

## The Path to Fellowship: Walking in the Light

*1 John 1:5–10*

It was a year ago last Sunday that we canceled in-person worship services due to Covid. That was the first of many adjustments we had to make due to Covid. Groups began to meet on Zoom and all sorts of other changes were made. I wouldn't be telling you anything you didn't know if I said that this pandemic has been disruptive to our ability to experience fellowship.

Fellowship is vital for our Christian lives. When we are walking in true biblical fellowship with each other, we are encouraging each other and building each other up in Christ. We are bearing each other's burdens. We are pointing each other to God and His ways. We are using our spiritual gifts for the mutual good of each other. Fellowship is simply vital.

As much as this pandemic has disrupted our fellowship, I want to suggest that there is something else that poses an even greater barrier to biblical fellowship than Covid. It's like a cancer that can eat away at our ability to experience fellowship. What am I talking about? Sin. But I don't mean just sin; I mean sin that we are not addressing in our lives; sin that we are not being honest about. This is a greater threat to our fellowship than Covid. The answer to this threat, John will tell us, is to walk in the light.

**Transition:** Today, we are looking at 1 John 1:5-10 where John looks at this issue of fellowship and sin. The main principle that we are going to see is: **To have fellowship with God, we must walk in the light.** To the degree that we walk in the light, we can have fellowship with God and therefore biblical fellowship with one another. John is going to start by making a statement about God's nature. He then will go on to articulate some truths about how we are to deal with sin in light of who God is. And so here is what he says about God's nature:

### I. We must understand that as we seek fellowship with God that God is light (1:5)

John says in verse 5:

*<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.*

Light and darkness are themes emphasized throughout Scripture. Light refers to what is true, holy, and good. It speaks of revelation. Darkness refers to sin, error, ignorance, and the lack of revelation. And so, to declare that *God is light* is a statement that God in His essence is holy and true. God is light. There is *no darkness at all* in Him. John writes this in the strongest of terms. It could be written, "in Him is no darkness – none!"

Sometimes when we think about walking in fellowship with God, we only want to focus on His love. He IS a God of love. He DOES love us. But John doesn't start with God's love; he starts with God's holiness. And if we want to walk in fellowship with God we need to live in light of this truth. This truth governs how we are to relate to God. We are not relating to One who is like us.

We are always relating to a God who is holy. This truth has implications for our lives as we seek fellowship. As John goes on in verses 6-10, the main thing he says is:

## II. We must walk in the light to have fellowship with God (1:6-10)

In these verses, John repeatedly uses the phrase, *if we say*. He is addressing claims that were being made by false teachers. Each of the claims are related to how they wrongly understood sin and its effect. Their claims cannot be true if God is light. And so after these claims, John counters with the truth. And so here is the first false claim.

### False Claim #1: Our sin doesn't affect fellowship with God (v. 6)

*<sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

The fact that he uses, *we*, is way to confront the false teachers and to humbly include himself and us in this possibility that he is presenting. In this first one, the claim is a situation where someone is saying, "I have fellowship with God," while they are in fact walking in darkness – in sin.

It's possible that the false teachers were teaching a kind of theology that said that what you do in the body really doesn't matter. In other words, physical acts don't touch the spiritual part of you. But John's answer is that the person who makes this claim of fellowship with God while living walking sin is a liar. They are not practicing the truth. Scripture consistently teaches that walking in sin is always a barrier to fellowship with God (Ps. 66:18; Is. 59:2).

### Truth #1: We have fellowship with God and each other by walking in the light (v. 7)

*<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.*

To *walk in the light* means that we live in a way that is consistent with God's character. We walk in truth and purity. John says that if this is the pattern of our lives there are two results. First, *we have fellowship with one another*. This is interesting because we would expect John to say that we have fellowship with God because that's what he was talking about in verse 6. But he goes a step further and says that *we have fellowship with one another*. Back in verse 3 he connected our fellowship with one another to our fellowship with God. I think he is saying that if we walk in the light, we will have *fellowship with one another*, because we are in fellowship with God.

The second result of walking in the light is that *the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin*. When we consider the full teaching of Scripture, we know that when we trust Christ, we are forgiven for all of our sin (Eph. 1:7) and we are cleansed in an absolute sense. For instance, 1 Cor. 6:11 says:

*<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Paul is talking about the complete cleansing we experience the moment we put our faith in Christ. It is an accomplished fact. And yet, there is a need for ongoing cleansing, which is what John is talking about. As believers who are forgiven, our sin disrupts our fellowship with God. And so, we need to experience fresh cleansing from sin.

The second false claim goes a step further. It is a claim to not even have sin.

#### **False Claim #2: We have no sin (v. 8)**

*<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

To claim to not have sin goes against the clear teaching of Scripture. We are forgiven. We are new creations in Christ. But as long as we live, we will battle sin (Gal. 5:16; Rom 7).

If I think I have no sin, I have to be so self-deceived. I would not be walking in truth. To think that I have perfectly obeyed in every thought, word, and deed or to think that I've loved God with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself requires all sorts of self-deception. I would have to overestimate my own goodness and underestimate God's high standards.

