

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 1, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



## THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *How To Have Fellowship with God - 1 John 1:5-10*

*“<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and 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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that 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 that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” – John 1:5-10 (NKJV)*

### **BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2<sup>ND</sup>, & 3<sup>RD</sup> JOHN:**

**(1) AUTHOR = The Apostle John** – If you will notice, the letter of 1 John bears no inscription (name, autograph, signature). It doesn't give us a name of an individual in the actual letter itself. For that reason 1 John is often called an “anonymous letter,” but 2 and 3 John do carry an inscription. They are written by someone called “the Elder,” a reference to one of Jesus' closest disciples/apostles who was a part of Jesus inner circle, John. The moniker “Elder” does indicate that John is advanced in years when these letter were written. The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John's Gospel, so the traditional view and the most commonly held view is that all three were written by the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24). There is no reason to doubt this and early church leaders titled these three little book by John's name.

John actually wrote 5 books in the New Testament... not just these three.

### **5 Books Written by the Beloved Disciple:**

- 1. The Gospel of John**
- 2. First John**
- 3. Second John**
- 4. Third John**
- 5. The Book of the Revelation**

And this I think is significant... all of his books were written later in life and after all the other books in the Bible were recorded.

### **Here are some facts we know about John:**

- **He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41)**
- **He and his brother James were fishermen with their father (Mk. 1:19-20)**
- **He and James were called Boanerges or Sons of thunder by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54)**
- **He was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37)**
- **He was a close associate of Simon Peter... the first ones to arrive at the tomb (Jn. 20:2-8), they suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (Acts 3 & 4), and they traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (Acts 8:14-17) not to mention that they were the disciples closest to Jesus**
- **He was one of the pillars (prime leaders) of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9)**
- **From external and extra-biblical sources (history/tradition), like Polycarp, Papias (*pappy-us*), and Justin Martyr (early church fathers) we are told the following about John from his writings – These early church fathers often quoted John and used his writings**
- **Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John - They have writings dated as early as the 2nd century**
- **John was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote The Revelation (cp. Rev. 1:9)**
- **He returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name - Archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines**
- **John outlived all the other apostles**
- **The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John probably close to the same time he wrote these small epistles which bear his name.**
- **Remember the book of the Revelation was written about the vision that John saw while banished to the Greek island of Patmos on the Aegean sea.**
- **Tradition says that this was after John had been sentenced to death by martyrdom.**
- **We know little about John's later life and death from the Bible**

- **The most insightful bit of information comes from John 21 when the risen Christ was talking to Peter about Peter's death** - After Jesus told Peter that he would not live long Peter asked about John's death. Jesus replied that if John lived until Christ's return, that was not Peter's concern. This was not a promise that John would live until the Lord returned, but it does seem to indicate that the Lord knew John would live a long time (John 21:19-23)
- **Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience**
- **Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus** – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John's death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...

### **God Questions? How Did the Apostle John Die?**

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9). The Bible does not give us details on how the apostle John died, but tradition gives us a few theories.

The most plausible theory of John's death states that John was arrested in Ephesus and faced martyrdom when his enemies threw him in a huge basin of boiling oil. However, according to the tradition, John was miraculously delivered from death. The authorities then sentenced John to slave labor in the mines of Patmos. On this island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea, John had a vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed, possibly due to old age, and he returned to Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. He died as an old man sometime after AD 98, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Another theory concerning John's death is associated with a second-century bishop named Papias of Hierapolis. According to one commentary on Papias's writings, John was killed by a group of Jewish men. However, many historians believe Papias was misquoted or misread and doubt the credibility of this theory.

There is also a legend that says John did not die but rather ascended straight to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. There is no biblical evidence to lend validity to this story.

Ultimately, it is not essential to know how the apostle John died. What is important is the fact that he was not ashamed of Christ (see Luke 9:26) and was willing to die for his faith. A man will not die for something he knows to be a lie. John knew the truth that Jesus had been resurrected, and he was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith in his Savior.

- (2) DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D. Again, we don't know the exact time or order of the books having been written, but here are some possible dates for John's writings...

