

Introduction

The Apostle John was the last writer of the Scriptures. He began to follow Jesus as a young teen and lived until the end of the first century, pastoring and teaching congregations of Jews and Gentiles in the early church. One by one, the other apostles died a martyr's death, but John survived the persecution in the Roman Empire and re-located to the church in Ephesus shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Among the believers in the churches of Asia Minor, John was held in high esteem as the last of the original apostles. He wrote his Gospel to put a different spin on the ones that were already in circulation, and then his shorter message and letters followed to deal with problems that come from a growing church.

By the time in which he wrote this message, a second generation of Christians had grown up. They had experienced tribulation under the Roman government. They were restless for the return of Christ and thought that He would come at the end of the first century, the time in which they were living. When He tarried, they began to adjust their faith practices to the ways of the world.

Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, was a melting pot of many cultures. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Syrians, Persians all passed through this crossroads area and brought their languages, their pagan customs, their sexual perversions, their human wisdom, their disdain for the holiness of God. The intellectuals of the day taught that there were many roads to truth and they selected what seemed realistic from a variety of the day's philosophies: a little Plato, some mythology,

some animal or human sacrifice, polygamy, or whatever satisfied their desire for truth. Remember, people were for the most part, non-readers and relied on the spoken word of experts for their knowledge. Christians were having a difficult time sorting out the Truth of the Gospel from an onslaught of new ideas. A little compromise here and there became the norm and the Truths of the Scriptures were twisted just enough to be dangerous. It sounds a lot like today, doesn't it?

So, it was in the midst of this confusion that John wrote the proclamation which we know today as the first letter to John. It may not have been originally a letter; it contains no salutation or closing so it may have been a sermon delivered to people who were familiar with John's teaching and background.

John's flock had suffered a split. We'll see next week that he refers to 'antichrists' and false prophets who had threatened John's believers with their efforts to divert them. His warnings to his believers speak to those who were tempted to compromise their faith with what is popular in the culture. Those same temptations are very relevant today, so open your Bible to 1 John and prepare to be challenged as John's message resonates to us from 1900 years ago.

1 John 1:1-4 John's Prologue

John opened his writing with the same theme as his Gospel..... "That which was from the beginning....." John starts with his declaration that Jesus is the Word of Life...eternal life. Eternal life has always been God's intention for His creation and the beginning of eternal life starts with the author of life Himself, a real person. John heard Him, saw and touched Jesus, thus declaring that his witness to the life

of Christ is a valid one. John's testimony and his own fellowship with God were based on what he had physically experienced with Jesus, but now his point is this: the fellowship that he enjoyed with the Father is NOT unique, but possible for all believers even without having had the opportunity to physically see, hear and touch Jesus. And it is John's great joy to bring all of us into that same fellowship not only with other believers, but, more importantly, with God. Fellowship with God is certainly the most unique feature of Christianity....no other religion then or now, promises believers intimate fellowship with the God of eternity.

The idea of fellowship is one of the most important ideas in this writing of John's. It is the ancient Greek word *koinonia*, which speaks of a sharing, a communion, a common bond in life. It is a living, breathing, sharing, loving *relationship* with God and extends only to believers who claim the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Fellowship, then, is the key to vital Christianity. The important question is, are we experiencing fellowship with the Father and with his Son, and as a result, sharing that life with a group of believers? Both are crucial to our walk.

Our fellowship with God is the basis of our faith. And it starts with our vertical relationship with Him, through our faith in Christ. It was God's plan from the beginning, but was damaged through sin, and then redeemed through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. Once redeemed, we now have the great hope of eternal life with Him and with others. And thus, it is with people where our faith is lived out, where the iron sharpens iron, where we know and are known, where our true nature is revealed. Fellowship with other believers in your family, in your small groups here or at home, and in your Sunday school class is a means of

accountability as well as a major source of love and encouragement especially when facing pressures and problems. Working through issues with fellow believers is part of God's program as He uses us to disciple others, to encourage them, and to pray for and with them. But, as you well know, the enemy is always working to thwart that fellowship with God and man.

And so, John continues his message to explain how believers experience fellowship, and what hinders it. Once again, he starts with the basics in verse 5: *God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.*

That message came from Jesus Himself in John 12:46 when Jesus said: *I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.*

To understand the character of God, we can observe what light is; what light does; what light accomplishes.

