

Fellowship of Light

1 John 1:5-10

Introduction

In the first four verses of 1 John we saw that
Reality→Fellowship→Joy

The opposite is also true
Falsehood→Alienation→Misery

With all the voices in our world, how do we know who is telling the truth? How do we know who is for real?

The apostle John wrote this letter "that you may know."

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

These verses vividly portray the contrast between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood, between those who are saved and those who are not.

Three times we see the clause, "If we say." And in contrast, if we walk or if we confess. False teachers are practiced at talking a good game. But it is not reality. True Christianity shows itself in the nitty-gritty realities of everyday life. John clearly lays out for us what it means to be part of the fellowship of light.

1. The Foundational Reality of Who God Is (5)
2. The Contrasting Outcomes of Walking in Light or Walking in Darkness (6-7)
3. The Telltale Test of What We Do with Our Sin (8-10)

1. The Foundational Reality of Who God Is (5)

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.

John is following up on what he said in verse 3: that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The “message” is what the apostles “proclaimed/announced” to the readers. A noun and a verb based on the same term from which we transliterate the word “angel.” The angels are messengers of God who announce His word to us (Luke 2:10-11).

Verse 5 declares that the apostles heard this message from him—that is, from God the Son, the Word of Life who embodies the gospel message of eternal life. To see Jesus was to see the Father. “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

John 14:6-11

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is

in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Isaiah 7:14 prophesied that the Messiah, born of a virgin, would be called "Immanuel"—
"With us, God!"

2 Corinthians 4:4, 6

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So what is God like? What did Jesus reveal Him to be? What is His essential character?

John answers with the message he and the other apostles received from Jesus, the Word of Life: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Light—common imagery for truth, righteousness, and life in contrast to ignorance and falsehood, sin, and death. Light by its very nature shines. *God shines. He communicates. He reaches out. He loves. He illuminates our lives with truth, righteousness, life, love.*

There is so much darkness in our world.
There is so much darkness in us. God is light.
Apart from Him there is nothing but darkness.
Where He is, there is light.

This foundational, essential nature of God will reveal the difference between the true gospel and false gospels, between true Christians and false.

“The miserable errors of the heretics were due to their ignorance of God’s ethical self-revelation as Light. They could never have laid claim to a private, esoteric *gnosis* into which they had been initiated if their conception of God had been of One who is Light, diffusive, shining forth and manifesting Himself, *in whom is no darkness at all*. No secrecy, no hiding in the shadows.” John Stott, *The Epistles of John*, 70.

Does your conception of who God is match the message the apostles proclaimed?
In what ways do your notions of God deviate from God as light? Come to the light—like gathering round a warm fire on a winter’s night.

2. The Contrasting Outcomes of Walking in Light or Walking in Darkness (6-7)

“If we say”—appears three times in our passage, each time introducing what false

teachers teach, followed by a contrast with what true believers do. Here is the first one.

1 John 1:6

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

When light shines it reveals. It shows the path to walk. Light is not for mere academic theory and philosophical speculation. It's for lighting your way, showing your path. When you're in the dark, you're not sure where to walk.

Psalms 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

"If God is also light in the sense of possessing an absolute moral perfection, their claim to know Him and have fellowship with Him despite their indifference to morality is seen to be sheer nonsense." John Stott, 70

No one who walks in the darkness of lies and sinful living is close to God. It's just not possible. "Religion without morality is an illusion." Stott, 74

Photo of ancient oil lamp

When you think of light in the darkness, think of the small oil lamp with which John's

readers would have been familiar. To walk in the light, you had to be close to the light. The farther you were from the source of light, the greater the darkness in which you walk. Closeness to God and walking in light go together. That's what the word *fellowship* conveys. You are sharing in the light, partaking of light. It is a "fellowship of light."

Photo of Wooster boys on Halloween.

So here's the positive contrast. Here's how true Christians live.

1 John 1:7

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

We expect John to say "if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with Him." While that is true, look at what he says instead. "We have fellowship with one another."

It can be hard to observe with accuracy whether someone is in true communion with God. People may talk about God. They may share what God taught them or told them. They may even seem super close to God in a way you wish you experienced more. Who can prove or disprove their private experiences?

But you can easily observe whether they have fellowship with God's people. *A person who can't get along with the born-again people of God is not in fellowship with God either. A person who withdraws from them or disdains them is not truly godly. It doesn't matter how smart they are or how spiritual they seem.* Such people often have a superior attitude toward other Christians—just as did the Gnostics with their so-called higher knowledge.

If you are walking in the light you're going to connect with others who are doing so. Wherever there are people there are problems. But children of God seek to resolve them to restore the fellowship. Paul: "Entreat Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Help them, true yokefellow, to do so." There's a "truthing in love" going on. An honesty and a humility about who you are. A sharing. A comradery. You're not hiding because there's nothing to hide.

That raises a serious question for us. We know there's not one of us without sin. So *how can we have this open fellowship with God and with His people, when we know how messed up we are?* How can we live even an hour of the day totally clean from sin?