**Dates for John's Biblical Writings:**

1. **The Gospel of John = AD 80 to 98**
2. **First, Second and Third John = AD 90 to 95**
3. **The Book of the Revelation = AD 94 to 98**

Of course we know God inspired the Bible and that it was written with His leading, but this may explain why the book of John seems so applicable to the readers of today. **Think of this... John had more time to think about what questions were raised in the 50 or more years after the resurrection of Christ. He knew what doubts had been raised and how to answer the questions before we knew to ask them.**

**(3) PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus** – Again, as with most books in the Bible, we cannot know with certainty when and from where these small letters of John were written. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that guesses. It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church. Also, 1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21; and 3 John 4 all reference John’s readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

**(4) RECIPIENTS = 3 different audiences** - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

**3 Recipients of John's Letter:**

1. **Letter 1 = The Ephesian church (and/or surrounding churches)** - The first epistle was not addressed to anyone in particular, but was written more as a sermon
2. **Letter 2 = Elect lady** - The second was written to an unnamed “elect lady.”
3. **Letter 3 = Gaius** - The third to a man name Gaius. There are three men who bear that name to whom the letter could have been written. There was a Gaius in Macedonia (Acts 19: 29), Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Derbe (Acts 20:4).

**(5) PURPOSE = Multiple purposes** - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

**3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:**

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**
2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1**
3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**

Like the gospel of John, the 3 letters of John were written to supply evidence essential for the building of credible faith.

It also seems evident that John had a purpose to write that was negative in nature.

### **Three Stated Negative Purposes for These Letters:**

- 1. He addresses false doctrines that threatened the faith of the early saints = 1 John 2:26).**
- 2. There were some who even went out from among the believers = 1 John 2:19 (see also Acts 20:30)**
- 3. Of particular concern during these days was the threat of Gnosticism-**
  - The word “Gnosticism” comes from gnosis, which meant “knowledge.”
  - It was “the philosophical result of the blending of the cosmology (*Cosmology deals with the world as the totality of space, time and all phenomena. Historically, it has had quite a broad scope, and in many cases was found in religion*) of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, esp. Judaism” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3, p. 648).
  - Gnostics believed they had superior knowledge, and such knowledge was limited only to their select group.
  - According to them, salvation came from knowing theories rather than faith in a Savior.
  - Such a claim obviously puts them at odds with the Lord’s apostles who were promised to be ‘guided into all truth’ (Jn. 16:13).
  - It also contradicts the promise made to those who, upon reading inspired documents, would have apostolic insight into previously hidden mysteries (Eph. 3:3-5).
  - To meet such a threat, the error of gnosticism had to be exposed. Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, and the spirit of man was good.
  - They believed the human body and the spirit within had no effective contact with each other.
  - A redeemed soul inside a sinful body was not affected by immoral behavior.
  - Thus, a person could engage in all sorts of wickedness and it would not endanger the soul.
  - This “theory” puts them in conflict with the Incarnation, or God dwelling in bodily form (cp. Phil. 2:7; Col. 2:9; Jn. 1:14).
  - In terms of everyday application of such a doctrine, usually one of two extremes were practiced: (1) man should abstain from everything that would satisfy the sinful flesh (2) since the soul could not be affected by sinful behavior, man was at liberty to do anything that would satisfy the flesh
  - Generally, gnosticism fell into 2 categories:

### **2 Categories of Gnosticism:**

- (1) **Docetic Gnosticism** – Docetic gnostics (from dokein, ‘to seem’) did not believe that Christ came in bodily form. He only seemed to have been physical; it was “imagined.” If He did come, He was not perfect while in the flesh (cp. 1 Jn. 4:1-3).
- (2) **Cerinthian Gnosticism** - Cerinthian gnostics (named after Cerinthus, an Ephesian gnostic) attempted to make a distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ. They taught that Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism, and ascended shortly before His crucifixion. Thus it was not Christ who suffered, died, and rose again but Jesus (cp. 1 Jn. 5:6). In order to combat these heresies, John provides proof of the reality of the Lord’s fleshly body. He offered testimony using 3 of his 5 human senses (1 Jn. 1:1). Also, to refute the notion that sinful activity can be indulged in without consequences, John pointed out the following: (1) only those who are pure have an eternal hope (1 Jn. 3:3) (2) only those who do righteousness are righteous (1 Jn. 3:7) (3) those who habitually practice sin are of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8)

