THE EPISTLE OF 1 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

- I. Howard Marshall, *The opening of the letter is remarkable in that it lacks any salutation or personal reference. In this it differs from all the other New Testament letters except Hebrews.*
- Thomas Constable, *John began this epistle by explaining to his audience why he wrote. He said that he wrote so that his readers would enjoy the fellowship with God that before this was possible only to those who had seen Him. This fellowship, he explained, rests on the reality of Jesus Christ's incarnation, and it results in full joy for those who experience it.*
- William Barclay, *Everyone who sits down to write a letter or gets up to preach a sermon has some object in view. The intention, and the hope, is to produce some effect in the minds and hearts and lives of those to whom that message is addressed. And here, at the very beginning of his letter, John sets down his aim in writing to his people.*
- Zane Hodges, *The first four verses of the epistle constitute its prologue. Here the writer affirmed the tangible reality of the Incarnation of Christ and announced that the goals of his letter were fellowship and joy.*
- F. F. Bruce, *The structure of the sentence covering the first two and a half verses of chapter 1 (with the parenthesis in verse 2) is unusually complicated for the Johannine writings, and an English version will be more readily intelligible if it takes four sentences to say what the Greek text says in one: "Our theme is that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled. Our theme, in short, concerns the word of Life—that Life which was made manifest. Yes, we have seen and we bear witness; we make known to you the Eternal Life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. What we have seen and heard we make known to you also, in order that you in your turn may have fellowship with us."*

PROLOGUE, 1 JOHN 1:1-4

A. The Apostle John was an eyewitness to the incarnation (1-2)
   1. John declares the nature of Jesus (1)
      a. From the beginning (1a), ***That which was from the beginning,***
         1) Related verse, John 1:1, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
         2) Comments
            a) Thomas Constable, *The beginning (Gr. arche) may refer to the beginning of all things (2:13–14; John 1:1), or the beginning of the creation (3:8; Gen. 1:1), or to Jesus' incarnation (v. 2; cf. John 1:14). It could also refer to the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry (Acts 1:22–24), the beginning of the Christian gospel (Mark 1:1–4), or the beginning of the readers' experience as Christians (2:7, 24; 3:11). The beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, specifically the beginning of His teaching ministry, seems most consistent with what John proceeded to say about that beginning (cf. vv. 1b, 3a) ... John was probably referring to all that the apostles had experienced with Jesus from the time that they first became His disciples. John's verbs (have heard, have seen, have looked at, and touched) indicate a progressively closer approach to the object of investigation. The essence of fellowship is increasing intimacy. Our fellowship with God must involve drawing closer to Him and viewing Him more intently all the time in order for it to be genuine fellowship. The same is true of fellowship on the human level.*
            b) Zane Hodges, *The apostle declared his subject to be that which was from the beginning. Many have thought that he referred here to an absolute beginning, such as described in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. This is possible, but in view of the epistle's concern with the original message about Jesus Christ, it seems more likely that John referred to the beginning of the gospel proclamation. If so, the usage is similar to that found in 1 John 2:7, 24; and 3:11. The writer was then asserting that what he proclaimed was the truth about God's Son that was originally witnessed by the apostles who had direct contact with Him.*
            c) Charles Spurgeon, *You remember how John begins his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), and how a little later he says, "In him was life" (John 1:4). The Holy Spirit seems to have recalled those expressions to his mind, for He moves him to use them again.*

d) I. Howard Marshall, *If the readers were familiar with the Gospel of John and with the book of Genesis, it is highly likely that they would recognize the echo of John 1:1, which in its turn echoes Genesis 1:1. If so, they would equate "that which was from the beginning" with the "Word" which was with God in the beginning. The writer, however, does not use the term "Word" at this precise moment (although he will do so by the end of the verse), and he thus leaves open the question of what it was that "was from the beginning." He goes on quickly to describe it as something that he and others had "heard." This confirms that it is the "Word" which he has in mind, and it indicates that what had been with God from the beginning had now come into the area of human experience. God's message has come to men so that they can hear it.*

e) John Stott, *... what the apostle stresses in his proclamation of the gospel is the historical manifestation of the eternal ... The eternal Son was before his historical manifestation; the preaching of the gospel came after.*

f) David Jackman, *... his concern in the letter is to declare that the Word which was made flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary was the same eternal Son of the Father who was before all time and who was the agent of all creation. The Word of life did not merely come into existence at Bethlehem; he already existed from the very beginning with the Father (verse 2).*

g) F. F. Bruce, *The "beginning" in this sense is the beginning of the gospel—in 1 John 2:7, 24, the beginning of the gospel so far as their acquaintance with it was concerned, while in 1 John 1:1 it is the beginning of the gospel absolutely, the beginning as it was known to one who was present at the time and directly witnessed the saving events. The neuter gender of "that which was from the beginning" points to the gospel rather than to the personal Christ, although indeed the gospel is so completely bound up with the personal Christ that what is primarily true of the one may be said of the other.*

b. Through hearing, eyesight and feeling (1b), ***which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands,***

1) Related verses

a) Acts 4:20, *for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."*

b) John 19:35, *He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.*

c) 1 John 4:14, *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*

d) John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

e) 2 Peter 1:16, *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

f) Luke 24:39, *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."*

g) John 20:27, *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."*

2) Comments

a) Thomas Constable, *John used three of his basic senses (hearing, eyesight, and feeling) to highlight the reality of the object so that his readers would know that he was not speaking metaphorically. He cited personal experience and appealed to verifiable evidence to support the humanity of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:39). Some false teachers denied His humanity ... John may have used "we" editorially to represent himself personally, or "we" may include all Christians. It is more likely, however, that "we" represents John and the other eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ: Jesus' apostles. In this epistle John was speaking for others besides himself, and he was seeking to persuade still other believers of something not all of them had experienced or acknowledged (cf. Luke 1:2).*

b) Charles Ryrie, *Extreme Docetism [i.e., Docetic Gnostics] held that Jesus was not human at all but was merely a prolonged theophany, while moderate Docetism [i.e., Cerinthian Gnostics] considered Jesus the natural son of Joseph and Mary, upon whom Christ came at the time of baptism.*

c) Zane Hodges, *The writer was then asserting that what he proclaimed was the truth about God's Son that was originally witnessed by the apostles who had direct contact with Him. Numbering himself among these apostolic eyewitnesses, the author described this proclamation as one which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.*