The dangerous thing about this kind of self-deception is that it will keep us from doing what we actually need to do to have fellowship with God. And that is to be honest about our sin. John says that if we want to have fellowship with God, we must walk in the light as God is in the light and the way we do this is not by minimizing our sin or denying it, but by being honest about it. And so the second truth is this. . .

#### **Truth #2: We need to confess our sins (v. 9)**

*<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.*

To *confess* means "to admit," or "to agree" with God about our sin. If we want to walk in the light, we don't deny our sin, we admit it to God. *Confess* is a present tense verb and so this something we keep doing. We are to confess as a lifestyle.

John uses the plural here, *sins*, which indicates that we don't confess in vague, general ways. We are to call our sin by name – envy, lust, anger, deceit, or whatever it is. And we agree with God that in doing that sin we have done what is wrong before a God who is light.

When we admit our sin to God, John says that God will do two things. First, he will *forgive our sins*. Remember that John is writing to believers who are forgiven. And yet there is a need to confess sins in order to receive a fresh experience of that forgiveness. Secondly, John says that

God will *cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. We experience fresh cleansing from the stain of all of our sins.

Here's how I understand why confessing our sins is so important. Let's suppose we are on a family vacation and at some point one of my boys wrongly gets mad at me and says some unkind things and storms out of the room. And over the next couple of days, he doesn't say a thing about it. He doesn't apologize. What would things be like during those days? Strained. Uncomfortable. Distant. That boy would still be part of the family, but we wouldn't be in fellowship. What would bring him back into fellowship would be if he would come and talk to me and acknowledge what he did. If he would do that, I could forgive him and our fellowship would be restored.

This is what John is talking about. When we sin, we don't lose our relationship with God, but our fellowship is hindered. And so, we confess our sin as a lifestyle to stay in fellowship with God. John says that if we will do this God will be *faithful* to forgive us. He is faithful in the sense that he has promised to forgive us, and he can be relied upon to do what he has promised. And he is *just*. He is acting in a just way in forgiving us because Jesus' death atoned for our sin.

And so you can see how dangerous this lie is. If we deny that we have sin, we won't confess our sin and therefore we will begin to walk in darkness. Now, I want to come back to talk more about confession in a moment, but let's look at the last verse where John confronts the third false claim. The third false claim is really just restating the second false claim in a different way.

### **False Claim #3: We have not sinned (v. 10)**

*<sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

God has communicated through the Scriptures that we all sin even after we come to genuine faith in Christ. And so, if I make the claim that I have not sinned, I'm not just deceiving myself, I'm actually calling God a liar, because God says we do continue to sin.

And so in responding to these false claims John makes the point that **to have fellowship with God, we must walk in the light**. And central to walking in the light is being honest about our sin. We don't deny it or minimize it, rather we bring it into the light through confession. And so, I want to talk a little bit about this idea of confessing our sins.

Is it your regular practice to confess your sins? As we grow in Christ, we sin less and less and yet most of us still sin every day. And so, confession ought to be just as regular. It should be an ongoing practice in our lives. I want to offer some practical ideas about how you can practice confession as a lifestyle.

## Practicing Confession as a Lifestyle:

This first one is the most important. **Confess as soon as you are aware of your sin.** Maybe you are at the store and someone cuts you off and in your heart you call that person a bad word. And immediately you sense the conviction from the Holy Spirit. Confess it right then. "God, that was wrong for me to think that in my heart. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." As you do that you will continue to walk in the light.

Second, **practice the prayer of examen.** This is practice where at the end of the day you take some time to reflect on the day. As you are getting in bed you invite God to help you think through your day and show you your sin. And as He does, confess it.

Third, **use communion Sundays for self-examination.** Part of what we should do when we come to our monthly celebration of the Lord's Table is self-examination. And so use that as another time to invite God to show you any sin in your life and confess it.

Fourth **make a sin list.** This is an exercise that I have found helpful from time to time. In an extended time with God, I will invite him to bring to my mind any sin in my life. And then I just sit in silence and wait. When God reminds me of some sin, I write it down. Once I have a sense that God is done bringing sin to my mind, I will then confess them one-by-one. And at the end, I might actually write out 1 John 1:9 and claim the truth that God is faithful and just to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. And then I'll tear up the list as a visual picture of what God has done with my sin.

Fifth, **use Psalm 51 to give voice to your confession.** This psalm records David's confession after his sin of adultery and murder. Many believers have found this a helpful way to give voice to their sin.

Finally, **confess your sin to a trusted friend.** James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another. This may sound scary and crazy, but there is something powerful when we confess our sin to a sister or brother in Christ. This can be especially helpful in areas of sin that are habitual. If you are going to do this make sure you find someone who can keep your confidence. As well, they should be someone who will not brush off your confession and says, "It's not so bad." You also really want it to be someone who understands and lives in grace.

Fellowship is vital for our Christian lives. We've all been reminded of this truth this past year as our fellowship has been disrupted because of Covid. Thankfully, we are slowly getting back to normal related to Covid. That barrier is being removed. But may be each hear John's encouragement in this passage to take our sin seriously as a threat to fellowship. Maybe we be people who don't deny or minimize our sin, but rather live a lifestyle of confessing our sin that we may walk in the light as God is in the light and therefore have deep, life-changing fellowship with each other.