Perhaps, one of the most distinguishing elements that characterized the early church and the lives of New Testament Christians was “fellowship.” Listen to these words in Acts 2:42-47 and the description of what the early church following Pentecost was like, *“<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup> and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added <sup>[d]</sup> to the church daily those who were being saved.”*

- *What descriptive word so you see there that might help us understand what “fellowship” is?*
- *How does that word explain fellowship?*
- *How might it relate to us and the church today?*
- *What do you see in that passage (Acts 2:42-47) that indicate what the main functions/practices of the church?*

**Four Essential Ingredients/Practices in the Early Church: (if there were essential for the early church they are not less essential for us today)**

- (1) **Preaching/Teaching** (v.43) – *“doctrine”* indicate the teaching and preaching/proclamation of the gospel and God’s Word
- (2) **Fellowship** (vv.44-45) –
- (3) **Worship** (v.46) – Observance of the ordinance, the breaking of bread, the Lord’s Supper... an act of worship
- (4) **Prayer** (v.47) -

**What is “fellowship”?** Can you define it? In your own words write your definition of fellowship in the space provided below. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is fellowship... real/genuine fellowship? Try your hand at the following exercise.

- In column 1 place a check  beside each one that you believe is how we use the word fellowship in the church today.
- In column 2 place a X [x] beside each ones that you believe is not actually an accurate understanding of what fellowship really is.
- In column 3 place a question mark [?] beside the ones that you believe could have something to do with fellowship
- In column 4 place an asterisk [\*] beside the ones that you believe have benefit in promoting fellowship in the church.

<b>WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Dinners at the church.</b>				
<b>2. Social events at the church</b>				
<b>3. Sunday School Class Get Togethers</b>				
<b>4. Shaking hands with visitors during church and greeting one another</b>				
<b>5. Youth events and activities</b>				
<b>6. Pizza and bowling parties</b>				
<b>7. Home Bible Studies with a snack time</b>				
<b>8. A club or organization within the church (i.e. Men’s Fellowship)</b>				
<b>9. Children’s Party</b>				
<b>10. Cell groups or small group within a church</b>				

- *What might be wrong with defining “fellowship” this way? Why?*
- *What might be right with defining “fellowship” this way? Why?*

Whatever your thoughts about these things, it is clear from Scripture that “fellowship” is essential in God’s plan, in who God is, in what He desires for this people and His church. The significance here is that it is another one of those words that is “key” in these letter of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John. The word (fellowship) appears at least 4 times in these first few verse of 1 John.

### **DEFINITION OF FELLOWSHIP**

So let’s come back to the question, “What is fellowship?” What is it Biblically and how might it apply to us? This is important to understand what John tells us in the introductory verses of his letter.

### **What is “fellowship” in the Bible?... Some Basics:**

- (1) The Greek word translated “fellowship” in the New Testament is “*koinonia*”**
- (2) The word literally means “partnership, sharing in common, or communion”**
- (3) The essence of partnership is agreement or unity of purpose**
- (4) Fellowship with God is, at its most basic, agreement with Him in all things**

The New Testament assures believers of this partnership. Not only do we have fellowship with God the Father, but we also have fellowship with His Son and the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:3).

To have fellowship with others, there must be a oneness of the heart, something that links two people together. Amos 3:3 says, “*Can two walk together unless they are agreed?*” At the very heart of fellowship, there must be like-mindedness. Two in fellowship must have like wishes and like desires, which is why Paul exhorts believers in 2 Corinthians 6:14, to not be “*unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*” (2 Corinthians 6:14). Believers have true fellowship with one another because of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers (John 14:17). Through the Spirit we have true fellowship, unlike any relationship we can have with those who do not know Christ.

Now John mentions, a fellowship that with God. How can sinful man have this with God, who is holy and set apart and cannot look on sin? How can we have fellowship with God? Seems like a stretch. So whatever does He mean?