d) I. Howard Marshall, *Our writer here wants to emphasize that the Christian message is identical with Jesus; it took personal form in a person who could be heard, seen, and even touched ... the writer goes on to add "we have seen with our eyes." It is a strange message which is visible, and the qualification "with our eyes" leaves no doubt that literal seeing is meant. The point is hammered home by the further statement that the writer had gazed upon it and had touched it with his hands. These descriptions of something perceived by the senses mean that the writer cannot be thinking merely of a message that is heard. He must be thinking of the appearance of the "Word" described in John 1:1–18 who was made flesh as Jesus Christ ... Our writer here wants to emphasize that the Christian message is identical with Jesus; it took personal form in a person who could be heard, seen, and even touched.*

e) William Barclay, *Here at the very beginning of his letter, John sets down his right to speak. It consists in one thing—in personal experience of Christ ... (1) He says that he has heard Christ ... True teachers are those who have a message from Jesus Christ because they have heard his voice. (2) He says that he has seen Christ ... We cannot see Christ in the flesh as John did; but we can still see him with the eye of faith ... (3) He says that he has gazed on Christ ... a steadfast searching gaze which seeks to discover something of the mystery of Christ ... (4) He says that his hands actually touched Christ ... John is thinking of those people called the Docetists who were so spiritually minded that they insisted that Jesus never had a flesh-and-blood body but was only a ghost in human form.*

f) Charles Spurgeon, *They were veracious witnesses, and they died in testimony of their faith in what they asserted. And when anything has been heard, seen, inspected, and even touched and handled, by a company of reliable witnesses, the testimony of such witnesses concerning it must be accepted as true.*

g) David Walls, *More than likely, false teachers were suggesting that Jesus' physical body was not a normal body; or that he was an angel, not a man; or that his physical body was an illusion; or some other erroneous speculation. John met this false teaching head-on by saying that he had firsthand experience with Jesus, and based on that experience, he is telling us what he knows about Jesus.*

c. Concerning the Word of Life (1c), ***concerning the word of life—***

1) Thomas Constable, *The word of life probably refers to the message about Jesus Christ, namely, the gospel. John referred to Jesus as the Word in his Gospel, and he described Jesus claiming to be the life (John 14:6). The phrase word of life seems more likely to describe the message about the Person who is and who personifies life (cf. v. 2; Phil. 2:16; Acts 5:20). John probably spoke of Christ as "what," rather than "He" because here he wanted to emphasize the content of the message about Christ rather than the person of Christ.*

2) Zane Hodges, *Numbering himself among these apostolic eyewitnesses, the author described this proclamation as one which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched ... With these introductory words, the apostle directed his first shafts at the heresy with which he was concerned. The antichrists brought new ideas, not those which were "from the beginning" of the gospel era. Moreover, their denial of the reality of the incarnate life of Christ could be countered by the experiences of the eyewitnesses whose testimony was founded on actual hearing, seeing, and touching (cf. "look" and "touch" in Luke 24:39). John's message is solidly based on a historical reality.*

3) Charles Spurgeon, *The facts of Christ's history on earth are recorded by eyewitnesses who could not be deceived concerning them. They exercised their various senses with regard to Christ—hearing, seeing, and touching him again and again. They were veracious witnesses, and they died in testimony of their faith in what they asserted. And when anything has been heard, seen, inspected, and even touched and handled, by a company of reliable witnesses, the testimony of such witnesses concerning it must be accepted as true.*

4) William Barclay, *Here at the very beginning of his letter, John sets down his right to speak. It consists in one thing—in personal experience of Christ (verses 2–3) ... (1) He says that he has heard Christ. ... (2) He says that he has seen Christ ... (3) He says that he has gazed on Christ. What is the difference between seeing Christ and gazing upon him? In the Greek, the verb for to see is horan, and it means simply to see with physical sight. The verb for to gaze is theasthai, and it means to gaze at someone or something until something has been grasped of the significance of that person or thing ... (4) He says that his hands actually touched Christ ... Here, John is thinking of those people called the Docetists who were so spiritually minded that they insisted that Jesus never had a flesh-and-blood body but was only a ghost in human form. They refused to believe that God could ever degrade himself by taking human flesh and blood upon himself. John here insists that the Jesus he had known was, in truth, a man who came among them; he felt there was nothing in all the world more dangerous—as we shall see—than to doubt that Jesus was fully human.*
5) H. D. M. Pence, *Between the first clause and what follows lies the tremendous fact of the Incarnation; and St. John piles verb on verb, and clause on clause, to show that he speaks with the authority of full knowledge, and that there is no possible room for Ebionite or Cerinthian error. The first clause assures us that Jesus was no mere man; the others assure us that he was really man. Precisely that Being who was in existence from the beginning is that of whom St. John and others have had, and still possess, knowledge by all the means through which knowledge can have access to the mind of man.*
6) David Walls, *He said he had heard, seen, and touched the Word of life. Why would John talk about hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus? The answer seems to be related to false teaching that his readers were hearing. More than likely, false teachers were suggesting that Jesus' physical body was not a normal body; or that he was an angel, not a man; or that his physical body was an illusion; or some other erroneous speculation. John met this false teaching head-on by saying that he had firsthand experience with Jesus, and based on that experience, he is telling us what he knows about Jesus.*
7) David Jackman, *It is this divine life which has been manifested in human history, in a real man, who really lived, really died and really rose again from the grave; in Jesus of Nazareth. John and his fellow apostles heard him speak. They saw him with their own eyes; not as a mystical vision, but in living reality. It was more than a momentary glimpse, rather, it was a consistent daily revelation. They touched him physically both before his death and after his resurrection. This was no spirit being, disguised in a temporary human suit of clothes. Neither was he a mere man on whom 'the Christ' descended for a period of time. He who was from the beginning and whom John heard and saw and physically touched was the Word who is the life.*
8) F. F. Bruce, *The language John uses is the language of apostolic witness: "we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" was the reply of the apostles Peter and John to the Sanhedrin when they were ordered to give up speaking or teaching in Jesus' name (Acts 4:20). If we ask who it was that they heard and saw, the answer is that they heard and saw Jesus; if we ask what it was, the answer is that they heard His words and saw His works.*

