

LIVING IN THE LIGHT, NOT IN DARKNESS

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

By about A.D. 85-90 the Christians were faced with internal heresy. False teachers were entering into the group proclaiming heresies. There was also a lack of brotherly love on the part of some of the brethren, particularly those who had more material gain than others. For these major reasons and other minor ones, John wrote to his "little children."

The text itself lends no indication as to whom the letter was written. It was apparently directed to a group of churches rather than a single church. Some suggest that it was the group of churches surrounding Ephesus where history says John labored. It may have included the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

That John places such a heavy emphasis on the deity of Christ and His relationship to the Father is not surprising. The Gnostics of that day believed that matter was evil. They depreciated the person of Jesus. They attempted to make Jesus less than the divine Son of God who is an equal member of the Trinity. The Gnostics maintained that Christ came upon the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him before He died on the cross. They believed that Christ could not become a man because flesh was evil and He could not go to the cross because God cannot die.

The epistle is rich in practical truths. John offers a guideline for godly living in the midst of internal and external trouble in the Church. Chapter one introduces us to life of God (1:2) and the light of God (1:5). He gives believers eternal life, so they do not need to fear death, and He gives them light, so they do not need to stumble into sin. They are given the truth with power to obey it so they can live holy lives. In the next lesson we will consider the law of God (2:3, 5) and the love of God (2:5; cf 4:8). He has laws for believers to obey, but they are given to perfect His love in the believer (4:12-5:3).

I. The Communication of Life – 1:1-4

A. The Substance of the Communication – 1:1-2

John reminds his readers of the early message of his preaching. This message had both substance and significance.

1:1-2 – These verses describe the substance of John's early preaching. It concerned the Word (Christ) who became flesh (Jn 1:14). The Word is timeless as to His glory. He was from the beginning, which is a way of saying He is eternal (Jn 1:1-2). Before time began, Christ was there with His Father and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in essence, but not in authority. The Father is first in authority, then Christ and finally the Holy Spirit, but they all share the same glory.

Moreover, the Word was tested to be certain He was a genuine human being. While the Gnostic teachers would have denied the Word was a real human being, John declares that he heard Him, saw Him, looked at Him and handled Him. This is an eyewitness account that made him a believer, not some theory of a doubter. These are John's sense impressions of the Word that add credibility to his witness of Christ's humanity. By these means He was tested and found to be a genuine man with flesh, blood and bone.

1:1 – "Looked upon" – The word gives strong evidence to the humanity of Christ. It means John gave Him a steady gaze as opposed to a stolen glance. The difference is in duration. John scrutinized Him to be certain that He was truly human. The disciples watched Jesus carefully over a long period of time under all kinds of conditions to prove this was no momentary vision.

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Finally, the Word is the true life. His life is eternal and it is complete. Sinners receive this life when they are born again. When sinners receive Jesus Christ as Savior, they become new persons. Christ takes their sins and gives them His life, which is eternal and chockfull with blessings that will fully satisfy their souls. This life, though invisible, is “manifested” to them.

B. The Significance of the Communication – 1:3-4

1:3 – The message John preached was more than facts. It had real significance to believers. These facts, when believed, brought fellowship on two levels. John wanted believers to have fellowship “with us.” That is a necessary relationship between believers. Fellowship with believers will lead to fellowship with the Father and His Son. One purpose of a church is to provide fellowship with believers and fellowship with God. Fellowship with believers is founded on love for one another that gives rather than receives. Fellowship with God is founded upon a holy love for Him that hates sin and loves righteousness. This is the aim of John’s message to the believers in the churches.

1:4 – “Your joy” – Jesus talked to His disciples about these things on the night before His crucifixion so that His joy might remain in them and that their joy might be made full (Jn 15:11). When the message of Christ is given and received, fellowship is the result. Both the messenger and the recipient will rejoice together. Their joy will be complete. The practical significance of the communication of life in Christ is fellowship with full joy.

II. The Communion of Fellowship – 1:5-7

The fellowship resulting from the message of eternal life is next described in more detail. Fellowship is grounded in four areas of Christian belief and practice.

A. Fellowship and the Character of God – 1:5-7

God’s holy nature is the keystone of fellowship, so John introduces it first in the form of a “message.” His message tells us the source of fellowship, a statement of God’s nature that affects our fellowship with Him and the state of believers that determines their fellowship with God.

1:5 – Christ is the source of fellowship; the message was heard “of Him,” or more accurately, “from Him.” The nearest antecedent is Jesus Christ (v. 3). John had been trained by Christ to communicate this message. Jesus Christ, then, is the source of the message.

