



FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT - 1 JOHN 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of I John would best begin with an understanding of the purpose of the letter, as stated in 1 John 5:13, *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the Son of God.* John was writing to believers who were upset and confused by some who had left the church and were teaching doctrines which were contrary to what the apostles had taught. As stated in Lesson 1, these were probably doctrines related to the various forms of Gnosticism. John wrote to reassure those who were uncertain of their beliefs and their position in Christ. John was sure of the truth. He had received the truth directly from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and it had changed his life. His letter expresses in very clear terms the essence of the truth he knew and the conditions for possessing eternal life and enjoying true Christian fellowship.

Fellowship in the light: John begins his letter, not with a customary greeting, but with the very foundation of the Christian faith, the *Word of life* (1:1). (Note that the word "life" is capitalized in some translations.) He holds out the joyful possibility of fellowship between men and God through the *Word of life*, Jesus Christ. John explains that God is light and that one must walk in the light in order to experience this fellowship. Sinful human beings walk in the light only through the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7 and 9).

Fellowship in Jesus Christ: In chapter 2, John continues to express the need of propitiation for sins. In addition, he goes on to show that those who have come under the shed blood of the Savior and truly know Him demonstrate their knowledge of Him through keeping His commandments, particularly His command to love one another. The false teachings of Gnosticism refuted the deity of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death for sin. The Gnostic teachers were not showing love for the brethren. They were men who walked in darkness and not in the light of God. John calls them *antichrists*, people who were opposed to Christ. They were liars who had cut themselves off from God.

Fellowship in love: In direct contrast to the false teachers, true believers are called *children of God* (1 John 3:1). They show their love for the Father by living righteous lives and loving one another as Christ loved. Above all, God's true children have a great and loving Father Who gives them assurance of salvation even when their feelings would condemn them. This

assurance comes through the gift of answered prayer and through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Fellowship in truth: God's children must be on the alert because there are evil spirits in the world which would lead them astray. John says, *test the spirits* (1 John 4:1) and trust God's truth (1 John 4:6). In John's day, God's truth was delivered through the apostles who had received teaching directly from Jesus. Their authority came directly from Him. Today, the authority of God's truth is found in the Bible, which includes the written words of the apostles.

Fellowship in faith: In the last chapter, John's final word is faith. As in the words of an old hymn, "Faith is the victory that overcomes the world." It is through faith that believers obey. It is through faith that believers know for sure that they have eternal life, an eternal life of joyful fellowship with God, His Son Jesus Christ, and other believers.

Even though the word "fellowship" appears only in the first chapter, the principle of Christian fellowship, which comes only through God's gift of His Son, is an underlying current throughout John's letter. It is because he desires true Christian fellowship for his readers that John has taken up his pen to write (1 John 1:3). The letter begins with a call to fellowship.

OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN 1

- I. Call to Fellowship - 1 John 1:1-4
- II. Conditions for Fellowship- 1 John 1:5-10

I. Call to Fellowship - 1 John 1:1-4

- A. Presentation of the Word of Life 1 John 1:1-2

John begins His letter by setting forth the *Word of life*. *The Word of life* refers to Jesus Christ Himself and to the message which He brought from God to the world. In John's gospel, he refers to Jesus as the Word who was in the beginning with God and in whom was life (John 1:1-4). In John 11:25 and 14:6, Jesus referred to Himself as *the life*. From John 4:14, 10:28, 17:3 and I Timothy 1:16, it is clear that the message which Jesus brought was of God's gift of eternal life. Therefore, *the Word of life* includes both Jesus Himself and His message.

- 1. Eyewitness - 1:1

John states that he has heard with his ears, seen with his eyes, and handled with his own hands the *Word of*

life. In other words, he is an eyewitness who has heard first-hand all the knowledge he will now share in his letter. His witness is based upon the historical reality of his experience as one who walked with, talked with, touched, and learned from Jesus when He was here on earth. What better teacher could we desire than one who has direct first-hand knowledge and experience!