2. John experienced the life of Jesus (2), ***the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—***

a. Related verses
1) John 1:4, *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*
2) John 11:25, *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*
3) John 14:6, *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
4) 1 John 3:5, *You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*
5) 1 Timothy 3:16, *Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*
6) John 15:27, *And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

b. Comments

1) Thomas Constable, *Life is a title of Jesus Christ here, like Word is in John's Gospel (John 1:1). "Life" reflects the Christian experiences about which John wrote here, whereas the "Word" (Gr. logos) reflects the facts that Jesus declared and that John recorded in the fourth Gospel. Grace and truth explain the Word in John's Gospel (John 1:14), but light and love clarify the Life in his epistles ... In verse 1 the progression in the series of verbs (heard, seen, looked at, and touched) reflects increasingly intent attention to Jesus as the essence of fellowship. The progression in the verbs in verse 2 (revealed, seen, testify, and proclaim) shows the result of contemplating Jesus Christ and enjoying His fellowship, namely, bearing witness. One first sees the manifested Christ. Then, having seen, he or she is able to bear witness. Finally, one feels impelled by what he or she has seen to announce to others the message of life ... There is a strong stress on the eternality of the Life (Jesus Christ) in this verse. The emphases on the quality of the life (eternal) and its equality with the Father make this point (cf. John 1:2). The Incarnation is in view.*

2) I. Howard Marshall, *Although the Christian message is the means of bringing eternal life, it was of supreme importance to the writer to make it clear beyond all possibility of mistake that the life to which it bears witness was revealed by God in the historical person of Jesus ... It is the eternal life, he says, which was with the Father and then appeared to us ... It was the personal manifestation of eternal life in the historical person of Jesus which was of crucial importance for the writer—and his readers.*

3) Zane Hodges, *The Life which the apostles proclaimed is intensely personal. Not only has that Life appeared, but it is nothing less than the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to people. The Incarnation is unquestionably in view.*

4) Charles Spurgeon, *True witnesses speak not of what they have gathered second-hand from others, but of what they have themselves personally seen and heard. It is for this reason that the verbs to 'see' and to 'testify' are so commonly associated with each other in the New Testament, as they are in verse 2 ... He not only showed himself to the disciples to qualify them as eyewitnesses, but gave them an authoritative commission as apostles to preach the gospel. Our author insists that he possesses these necessary credentials. Possessing them, he is very bold. Having heard, seen and touched the Lord Jesus, he now testifies to him. Having received a commission, he proclaims the gospel with authority. For the Christian message is neither a philosophical speculation, nor a tentative suggestion, nor a modest contribution to religious thought, but a confident affirmation by those whose experience and commission have qualified them to make it.*

5) David Walls, *This life is eternal, was originally with the Father, and now has appeared on earth. This supports the historic Christian teaching that Jesus is coequal and coeternal with God the Father (as well as the Holy Spirit, who is not mentioned in this passage).*

B. He states the purpose for the letter (3-4)

1. It is a declaration that fellowship is available with the Father and the Son (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.***

a. Related verses

1) John 17:21, *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

2) 1 Corinthians 1:9, *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

b. Comments

1) Thomas Constable, *"You," the recipients of this epistle, must have been genuine believers in view of how John referred to them (cf. 2:12–14, 21, 27; 5:13). They had not known Jesus Christ in the flesh as the apostles had. John wrote to them so they could enter into and continue to enjoy the intimate fellowship with Christ that the apostolic eyewitnesses enjoyed (cf. Acts 10:40–41) ... Fellowship requires and rests on information, a common body of knowledge, and mutual acceptance of that data. John wrote to share this information with his readers.*

2) Glen W. Barker, *This verse introduces the purpose of the Epistle: 'that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.'*
3) Zane Hodges, *The objective John had in mind in writing about these significant realities was that you, the readers, may have fellowship with us, the apostles. Since he later, in 2:12–14, made it perfectly clear that he regarded the readers as genuine Christians, his goal was obviously not their conversions.It is an interpretive mistake of considerable moment to treat the term 'fellowship' as though it meant little more than 'to be a Christian.'*
4) George Findlay, *Only when we think aright of Jesus Christ, are we in unison with God. Only when we think aright of Him and are rightly disposed toward Him, can we have fellowship with each other; only on this condition can we work together with God for the world's redemption …*
5) Warren Wiersbe, *This word fellowship is an important one in the vocabulary of a Christian. It simply means "to have in common." As sinners, men have nothing in common with the holy God. But God in His grace sent Christ to have something in common with men. Christ took on Himself a human body and became a man. Then He went to the cross and took on that body the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24). Because He paid the price for our sins, the way is open for God to forgive us and take us into His family ... In his letter, John explains the secret of fellowship with God and with other Christians. This is the first purpose John mentions for the writing of his letter—the sharing of his experience of eternal life.*
6) I. Howard Marshall, *Now at last he comes to the principal verb of the sentence and tells his readers that he is sharing his message with them too, so that they too may have fellowship with him. But, he goes on, he and his colleagues enjoy fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. The implication is surely that his readers also will share in this fellowship with the Father and the Son as a result of their fellowship with him.*
7) Charles Spurgeon, *What the apostles learned, they learned in order that they might tell it to others. All that John saw he was prepared to speak of according to his ability, that others might have fellowship with him. Remember that, if you ever learn anything of Christ—if you have any enjoyment of His presence at any time—it is not for yourself alone, but for others also to share with you ... When fellowship is the sweetest, your desire is the strongest that others may have fellowship with you; and when, truly, your fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, you earnestly wish that the whole Christian brotherhood may share the blessing with you ... Those who have by His grace believed, and have been washed by the precious blood, have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord; they are "no longer strangers and foreigners, but … fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19), and they have access with boldness into this grace wherein we stand.*
8) H. D. M. Spence, *St. John's aim in writing his Gospel is that the great High Priest's prayer may be fulfilled—that believers may be one in that communion of which the unity between the Father and the Son is the pattern and the basis; may "be joined together in the same body, the same belief, the same knowledge, the same aims, the same hopes, the same destinies" ... Communion with Christians is shown to mean a great deal—no less than communion with the Father and with the Son.*
9) John Stott, *'Fellowship' is a specifically Christian word and denotes that common participation in the grace of God, the salvation of Christ and the indwelling Spirit which is the spiritual birthright of all believers. It is our common possession of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which makes us one. So John could not have written that you also may have fellowship with us without adding and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, since our fellowship with each other arises from, and depends on, our fellowship with God.*
10) David Walls, *If Christians are not in fellowship with God, they cannot be in full fellowship with other devout Christians. Christian-with-Christian fellowship is rooted in fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Apparently, the false teachers had called into question the salvation of the readers, so John was reaffirming their faith.*
11) David Jackman, *You cannot know God without knowing Christ. You cannot know fellowship without receiving the truth ... All true spiritual unity is therefore grounded in the gospel.*
12) F. F. Bruce, *There is nothing vague or merely sentimental about this fellowship; it involves obedience to the commandments of Christ and faithfulness to His teaching communicated through His apostles. Those who abandoned the apostolic teaching and fellowship severed themselves from fellowship with the Father and the Son.*

