

4,9,26 1 Jn. 1:5-10, True Fellowship by Walking in the Light

Let's begin by reading from where we left off last week.

(1 Jn. 1:5-7) This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Before we move too far into 1st. John, there is something significant that differentiates John's epistles from his Gospel. The Gospel of John focused on presenting the Person of God's Son to us, both by His historically recorded actions and by His teaching. But John's letters focus on the application or implications of the Life of Christ seen in the Gospel. This is extremely important, which will become more obvious as we move through the epistle. Here's an explanation by Zane Hodges;

It would be difficult to stress too much the importance of getting the subject matter of First John clearly in mind. The Incarnate life of Christ on earth definitely forms the core of the truth that John is addressing. But the specific, historical details of that life are not under consideration in this epistle. In fact, a major contrast between the Gospel and the Epistle is precisely the absence of historical information from the latter. Instead, in this letter, John is addressing precisely those principles of the earthly life of our Savior which are to find recapitulation in the life of his Christian readers. When Christians truly experience this life, Jesus himself, *the* life, is once again reincarnated among them.

So, as we all know, there is no way we can lose eternal life, but the purpose of John's letter is to warn against the danger of either having that life experienced and shared or weakened and undermined. To do that, John uses the concept of "fellowship" to describe this shared life of Christ and his definition of that term will

include the most important principles that should govern spiritual fellowship to ensure that we are experiencing what is being offered to us.

Another way to put that would be to say that whatever John means by “fellowship” involves our involvement in certain things that act as a defense against either the loss of fellowship or the minimizing of what’s possible in true fellowship.

So, when John speaks of fellowship, he’s talking about something much more than social interaction; he’s taking us into something deeper, something spiritual and something related directly to the indwelling life of Christ within all of us. That’s why, in John’s initial offer and explanation of Christian fellowship, he includes the Father and the Son as well as the word “us”.

(1 Jn. 1:2-3) We declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with *us*; and truly *our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

As mystical as that may seem to us, provision has been made for universal and timeless spiritual fellowship to happen for all of God’s children. As we grow in our understanding of what John is going to teach us about this, and as we intentionally, aggressively, avoid John’s listing of “fellowship breakers”, we will also grow in our ability to spiritually sense the oneness, the fellowship, of other believers who are moving along the same path we are taking. It won’t just be a sense of the fact of them being members of the Body of Christ, it will also be a sense of *their* spiritual awareness and openness as those within the Church who are growing.

As one author put it, “It is vital that we discuss the terms, conditions, and experiences connected with genuine fellowship with God and our fellow believers.”

That’s what 1 Jn. is all about; it is John’s explanation of the “terms, conditions, and experiences” that allow us to have genuine fellowship with the Lord and others in the Church.

And like all of the New Testament letters, this letter came about because of the enemy’s attempts to rob us, to “steal”, our fellowship with God and His people away from us through what was happening at the time of John’s writing, and as

we'll see, he is stealing that fellowship from those in our generation also, through similar "devices of the devil" infiltrating the Church.

As we've seen in other contexts, Satan's primary means of accomplishing this is to disguise himself as a servant of Christ and then instruct us about things related to fellowship that are an imitation of real fellowship. Being able to discern the difference between the real and the imitation requires personal attention to the truths that both protect us from accepting a false position of fellowship in which no one's "joy will be full" (as offered in 1 Jn. 1:4) and also to clarify reality for us so that what *is* possible is eventually discovered.

The two things we need most to gain from in this letter (and the reason John wrote it) is to know what fellowship is from God's standpoint and what the dangers are that the enemy is using to counter that fellowship in our lives. I guess, we could say that as we go through the letter, we're looking for increased clarity on what fellowship is and on what fellowship is not, so we can embrace the real and avoid the imitation.

Let's start with what John was up against so we can see if there are any contemporary applications we can make.

The two most prominent theological enemies John was combating were Antinomianism and Gnosticism. From what I could find, it looks like the Nicolaitans were connected with Antinomianism. We see them mentioned in Rev. 2:6 and Rev. 2:15-16. They had infiltrated the churches at Ephesus and Pergamos;

"... this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

"You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

Whole books have been written on both Antinomianism and Gnosticism, so I'll just give summaries because all we need for our study is to show why John chose certain words and principles repetitively in his warnings.