Light is the first bit of matter that God spoke into existence in the beginning. When matter is analyzed down to its sub-atomic components, which are broken down even further than anyone but a physicist can explain.....they are....light. All matter comes from light. John knew of Whom he wrote when he penned in his Gospel, *In Him was life and that life was the light of men* (John 1:4). Paul was not speaking from his imagination when he wrote to the Colossians that '*in Him* (meaning Jesus), *all things hold together.*" (Col 1:17)

Light has been used for various purposes; its speed is the fastest thing in the universe; it produces x-rays, CAT-scans, and laser beams which do phenomenal things. It makes beautiful shows at Disneyland and yet most of the time, works so unobtrusively so that we often take it for granted until it is missing. Light is powerful. God is powerful.

Light reveals Truth. God revealed Himself as a burning bush to Moses, a flaming chariot to Elijah, used burning oil in the Temple as a symbol of His presence. Jesus Christ as light opens up the eyes of the heart and life comes into focus. We see clearly, without distortion. Sometimes revelation comes in one amazing transformation. Often, it is a gradual process where we recognize the reality of who we are as sinners and the Truth that God is both the Creator and Redeemer of our souls. The great mysteries of the Scriptures become clear, and the world's illusions will be seen for deception that they are as the light shines upon them.

Light reveals Truth; God reveals Truth

Light is a point of reference. In economic life, political life, social life, scientific life, psychological life, whatever it may be, we are confronted with mysteries and puzzles wherever we turn. As men seek solutions to the solutions of the world, how do they know which one is right? Men need a plumb line, and God's word is just that, giving us a reference point for which to live purposeful lives. Light is the standard and God's Word is the standard.

Darkness is not the opposite of light, but rather the absence of it, for darkness has no energy or power of its own. You cannot measure the speed of darkness or its

strength. One only describes darkness by the amount of light that is missing. And spiritual darkness is experienced when people reject what the light has revealed. And believers, those who Jesus called the light of the world, can squelch light which they have already received and plunge into spiritual darkness. And John's message is to believers who have made false claims about themselves. Take a look at them in your Bible (underline) in verses 6, 8, 10. They begin with the words, "If we claim, " or other versions, 'If we say".

- Verse 6: If we claim that have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.
- Verse 8: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- Verse 10: If we claim that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

Well, if God is light and in Him, there is no darkness, where do believers get off track? It happens when Truth is obscured with distortions and compromise. Our fellowship with God then suffers and needs to be corrected. How do you know if you as a believer are off-track? Well, we shine the light of His word into the dark corners of our walk. Get ready, we're cleaning cobwebs today!

1:6 If we say that have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

If we as Christians behave just like the rest of the world, we are hypocrites and are deceiving others.

What is the most common reason that people reject the Christian faith?

Christians are hypocrites! Not me, you say? Some of us may not see ourselves as hypocrites, but chances are that others do. We have areas in our walk where we have compromised attitudes and behavior. When I take a long honest look at myself, it's easy to see how I've become comfortable in my Christianity. I rarely miss church and Sunday school, I listen to Christian radio, have a library full of Christian books and magazines, Scriptures on the walls and attend Bible study each week. Looking at the exteriors, you'd think I'm doing okay. So if I claim to have fellowship with Him, and yet walk in darkness, I lie....to myself and to others who don't really know me 24/7.

To walk in darkness means to walk as though there were no God, for God is light. It may or may not be actual sinning, but it looks like a practical atheist. Not an actual one, of course. I believe that God exists and I have determined to follow Him, after all, but in much of my life, I live as though I am in charge. Take away God, and I look a lot like the world. I'm selfish as I go about my daily activities; I often put God on the back burner while I stay busy being a 'martha' type. It's a character issue, where I really must ask myself, 'What would Jesus do and not do?'

- Would Jesus demand the same perfection I expect from my spouse, my kids, my annoying neighbor, or would He be merciful when they don't do things my way? *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*
- Would Jesus walk by and ignore that homeless fellow that I see regularly on the street as I usually do? *No, Jesus would love him.*

- Would Jesus get up with the early alarm clock to spend time in prayer or would He go back to sleep if He didn't have an appointment? *Jesus would spend time in prayer.*
- Would Jesus have an extra snack sitting nearby while working on the computer or would He fast from it unless He really needed to eat? *Jesus would not eat unless it was necessary.*
- Would Jesus say that memorizing God's Word is 'just not my thing,' and not put much effort into that endeavor, or would He memorize the Scriptures so that they would be on the tip of my tongue when I needed to use my sword? *Jesus would memorize Scripture*

Do you look and do good to others when they are watching, and yet still have a heart problem where no one really sees it? That is hypocrisy! See how easy it is to walk in darkness even if we claim fellowship with Christ? Oh wretched man that I am...who will rescue me?