### **What is fellowship with God?: (this may help us further understand fellowship and what it means to have fellowship even with one another)**

- (1) Fellowship with God is synonymous with salvation in the New Testament** - When we believe the Gospel, we are invited into an intimate and unending fellowship with the Trinity (1 John 1:1-3; John 17:21).
- (2) Fellowship with God is only possible through the blood of Christ** - Before we are saved, we are at enmity with God (Colossians 1:21). But Jesus reconciled us to God through His death on the cross (Romans 5:10). When we repent of our sin and trust in Christ, the result is that “now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life” (1 John 5:20).
- (3) Fellowship with God is erroneously viewed by some as an on-again, off-again relationship with God** - Some believe we are in fellowship with God when we aren’t sinning, but when we sin, we are out of fellowship with Him. Then, we must confess our sins in order to get back into fellowship with Him. **But the New Testament does not present fellowship as something that can be interrupted by sin.** In our study, in 1 John 1:1-3, fellowship is synonymous with salvation. We are either in fellowship (saved) or outside of fellowship (lost). There is no bouncing in and out of fellowship with God.



Furthermore, confession of sins does not restore fellowship by bringing us more forgiveness. Remember that only blood brings forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus shed His blood once in order to take away our sins, so that our fellowship with God would be secured forever (Hebrews 10:12-14). This is important to understand.

Now, the apostle John opens his letter by asserting that one of the main aims of the Christian message is we may enter into this relational fellowship with God, which is “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1:3). Such fellowship with God is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not, at its core, the observance of rituals or rules. Rather, it is a walk of personal fellowship with the living God.

But before we all sign up for the program, John makes it clear that fellowship with God is not a matter of being chummy with your good buddy in the sky! He asserts that God is absolutely holy (1:5). To have genuine fellowship with the holy God, we must walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light. It’s easy to *claim* to have fellowship with Him, but to be mistaken or deceived. The false teachers were claiming to have fellowship with God, but their claims were patently false. There was in John’s day, as there is today, the peril of profession, the danger of claiming to know God, but of being deceived. John’s message is:

*To have fellowship with the holy God, we must not walk in the darkness, but walk in the light.*

John begins with the apostolic message, that God is light (1:5). Then he develops the implications of that message as it relates to having fellowship with this holy God (1:6-2:2). He does this against the claims and consequences of the errors of the false teachers (“If we say...” 1:6, 8, 10). He then gives God’s remedy (1:7, 9; 2:1-2).

We will hear John telling us three things about having fellowship with God...

### **3 Truths About Having Fellowship with God:**

- (1) To have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy (1 John 1:5)**
- (2) To have fellowship with God, we must not walk in darkness (1 John 1:6, 8, 10)**
- (3) To have fellowship with God, we must walk in the light, as He himself is in the light (1 John 1:7, 9)**

Let’s delve into each one of these to understand what John is telling us about fellowship with God...

### **TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT HE IS ABSOLUTELY HOLY (1:5)**

John writes in 1 John 1:5, “<sup>5</sup> 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.” Note two things:

## 2 Keys to Fellowship with God:

(1) **To have fellowship with God, we must begin with God and His authoritative revelation of Himself –**

### What John is not saying...

1. **John is not sharing with us his speculations on what God may be like -** He doesn't throw out an idea and suggest that his readers discuss what they think about it. Rather, John says, "We heard this straight from Jesus and we announce it to you."
2. **John wasn't raising a discussion point -** This was an authoritative pronouncement from Jesus through the apostles to the readers. It wasn't up for discussion... who God is. To have fellowship with God, we must start with His authoritative revelation in His Word.
3. **John does not begin with his hearers felt needs -** He doesn't discuss where they may be hurting, or bring up how this message will help them have a happy family life or a successful personal life.
4. **John begins with God and he brings us face to face, not with God's love, but with His holiness -** Coming after **verse 3**, about having fellowship with God, you would expect John to say, "To have fellowship with God, you need to know that He loves you very much." But, rather, he bluntly says, "God is light." Then, so that we don't dodge the uncomfortable implications of that, he states the negative, "and in Him there is no darkness at all."

➡ **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** makes this point (*Fellowship With God* [Crossway Books], p. 100), that "We must *always start with God.*"

- He argues that our main problem is our self-centeredness, and so we come to the Christian faith looking to have our needs met.
- I'm not happy; can God make me happy?
- I'm looking for something that I don't have; can God give it to me?
- How can Christianity help me with my problems and needs?
- But to approach the Christian faith in that manner is to cater to our main problem, which is self!
- So, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says (p. 101), "The first answer of the gospel can always, in effect, be put in this way: 'Forget yourself and contemplate God.'"
- He adds (p. 102), "The way to be delivered from self-centeredness is to stand in the presence of God."
- The entire church growth movement, including one of its most famous leaders, blatantly contradicts this.

