

**3rd Sunday of Easter**  
**1 John 1:1 - 2:2**  
**Sermon #685**  
**April 19, 2015**  
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<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — <sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Dear followers of Jesus,

In a few weeks many colleges will be finishing their school years. Shortly after that elementary, middle, and high schools will be finishing up. That means students are reaching the point where they can't do too much to improve grades on their report cards. Final exams might do a little, but the change will be very little. Soon report cards will come. What grades will be on them? Passing grades, we hope! Hopefully, no "F's"! "F" on a report means "failure". We never want to see them.

But with Jesus, according to His apostle John, there are some "F's" that aren't failures. Far from it. These "F's" are at the heart of passing through life and death into eternal life in heaven.

## THESE "F'S" ARE PASSING GRADES - WITH JESUS!

1. Know the Jesus Facts!
2. These Facts work Faith.
3. Faith establishes Fellowship.
4. Jesus' Fellows Function like Jesus.

In a court case, how do the facts come out in the open? Lawyers call eyewitnesses to testify to what they've seen and heard. The disciple and apostle John was an eyewitness to the things Jesus said and did. He says, **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life."** John was called early in Jesus' ministry to be a disciple. From early in Jesus' ministry on earth John heard Jesus teach, saw Him miraculously heal. He touched Jesus - before and after His death and resurrection. John begins this letter with this testimony because already there were false messages floating around about Jesus. This letter and the other two in the New Testament most surely were written later in John's life, probably around 90 A.D., some sixty years after Jesus' ascension. John wrote as an eyewitness because the FACTS about Jesus were already being distorted and denied. This seemed to be taking place among a group in northern Africa, in Egypt. They were led by some very intelligent men. They were promoting the idea that there was more to the "Jesus story" than the close apostles were telling. They put forth the notion that there were "secrets" of God which would give even clearer pictures of Jesus and what He desired for His followers. Upon inspection, we find that their ideas were a pulling of various religious teachings, some from the teachings of Jesus, some from Old Testament sources, and still other facets from philosophies found in the pagan religions of the world, such as the religion of the Canaanite people which so infected the religion of the Israelites and Jews during the times of God's prophets.

The resulting "secrets" of these supposedly enlightened teachers were ideas such as the Christ of heaven and the Jesus of earth were two different beings. Jesus was not truly God and man, just a man. Another "secret" of God put forth by these teachers was that anything physical or material was inherently evil and eventually will be destroyed. The mind and spirit,

however, is in and of itself pure. This led to the application that, since this tent of a body will be destroyed and the spirit within is pure, you can do whatever you wish with the body. Use it for whatever physical pleasure you desire. This religious system became known as "Gnosticism" and its teachers were called "Gnostics", from the Greek word meaning "to know". Already such denial of the facts about Jesus was surfacing. And they are still being shoved in the face of Christians. The novel and movie "The Da Vinci Code" is all about the philosophies of the Gnostics of the late first and early second century. Because of the danger this presented to the saving faith of his dear friends who probably lived in the region around the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor and whom John had probably served as pastor, he wrote this letter and the other two bearing his name. He warned and encouraged them. He firmly asserted that he himself was an eyewitness of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He put before them the facts. Jesus is human; he saw Him, heard Him, and touched Him. John was there as our Gospel lesson recorded (Luke 24:36ff) to see Jesus after His resurrection eat. Jesus is the Word of Life come from the Father to bring eternal life to sinful humans. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people, the sacrifice needed for there is indeed such a thing as sin, though the Gnostics denied that. John emphatically proclaimed as an eyewitness that what he had written in his account of Jesus' life and what he continued to speak and write were the Jesus facts! These Jesus FACTS are what the Holy Spirit uses to work FAITH in people.

Saving faith starts with believing what God says in the writings of His prophets and apostles about human beings. John wrote here, **"<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."** The Gnostics were fooling themselves and misleading people by telling them that inwardly they were pure while outwardly engaging in all sorts of behaviors that the Bible says are sinful and offensive to God. In reality, when we sin by disobeying God's commands we are walking in the dark and are headed for an eternity of darkness in the depths of a real place the Bible calls "hell". Sinful behavior against God's commands is not enlightened behavior; it's not "walking in the light". It is darkness and should cause us to fear facing God. But FAITH moves beyond confessing that we do sin. It receives with joy and comfort John's next statement, **"<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to**

**cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" That statement brightens and lightens our spirits! God has made a promise. He promised that through Jesus' life and death He would remove the guilt of our sins, that He would, in the words of His prophet Jeremiah, **"remember their sins no more"**! He promises that through this forgiveness we will live in the light of His glory in His heaven forever! God is faithful to that promise!