The word “Antinomianism” literally means “Against Law”. It’s a disregard for law on the part of someone who is, or who claims to be, a Christian. Both believers and unbelievers could be “lawless” in their approach to God’s commandments – but John’s emphasis is on educating and challenging *Christians* who embrace these teachings. His letter wasn’t written to challenge unbelievers or fake Christians.

When we come across the verses that say things like “He who says this but does that. . .”, the indictment is that a person like that is not walking in the Truth regardless of how loudly they might protest that they are. They are “lawless” Christians; their salvation is not the issue John is addressing. It’s the same as James challenging the health, not the existence, of the faith of his readers.

(Jas. 2:17-18) Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

A person can *say* their faith is rock solid, but if their life has zero fruit, then their faith is dead. James wrote his letter to Christians to challenge their claim to a living faith, not to tell them they were probably unsaved. Again, James is questioning the health, not the existence, of the faith of his readers. All of the New Testament epistles were written to Christians to warn or encourage; none were written to unbelievers.

Antinomianism also taught that there is evil in God. This is one of the reasons we see John so emphatically stating that “In God, there is *no darkness at all*” (1 Jn. 1:5).

Another teaching in this movement is that a person who lives in sin can still have fellowship with God. They separated the physical from the spiritual and decided that whatever we did with our bodies would have no effect on our spiritual life. John refutes that by using God as his example. He says that God is a Person and has a nature that is characterized by pure light; zero darkness. And our bodies, like the body of Jesus of Nazareth, are to be the outward expression or manifestation of the inward character of Christ. The “Light” was manifested to us and we saw, touched, handled, etc. John is saying that we knew the nature of the Person

because we were eye-witnesses of the expression outwardly of that nature in real life.

Someday, that will be true of all of us. The flesh will be gone; our nature and character will be completely pure, nothing hidden, no pretense; and everything that proceeds from us in word or action will be coming from pure light; no darkness at all. That is God's goal for us; and the more we grow spiritually, the more real that will become. All of this, of course, is the opposite of Antinomianism which makes the outward life manifestations irrelevant. It's not irrelevant; it is the expressed reality of the Person. Our eventual perfection is definitely something to look forward to; the sooner the better.

In terms of the words John uses, we see the physical represented by glory; the intellectual represented by truth; and our morality represented by holiness. Unlike the Nicolaitans, we believe all of these are both important and are also inseparably tied together in who we are.

They are intended to be transparent and not separated.

Now, as to Gnosticism, this movement believed that secret knowledge was given to them; knowledge beyond the scriptures. They also believed in "dualism" (like Antinomianism), that the body and spirit were not intertwined in character. Their take was that the material world was evil and the spiritual world was good. They didn't believe Christ was God, but that He was a messenger sent from God to give us knowledge that would awaken us. And they believed that salvation is not through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, but is through achieving enlightenment about the belief that we are also gods. Gnosticism was "New Age Theology" 101.

Like Antinomianism, these beliefs that were spreading in the Church show us why John worded things the way he did. As we go through 1 Jn. I don't plan to continually note particular phrases John uses as being tied to his attacks on these false doctrines (or as Paul calls them, "doctrines of demons"). That's what John was up against, but the main purpose of his epistle was the building up and spiritually strengthening his readers, not just acquainting them with a detailed deconstruction of these false movements.

Our study will focus on the meaning of what John wrote in light of these things, but the emphasis is going to be on what we, in our generation, can gain from him. I personally see that as more important than an historical breakdown of 1st. century heresies. History can be both helpful and fascinating, but personal, present-day application of spiritual truths seems more helpful in the long run.

So, let's do that. We'll begin by re-reading the section of 1 John we will be starting with tonight;

(1 Jn. 1:5-7) This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

John starts with a very simple but straightforward declaration: "*This* is the message we heard from Him and bring to you." God told us to tell you *this*. John doesn't say, "These things are the message, etc." In all that John is going to tell us, there is a foundational message (singular), without which the rest is not going to be clear. And that message is: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." We saw earlier why John emphasized this, but now John is going to start laying out the implications of that Reality.

"No darkness" means, no sin, no lying, no deception, no pretending, no compromise, none of the things we see as being consistently common in our generation. It's hard to imagine spending 3 ½ years, 24/7 with a Man like that. He never said or did anything without a pure motive; He never withheld anything that would have helped those around Him. He always told the truth regardless of the consequences. And what is God's goal for all of us? "Conformed to the image of Christ". Christ is God's ideal human. He's the ultimate Cause, Expression, and Goal of the creation of Man.