Robert Schuller, in his heretical book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* ([Word], p. 64), argues that classical theology "erred in its insistence that theology be 'God-centered,' not 'man-centered.'" So he calls for a new Reformation that puts man, not God, at the center! Following his lead, other church growth leaders have started with the

“religious consumer.” They have gone to people with the question, “What would you like in a church? What would get you to come back and try the church again?” People have responded, “We’d like a church that is a happy, upbeat place. We don’t want to hear about sin or a holy God who threatens sinners with His wrath. We want help on how to have happy families, how to be successful in reaching our full potential, and how to recover from divorce, drug addiction, and sexual addictions. We don’t want sermons that make us uncomfortable. Give us more drama and less preaching. In fact, don’t preach at us; share with us. Tell more stories and jokes. Don’t bring up controversial issues. Make it positive.” So, the church marketers go back to the drawing board and re-design the church to meet the felt needs of the consumer. The result is amazing growth. But, have people come face to face with the living God?

John says, first, to have fellowship with God, we must begin with God and His authoritative revelation of Himself, not with ourselves.

- (2) **To have fellowship with God, we must begin with His holiness** - The church marketers (Seeker-friendly movement, Progressive movement, Emergent movement, Contemporary church movement) would say, “‘God is holy’ won’t sell. That’s just not popular. If you want to draw the crowds, begin with, ‘God is love.’ Everyone wants to hear that!”

But listen to John’s words again in verse 5, “*<sup>5</sup> 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.*” John begins with, “*God is light.*”

- In Scripture, “light” may refer to God as the source of knowledge, illumination, or guidance.
- It may point to God’s glory and that He is unapproachable, infinite, unchangeable, and omnipresent.
- **But here, the main idea is that He is holy. This is indicated by the negative explanation, “and in Him there is no darkness at all.”**

It is this moral connotation that Jesus brought out when He said in the Gospel of John 3:19, “*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.*” You may ask, “But why start with God’s holiness? Why not start with His love, which is more inviting?”

Again, Dr. Lloyd-Jones answers these questions (pp. 108-109). I can only summarize his main points.

**Why start with God’s “holiness” rather than His “love?”: (accord to Bible Scholar and Theologian, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones)**

1. **If you don't begin with God's holiness, you will never understand God's plan of salvation through the cross of Christ** - If God is only love, then the cross is unnecessary and meaningless.
2. **If we start with God's holiness, it exposes all false claims of fellowship with God** - In our day, as in John's, many claim to have fellowship with God, but often this is an empty claim based on their own imagination with a false god that they have made up. True fellowship is with the holy God, not with a good buddy god.
3. **Starting with God's holiness saves us from the danger of blaming God in times of trouble** - We're all prone to ask, "Why is God allowing this? I didn't deserve this!" But if we start with God's absolute holiness, we will see that we deserve nothing but His wrath, and we won't challenge and criticize God when trials come.
4. **Starting with God's holiness is the only way to true joy** - It's easy to have a false peace if you have a "user-friendly" god. If you bring God down to man's level, then you can enjoy peace with God without dealing with your sins. But, it's a false peace that will not hold up in the day of judgment. True peace and joy come from being truly reconciled to the holy God through the blood of His Son Jesus (1:7).

So, John begins with God. He says that to have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy.

### **TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST NOT WALK IN THE DARKNESS (1:6, 8, 10)**

Notice John's words again in verses 6-10, "*<sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and 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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that 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 that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*"

To understand this paragraph, we have to understand that John is writing against the false claims of the false teachers. Their claims are introduced by the phrase, "if we say..." (1:6, 8, 10). John here shifts the "we" from the apostles to a hypothetical group that may include anyone, but especially targets the false teachers. Their first claim was, "We have fellowship with God" (1:6), but John says that their lives did not back up their claim. They walked in darkness, they lied, and they did not practice the truth. Here John gives us three "if-then" statements that not expose the falseness of these false teachers/professors... but also these statements may expose us if we are honest in examining our own lives (something each of us... each of us must do).

