

March 3, 2024 (Lesson 1)

WALK IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

1. Fellowship With the Father and Son (1 John 1:1-3)
2. Fellowship in the Light (1 John 1:4-7)
3. Fellowship Through Cleansing (1 John 1:8—2:2)

Central Truth: Christians are called into fellowship with God and other believers.

Focus: Examine what it means to live in fellowship with God and resolve to live such a life.

Evangelism Emphasis: Salvation through Christ brings us into fellowship with God.

Golden Text: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Near the end of the first century AD, the elderly Apostle John penned three letters, probably writing from Ephesus. We will be exploring these writings for several weeks.

The letters of John present God as “light” (1 John 1:5). Ultimately, God is beyond our comprehension. Yet, He desires to enlighten us—to make Himself known to humanity. So great is that desire that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, dressed in human flesh, to live before people so they could see what God is like. As John Killinger put it, “Jesus is God’s way of getting rid of a bad reputation.”

Humans had many ideas about the nature of God, some of them not very good, prior to the coming of Jesus. But in Christ, God has given us a true picture of His nature. We could not climb up to Him, so He reached down to us in Jesus of Nazareth. He is the revelation of God.

John also presents God as “love” (4:8). His attitude toward humans is love. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 NKJV). This same love God has toward us, we should have toward Him and toward each other.

John also teaches God is “life” (1 John 1:1). When we accept Christ as our Savior, we become partakers of the divine nature. The life of God lives within us. God is eternal, and the life we receive from Him is everlasting. This is life of the highest possible quality. No one on earth who is apart from Christ, no matter how rich or noble, enjoys the quality of life Christians have.

1. FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND SON

A. The Word of Life (1 John 1:1-2)

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.

“That which was from the beginning” is a reminder of John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word . . .”; therefore, we may understand this verse to mean from the beginning of time, or rather, from eternity. John’s witness, unlike that of his opponents, represented neither innovation nor afterthought. “Which we have heard” (1 John 1:1) indicates John delivered nothing by hearsay and nothing from the conjecture, but had the fullest certainty of all he wrote. His witness was based on the immediate evidence of personal experience.

There were those in John’s day who denied Christ had come in the flesh. John offered the strongest possible evidence of the physical presence of Christ. He declared not only had he and the other disciples heard Jesus with their own ears, but also had seen Him with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands. John said they “looked upon” (v. 1) Him, meaning they gazed at and contemplated Him. They beheld Him attentively and considered diligently His person and conduct, life and ministry, teachings, sufferings, miracles, and all the other aspects by which He manifested the reality of His incarnation.

In verse 2, John further explained the “Word of life.” The life to which he bears witness, the life that was with the Father, is precisely the life manifested in the historical person of Jesus. That is why John could bear personal witness to it and make an apostolic declaration concerning it. As observed by B. F. Westcott, “The three verbs give in due sequence the ideas of personal experience, responsible affirmation, authoritative announcement, which are combined in the apostolic message.”

God Speaks

God is not silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second person of the Holy Trinity is called “The Word.”—A. W. Tozer

B. A Shared Life (1 John 1:3)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

This verse provides one of the reasons for John’s epistle: “That ye also may have fellowship with us.” The Greek word *koinonia*, translated “fellowship,” occurs here and in verse 6. One may also translate it “communion,” “participation,” “share a common life,” and “partnership.” Its root meaning is “common” or “shared” as opposed to “one’s own.” In the New Testament it refers to Christians who share a common faith (Philem. 1:6), share possessions (Acts 2:44; 4:32), or are partners in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5).

“Our fellowship . . . with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3) refers to the supernatural life Christians share. It is everlasting, life manifested and made possible in the incarnate Christ.

§ *Why is it foolish to try to lead an isolated Christian life?*

2. FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT

A. Fullness of Joy (1 John 1:4)

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John wanted his readers to find the joy that fellowship with Christ brings—the joy he and the disciples had found (v. 4). He knew if they were firmly established in the Christian faith and fellowship, they would be filled with joy. The beloved disciple wrote during challenging days for the church. He knew if persecuted believers were to survive, they would need the joy of fellowship with Christ and with each other. No circumstance of this life could triumph over them as long as they walked close to Him and continued in unity with other believers. The same is true for believers today. We are made stronger through fellowship with other Christians.

Genuine Unity

One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always.—A. W. Tozer

B. God Is Light (1 John 1:5)

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

In the Book of Genesis, light is shown to be the first of God's creative acts. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (1:3). The psalmist declared, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (27:1). John opened his Gospel by asserting Christ is light. He quoted John the Baptist as announcing, "The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9 NLT). Jesus boldly proclaimed, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (8:12).

In saying God is light and Christ is light, we are given a glimpse into the character of God which Christ lived out while on earth. God is holy and righteous; in Him there is nothing evil or false—"no

darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Those who walk in fellowship with “the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (v. 3) will reflect the character of God in their lives.

It is the nature of light to shine, and it is the nature of God to reveal Himself. When God chooses to make Himself known, we see One who possesses perfect purity and displays unutterable majesty. He is “the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa. 57:15a NKJV). Yet, God makes Himself known and dwells with those who are lowly in heart. He says, “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (v. 15b).

God never deceives, misleads, or distorts. Those are attitudes of darkness, and there is no darkness in Him. He deals only in truth. Thus, we can trust the light He shines on our pathway and walk safely in His way.