You can see how just this first part of 1 Jn. 1 destroys Antinomianism and Gnosticism; but it also, briefly and deeply, reveals both the nature of God and the pre-determined purpose of God in Man.

Then comes the warning in vs. 6; “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” That’s more than just making a mistake or committing a sin – that is a repudiation of God’s intent for what we are meant to be. It’s not just a behavior to be corrected; it’s a nature that needs to be re-shaped into something else. And in the context of 1 John, it’s the first thing John lists that destroys genuine fellowship with God and others.

All of this is setting forth a contrast between *practicing* “darkness” versus “*practicing*” the truth, which means that from God’s perspective, “darkness” is not as much a sin issue as it is a deception issue based on not acting according to the truth.

We are more likely to recognize a sin we may be committing (and hopefully confessing), than we are to recognize a deception we’ve been caught in. We may even be morally upright and walking in darkness at the same time. Mormons have that down pat. We could be “whitewashed tombstones”, like the Christians in Sardis who had “a reputation” that they were spiritually alive (they believed it; and the community they were in believed it, that’s what “reputation” means), but like the Laodiceans, because of deception, Jesus said they were spiritually “dead”.

If you were the messenger sent by the Lord to tell Sardus that (we know from Rev. 3:1 that *someone* had that task), you would likely have been met with acceptance by some and indignant denial by others. Is that not a perfect summary of the life of Jesus and Paul? Some believed; most didn’t?

I don’t know from history how many of those John wrote to took what he wrote to heart and did something about it, or how many opted for the Nicolaitans, but I do know that just in that first century of Christianity, near the end of that generation, Paul said that “all in Asia” had abandoned him (2 Tim. 1:15).

Think about that. Asia Minor is where Paul planted his churches and all but a very small remnant had exchanged apostolic Christianity for an imitation of some kind.

That was just within the first century – but people become very defensive when anyone suggests that after 2000 years things could be even worse.

Then in vs. 7 John brings in the solution (the action step) of what they needed to do to move back onto the right path;

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

You may have noticed that vs. 7 ends the same way vs 9 ends- being cleansed from all sin or unrighteousness. But the way that happens in vs. 7 is “walking in the light” and the way it happens in v. 9 is “if we confess our sins”. What this tells us is that confession or agreement with revealed sin is synonymous with the transparency of walking in the light. Staying in fellowship, then, is a combination of being of the same mind and of being transparent. It’s a “walk” or “mindset”; not a religious formula to observe.

We’re told from the moment we were saved that (quote) “Christianity is not a religion; it’s a personal relationship with Christ.” Then when verses like the ones we’re looking at come up, we tend to interpret them ‘religiously’ instead of “relationally’. The whole point of the new dispensation is that the Law ended at the Cross. So, as Paul wrote numerous times in one form or another; as in Rom. 6:14; “You are not under Law, but under grace.” Don’t turn a personal relationship into a religion.

Each day, as you walk down the street, just hold on to Jesus’ hand and tell Him everything.

We’ve already seen earlier that “light” represents transparency and truth. Transparency is an easy concept to get hold of – it’s a willingness on our part to admit our wrong, to stop hiding or pretending that everything is fine when it’s not. Transparency is not a demand for perfection; it’s a demand for honesty. And honesty, openness, is the first step of any restoration.

After that, whatever was not true, not light, has to be replaced immediately by the truth. There are many places that John equates truth with light, and lies with false teaching and darkness. Just as Paul did in Eph. 5:8-11;

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

We are to not only walk in the light, in the truth, but we are to expose that which is false. Without going into it now, in 1 Jn. 2:4 & 10, and in 3 Jn. 4 we read this;

I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; I have *no greater joy* than to hear that my children walk *in truth*.

It's always been interesting to see that the one apostle of the Lord who was given the title "The apostle of love" found his *greatest* joy in knowing that his children were walking in the truth.

Here's a summation by Hodges on why this was the case;

John's epistle will stress the truths about eternal life which have been revealed in and by the Lord Jesus. The reaffirmation of these truths is the key to ongoing fellowship with the apostolic circle and with the Father and the Son. The readers must "Let that abide in them which they heard from the beginning."