2. It is to make joy complete within the fellowship of believers (4), ***And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.***

   a. Related verses
      1) John 15:11, *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*
      2) John 16:24, *Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

   b. Comments
      1) Thomas Constable, *Here "we" is probably editorial. "These things" refers to what John wrote in this epistle. Not only would his readers experience full (complete) joy, but so would John, as the readers entered into and continued in intimate fellowship with God (cf. 3 John 4). Joy is the product of fellowship with God. When there is no joy, there is no fellowship (cf. John 15:11; 16:24).*
      2) George Findlay, *He has the heart of a pastor which cannot be completely happy so long as some of those for whom he feels responsible are not experiencing the full blessings of the gospel.*
      3) John G. Mitchell, *It is usually true that in the introduction to a book we find the key to that book. In the first four verses of this Epistle we find the key.*
      4) Zane Hodges, *The apostles so shared the heart of Christ for His people that their own joy was bound up in the spiritual well-being of those to whom they ministered. If the readers retained their true fellowship with God and with His apostles, no one would be any happier than John himself.*
      5) Warren Wiersbe, *Fellowship is Christ's answer to the loneliness of life. Joy is His answer to the emptiness, the hollowness of life ... John, in his epistle, uses the word "joy" only once, but the idea of joy runs through the entire letter. Joy is not something that we manufacture for ourselves; joy is a wonderful by-product of our fellowship with God.*
      6) Charles Spurgeon, *Very closely does the apostle John resemble his Lord in the motive that prompted him to write this epistle! Remember how Christ said, in His last discourse to His disciples on the eve of His passion, "I have spoken these things to in order that … your joy may be made complete" (John 15:11); and how He counseled them, "Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete" (John 16:24); and how He prayed the Father for them, "that they may have my joy completed in themselves" (John 17:13). Here, then, the beloved disciple, moved by the Spirit of God, reflects and follows out the same gracious purpose: "These things we write, in order that our joy may be complete."*
      7) David Jackman, *The conscious possession of eternal life, the daily enrichment of personal fellowship with the living God, the deepening awareness of oneness with all God's people everywhere—could there be any comparable recipe for fullness of joy? Such joy is quite different from human happiness.*

C. Conclusion
   1. Thomas Constable, *In summary, John wrote as an apostolic eyewitness of Jesus Christ and His earthly ministry. He identified two dangers to readers that are still prevalent in the church today: One is the assumption that Christian fellowship is possible without common belief in Christ. The other is the assumption that someone can have a relationship with God without a relationship with Jesus Christ. John wrote this epistle so his readers might join and continue in the fellowship with God that is possible only for those who have seen God, as the apostolic eyewitnesses of the incarnate Christ had done.*
   2. I. Howard Marshall, *John's prologue highlights two dangers which still confront the church. The one is the assumption that Christian fellowship is possible other than on the basis of common belief in Christ ... 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.*
   3. Charles Spurgeon, *What an evidence of our Savior's deep attachment to His people that He is not content with having made their ultimate salvation sure, but He is anxious concerning their present state of mind! He delights that His people should not only be safe, but happy; not merely saved, but rejoicing in His salvation. Hear this, people of God! The object of the revelation of Jesus Christ is that you may have joy—indeed, that you may have a heart full of joy, and that you may know what full joy means. Here below, we get but drops and dashes of joy unless we are brought into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ; then, we have the very joy of God in our souls. Oh, the delight of it! Oh, that you could all know it to the full!*

4. David Walls, *The prologue concludes by linking John's own joy with the spiritual welfare of his readers. He reaffirmed these truths so that their joy could be made complete. John was so concerned about their welfare that he could not experience complete joy himself as long as they were struggling with doubt created by these false teachers. If the readers had their salvation reaffirmed, their joy would be made full, and in their joy, John's joy would be made full ... nothing is more enriching or more wonderful than helping others to that same conviction too, and seeing their fellowship deepen.*

WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, 1 JOHN 1:5-2:11

INTRODUCTION

- Zane Hodges, *Since fellowship is the objective of John's letter, it was natural for him to begin with a discussion of this subject. So in 1:5–2:11 he enunciated some fundamental principles which lie at the root of all genuine fellowship with God. These principles are of immense practical value to the everyday lives of all Christians. By these principles believers may test the reality of their personal communion with God. They may also discern whether they have come to know the God with whom they commune.*
- I. Howard Marshall, *His aim was that his readers might stand in a position of real fellowship with himself and so with God and Jesus. But there are conditions attached to such fellowship, and in addition to the doctrinal condition already hinted at (which will be developed later) there is also a moral condition which arises out of the character of God.*
- David Jackman, *John's authority to write and our authority to believe rest on the crucial importance of this disclosure of the hidden eternal life of God, in time and space, in Jesus of Nazareth. What more authority could anyone want, or need? Against this, his opponents could offer only their own speculative fantasies.*

HOW TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, 1 JOHN 1:5-10

A. God's nature is light (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.***

1. Related verses
   a. 1 John 3:11, *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*
   b. James 1:17, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

2. Comments
   a. Thomas Constable, *John began his explanation of what it means to walk (live) in the light of God's fellowship by stressing the importance of continuing to obey God ... The message in view in this verse is the truth that Jesus Christ revealed to the apostolic eyewitnesses ... The figure of light that John used to describe God emphasizes both His ability to reveal and His ability to deal with what the light of His holiness reveals (cf. John 1:4–5, 7–9; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46; Rev. 21:23).*
   b. D. Edmond Hiebert, *Just as light reveals and purifies, so by His very nature God illuminates and purifies those who come to Him. His nature determines the conditions for fellowship with Him.*
   c. Glenn W. Barker, *As darkness has no place in God, so all that is of the darkness is excluded from having fellowship with God.*
   d. Robert Jamieson, *As all material life and growth depends on light, so all spiritual life and growth depends on GOD.*
   e. Zane Hodges, *This precise statement is not found in the recorded words of Jesus, but the author was an apostle who heard much more than was "written down" (cf. John 21:25). There is no reason to think that John did not mean just what he said. This is a truth he had learned from the Lord ... In describing God as Light, which John frequently did (John 1:4–5, 7–9; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46; Rev. 21:23), he was no doubt thinking of God as the Revealer of His holiness.*

f. Warren Wiersbe, *When we were saved, God called us out of darkness into His light (1 Peter 2:9). We are children of light (1 Thes. 5:5). Those who do wrong hate light (John 3:19–21). When light shines in on us, it reveals our true nature (Eph. 5:8–13) ... Light produces life and growth and beauty, but sin is darkness; and darkness and light cannot exist in the same place. If we are walking in the light, the darkness has to go. If we are holding to sin, then the light goes. There is no middle ground, no vague "gray" area, where sin is concerned.*

