

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	140		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	1 John 1:5-10		
Date:	April 19, 2026 (a.m.)		

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

The immediate context for this passage in 1 John revolves around the theme of fellowship with God. If we are to have fellowship (the Greek word *koinonia*, which comes from *koinōnos*, partner, and *koinōneō*, to share in) with the Living God: The Father – The Son – and The Holy Spirit – we must first *know* the character of God. Leon Morris, one of the great Biblical scholars of the 20th century, rightly points out that Christianity is uniquely a religion of redemption. The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith: “Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere. That does not mean that a carefully articulated doctrine of the atonement is a necessity before a man can be called a Christian. But it does mean that, whether we can put it into words or not, our relationship to Christ and therefore to God depends on the way we view the cross. If we feel that Christ has really put our sins out of the way, effectively and finally, our view of the faith will be very different from what would be the case if we felt that He had simply given us an example, or had won a spectacular victory which has little regard for the rights of the case. Our view of the atonement and our view of God are inextricably interwoven.”¹ Note the striking language John uses in 1:7. George Smeaton, in his classic study on the atonement, observed: “The apostle describes this cleansing blood as the blood of God’s Son – an addition having peculiar emphasis, as it is intended to exhibit the infinite value and efficacy of that blood. The Title Son occurs in a higher sense than can be ascribed to any other being. It assigns a divine nature to Him, and, in such connections as the present, exhibits His redemption-work not merely as planned and approved by God, but wrought out, so far as atoning action is concerned, by the only-begotten and beloved Son. This imparts to Christ’s atonement its infinite sufficiency and value, making it adequate to procure for men the remission of sins, how great and numerous soever, whether we think of individuals or of countless millions. On account of the personal union of the two natures, the blood is spoken of as the blood of the Son of God. Though the blood belongs to Him as Son of Mary, yet in virtue of the hypostatic union it is the blood of God’s Son, and therefore possessed of all the value that the divine nature lends to it, and adequate to the expiation of human sin laid in the scales against it.”²

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, physician turned preacher, gives this assessment of what fellowship with God involves: “We have seen that what we must do if our fellowship with God is to continue can be put like this: We must walk in the light, and we must confess and acknowledge our sins. It is no use our talking about fellowship with God if we walk in the realm of darkness; no, we must walk in the light and we must repent, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and follow Him. And in addition to that, we must confess and acknowledge our sins. But that in and of itself is not sufficient, because we must recognize at once that if we are walking with God and having fellowship with Him, it follows of necessity that we shall be more conscious than ever of our sinfulness and our unworthiness; and that is the great problem always with regard to this whole matter of fellowship with God. Our first tendency, as we have seen, foolishly and ignorantly, is to think that as we are we have fellowship

with God; but the moment we are convicted of sin we are soon delivered from that. Then the next stage is the one in which we begin to feel hopeless because we are so conscious of our sin and of the holiness of God that we begin to say at once, *Surely fellowship with God is a sheer and utter impossibility*. Light, we have said, is something that exposes the hidden things of darkness; light always reveals things of which we were unconscious. Light in a room will do that; it will reveal dust and various other things; light on a dark road in the country reveals all sorts of things. It is the character of light to reveal the hidden things of darkness, and this is supremely true of walking with God. When we walk with God and when His Word dwells within us, of necessity we are convicted of sin; everything that is wrong, unworthy and sinful in us is at once brought to the surface. . . . The presence of God at once convicts of sin. In other words, as we have fellowship with God and as we walk with Him in the light, we all experience what the Apostle Peter experienced during one of the first contacts he had with our Lord when our Lord worked a miracle. They had been unable to catch any fish; they had tried, but they had failed, and our Lord sent them back again to the very self-same place and there they had a great haul of fish, and you remember the effect that that had upon Peter. Peter, seeing and realizing something of our Lord's Godhead and glory, said, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (Lk. 5:8). That is the effect of realizing something of the glory of the Son of God incarnate on earth – *Depart from me, O Lord, I am not fit to be in Your presence; I am so conscious of my sin*. That is what happens when we are truly in the presence of God. So at once the question arises, What can we do? We are trying to walk in the light, we are doing our utmost, we are confessing our sins, but that in and of itself seems to break the fellowship and make it impossible, for our conscience condemns us and we feel we cannot dwell in such a glorious light. And it is in order to answer that question that we must return again to verses 7 and 9. In other words, I want now to emphasize the other side, that which I have already described as the godward side, or the godward aspect. *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. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"³