John’s statement regarding God’s holy nature has a direct affect on our fellowship with Him. He said God is light, without any darkness (see John 1:5 and 3:19-20). This is a word-picture for God’s holiness, His absolute righteousness, which is intolerant of all evil or “darkness.” Light and darkness cannot co-exist, either in nature or in God. The child of God cannot have fellowship with his holy heavenly Father as long as he has known sin in his life. He must confess his sin to Him before fellowship with Him can be restored.

The state of believers, whether good or bad, determines if they have fellowship with God or not. If they tolerate sin in their lives, they have no fellowship with Him. If they live godly lives and confess their sin when it is made known to them, they will have fellowship with Him.

1:6, 7 – In verse 6, John speaks about a believer that claims to have fellowship with God, but he is walking in darkness and refuses to confess his known sin. His claim to have fellowship with God is a lie. He cannot have fellowship with God, who is in the light, and walk in darkness. In verse 7, John speaks about a believer that walks in the light as God is in the light and he does have fellowship with God. He also has fellowship with other believers that are walking in the light. Since God’s light shows He is holy, without any sin, a believer that walks with God must be holy without any known sin. But someone will say, “That is impossible. How can we be holy like God so we can walk with Him?” It is true that we cannot be holy like God by our power, so God has made special provision for believers that walk in unknown sin. That provision is the blood of Jesus Christ.

1:7 – “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin” – “Cleanses” is in the present tense and indicates a process which goes on continually. If we should inadvertently sin, the blood of Jesus Christ maintains our fellowship until we become aware of our sin. When that happens, we must confess the offense so we can continue our walk in the light with God (see Psalm 19:12). In this way fellowship with God is made possible.

B. Fellowship and the Confession of Sin – 1:8-10

John deals with those in the church that claim they have no sin and with those who say they have not sinned. Do we have to attain sinless perfection to be in fellowship with God? John strongly denies it, but in chapter 3, he says that believers do not sin. So what is the correct doctrine on this issue? The answer is found by a careful reading of 3:6, 9. This aspect of the Christian experience will be discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, John states that sinless perfection is not the condition that God requires to have fellowship with Him.

1:8 – “We have no sin” – A person that says he has no sin has denied his sin nature. He does not believe that Adam’s sin plunged all mankind into sin. All people are descendants of Adam, so all people have received his sin nature (Rom 5:12-21). That nature causes him to sin. No one can rightly say, “I have no sin.” God has said in His Word that “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23). A person that says he has no sin is deceiving himself. He needs to be taught the truth. True believers acknowledge that they have a sin nature, which causes them to sin. If a person refuses to believe that he has a sin nature that causes him to sin, he should be treated as a non-believer.

1:9 – “If we confess our sins”. First, we must confess our innate sinfulness and lost condition to be saved from the penalty of our sins in the Lake of Fire. Then as believers, we must confess our sins to be restored in our fellowship with God. When we confess our sins, we must be specific, naming them one by one. It is not right to make a general confession of our sins. Confession involves several elements:

- 1) Recognition – “I recognize that I have sinned against God.”
- 2) Reiteration – “I reiterate the deed done when I confess it to God.”
- 3) Repentance – “I repent (change my mind) of the sin, and hate it.”
- 4) Rejection – “I reject any love that I had for the sin.”
- 5) Recognition – “I recognize that I am forgiven.”

Psalm 51 is the classic model of sincere confession. Confession is the believer’s part; forgiveness is God’s part. When true confession is made to God, complete cleansing of sin is given to the believer by God and full restoration of fellowship with Him is made. God can be trusted to do His part because He is both faithful and just (righteous.)

1:10 – “We have not sinned” – A person that says he has not sinned has a low view of sin. He may call his sin an error in judgment or a mistake, but not a sin. This is how some say that they have arrived at sinless perfection. They bring the high standards of God’s Word down to their level. They need to study the Ten Commandments to get a high view of sin. When a person justifies his sin which God has condemned, he makes God a liar, because He has come to the conclusion that all have sinned (Rom 11:32; Gal 3:22). This shows that the Word of God is not in him.

In the next lesson we will consider the last two aspects of fellowship with God: the conciliation of Christ (1:1-2) and the conformity of children (2:3-6).

Are you walking in the light with God or are you walking in the darkness with the world? If you are walking in the darkness, God invites you to repent by changing your mind about your sins and hate them and about Him and love Him. He loves you and wants to walk with you. Then come to Christ, confess your sins and enter the light. There is nothing greater than to walk with almighty God. Do not wait. Do it now.