Answer: we have to come to God to be clean; we have to walk in the light. When you do so

you have fellowship with God's people. That fellowship with one another springs from your fellowship with God. How is the fellowship with God possible for sinners like us?

The answer:

"And the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

I can't get rid of my sin and the guilt of it by ignoring it or rationalizing it. It must be acknowledged. It must be paid for. It must be cleansed. Only the blood of Jesus can do that.

Romans 3:23-25a

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Note that God does more than just forgive us. He cleanses us from all sin. Not just the sins we are aware of. Every stain of sin in our deeds, words, thoughts, desires. Totally clean.

Else how could sinners ever have close fellowship with a completely holy God?

What is the state of your relationship with God? If you will get that clear, you will find the path to restoring your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

This naturally leads then to another defining test of true Christianity versus false religion.

3. The Telltale Test of What We Do with Our Sin (8-10)

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Two times—"if we say"—again, the false claims of fake Christianity
If we say we have no sin—that is, no sin nature. This is different from just saying that my sin does not impact my fellowship with God. That was the first lie. This is the second lie.

Because they are enlightened now, they are claiming that sin is no longer part of their nature. They are beyond sin, whatever their outward behavior. Those who believe they can grow so much that they no longer have any propensity to sin and never give into it (perfectionism) have drifted toward this error as well.

Such a claim demonstrates self-deception. Not only don't you know God, who is light,

but you don't know yourself. In our era, it's very popular to believe that we all are basically good. That if there even is such a thing as sin, it's an aberration or somebody else's fault. "The guilt I feel is just a psychological problem. I'm not sinful, it's the system. It's society. It's the oppressors. It's my upbringing. I just need healing from the damage other people caused me." Perhaps most pervasive is this claim, "I'm basically a good person." If I deal with my sin in any of these ways, I'm engaging in self-deception.

There is a third lie in verse 10:

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This lie deals not with my nature but with my deeds. Claiming that I've committed no sinful deeds. I can get there by ignoring or justifying the sinful deeds I have committed or by redefining what sinful deeds are.

It is common today to do both. Calling evil good and good evil has infected our society all the way from entertainment to the legislature and the courts. And many churches and professing Christians have caved to it or joined in so that they can avoid the scandal of being out of the step with the times.

Violence and vengeance are promoted, praised, and protected. Sexual sins are no longer sinful. They should be celebrated as

merely expressions of who we are or to put a religious flavor to it, who God created us to be. If you call out my sin, then, you are not only my enemy but God's.

People love to portray biblical morality as nothing but a social construct rather than the law of God written into the fabric of the universe. All of these approaches make God a liar. Anyone who believes and talks this way does not have God's Word in them. They are purveyors of darkness not light.

In contrast to these lies, how does a true Christian respond to his own sin? What does the gospel teach?

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Instead of hiding our sin, rationalizing our sin, blameshifting, denying, redefining, or any other such dishonest, evasive tactic—

If we confess our sins—that is, to say the same thing about our specific sins as God does—for He establishes what is right and wrong. If we own our wrongdoing and freely admit our sin to be sin before God, he is faithful to forgive us our sins. Faithful to His promise to forgive those who humbly, honestly come to Him. And just—righteous to

forgive because Jesus has paid the price of our sin already.

Romans 3:24-26

²⁴ And are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

But God does more than just forgive us our sins. He cleanses from all unrighteousness—everything that does not meet His perfect standard or right.

"My sins are gone; I've been set free."

Same as what we saw in verse 7: the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin—everything that falls short of the mark.

The only way to deal with our sin is to bring it openly to God for His forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Jesus our Ransom.

How we deal with our sin reveals whether we are in fellowship with God or not. If we don't

deal with our sin God's way, we cannot walk in the light. In fact, we will run from the light.

John 3:19-21

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Human nature is to shrink from coming to a holy God with our sin. We are afraid to do so. But God says come.

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,
Jesus, ready, stands to save you,
Full of pity love and power.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.*

*I will arise and go to Jesus.
He will embrace me in His arms.
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O, there are ten thousand charms.*

Psalm 32:1-5

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah* ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

If you have a terminal disease, it does no good to deny it or ignore it, especially when there is a proven cure. Stop running. Stop rationalizing. Stop fearing to come to the only One who can make you whole again.

Conclusion

How do you know who is part of the fellowship of light and who isn't?

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Discussion Questions

1. What characteristics of God does John's statement that "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" convey?
2. What are some common misconceptions of what God is like that are contrary to His being light?
3. What are some examples of people who say they have fellowship with God even though they are walking in darkness?
4. What are some reasons walking in the light produces fellowship with other believers?
5. Why is cleansing from our sin necessary to walking in the light and having fellowship with other believers?
6. What are some common ways we human beings dodge honesty about our sin and our sins?
7. What are some reasons we find it hard to admit our sins even to God?
8. What does it feel like when you've done someone wrong, and they freely forgive and welcome you back into relationship with them? How does it feel when that "someone" is God Himself?