with God, Christian fellowship has no meaning. This is the point that contemporary Christians might be missing. In his high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed that all his disciples, even future followers be united, as Jesus and the Father are one (John 17:20-21; cf. 10:30).⁴⁷ The Triune

⁴³John uses the perfect tense (γεγενηται) in all occurrences in the epistle (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; cf. John 1:13; 3:6, 8).

⁴⁴Concerning the reason why the Holy Spirit is called “anointing (κρισμα)” in the epistle, Marshall, 153, explains it as a play on the word antichrist (ἀντίχριστος).

⁴⁵1 John 3:2 reads, “we shall be like him.”

⁴⁶The form of the verb πεπληρωμεν is a perfect passive subjunctive periphrastic construction. Hiebert’s explanation on this verb is meaningful, “The perfect passive points to joy continuing as fully complete, while the subjunctive suggests a future fulfillment beyond this present life” (p. 51). Boice, 31, emphasizes the futuristic aspect of the subjunctive mood and defines this joy as completed only in heaven.

⁴⁷Concerning the discussion of the unity of Father and Son, see Bernard, 365-366.

God is the source of true fellowship. Through this unity, Christian fellowship becomes divine fellowship. It is interesting that Hodges sees “the first-second-third person relationships” in verse five.⁴⁸

Manifestation of Divine Character

Light, Sign for Fellowship with God

The manifestation of God’s nature is a sign to test whether or not one has true fellowship with God. The first character of God realized in believers is that God is light. The gospel calls Christ as light in many places (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). This light and darkness concept is used both figuratively and literally in the gospel. In the epistle, only the figurative meaning is used. Conzelmann considers this concept as ethical in the sense that they are linked with a *martiría* and *yeuvdois*.⁴⁹ “The children of light” phrase had been popular both in Hellenistic culture and among the Jewish community such as Qumran.⁵⁰ However, the light concept is originally an Old Testament concept. The first thing that God created was light. And John relates this fact in the prologue of his gospel. In the Bible, light stands for the symbol for holiness and purity. Also it stands for understanding and revelation from God. In this fellowship passage John uses this term in a moral sense. The statement that “God is light” cannot be found in the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. This epistle is the only place that this statement is found. The question could be solved, as Boice points out, in that since Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father, the revelation of God in Christ explains everything.⁵¹

Lightless Fellowship is Fellowship Without Commitment

John introduces three negative statements that reinforce the true

⁴⁸Zane C. Hodges, “Fellowship and Confession in 1 John 1:5-10,” *BSac* 129 (1972): 48-60. Hodges, 48-49, explains that apostles (we) communicate to the readers (you) the message either from God or from the Son (he).

⁴⁹Hans Conzelmann, “*sko/tos, skoti+a, ktl.*” in *TDNT* 7:444.

⁵⁰Concerning the Old Testament and Hellenistic backgrounds, see Hodges, 50. Also see Earl F. Palmer, *1,2,3 John & Revelation*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1982), 26-28 and Bruce, 41.

⁵¹Boice, 36.

concept of divine fellowship. All the three false claims start with “if we say (ε α»ν ειϋρωμεν οϋτι).”⁵² John replies to their false claims with his denial of the teachings.⁵³ The first false teaching at the time was that some who practiced the works of darkness also insisted on their fellowship with the God of light. Light and darkness cannot go together (John 1:5; 1 John 1:5). This claim is common and can be found even among us nowadays. They confess faith in God, but their practice proves their failure in the fellowship with God. It is a separation of religion and ethics. They like to enjoy all the privileges of faith but reject the responsibilities of commitment. The meaning of “walk in the darkness” is habitual sin.⁵⁴

FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS

Realized Divine Nature Through Fellowship

The same principle is applied to other fellowship statements in the epistle. All things mentioned about God could be applied to Jesus at the same time, or vice versa. Fellowship with God opens a new relationship with God in unity. The nature of this unity is not only religious participation in rituals, but literally sharing the character of God as well. This is what Peter calls, “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). In the Gospel of John, Christ was represented as a connecting point between God and the world, including believers, starting with the creation of the universe. However, the epistle takes all these relationships as realized. The gospel purports that the reader may have eternal life, but the epistle takes eternal life for granted, which is the common theme of the

⁵²Brooke, 13, comments on the form of this phrase, “The form of the sentence introduces a not impossible, perhaps a not unlikely, contingency. And the use of the first person plural, where the writer is thinking of his τεκνι/α, with whom he is in spiritual fellowship, and with whom he identifies himself as ‘compassed with infirmity’ and not free from the dangers to which he knows them to be exposed. .the influence of his opponents had made itself felt both in thought and practice.”

⁵³John refutes them with the phrase; “we lie” (1:6), “we deceive ourselves” (1:8), and “we make him out to be a liar” (1:10).