The solution is in verse 7: *But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.....*number 1 remedy: Walk in the light..... in other words, examine ourselves for the hard things, be willing to look at ourselves for areas that are not wholly committed to God. To walk in the light means to hide nothing, nor try to appear to be something that you are not. Recognize the areas of your life where hypocrisy has slipped in.

Number 2, *we have fellowship with one another.....* but I am not in the type of fellowship where I am accountable for this part of my walk. And you probably are not either; most of us really don't want that much light in the dark corners of our

personal lives...do we? But if that situation is remedied, then look what happens:
the blood of Jesus purifies us of all sin.

It is my fellowship with my friends, which compels me to confess to you and know that the blood of Jesus purifies from all sin. Purifies....It is the present tense; continuously, all the time. But it must be dealt with as the light reveals it, being honest and open with God and with others, so that you can experience the fellowship sweet, and know that He abides with you still! What a glory He will shed when we allow that to happen!

Now, let's look at a second claim we make which squelches the light of Truth in Verse 8: **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

Who in their right mind would say they have no sin? Well, it turns out that plenty of people, even believers, have the wrong idea about sin and the nature of man. If we say that man's nature is inherently good, then we are deceived with an inaccurate world view, and our life pursuits become meaningless.

If your kids are in the public schools or attend a non-Christian college, they have been exposed constantly to humanism, the idea that man is the solution to man's problems. That, friends, is a distortion of the truth of God's word.

Now sin, singular, in verse 8 refers to the root of sin, man's sinful nature which we inherited from Adam and Eve. It is often referred to as original sin. There are many kinds of *sins*, but all from one root, original sin. John the Baptist

told his disciples, "Look there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin (singular) of the world." Sin is the problem and Jesus is the only remedy. But the world did not then, nor does it today see that the problems we face in life originate with man's sinful nature. The secular world view sees mans' problem originating with the social environment in which one lives, the unfortunate circumstances, poverty, lack of education, corporate greed, racism, etc. We don't need a savior, when we can solve the world's problems with better education, more money, government programs, surgery, and worldly success or technology. The failure to recognize that man is by nature a sinner causes a faulty world view; and sends man on a futile attempt to remedy problems by changing only the outward circumstances.

Even Christians are caught up in this self-deception when we put our best efforts into programs with more money, or additional man power, overlooking the original sin problem. If we are depending on Oprah, Dr. Phil or social services or the government, we will be disappointed in the results; the Truth is not in them! The Truth is that the greatest need for everyone is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Instead, many of us will keep busy spending time, energy, and money with worldly pursuits which offer only a temporary diversion. Why? Because, as John says, the truth is not in us. Have you deceived yourself with a world wind of pursuits that have no eternal value? If so, then thanks be to God, we have a remedy in verse 9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess our sins, plural, He is faithful to forgive us. The plural sins is the fruit of the original sin. What God wants us to do is to look at our sins and to agree with God about them, and that is what the word confess means: *Fess* comes from a root which means "to say," and *con* means "with." "We agree with God about the seriousness of our sins and admit that they damage our fellowship with Him. Our confession becomes a blessing to us, as by faith, we accept His forgiveness and His cleansing of all unrighteousness. You may recall when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He told Peter that the person who already had a bath, that is a complete cleansing of his sin, needed only to wash his feet from time to time. It is here with the confession of sins that believers keep their feet clean so that they can continue to walk in the light. Confession of sins must be a part of a vibrant fellowship with other Christians.

Now once again, in verse 10, we see the third problem that keeps Christians from walking in the light:

1 John 1:10: If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

With the first claim in verse 6, we deceive others, with the second in verse 8, we deceive ourselves, and now with the third claim, we call God a liar. Wow! Serious call here! Here's how that looks today. If we rationalize our sin to fit in with the world, we have rejected Truth of God's word and have declared our own god.

If we claim we have not sinned.....we do this when we change the wording of the sin to make it more acceptable. You've seen it before, how we call abortion..actually murder of babies...a choice! And we have re-phrased all kinds

of sexual sin..... fornication, adultery, homosexuality, pornography..... so that they are now 'freedom of consent'. That's how many today claim that they have not sinned. But there are other more 'acceptable' behaviors that we often rationalize. Let's examine this problem more closely, because it is the church's greatest failure.

We rationalize our sinful addictions by calling them a genetic predisposition.

Stress at work or at home causes my chronic anxiety, so it's really not a sin...is it? But we have been commanded....commanded, mind you, to be anxious for nothing, so our refusal to do so, is in truth, disobedience.

It is my personality disorder that causes me to chatter and gossip about others, not sin!