2. Eternal life - 1:2

The *Word of life* which John presents is eternal life, That eternal life which was *with the Father and was manifested to us*. This life was *from the beginning* (1 John 1 and also John 1:1) and has now been manifested (1 John 1:2). John 1:14 states that the *Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. So the manifestation of the life was brought about by the incarnation of the Word, that is by Jesus coming into the world as human flesh and blood.

B. Proclamation of Eyewitness Experience - 1 John 1:3-4

Now John proclaims all that he has seen and heard concerning Jesus Christ and His message of eternal life. This he does for two reasons.

1. For fellowship - 1:3

The word *fellowship* introduces an important thought in John's mind as he wrote. John and the other apostles enjoyed blessed fellowship with God, with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and with one another. John's desire was to share this fellowship with his readers. John realized that the most important thing in anyone's life, which comes through the acceptance of Jesus as the true Son of God, is fellowship with God and with man. This fellowship is made possible through the manifestation of the Word of life. The word *fellowship* in the Greek is "koinonia," a word which conveys the meaning of sharing in common. It is only through Jesus Christ, God's Son who became flesh and walked among us, that we have a common basis for sharing with God. (This will be explained more fully in the comments on verses five through seven.) Those who refuse to acknowledge the deity of Jesus Christ and refuse His message of eternal life cannot experience true fellowship with God or with other people. Jesus is the only ground for all true fellowship!

2. For joy - 1:4

John calls his readers to fellowship through Jesus Christ so that both he and they may experience the fullness of joy in the Christian life. Christian joy cannot be complete without fellowship. Fellowship begins at the cross where sinners go to find forgiveness and the common ground to be able to draw near to God.

But that is not all. Fellowship also finds its continuing common meeting place at the cross. Any desire for joy in daily life must begin at the cross where we lay down our "selves" and follow Christ. Do you begin your day at the cross by spending time in Bible reading and prayer in order to establish a daily basis for fellowship with God, with His Son Jesus Christ, and with other Christians? Is the cross of Christ the basis for every action and decision you make? Are you experiencing the fullness of joy in your life because the cross of Christ is central to all you think, say, and do?

II. Conditions for Fellowship - 1 John 1:5-10

To be certain that the readers of this letter are led to experience the joy of fellowship, John next sets forth the conditions which are the very basis of the fellowship of which he speaks. For fellowship to exist, one must receive the message of Christ, walk in the light, admit personal sin, and confess that sin.

A. Receive the Message of Christ - 1 John 1:5

The message which John presents is not his own. It is the message he heard from Jesus Christ. John is about to set forth the truth he has heard directly from the lips of the Lord. Before fellowship can be enjoyed, this message must be received.

B. Walk in the Light - 1 John 1:5-7

1. God is light - 1:5

The truthful message which John has heard from Jesus Christ is that *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*. This is corroborated in the Old Testament. In the Psalms, David said, *The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness* (Psalm 18:28), and again, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?* (Psalm 27:1). The prophet Isaiah spoke of God as an *everlasting light* (Isaiah 60:20), and Micah said, *The Lord will be a light to me* (Micah 7:8). In the New Testament, Jesus' coming is presented by the gospel writers as the revelation of light. In Matthew 4:16, the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry is described as the dawning of a great light upon those who sat in darkness. In Luke 2:32, Simeon, after seeing the baby Jesus, proclaimed that He was *a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles*. In John 1:9, Jesus is presented as *the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world*. Jesus referred to Himself as *the light of the world* in John 8:12 and 9:5. These Scripture passages reveal that the character of God is light and that Jesus brought the divine light into the world for men to behold.

a. Light is His nature

Notice that John does not state that God is merely "a"

light or even "the" light, but simply *God is light*. Light is His very nature, just as God is spirit (John 4:24) and God is love (1 John 4:8 and 16).

- b. There is no darkness in Him at all

Not only is God light, but John adds that *in Him is no darkness at all*. Therefore, one who lives in darkness could definitely not fellowship with God. It is against the nature of God to fellowship with darkness. Fellowship between light and darkness is impossible because the two share nothing in common.