The modern world, with its skepticism and unbelief, has lost its respect for apostolic authority. Modern and postmodern scholars believe the Apostles were mere products of their own, pre-scientific age. Their viewpoints have no more authority than the modern mind feels willing to grant them and the enlightened scholar of today always knows more than these (quote) 'ignorant and unlearned men' did.

But the biblical point of view is different. In the Christian faith all claims to truth must be tested by the bar of Apostolic authority. What the Apostles said as representatives of a risen Lord carried all the authority of the Lord Himself. To refuse to hear the apostles was to refuse to hear God Himself. In

the same way, to be out of fellowship with an apostolic thought, doctrine and practice was to be out of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Since the New Testament message is nothing more or less than the truth which the Lord Jesus revealed to His apostles and which He commanded them to teach to us, *there is no form of true Christian fellowship outside of apostolic truth.*

Contemporary Christian leadership is not concerned about doctrine as long as the flock attends the meetings of the church with regularity and participates in the Church's aims and goals. What the contemporary Church urgently needs is a revival of its respect for the importance of divine truth, along with a rejection of doctrinal error because of its danger to God's sheep. Insofar as pastors and other leaders ignore the relevance of truth to spiritual growth and personal conduct, they will endanger the Flock's fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Those in leadership who claim to represent their Lord, who are overly careful to never offend anyone, will never accomplish anything.

The Epistle of First John is written to rebuke these errors, to keep the readers abiding in the original truths they have learned, and to ensure the spiritual well-being of God's children.

It is often forgotten in our day that revealed truth is the basis for all fellowship with God and for true fellowship with one another. One who departs from the original truths which the Lord revealed to his appointed witnesses will, by that much, depart from true fellowship with God. God will not have fellowship with a lie or with *any* form of untruth or spiritual darkness.

Again, genuine fellowship with either Christians or with God depends on the combination of light, transparency, and apostolic truth. The divisions, immaturity and conflicts within the Church are simply the result of the setting aside of personal transparency and accurate revealed truth. That is where we are in our generation, and that is why we are here. For anyone who desires to know what 1st

century fellowship with God and His people is like, and wants to be a part of that, they will have to start by making sure the foundation of transparency and doctrinal truth make up the character of like-mindedness that binds them together.

No matter how good the food is at the potluck or how fun and exhilarating the games and social activities are, without that foundation, it can never be something that God can enter into. As Hodges said, “God will not have fellowship with a lie (an imitation) or with any form of untruth or spiritual darkness. . . there is no form of true Christian fellowship outside of apostolic truth.”

In our generation the problems we face are only different that John’s in name (I don’t know any Nicolaitans personally), but what drives contemporary imitations is the same thing that has always driven them – a lack of personal honesty coupled with an absence of the essential doctrines of our faith.

When we get there, we will see another very important emphasis on this in 1 Jn. 2:28 where John wrote, “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from him in shame when he returns.”

As another commentator I found on 1 Jn. pointed out; “Abiding in the Truth produces confidence at His coming.”

Our past may have been a rollercoaster doctrinally and morally, but where we go from here is what counts the most. Will we be abiding in the Truth when He appears?

The last few verses of 1 Jn. 1 re-emphasize our need for abiding in the light;

(1 Jn. 1:8-10) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

John’s first use of “sin” is in the singular, which refers to our nature or the flesh. That nature, which we inherited from Adam, is the source or generator of the sins (plural) that we commit. The flesh resides in our bodies, and when our bodies are

regenerated at the rapture, the resurrection of the saints, our new bodies won't have a trace of Adam's nature in us.

(1 Cor. 15:42-54) (This) is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. . . However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the Second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Those who are in Adam, who are “of the dust” share Adam's fallen nature and his corrupt body; but those who are in Christ, the new creation humanity, share the nature of the Head of that race, the “Second Man”, the Lord from Heaven, and will be given a body like His glorious body.

(Phil. 3:20-21) Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.

The solution God has provided so that we can remain in fellowship with Him is that He will immediately forgive and cancel our sins the second we acknowledge them –

which is where transparency comes in. Walking in the light simply means complete transparency about who we are and what we've done. God honors that with a full restoration of any fellowship that sin may have broken.