I control my kids or grandkids with anger, but that's not sin.....or is it?

I spend hours with wasteful entertainment as a means of escape, but that's not idolatryor is it?

Sure, I spend a lot of money on things that have no eternal value and call it a hobby or betting, or gambling, or collecting, but after all, it's my money.....or does it all belong to God?

We spend more money and time on our kids, our pets, our homes, sports and technology, than we do on kingdom purposes, and have convinced ourselves that our hand-held devices more important than feeding the hungry.

We use our family as an excuse to not pray; we overeat but we're not gluttons.

And no, I could never fast for the sake of saving our country in the upcoming elections; it would affect my blood sugar!

We shop, work, or play on Sunday, overlooking the command to keep the Sabbath holy.

We are all experts at rationalizing our own sin, and worse yet, most of our friends here at church will affirm you because hey, we are only human; we need balance in our lives, so much so that we have a hard time recognizing it as offensive to God. Now, listen to what John is telling us here: "If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His Word is not in us." Did you get that? You have just told God that He is the liar and have ignored what His word says.

Now think of the enormity of that charge! The light of the world just got reduced to complete darkness. If we continue to cover the truth, we will continue to walk in darkness. Believers have been deceived. We have false ideas about ourselves, our sin, each other and God. Who of us is not guilty?

But John did not write this letter, to make us feel guilty, but to shine light into dark areas of our lives where we have fallen short. ***My dear children***, John continues in chapter 2, verse 1: ***I write this to you so that you will not sin.***

Not sin? Is he serious? After what the light has just exposed in each one of us? Yes, he is. For a believer, there is never any need to sin, since God's Word is clear in how to avoid it. Be alert, pray, flee, consider others more than self, give thanks, put on your armor! But if we find that we have sinned, the provision is already in

place. We see this in chapter 2 verse 1-2: *We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

Our defense attorney is standing by ready to advocate on our behalf, but His defense is of no use to us if we retain our claims.

Do you claim to be a Christian and yet are walking in darkness?

Do you claim the world view that man does not have a sin nature?

Do you claim that you have not sinned by rationalizing your behavior, calling God a liar?

Then you will be your own advocate and will need to defend yourself before Almighty God. Good luck with that!

Or you can do it His way; confess our sins and rely on Jesus to be your advocate.

We accept that the price has already been paid through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and we stand before Him guilty as a sinner, but forgiven as His righteous child. For John explains that, *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world"* to remind us that if anyone accepts the work of Christ, they can be brought into fellowship with God.

Have you questioned your faith today and wondered, "Do I really have fellowship with God? My sins are grievous...embarrassing....am I really saved?

The enemy is quick to bring up these fears whenever we closely examine our walk in the light of His word as John would have us do. And a close examination is a good thing; light shines in the darkness and exposes those things that need to be dealt with. It rattles our complacency so that rather than presume on God's grace,

we appreciate even more His sacrifice on the cross and are better equipped to walk in the light. Our claims fall short; we can no longer walk in darkness and say that we have not sinned. That is evidence of our love for Christ. Here is how John teaches it in chapter 2, verses 5 and 6:

But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

What He says, we will do, as we sang earlier, and His love is then made complete in us, enabling us to walk as Jesus did. That does not mean to do the same things that Jesus did; for then we'd be walking around with 12 guys trying to find the right fish to catch to pay our taxes. Instead, walking as Jesus did means to act from the same principles and to reflect the same kind of fellowship with the Father that Jesus modeled. Jesus was clear about how He maintained that fellowship: He said, "The Son of Man does nothing of himself." the Father who dwells in me; does the work.

We don't look like spiritual giants to walk as Jesus did. A daily walk in the light which is characterized by a quiet, steady dependence upon God always at work in us. It is indeed fellowship sweet, when we recognize that God did not intend for us to try to manipulate the circumstances and people in our lives match our agenda. For our vision is limited. When we walk in the light, we understand that circumstances and people have been uniquely designed to show forth God's glory, no matter how difficult, how inconsequential, how tedious they may be.

Jesus walked in total surrender to the will of the Father. In doing so, Jesus disappointed a great many people on earth, His family, his cousin John the Baptist, the church leaders, the disciples many times who could not understand why He went to the cross. They had a worldly agenda. But Jesus did not disappoint His Father. His Father declared that He was well-pleased with His Son. When we walk with the Lord, we may not appear to be as busy, as important, as significant as we would appear to the world, but we become more aware of our significance to God, and thus, when we claim to have fellowship with Him, our claim is true, we do indeed walk in the light.