I. **TRUE FELLOWSHIP.** It is absolutely essential that we properly understand what this involves – and there are *two* distinct dangers we must be aware of. “The one is the assumption that Christian fellowship is possible other than on the basis of common belief in Christ. Some people would almost go so far as to say that Christian unity means Christians of different beliefs, coming together in fellowship; it is easy enough, they say, to have Christian unity with those of like mind, but the real test of Christian unity is whether we are willing to have it with those with whom we disagree. There is a sense in which this is true; where matters not of substance of the faith are concerned, it is all too easy for us to avoid Christian unity with people whose way of doing things or whose general culture is different from ours, and we need to pull down such barriers. But it is not true that there can be fellowship between persons who disagree on the central affirmations of the faith. There cannot be unity between denominations which differ in their understanding of the way of salvation, and there cannot be unity between those who accept and those who do not accept Jesus Christ – crucified for our sins and raised for our justification – as Savior. There is no common ground in such cases. The other danger is the assumption that it is possible to have a true relationship with God while rejecting Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. As this Epistle will go on to make clear, the Father can be known only through the Son. There is *none other name*.”⁴

II. **GOD IS LIGHT.** Notice that John does not begin with our so-called *felt needs*. He does not offer his readers tips for personal success or how to overcome life's difficulties. No, he directs us to God's holiness. Light is used in Scripture in a variety of ways. It can refer to knowledge, illumination, or guidance. But here it points to God's holiness. John Stott comments: “Of the statements about the essential Being of God, none is more comprehensive than *God is light*. It is His nature to reveal Himself, as it is the property of light to shine; and the revelation is of

perfect purity and unutterable majesty. We are to think of God as a personal Being, infinite in all His perfections, transcendent, *the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy* (Is. 57:15), who yet desires to be known and has revealed Himself. 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 *gnōsis* 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. And 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, as the author goes on to demonstrate."⁵

III. *WALKING IN THE LIGHT.* Over and over again in Scripture, walking points to the general tenor of one's life (Eph. 4:17-19; 5:7-12). Notice the contrast between walking in the light as opposed to walking in darkness. In this context, this refers to sin, especially ignoring or denying our sins. F. F. Bruce writes: "It is in the ethical sense that John here affirms that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*. God, that is to say, is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and truth; in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false. He revealed Himself thus in the age of preparation before Christ came, and when the age of fulfillment dawned in Christ, this was the character of God as unveiled in the life that was the light of men. This being so, those whose *fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ* will in their lives reflect the character of God; they will *walk as children of light*. Here, then, the first of a series of *tests of life* is laid down."⁶

IV. *CONFESSION OF SIN: WHAT IS THIS?* The Greek *ean homologōmen* is often thought to be a third-class condition, but as Wallace points out, "This verse is frequently seen to be a more probable future condition. As such, it is sometimes viewed as referring to unbelievers who have not yet confessed their sins (though the *we* is problematic). More likely, it is a present general condition in which the subject is distributive (*if any of us*). The subjunctive is thus used because of the implicit uncertainty as to who is included in the *we*."⁷ The *ean* and the present active subjunctive of *homologōeo* stresses "if we keep on confessing." Hiebert correctly notes, "To *confess* (*homologeō*) basically means to *say the same thing*; it is the willingness publicly to acknowledge and to admit our sins and to call them what God calls them. Such a confession is more than a general acknowledgement that we all are sinners by nature; such a confession costs little and does not meet the need. We must honestly confront and frankly confess the sins we are guilty of without defending ourselves or excusing our sinful deeds. The plural *sins* demands that the specific sins be named and confessed. It is a humbling experience and guarantee of our sincerity. The present tense underlines that such confession is to be our standing practice whenever sins do occur."⁸ Richard Gaffin, one of my esteemed professors, pointed out that, "Above all sin is theocentric; it is primarily against God and then, derivatively, against human beings, including the self (Rom. 1:18-32, Eph. 4:17-19). As such, sin is both relational and judicial, and it is the one only as it is the other. Sin is relational in that it is *essentially rebellion* against God, the image-bearing creature's effective renunciation of God as creator. . . . Sin is *idolatrous*. All told, it is deeply rooted hostility, particularly to God. Sin is also *illegal*. It is that, not in addition to its being relational, but as it is relational and it is relational only as it is illegal . . . Sin . . . does not accord with God's will or law."⁹