g. I. Howard Marshal, *John, therefore, begins his argument with a statement about the nature of God which, he declares, he has heard from Jesus ... God is light. This description of God is admittedly not found in the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels in so many words. The coming of Jesus, however, was regarded as a revelation of light (Mt. 4:16; Lk. 2:32; Jn. 1:4–9; 3:19–21). According to John Jesus identified himself as the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; 9:5; cf. 12:35f., 46), and Matthew tells us how he commanded his disciples to take up the same role (Mt. 5:14–16). All this implies that the character of God himself is light, and that Jesus was the incarnation of divine light for men ... Specifically two notions became associated with God as light. One was that of revelation and salvation (Ps. 27:1; 36:9; Isa. 49:6). Light provides illumination in dark places and is an appropriate symbol for the way in which God reveals himself to men to show them how to live. The other is that of holiness; light symbolizes the flawless perfection of God. The comparison of good and evil with light and darkness is a familiar one, and it was current in the ancient world ... The contrast between God and darkness is expressed as strongly as possible. The point is not so much that God did not create darkness but rather that living in the darkness is incompatible with fellowship with God. This makes it clear that the writer is thinking of light and darkness predominantly in ethical terms; it is his way of saying: "God is good, and evil can have no place beside him."*

h. William Barclay, *God, he says, is light, and there is no darkness in him. What does this statement tell us about God? ... (1) It tells us that he is splendour and glory ... (2) It tells us that God is self-revealing ... (3) It tells us of God's purity and holiness ... (4) It tells us of the guidance of God ... (5) It tells us of the revealing quality in the presence of God ... In God, says John, there is no darkness at all. Throughout the New Testament, darkness stands for the very opposite of the Christian life ... (1) Darkness stands for the Christless life ... (2) The dark is hostile to the light ... (3) The darkness stands for the ignorance of life apart from Christ ... (4) The darkness stands for the chaos of life without God ... (5) The darkness stands for the immorality of the Christless life ... (6) The darkness is characteristically unfruitful ... (7) The darkness is connected with lovelessness and hate ... (8) The dark is the home of the enemies of Christ and the final goal of those who will not accept him.*

i. Charles Spurgeon, *Scripture uses the term light for knowledge, for purity, for prosperity, for happiness, and for truth. God is light—and then in his usual style John, who not only tells you a truth but always guards it, adds, "and there is no darkness in him at all" ... There is no darkness of sin, or ignorance, or error about God.*

j. John Stott, *This message has not been invented by himself or the other apostles, but is what they have heard from him. It is unlikely that he is quoting any specific saying of Jesus that God is light, as no such saying has survived. Rather he is summarizing the Lord's teaching according to the emphasis he gives to it in his own Gospel ... 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.*

k) David Walls, *Light is a picture of truth, knowledge, and righteousness, while darkness is a picture of falsehood, ignorance, and sin. John declared that God is light (truth, knowledge, and righteousness) and in him there is no darkness (falsehood, ignorance, and sin).*

l) David Jackman, *The God who creates begins with light, as the primary expression of his own eternal being. And from this everything else grows. Without that light there would be no plant or animal life; no growth, no activity, no beauty would be possible. All creation owes not only its existence, but its sustenance, to the God who is light, and the Christ who declared himself to be the light of the world (Jn. 8:12; Col. 1:16–17) ... This function, as a source of illumination and guidance, probably lies behind John's emphasis here on walking in the light as an essential of Christian discipleship ... The other major significance of God as light in Scripture is as a picture of his perfect moral righteousness, his flawless holiness ... A foundation stone of right Christian believing and living, then, is that intellectually, morally and spiritually God is light, unsullied and undiluted. It speaks of holiness and purity, of truth and integrity; but also of illumination and guidance, warmth and comfort.*

m) F. F. Bruce, *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. for they will "walk as children of light." Here, then, the first of a series of "tests of life" is laid down.*

2. Christians are to walk in the light (6-7)
   a. A Christian can't have fellowship with God when he walks in darkness (6), ***If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***

      1) Related verses
         a) 1 John 2:11, *But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*
         b) John 12:35, *So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.*
         c) 2 Corinthians 6:14, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*
         d) John 3:21, *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."*

      2) Comments
         a) Thomas Constable, *John may have used the "If we claim" phrase in verses 6, 8, and 10 in order to voice the teaching of false teachers ... The Nicolaitans, a group of antinomians, made such claims. In our day any person who claims that it is not important to do the will of God, as expressed in Scripture, makes this claim ... John's claim here is that the Christian who professes to have fellowship with Him who is Light (holiness), but disobeys Him (walks in darkness), is lying. A practicing sinner cannot have close fellowship with a holy God, though he can have a relationship with God (i.e., be a true Christian). God revealed this truth throughout Scripture. We do not need to reestablish our relationship with God every time we sin, though we do need to reestablish our fellowship with Him. Faith in Christ results in our becoming the children of God and obtaining eternal life. Action, specifically obedience, was a very important part of true knowledge for John, and it must be for us as well (cf. James).*
         b) I. Howard Marshall, *It is probable that these claims were real statements made by people in the church to which John was writing, and that they reflect the outlook of the people who were causing trouble in the church ... The claims were: (1) We have fellowship with him. (2) We are without sin. (3) We have not sinned ... To live in the darkness means to live without the benefit of divine illumination and guidance and so to live in sin. What John is saying is that it is not possible to have fellowship with God and yet to live in sin because to have fellowship with God means walking in the light while to live in sin means to walk in the darkness.*
         c) Zane Hodges, *John knew, as does every perceptive pastor, that Christians sometimes feign spirituality while engaging in acts of disobedience. The Apostle Paul had to deal with a case of incest in the Corinthian assembly (1 Cor. 5:1–5) and laid down a list of sins for which church members should come under church discipline (1 Cor. 5:9–13). Spurious claims to fellowship with God have been a tragic reality throughout the history of the church ... A Christian who says he is in fellowship with God (who "is Light") but who is disobeying Him (walking "in the darkness") is lying (cf. 1 John 2:4). Ten times John used "darkness" to refer to sin (John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35 [twice]; 1 John 1:5–6; 2:8–9, 11 [twice]).*
         d) Warren Wiersbe, *It is clear that our Christian life is to amount to more than mere "talk"; we must also "walk," or live, what we believe. If we are in fellowship with God (if we are "walking in the light"), our lives will back up what our lips are saying. But if we are living in sin ("walking in darkness"), then our lives will contradict what our lips are saying, making us hypocrites.*