2. Fellowship takes place only in the light - 1:6-7

In his commentary, The Epistles of John, I. Howard Marshall points out quite accurately that there is a sense in which all Christians continue to live in darkness because they live in a world which is opposed to God and therefore characterized by darkness. His explanation of the Christian's situation is as follows: "It is like that of a person walking on a dark stage in the circle of light cast by a spotlight which is focused on him; he moves slowly forward so that he can walk in its light without fear of stumbling and losing his way. To live in the glare of the spotlight involves living a life that is compatible with being in the light, a life that is free from sin. To live in the darkness means to live without the benefit of divine illumination and guidance and so to live in sin. What John is saying is that it is not possible to have fellowship with God and yet to live in sin because to live in sin means to walk in the darkness."

- a. Liars - 1:6

The one who claims to have fellowship with God and continues to walk in darkness (the sinful ways of the world) is obviously lying because the truth is clear that God does not fellowship with darkness. As chapter 2 will reveal, such a person is spiritually blinded by the darkness. This person will always stumble and fall over circumstances and choices in life because he or she does not have the light of God for guidance, having chosen to walk outside the circle of God's light and fellowship.

- b. Light's benefits - 1:7

Those who walk *in the light* enjoy fellowship with God and also with other believers. *In the light* is where Christian fellowship takes place. Believers who walk *in the light* also have the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin. Even though we are conscious of sin (which is darkness) in our lives, Jesus' sacrifice cleanses us by forgiving and removing our sin. It is important to note that the word *cleanses* is in the Greek present tense, denoting that

the cleansing is present and continuous. Through the continual cleansing by His blood, we are able to walk in the light and in fellowship with God because the good news is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

- C. Admit Sin - 1 John 1:8

The temptation for a Christian who is enjoying fellowship with God and with other believers may be to think that he or she is free from sin. John makes it clear that this cannot be the case. He warns that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and lead ourselves astray. In other words, we are wrong and we are responsible for our error.

This deluded thinking also shows that the truth is not in us. The Bible says that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Therefore, we must examine ourselves and admit our sin. Admission of sin is necessary before sin can be confessed, forgiven, and cleansed.

- D. Confess Sins - 1 John 1:9-10

1 John 1:9 is a verse which every Christian should know by heart and practice from the heart....*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Not only must we admit that we are sinners but as we become aware of sin in our lives we must take it before the Lord in humble confession. Confession requires that you must:

1. Acknowledge your sin as sin;
2. Say the same thing about your sin that God says (The Greek word translated *confess* is "homologeō", which means "to say the same thing.") — that sin is a terrible thing;
3. Feel the same way about your sin that God feels — you must hate it;
4. Stop the sin and turn away from it. This shows repentance, and repentance and confession must go together.

Then, knowing that God is always faithful to His own nature and to His promises (Hebrews 10:23), you can be confident that He forgives, He cleanses, and He removes the guilt of all unrighteousness. (Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry Commentary, p.1956) observes from these verses that, the Christian life is a life of continual repentance, continual faith in God, and continual thankfulness and love for His faithfulness.

John has made it clear that to deny one's sin is to tell a deliberate lie and to deceive oneself (1 John 1:6 and 8). Now he goes further and says that denial of sin is also to accuse God of lying. God's Word plainly states that

all are sinners. *There is none who does good, no not one* (Psalm 14:3 and Romans 3:12). There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20). *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way* (Isaiah 53:6). *We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6). When confronted with what God's Word has to say about sin, we should admit our sins and confess them. Not to do so would be to call God a liar and to reject His Word.

A life of fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ flows from acceptance of the truth, walking in the light, and admitting and confessing our sin. The result is joy, fellowship with other believers, forgiveness, and cleansing from all sin.

Applications:

1. Do you believe God's message of eternal life which was delivered by His Son Jesus Christ? Do you believe it enough to take action concerning the sin in your life?
2. From what sin do you need to repent today in order to remain in the circle of light?
3. Will you confess your sin to God and thank Him for His faithful promise to forgive?
4. Will you accept His forgiveness and cleansing and take joy in fellowship with God, Jesus Christ, and other believers?