### **3 Important “If-Then” Statements:**

- (1) **1 John 1:6** – ***“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, (then) we lie and do not practice the truth.”***
- (2) **1 John 1:8** – ***“If we say that we have no sin, (then) we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”***
- (3) **1 John 1:10** – ***“If we say that we have not sinned, (then) we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”***

“**To walk**” points to the general tenor of one’s life. Since to walk in the light involves confessing our sins (1:9), to walk in the darkness means ignoring or denying our sins.

### **What does it mean to walk in darkness?: (1 John 1:6)**

- (1) **To walk in darkness is to block out the light of God’s holiness** - It is to block out the light of God’s holiness, as revealed in His Word, and to live as the world lives, making up your own ideas about right and wrong apart from God (see Eph. 4:17-19; 5:7-12).
- (2) **To walk in darkness is to justify our sinful behavior** - It is to justify your own behavior either by redefining sin, by blaming it on other factors, or by doing away with the entire concept of sin. To walk in darkness is to try to hide from God, rather than to expose your life to Him.

Apparently these false teachers were doing this, because John’s next hypothetical statement is (1 John 1:8), ***“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*** They may have been claiming that they had achieved a state of sinless perfection. Or, perhaps because they believed that the body could not touch the spirit, they were claiming not to have a sin nature. They said, “You’re just seeing my body. My spirit is without sin.” John says, “You’re only deceiving yourselves!”

The heretic’s third claim was (1 John 1:10), ***“We have not sinned...”*** This is the most blatant of the three, as seen by John’s consequence, ***“we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”*** It goes farther than the other claims by saying, “We have not sinned in the past and we are not now sinning.” Perhaps they were claiming that their enlightenment had led them to see that they were basically good at the core, not evil sinners.

John would say, “That man is walking in the darkness, deceiving himself and anyone who believes him. Worse, he is calling God a liar and God’s word is not in him!”

But we need to apply this personally...

- If as a way of life, I am not allowing God’s Word to confront my sinful thoughts, attitudes, motives, words, and deeds, I am walking in darkness.
- If I dodge my sin by blaming others or making up excuses for why I sin, I am walking in darkness.

- And for John, to walk in darkness is not describing a “carnal” Christian. It is describing an unbeliever, no matter how much he may claim to have fellowship with God. To have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy. And, we must not walk in the darkness.

## **TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST WALK IN THE LIGHT, AS HE HIMSELF IS IN THE LIGHT (1:7, 9)**

(Note: 1 John 2:1-2 also describes what it means to walk in the light, but we will examine those verses next time.)

Look at John’s words again in verses 7-9 of our passage, *“<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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that 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.”* Walking in the light is not a description of a class of spiritual believers, who have achieved perfection or some high state of sanctification. Rather, it describes all true believers. Believers walk in the light; unbelievers walk in the darkness. There are three aspects of walking in the light:

### **3 Aspects of Walking in the Light:**

- (1) **To walk in the light is to live openly before God, seeking to be holy and hating all sin** - To walk in the light is to walk *“as He Himself is in the Light”* (1:7). This is to say the same thing as 2:6, *“the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”* Or, in the words of 1 Peter 1:15-16, *“but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* Or, in Jesus’ words of John 3:21, *“But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”* This is in contrast with the evil person who loves darkness and hates the Light, who *“does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed”* (John 3:20).

Note: This does not imply that the person walking in the light never sins. 1 John 1:7 indicates that the blood of Jesus is cleansing (present tense) from all sin the one who is walking in the light. So to walk in the light does not mean to be sinless, which no one can do. Rather, it points to a habitual pattern of living openly before God, who examines the heart. To walk in the light is to seek to be holy as God is holy. But, what about when we sin?

- (2) **To walk in the light is to confess our sins, experiencing God’s forgiveness and cleansing** - A person walking in the light does not deny his sin or try to cover it up. He does not blame others for it or make excuses about it. Rather, he confesses it (1:9): *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* To confess means to agree with God that our sin is sin. It means to accept responsibility for it and to turn from it. God’s wonderful promise is that

if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive and cleanse us. Forgiveness and cleansing are somewhat overlapping, except that forgiveness relates to the guilt of sin being pardoned, whereas cleansing points to the defilement of sin being removed. The forgiven person does not need to fear God's judgment. The cleansed person is free to draw near to God in worship, because the defilement of sin has been taken away. But this verse creates a difficulty, in that other Scriptures teach that we are forgiven totally at the point of salvation, including all future sins.