e) William Barclay, *... John insists on certain things ... (1) He insists that, to have fellowship with the God who is light, we must walk in the light, and that, if we are still walking in the moral and ethical darkness of the Christless life, we cannot have that fellowship ... we must spend our whole lives in the awareness of our obligations, in the effort to fulfil them and in penitence when we fail. It will mean that we must never think that sin does not matter; it will mean that the nearer we come to God, the more terrible sin will be to us (2) He insists that these mistaken thinkers have the wrong idea of truth ... This means that, for Christians, truth is never only intellectual; it is always moral. It is not something which exercises only the mind; it is something which exercises the whole personality ... For Christians, the truth is something first to be discovered and then to be obeyed.*

f) Charles Spurgeon, *To have fellowship with God is a great matter, but merely to say that we have fellowship with Him is a totally different thing. John warns us that if we say that which our characters do not support, we lie. He leaves it just so, without a word of softening or excuse. Between saying and being, between saying and doing, there may be all the difference in the world.*

g) John Stott, *... it is not uncommon for people to claim fellowship with God who see no necessity either first to go to the cross of Christ for cleansing and forgiveness or thereafter to lead a consistently holy life. We are right to be suspicious of those who claim a mystical intimacy with God and yet walk in the darkness of error and sin, paying no regard to the self-revelation of an all-holy God. Since God is light, such claims are ludicrous. Religion without morality is an illusion. Sin is always a barrier to fellowship with God (cf. Ps. 5:4; 66:18; Isa. 59:1–2), for 'what fellowship can light have with darkness?' (2 Cor. 6:14).*

h) David Walls, *Since God is light and there is no darkness in him, no person can claim that he is living in full fellowship with God while walking in sin at the same time. If anyone makes that claim, he lies and is not living according to the truth.*

i) David Jackman, *In verse 6, the mark of unreality is to say that we have fellowship with God, while actually living a life marked by unrighteousness. The idea of 'walking' indicates a persistent movement in a particular direction, what we might call a 'lifestyle'. The proof of verbal claims to be orthodox in our beliefs and truly to know God is a holy life, and for that there can be no substitute. A person who persists in sin cannot be in touch with God. The two states are mutually exclusive.*

b. Benefits for those who walk in the light (7)

1) When we walk in the light we have fellowship with God (7a), ***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,***

a) Related verses

1] Isaiah 2:5, *O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

2] I Timothy 6:16, *who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

b) Comments

1] Thomas Constable, *Walking in the light means walking in the sphere that the light of God's will prescribes. Here light does not mean God Himself, as in verse 5, but the sphere in which God lives and operates. The idea is more where we walk than how we walk. Had John said according to the light, rather than in the light, he would have been requiring sinless perfection for fellowship with God. We must be open and responsive to the light that we have, which increases as we grow in our knowledge of God's will ... Two things are equally true of believers who walk in the light, according to this verse: we enjoy fellowship with God and others, and we are experiencing cleansing from all sin.*

2] Robert Yarbrough, *Since according to this passage God not only is light (verse 5), but He is also in the light, to walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God's presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This, of course, is done through openness in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed. By contrast, to 'walk in darkness' (verse 6) is to hide from God and to refuse to acknowledge what we know about Him.*

3] Lewis S. Chafer, *It [walking in the light] is … to be responsive to the light which God sheds into the heart. It is an attitude of willingness to confess immediately every sin as soon as it is recognized to be sin. Such confession brings the Christian at once into moral agreement with God.*

4] Zane Hodges, *It is strange that many commentators have understood the expression "with one another" as a reference to fellowship with other Christians. But this is not what the author is discussing here. The Greek pronoun for "one another" (allelon) may refer to the two parties (God and the Christian) named in the first part of the statement. John's point is that if Christians live in the light where God is, then there is mutual fellowship between Himself and them. That is, they have fellowship with Him and He has fellowship with them. The light itself is the fundamental reality which they share. Thus true communion with God is living in the sphere where one's experience is illumined by the truth of what God is. It is to live open to His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ ... It is significant that John talked of walking in the light, rather than according to the light. To walk according to the light would require sinless perfection and would make fellowship with God impossible for sinful humans. To walk in it, however, suggests instead openness and responsiveness to the light. John did not think of Christians as sinless, even though they are walking in the light, as is made clear in the last part of this verse.*

5] Charles Spurgeon, *I cannot dwell in the sun; it is too bright a place for my residence. But I can walk in the light of the sun though I cannot dwell in it. And so God is the light; He is Himself the sun, and I can walk in the light as He is in the light, though I cannot attain to the same degree of perfection, and excellence, and purity, and truth, in which the Lord Himself resides. ... As you read this verse, it looks very much as if all that was meant was fellowship with your brother Christians; but this, according to able critics, would not convey the sense of the original. "We have mutual fellowship; there is communion between God and our souls"—this is the sense of the passage.*

6] John Stott, *He has shown the consequence of walking in darkness; he now describes what happens if we walk in the light. Any interpretation of this phrase must be consistent both with the symbolic meaning of light and with the following phrase as he is the light. God is eternally and necessarily in the light because he is himself light; we are called to walk in the light. God is in the light because he is always true to himself and his activity is consistent with his nature. 'He cannot disown himself' (2 Tim. 2:13). We must walk in the light of his holy self-revelation, and in his presence, without deceit or dishonesty in our mind or consciously tolerated sin in our conduct.*

2) We are cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus (7b), ***and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***

a) Related verses

1] Ephesians 1:7, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*

2] Hebrews 9:14, *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

3] 1 Peter 1:19, *but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

4] Revelation 5:9, 9 *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,*

5] Revelation 7:14, *I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

6] Revelation 12:11, *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

b) Comments

1] Thomas Constable, *God cleanses us at conversion in the sense that He will never bring us into condemnation for our sins (cf. Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7). However, we need continual cleansing from the defilement that sinful daily living brings, because it hinders our fellowship with God (cf. John 13:10). The blood of Jesus is a metonymy for the death of Jesus. A metonymy is a figure of speech in which a writer uses the name of one thing for that of another associated with it or suggested by it. It is the power of Jesus' blood-sacrifice, the pouring out of His blood in His death, that cleanses us (cf. Heb. 9:22). It is not Jesus' physical blood that cleanses us by some magical and literal cleansing process.*

2] F. F. Bruce, *What John has in mind here is the cleansing of the conscience from guilt and moral defilement which is so insisted on in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 9:14; 10:2, 22), and which takes a leading place among the saving benefits of the redemptive self-sacrifice of Christ. These saving benefits are permanently available to those who are united to Christ, but not to those who sever themselves from Him.*