§ *How is the light of God influencing your daily life?*

C. Fellowship With God (1 John 1:6-7)

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

To be conscious of God’s presence in our life, we must walk by faith. To maintain a closeness to Him calls for holy living. Through the grace of God, we can enjoy a rich and rewarding communion with God. If we neglect to worship and obey God and fail to act according to truth, any confession of communion with God is only a pretense. Truth is the standard for righteousness. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

If we claim to have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we are deceiving ourselves and perhaps others. If we consciously practice sin, a taint of darkness overshadows our

heart that makes fellowship with God an impossibility. Our actions prove the truth is not in us. John bluntly says if we pretend to be a friend of God and at the same time live a wicked life, we are liars. Our profession is false and insincere. Light and darkness cannot dwell together. Holiness and wickedness are not compatible.

Those who walk in the light have nothing to hide. Jesus said, “Those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants” (John 3:21 NLT). They welcome the shining of the light on their life, and have no problem with others observing their conduct. They can pray as did the psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (139:23-24).

To “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7) is to walk with God and to always walk toward Him. Our path is lighted by the Word of God. Not only do we receive Christ, we also embrace His words. After all, He is the living Word. The way of light is the way of truth, and truth is found in the Scripture. The more we know of His Word, the brighter the light shines on our path.

As we walk in the light, not only do we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, but we also enjoy a special camaraderie with fellow believers. The common thread that knits believers together is our mutual communion with God. There are other bonds that unite individuals, but there is none so strong as our membership in the family of God. Believers have so much in common because we love the same God, share the same beliefs, and live with the same ends in mind. In this life, our goal is to glorify Christ and win others to Him. Beyond this life, we believe there is a larger, better life and an eternal home in the presence of God. With all of this commonality, we feel at home with each other.

This fellowship is possible through the blood of Jesus Christ shed for our sins. In our state of sinfulness and rebellion, fellowship with God was impossible. Something had to remove that barrier,

and only the shed blood of Jesus Christ was sufficient. The moment we put our trust in Christ, we were fully forgiven and cleansed from all sin. The door of fellowship with God and others was opened wide.

3. FELLOWSHIP THROUGH CLEANSING

A. Confessing Our Sins (1 John 1:8-10)

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

We can trace our plight back to Adam. When Adam fell, the human race fell with him. Tragically, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Since we were all born in sin, we all need a Savior. If we imagine we have no guilt and thus no need for the blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sin, “we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). The result of such thinking is to live under the weight of sin and travel down a road that leads to destruction.

But there is a remedy. If we come before God confessing our sins, recognizing our inability to save ourselves and humbly cast ourselves on His mercy, He will “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9). On Calvary, Christ paid the debt for our sins and purchased our redemption. When we put our trust in Christ’s sacrifice, God will take away our guilt and cleanse us from every kind of sin. We are then ready for communion with God in this world and to enjoy His presence and glory forever in the place Christ has gone to prepare for us.

There were some in the community to which John wrote who denied they had ever sinned, or that they needed a Savior. But if we deny we need pardon through the blood of Christ and claim we have never sinned, “we make [God] a liar” (v. 10). This attitude shows either we have no

understanding of the Word or we have given no place for it in our heart. Nothing could be more important than to understand our lostness apart from Christ, and to humbly look to Him for our salvation.

The Devil's Delight

It's Satan's delight to tell me that once he's got me, he will keep me. But at that moment I can go back to God. And I know that if I confess my sins, God is faithful and just to forgive me.—Alan Redpath

C. The Divine Advocate (1 John 2:1-2)

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Biblical standard for believers is that we do not sin. If we walk in fellowship with God, it stands to reason we will strive to lead a holy life. After all, we have been forgiven and cleansed from all our sin by the blood of Christ. That within itself is enough to encourage us to practice holiness. Although we are imperfect, we no longer live in sin by indulging our fleshly appetites and walking contrary to the Word of God. By the grace of God, we adopt a Christ-centered lifestyle marked by good works.

While John teaches holiness is God's standard of living for His people, he recognizes the temptation to sin is an ongoing reality. His statement "If anybody does sin" (v. 1 NIV) acknowledges this. When we sin, we must not continue in sin as though there is no help available. Rather, we should repent and find the remedy God has provided through Jesus Christ. What relief there is to know if we fail, we should not despair. "Jesus Christ, the Righteous One," will speak "to the Father in our defense" (v. 1 NIV) and restore us to fellowship with Him.

Not only did Jesus Christ die on the cross to pay the price for our sins; He sits at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us. The writer of Hebrews said, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:15-16). Although we are helpless without Christ, we are overcomers through Him.

§ *Who is Jesus Christ willing to represent before His Father, and why?*

FREEDOM AND FELLOWSHIP

The fellowship described in today’s lesson comes through the freedom only God can provide. This freedom involves living in the truth about God, ourselves, and the world.

In contradiction to the idea that freedom is all about increasing choices, John suggests freedom is about making wise choices that lead to life. Some choices enslave, so merely increasing the number of choices people have does not increase their freedom. Wise choices emerge from abiding in the truth rather than in deception. Without knowing the truth about our lives and what is really good, we cannot achieve genuine freedom.

The entrance to the path of freedom is God’s faithfulness to forgive. Once we understand the depths of God’s grace, we will discover a freedom to love deeply because our love will not be grounded in deceptions about who we are, but in the love of God. This love not only embraces us, but heals us by rightly directing our desires and therefore teaching us how to love as God loves.

Daily Devotions

M. Fellowship With God Broken (Genesis 3:8-13, 21-24)

T. Hospitality and Fellowship Demonstrated (2 Kings 4:8-13)

- W. Fellowship Betrayed (Psalm 55:12-14)
- T. Fellowship Among Believers (Acts 2:41-47)
- F. Limitations of Fellowship (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- S. The Right Hand of Fellowship (Galatians 2:1-10)