⁵⁴John uses present tense verbs related to sin (cf. 1 John 3:8, 9) and emphasizes the habitual state. And John clearly proclaims that everyone sins (v. 5).

purpose statements (John 20:31 and 1 John 5:13). The same principle could be applied to the other themes in the books. The gospel relates life, light, and love to Christ, but the epistle relates them both to God and Christ.⁵⁵

In this sense, fellowship with God can be identified with the fellowship with the Son mentioned in verse three. However, fellowship with the Son sheds light on another aspect of the concept of fellowship. Through the revelation of Jesus, the things that had been related to God became applicable to the Son. Through the earthly ministry of the Son, fellowship with the Father became a reality.

In the gospel, John verifies through seven miraculous signs that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In the epistle, John verifies through three pairs of signs whether or not a believer is a son of God in fellowship. Those three pairs of signs are light and darkness, love and hate, and truth and lie.⁵⁶ The result of these tests appears in a true-false form. These signs were challenged by the opponents who were trying to draw believers away from the household of God through new but false teachings on Christ. Marshall calls it, “some form of Christless religion.”⁵⁷ They insisted that it is possible to have fellowship with God without Christ.

Fellowship is Possible Only After the Forgiveness of Sin

The first denial leads to the idea of perfection. This second false claim of the opponents insists that they are “without sin.” This phrase may have two meanings. The first meaning is temporary purity without sin. The second meaning is that there is no such thing like sin, whose idea can be found in modern Freudian psychology that denies an objective basis for guilt. This idea can be related to Gnostics as well. The literal meaning of that phrase is “have no sin (a marti÷an oujk e¶comen)” which is distinguished from the verb “to sin (a marta;nw).” Brooke explains that this phrase “denies the abiding

⁵⁵For details on the different aspects of God and Christ, see Brooke, xvi-xviii.

⁵⁶Bruce, 29, distinguishes three main courses of thought, each course has two main themes, ethical and Christological.

⁵⁷Marshall, 106.

power of sin as a principle in one who has committed sins.”⁵⁸ This false claim is a strong rejection of the mission of Jesus on earth, his crucifixion on the cross. To deny the existence of sin, temporally or essentially, is the denial of the basic need of Christ’s incarnation for human redemption. Against the first false teaching, John calls it a lie, an intentional deception. In the case of the second false teaching, John calls it self-deception, an unintentional deception, which comes from ignorance.

Jesus came to solve the basic problem of human sin. Unless one solves this problem of sin, there is no fellowship with God, and no fellowship with his Son is meaningful. Unless one accepts the truth of human sinfulness, there is no need for Christ. After refuting the two false teachings, John emphasizes the only perfect solution of the sinful nature of human beings. Confession⁵⁹ is the recognition of our sinfulness and acceptance of Christ’s redemptive ministry on earth. This process of forgiveness is purifying divine children from all darkness to have the right fellowship with God who is light through Jesus Christ his Son. In that sense, fellowship with the Father and with the Son must go together.

The third denial deals with the inner sinful nature as distinguished from the act of sin. This is the most serious false teaching. According to this false teaching God is a liar, who sent his Son to die on behalf of the sins of human beings who have no sins at all. The main difference of the verbs used in verses eight and ten is the change of tense, from the present to the aorist. It is a denial of God’s character. It also is a denial of God’s special revelation where we find the problem of human sin and God’s redemptive solution through his Son.

CONCLUSION

Considering the situation of the Korean church, the biblical concept of fellowship in 1 John 1:3-10 sheds light for its guidance. Both the Gospel of John, and 1 John deals with signs, belief and eternal life.

⁵⁸Brooke, 17.

⁵⁹Literal meaning of confession (οἴμοιλογεῖω) is “say the same thing,” which is the denial of the second false teaching.

However, their approach is different because of their different purposes of writing and of their historical situations. They used the same vocabulary but with different aspects. In the gospel, John relates significant themes to God's witness for Christ's divinity. In the epistle, John emphasizes rather on the divine sonship of believers in fellowship with God and his Son.

The first fellowship is phrased as the "fellowship with us." This signifies sharing among Christian believers. This horizontal fellowship signifies eternal life given from God through Jesus, the life from God. Fellowship is sharing in common among the divine family members who are born of God.

The horizontal fellowship is based on the vertical fellowship with God. Light, representative of the divine characters, functions as a sign for verifying the divine sonship of a believer's fellowship in the first epistle. Through the three negative statements John clarifies the meaning of Johannine fellowship in the first epistle. Lightless fellowship is a fellowship without commitment.

Another vertical relationship is with his Son. Through the revelation of the Son, the things that had been related to God became applicable to the Son. True fellowship becomes possible only after one accepts the existence of sin in himself, confesses it, and receives the forgiveness of sins through the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ.

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