3] Warren Wiersbe, *How, then, can a holy God uphold His own justice and still forgive sinners? The answer is in the sacrifice of Christ. At the cross, God in His holiness judged sin. God in His love offers Jesus Christ to the world as Saviour. God was just in that He punished sin, but He is also loving in that He offers free forgiveness through what Jesus did at Calvary ... Christ is the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, but He is Advocate only for believers.*

4] I. Howard Marshall, *To say that the blood of Jesus purifies us is to say that our sin is removed and forgiven; its defiling effects no longer condemn us in the sight of God. Although as Christians who walk in the light we may be conscious of sin, yet this does not prevent our fellowship with God, for God himself removes our sin.*

5] William Barclay, *If you really know what the sacrifice of Christ has done and are really experiencing its power, day by day you will be adding holiness to your life and becoming more fit to enter the presence of God.*

6] Charles Spurgeon, *Blood is precious at all times, but this is no blood of a mere man: it is the blood of an innocent man—better still, it is the blood of man in union with Deity—"his Son!" God's Son! Angels cast their crowns before Him! All the choral symphonies of heaven surround His glorious throne. "God over all, blessed forever. Amen" (Rom 9:5). And yet He yields his blood, takes upon Himself the form of a servant, and then is scourged and pierced, bruised and torn, and at last slain; for nothing but the blood of Deity could make atonement for human sin ... nothing is said about Christian experience as a means of cleansing. The text does not say that our walking in the light cleanses us from sin. It does not say that our having fellowship with God cleanses us from sin—these go with cleansing, but they have no connection as cause and result—it is the blood, and the blood alone that purges us from sin.*

7] John Stott, *What is clear is that if we walk in the light, God has made provision to purify us from whatever sin would otherwise mar our fellowship with him or each other.*

8] David Walls, *... because of the present tense, it goes further to suggest that those who are walking in the light have sin's defilement removed and that they experience a progressive sanctification—a progressive character transformation into the image of Jesus ... All sin means every kind of sin and shows there is no limit to the categories of sin that Christ is willing to forgive. His sacrificial death made every type of sin forgivable.*

9] Zane Hodges, *So long as there is true openness to the light of divine truth, Christians' failures are under the cleansing power of the shed blood of Christ. Indeed, only in virtue of the Savior's work on the cross can there be any fellowship between imperfect creatures and the infinitely perfect God.*

10] David Jackman, *... to redefine sin and to fail to be convicted of it as sin in our lives is a certain indication that we are not walking in the light. A true Christian will find the searchlight of God's truth constantly exposing the parts of his life that need to be confessed as sin and left behind, through the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. Walking in the light means living each day with God who is light. The nearer I come to God, the more conscious I shall be of my own sin and rebellion. So the greatest saints have always been conscious of themselves as the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).*

c. The deceitfulness of sin (8-10)

1) We still sin (8), ***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

a) Related verses

1] Job 15:14, *What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?*

2] Jeremiah 2:35, *you say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned.'*

3] 1 John 2:4, *Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,*

b) Comments

1] Thomas Constable, *If a Christian claims to be enjoying fellowship with God, he may think that he is temporarily or permanently entirely sinless. Yet our sinfulness exceeds our consciousness of sinfulness. We have only a very limited appreciation of the extent to which we sin. We commit sins of thought as well as deed, sins of omission as well as commission, and sins that spring from our nature as well as from our actions. This verse warns against all forms of the heresy of perfectionism.*

2] Zane Hodges, *... when a believer is experiencing true fellowship with God he may then be tempted to think or say that he is, at that moment at least, free from sin. John warned against this self-deluding conception ... If Christians understand the truth that God's Word teaches about the depravity of the human heart, they know that just because they are not conscious of failure does not mean that they are free from it. If the truth is "in" them as a controlling, motivating influence, this kind of self-deception will not take place. Whether someone claims to be "without sin" for a brief period of time or claims it as a permanent attainment, the claim is false.*

3] I. Howard Marshall, *To John it was self-evident that these men were sinners. His reply to them is simply that they are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them. This doesn't mean simply that they are telling a lie, but that they have no share in the divine reality despite their claims to the contrary.*

4] William Barclay, *(1) There are some people who say that they have no sin. That may mean either of two things ... It may describe people who say that they have no responsibility for their sin. It is easy enough to find defences behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our upbringing or on our genes, on our environment, on our temperament or on our physical condition. We may claim that someone misled us and that we were led astray. It is a human characteristic that we seek to shuffle out of the responsibility for sin. Or it may describe people who claim that they can sin and come to no harm ... It is John's insistence that, when people have sinned, excuses and self-justifications are irrelevant. The only thing which will meet the situation is humble and penitent confession to God and, if need be, to other people too ... (2) There are some people who say that they have not in fact sinned. That attitude is not nearly so uncommon as we might think. Any number of people do not really believe that they have sinned and rather resent being called sinners. Their mistake is that they think of sin as the kind of thing which gets into the news ... In any event, anyone who claims not to have sinned is in effect doing nothing less than calling God a liar, for God has said that all have sinned.*

5] David Walls, *The longer we walk with Christ, the more likely it is that we will put aside more and more of the things we ought not to do. If we came to Christ as adults, we might be successful in putting away many of the overt sins we committed during our non-Christian days. We might no longer smoke and get drunk and curse and treat others abusively. We might go through a day or more in which we are not aware of committing an obvious sin ... On the other hand, when we grasp that we are to do all the things that Jesus would do if he were in our shoes, we fail continually. None of us loves perfectly as Jesus did. Therefore, we sin, because a failure to love perfectly is a sin. If we think we are without sin altogether, we are deceived and we live a lie.*

6] John Stott, *the very fact of sin is denied. These people cannot benefit from the cleansing effects of the blood of Jesus because they claim to be without sin. 'Sin' is again in the singular and refers to the inherited principle of sin or self-centredness. The heretics are now saying that, whatever their outward conduct may be, there is no sin inherent in their nature ... John's affirmation is equally applicable today to those who deny the fact or guilt of sin by seeking to interpret it solely in terms of physiological, psychological or social causes.*

7] Charles Spurgeon, *If you should venture to plead that you have no sin on the ground that your nature is not evil, I ask you to rid your heart of that lie, for a lie it is through and through. I do not care how honest your parentage or how noble your ancestry is—there is a bias in you toward evil ... It is not uncommon for others to arrive at the same conclusion by another road. They say that they have no sin by various feelings and beliefs that they, as a rule, ascribe to the Holy Spirit. Now, if any man says that all tendency to sin is gone from him, that his heart is at all times perfect, and his desires always pure, so that he has no sin in him whatsoever, he may have traveled a very different road from the character we just now warned, but he has reached the same conclusion, and we have but one word for both boasters. It is the word of our text: "If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" ... Some, however, have reached this position by another route. They plead that though they may have sin, yet they are not bad at heart. They look upon sin as a technical term, and though they admit in words that they have sin, yet they practically deny it by saying, "I have a good heart at bottom; I always was well intentioned from the very first ... They are either deplorably ignorant as to what holiness is, or else they are willfully uttering a falsehood; in either case, the truth is not in them.*