John wanted his dear friends to be with him in this. He wanted them truly in the saving faith. That would mean that they, along with him, would have peace with God now and would spend eternity with the Father and with Jesus and with John in the glories of heaven. That's what John called here "fellowship". He wanted his friends to be one with him and Jesus and the Father. Saving FAITH in Jesus, he said, establishes this FELLOWSHIP. Such fellowship would bring him great joy. He said that was the reason he was writing this letter, "to make our joy complete" by giving them the facts that work a saving faith that establishes real fellowship with Jesus, the Father and with fellow faithful.

That fellowship was being threatened by the Gnostic teachers and their teachings. John warned that if a person followed those teachings and was guided in behavior by them, they were not in fellowship, were not one with God, nor with him. So here in this letter John put into practice that wonderful fellowship he still shared with his readers. He warned and encouraged them. What a blessing fellowship in the true faith is! It allows us to pray together, to sing God's praises together, to publicly confess our faith in Jesus together! And all that fellowship activity serves to encourage one another to stay with Jesus in the one true faith. This blessed fellowship lets us lovingly warn one another when we place ourselves in spiritual danger with our behaviors, whether they be involvement in immoral activity or neglecting Jesus' precious word and sacrament. To be one in faith and teaching with those people he once served with word and sacrament brought joy to John's heart. It does the same for us.

John mentioned one last thing, then; one more "F". When through faith we have fellowship with Jesus and with His Father and with one another, we are "fellows" with them. We are one with them. Perhaps you've seen in a doctor's office a certificate that says your doctor is a "Fellow" of the

American College of Pediatricians or Surgeons or whatever specialty is his or hers. Your doctor is part of, one of this group of specialists. By faith in the Jesus facts you and I are one with, part of a special group. We are family members with Jesus, co-heirs with Him of the Father's kingdom of heaven! John put it this way, **"6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."** His point is that those who are "fellows" with Jesus will then FUNCTION like Jesus. They, like Jesus, will walk in the light shed by God's word. Contrary to what the Gnostic teachers promoted, John declared that spirit and body work together. When the spirit has been declared to be pure through the blood of Jesus, God's Son, then the body is going to walk a path of purity as laid out by God in His commands for our lives. So John moved on at the beginning of chapter two, **1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."**

Jesus' "fellows" function like Jesus. They don't sin. Just as Jesus did what was good and right in God's sight, so will those who have fellowship with Him. Jesus always did His best. Going back to our opening thoughts about grades I have to believe that every one of you students has been given mental gifts by God that allow you to do passing school work. I don't believe that a single one of you should ever do "F" work. Maybe you're not gifted to always do "A" or even "B" work. But I have to believe that if you faithfully use your abilities and do your work, you won't get an "F". The same thing applies to adults in the work force or in our homes. God has given abilities that if used faithfully will accomplish well what is asked of us. But all too often all of us, students and workers alike, won't do our best. And it may result in a bad grade, a bad notation on our work record or a demotion. This is not walking in the light. This is not functioning like Jesus. Therefore, it's sin. John comforts and encourages us in such instances by telling us that when we do sin **"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** When we stand before God's throne of justice, Jesus stands there with us! Jesus is our great defense attorney. And when God would accuse us of sin and contemplate condemning us to eternal punishment, our Jesus, our "fellow", our Brother, directs the Judge's attention to the cross. He defends us by reminding the Judge that judgment

had already been handed out, and it had been laid on Him. He reminds the almighty Judge that we, His fellows through faith, are free from this judgment and punishment. And with that Jesus frees us to now function like Him, to His glory and our good.

This is the new life we have through Jesus' real and physical resurrection from the dead, of which John was an eyewitness! That's why, when doubts and failures threaten our hope of heaven; when ideas float around that conflict with God's word and threaten to rob us of our joy and hope, go back to the "F's" of your relationship with Jesus. Go back to those "F's" that reassure you of passing from this life to perfect and eternal life with Jesus and His Father. Go back to those Jesus FACTS that Jesus' eyewitness apostles have given us. Those FACTS will strengthen your FAITH which will keep you in everlasting FELLOWSHIP with Jesus and the heavenly Father and FUNCTIONING like Jesus. These are the "F's" that are indeed passing grades for you and me! Amen.