One thing that's important to notice is that John doesn't use the word "repentance" anywhere in his letter. Repentance is needed when a *pattern* of sin is "practiced" or persisted in and needs to be changed. It comes up a lot in the letters to the 7 churches. But in our context, John is talking about those who "discover" sin *while in fellowship* with God, not those who have wandered away from Him. John's *audience* is spiritually solid.

(1 Jn. 2:12-14, 21) I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one . . . I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it,

Knowing who John is writing to makes a huge difference in how we interpret what he says. We saw that in Corinthians also.

So, again, the reason "repentance" isn't mentioned is because John wants them (and us) to know that Christians who are abiding in Christ, who are in fellowship with him may often *discover* some sin they are committing and wonder if it has broken their fellowship with the Lord. It hasn't been broken if they are transparent instead of justifying it. The word "confess" literally means, "to agree with". We are agreeing with what we have just seen, what God has shown us.

The blood of Christ gives God the freedom to sustain our fellowship in spite of our failures. Satan, of course, as the accuser of the brethren, will try to guilt you out of fellowship; but God has provided a way for us to abide in Him always, in spite of the fact that "If we say we have not sinned, we lie . . ." There is none who is perfectly

righteous; we all fall from time to time, but the Lord's sacrifice will cover those falls as long as we are walking in the light. In the Cross of Christ, God has actually provided a way for sinful creatures like us to live in unbroken fellowship with a holy and righteous God without there being any compromise to the Lord of His own righteous character.

I found an illustration that puts this principle in a real-life situation so we can understand it better;

Picture a man who puts on a suit he has superficially examined for dirt or spots. If he walks into a lighted room wearing that suit, He may be active in that room for some time before he actually notices a spot or two on the suit. At this point he can deny the truth of what he's seen in the light by saying, "No, that is not a spot of dirt, it's just a part of the weave of the fabric". But if he *does* say that, the light in effect goes out and he's now in darkness. In the same way, a Christian can maintain his fellowship in the light by promptly confessing what God's light reveals to him.

I know it's a little cheesy, but it helps makes the point. Personally, I think it's amazing that God found a way to allow us to remain in fellowship with Him knowing full well we were going to "undeserve" that constantly. This is just another proof that Grace, based on the sacrifice of God's Son, is what governs our lives.

It also shows that God will do whatever it takes to hold to His own integrity, justice and holiness, and to keep us free from guilt and condemnation so we can rest in Him in spite of our sinfulness.

It's what we've seen so many times throughout the scriptures that God's motive behind everything He's done, and is doing, is a combination of love and incomprehensible wisdom.

One final point I don't want us to overlook because of its broader implications is that vs. 9 concludes with ". . . and cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

We are no doubt committing sins consistently that we are simply unaware of, especially when we were young Christians. When we're new to the Faith, the only

sins we seemed to be aware of were the ten commandments; sins that are blatant. Even when we've grown to spiritual adolescence, we often struggle to decide which movie is "OK" to watch and which isn't. And we usually watch the wrong stuff for awhile till it dawns on us that we're making a mistake.

So, some believers are grateful that the sins they confess are gone, but they worry about all the sins they may have committed that they didn't confess because they can't remember literally everything they've done or every thought they've had that was sinful. The good news is the last part of vs. 9 ". . . and cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness." God only holds us accountable in this issue of fellowship for the sins we are aware of, those He has shown us and wants us to deal with. When we confess what we know, He erases the debt on *all* the sins we are *not* aware of. He knows which ones to call us on and which ones to simply cleanse out of mercy and grace.

I'll close with these comments by Spurgeon on the reality of God's intelligence and insight about this;

Who can understand his errors? A question which is its own answer. It rather requires a note of exclamation than of interrogation. In the presence of divine truth, the psalmist marvels at the number and heinousness of his sins. He best knows himself who best knows the Word of God, but even such an one will be in a maze of wonder as to what he does *not* know, rather than on the mount of congratulation as to what he *does* know. We have heard of a comedy of errors, but to a good man this is more like a tragedy. Many books have a few lines of errors at the end, but our errors might be as large as the whole volume if we had sense enough to see them. Augustine wrote in his older days a series of Retractations; ours might make a library if we had enough sight. We need grace to even recognize our mistakes.

Ok, the bottom-line is, the Lord will let us know what He wants us to know; and we can rest in the knowledge that He will cover the rest.