For example, Romans 8:1 states, *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Why, then, do we need to be forgiven again when we sin after salvation? Some explain this as "family" forgiveness that is necessary for fellowship, not forensic forgiveness that is required to deliver us from God's judgment. While that explanation may be okay, to me it does not take into account the terms *"faithful and righteous to forgive..."* God's faithfulness relates to His new covenant promise to forgive all our sins through faith in Christ, which happens at salvation (Heb. 8:12). His righteousness (or, justice) relates to His strict demand that the penalty for sin be paid. In the case of the believer, Jesus Christ paid this at the cross.

So I prefer to explain verse 9 differently. In verse 9, *"confess"* is in the present tense, but *"forgive"* and *"cleanse"* are the Greek aorist tense, focusing on an action as a totality or as complete. So confession points to an ongoing action, but the forgiveness and cleansing are completed actions in the past.

Let me use an analogy. John uses the word *"believe"* in the present tense to refer to the means of how we get saved (John 1:12; 3:16; *et al.*). When a person first believes, he receives all the benefits of salvation. Does he stop believing then? No, he goes on believing in what Jesus did for him on the cross. As he continues believing, he does not receive the benefits of salvation over and over, but he does experience them repeatedly. So the Christian is characterized by a lifestyle of believing in Christ. As he goes on believing, he repeatedly enjoys the benefits that he received at salvation

In a similar way, the believer's life is marked by continual confession of sins. It begins at salvation, when he acknowledges his sin to God and asks for forgiveness and cleansing. He experiences ongoing forgiveness and cleansing as he continues confessing his sins. Verse 7 (*"cleanses"* is in the present tense) indicates that there is an ongoing sense in which the effects of the cleansing of Jesus' blood are applied to us. Thus when a believer sins, he does not lose the forgiveness and cleansing that took place at salvation. But he does not experience it in his walk until he confesses his sin. Ongoing confession of sin and the experience of forgiveness and cleansing characterize those who walk in the light.

**(3) To walk in the light results in fellowship with God and His people** - Does the reference to *"one another"* (1:7) refer to fellowship between God and the believer or between

believers? In the immediate context, verse 6 refers to fellowship with God, and thus verse 7 would seem to point in that direction. But verse 3 also referred to fellowship with other believers. So I think that in 1:7 John's primary emphasis is on fellowship with God. But fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers is always linked, as verse 3 makes clear. Since the heretics had withdrawn from the church (2:19), John wants us to know that true fellowship with God always brings us into fellowship with others that know Him. If someone can't get along with other believers, he may not be in true fellowship with God.

## CONCLUSION

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an abbot was disciplining two monks for some infraction of the rules. He imposed on them the rule of silence. They could not talk to one another. They tried to figure out some way to fill the long hours.

Finally one of them gathered 28 flat stones from the courtyard. Putting different numbers on them, he devised a new game. By using gestures, the men agreed on certain rules, but the most difficult part was keeping silent when one of them scored a victory. Then they remembered that they were permitted to say aloud the prayer, "Dixit Dominus Domino Meo." By using the one word of this Latin expression meaning "Lord," the winner was able to signal his triumph by yelling, "Domino!" The monks gave the impression that they were *praying*, but really, they were *playing*. Thus the game of dominoes was born (From "Our Daily Bread" [8/77]).

It's easy to put on a religious veneer by claiming that you have fellowship with God, when really, you're walking in the darkness and deceiving yourself. John doesn't want us to play spiritual dominoes. He wants us to experience genuine fellowship with the holy God by walking in the light, as He Himself is in the light.

## Application Questions

1. To have fellowship with God, we must begin with His holiness, not with His love. Why?
2. Can you find a single instance in the Bible where evangelism *begins* with God's love? (If so, please let me know. I can't.) Should we therefore modify our evangelistic approach?
3. How can we avoid the deception of thinking that we are walking in the light, while really we're walking in the darkness?
4. If we're forgiven at the cross, why do we still need to be forgiven?