V. *CLEANSING.* In addition to reconciliation that brings forgiveness of sin, another important effect is cleansing from sin, i.e., deliverance from the pollution of sin. Andrew Murray points out that in the Old Testament: "Cleansing was something that he could feel and experience.

It brought about a change not only in his relationship to God but also in his own condition. In the offering, something was done for him; by cleansing, something was done in him. The offering had respect to his guilt; the cleansing, to the pollution of sin. The same meaning of the words *clean* and *cleansing* is found elsewhere in the Old Testament. David prayed in Psalm 51, *Cleanse me from my sin. . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean* (verses 2, 7, emphasis added). The word used by David here is that which is used most frequently for the cleansing of anyone who had touched a dead body. Hyssop was also used in such cases. David prayed for more than pardon. He confessed that he had been *shapen in iniquity* (verse 5), that his nature was sinful. He prayed that he might be made pure within. *Cleanse me from my sin* was his prayer. He used the same word later on in the same psalm when he prayed, *Create in me a clean heart, O God* (verse 10, emphasis added). Cleansing is more than pardon. In the same manner, this word was used by Ezekiel and refers to an inner condition that must be changed. This is evident from Ezekiel 24:13, where, speaking of uncleanness being melted out, God said, *Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged*. Later on, In Ezekiel 36:25, speaking of the new covenant, He said, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols*. Malachi used the same word, connecting it with fire: *He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify [cleanse] the sons of Levi* (Malachi 3:3). Cleansing by water, by blood, and by fire are all typical of the cleansing that would take place under the new covenant – an inner cleansing and deliverance from the stain of sin.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION: George Smeaton once again makes clear John’s meaning: “The expression, *the blood of Christ cleanses*, intimates purifying from the defilement of sin, by which the believer was again made meet to appear as clean before the Lord. The blood of Christ is regarded as the truth or realization of all the ancient sprinkling or cleansing which restored the Israelite to his standing or right relation before God, when this was interrupted by ceremonial defilement. The word *cleanse* is to be taken, first in the sense of effecting forgiveness for sins committed, and then of uniting us to God anew (Heb. 1:3, 9:14), as the Israelite was absolved and restored to Gods friendship by sacrificial blood. This further appears by what the apostle subjoins in the context. Thus it is said: *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (ver. 9). It is a peculiarity of John’s style to use two expressions for the same thing, the positive and negative (ver. 5); sometimes a coincident expression, as in Hebrew poetry, that the one may elucidate the other. The two expressions, *to forgive us our sins*, and *to cleanse us*, are equivalent, or a slight advance of meaning is found in the latter phrase. The Epistle to the Hebrews, recalling sacrificial ideas, speaks of cleansing or purging the conscience by the blood of Christ, and then identifies the purging with remission (Heb. 9:22).”¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹ L. Morris, *The Cross in The New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 5.

² G. Smeaton, *The Doctrine of The Atonement According to The Apostles* (rpt. Alpha Publications), p. 450.

³ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship With God: Studies in 1 John* (rpt. Crossway, 1993), p. 135.

⁴ I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 107.

⁵ J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 70.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 41.

⁷ D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond The Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of The New Testament* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 698.

⁸ D. E. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (BJW Press, 1991), p. 66.

⁹ R. B. Gaffin, “Atonement in the Pauline corpus,” in C. E. Hill, F. A. James, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 145.

¹⁰ A. Murray, *The Power of The Blood of Christ* (rpt. Whitaker House, 1991), p. 57.

¹¹ Smeaton, op. cit., p. 452.