8] David Jackman, *The claim to be sinless is in itself an evidence that we are not walking in fellowship with God (the truth is not in us). 'This doesn't mean simply that they are telling a lie, but that they have no share in the divine reality despite their claims to the contrary.' Walking with God in the light means that our lives are continually being searched by his truth so that we begin to realize how many marks of sin we have within us ... Walking in the light is not always a comfortable experience. As we walk in it, we become more conscious of our sin, not less.*

9] F. F. Bruce, *If people claim—perhaps on the ground of their possession of the Spirit—to have gotten beyond good and evil, to have reached a stage of spiritual development where moral principles are no longer relevant, they are self-deceived. The words "the truth is not in us" are reminiscent of what is said of the devil in John 8:44, "there is no truth in him." Those in whom the truth resides—and we may recall that in the Johannine writings the truth is embodied in Christ (John 14:6)—will exhibit it in their lives; they will practice the truth (verse 6).*

2) We must confess our sins which God will forgive (9), ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

a) Related verses

1] Psalm 32:5, *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*

2] Psalm 51:3, *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

3] Proverbs 28:13, *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*

4] Romans 3:26, *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.*

b) Comments

1] I. Howard Marshall, *To confess sins is not merely to admit that we are sinners, but to lay them before God and to seek forgiveness. If we do so, we can be sure of forgiveness and purification on the grounds of God's character. He is faithful and just to13 forgive confessed sin. The faithfulness lies in his adherence to his promises that he will forgive his people: "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.…*

2] Thomas Constable, *God absolutely promises forgiveness that is consistent with His justice (because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all of our sins) ... Some expositors teach that this verse cannot apply to Christians since God has already forgiven Christians. Therefore we do not need to ask for what we already have. This viewpoint fails to distinguish between judicial forgiveness, which we receive at conversion, and family forgiveness, which we need after conversion. For example, a judge could accept payment for his own son's fine in court and set him free from the legal demands of the law but still discipline him when he got home. Jesus instructed His believing disciples to ask the Father, not the Judge, for forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4) ... The fact that God has removed the penalty for our sins at conversion (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Col. 2:13) does not remove the necessity of confessing our sins frequently. Again, the issue is not acceptance by God, but fellowship with God. Conversion (judicial, forensic, positional) forgiveness makes us acceptable as members of God's family. Continual (parental, family, practical) forgiveness enables us to experience intimate fellowship as God's children within His family ... Since true confession involves saying the same thing about our sin that God does, it must include repentance. God not only said that sin is wrong, but He also said that we should turn from it. If we only label a particular act of sin as sin, we are not really saying the same thing about it that God says. We must be willing to say that we will turn from it if we want to say about our sin what God says about it.*

3] Zane Hodges, *... it is comforting to learn that the forgiveness which is promised here is both absolutely assured (because God "is faithful") and also is in no way contrary to His holiness (He is "just"). The word used here for "just" (dikaios) is the same one which is applied as a title to Christ in 2:1 where it is translated "the Righteous One" ... Obviously God is "just" or "righteous" when He forgives the believer's sin because of the "atoning sacrifice" which the Lord Jesus has made (see 2:2). As is already evident from 1:7, a Christian's fellowship with God is inseparably connected with the effectiveness of the blood which Jesus shed for him ... The teaching that a Christian should not ask God for daily forgiveness is an aberration. Moreover, confession of sin is never connected by John with the acquisition of eternal life, which is always conditioned on faith. First John 1:9 is not spoken to the unsaved ...*

4] Warren Wiersbe, *When should we confess our sin? Immediately when we discover it! "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). By walking in the light, we are able to see the "dirt" in our lives and deal with it immediately.*

5] Charles Spurgeon, *We are to confess both the inward sin and the outward fruit of it ... to see sin in ourselves from day to day, humbly to confess it, and mourn over it, is to walk in the light. And, walking in the light, we shall have fellowship with God, who is light.*

6] John Stott, *This forgiveness and cleansing, issuing from the faithfulness and justice of God, are conditional upon confession. There are many warnings in Scripture about the danger of concealing our sins, and many promises of blessing if we confess them. Moreover, what is required is not a general confession of sin but a particular confession of our sins, as we deliberately call them to mind, confess and forsake them (cf. Ps. 32:1–5; Prov. 28:13).*

7] David Walls, *The forgiveness John talks about in 1:9 can be understood as parental or familial forgiveness, not judicial forgiveness. That is, we all receive judicial forgiveness one time when we receive Jesus as our personal Savior (Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:6–11). We were, at that time, saved from the penalty of our sins. It is called judicial forgiveness because it is granted by God acting as a judge. After our salvation, we still sin (Phil. 3:12; Jas. 3:2, 8; 4:17). This sin does not cause us to lose our salvation (Rom. 8:37–39), but it does break the fellowship between us and God, just as the sin of a child or a spouse breaks the fellowship with parents or a mate. We confess our sin out of respect and love for the person we have sinned against. God forgives our sin, purifies us from all unrighteousness, and restores us to his fellowship. We need judicial forgiveness only once. We need parental or familial forgiveness whenever we sin.*

8] David Jackman, *If we are to continue in fellowship with God we must be prepared to let him deal radically with our lives. We shall have to come often to admit, 'Lord, that was sin. I recognize it was wrong and I confess that I am guilty. I ask for your forgiveness and the power of your Spirit to keep me from its repetition.' Confession of that sort is of course really repentance. It is identifying what is wrong (sin) and who is responsible (us) and asking God in his mercy and grace to deal with both, through the work of Christ ... This verse seems to assume that the confession will be directly to God, not to a priest or to a fellow Christian. There is indeed a place for confessing our sins to one another, as mentioned in James 5:16. The context there, however, seems to imply that this will be where some illness has been caused through a breach in human relationships. If we have offended someone, then it is our responsibility to go to him, admit our sin and guilt, do anything we can to make reparation, and ask for his forgiveness.*

3) Those who deny sinfulness have not received God's word (10), ***If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.***

a) Related verses
1] 1 John 5:10, *Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.*
2] John 5:38, *and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.*
3] John 8:37, *I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.*

b) Comments
1] Thomas Constable, *The false claim here is that the sin we have committed is not really sin. This is the third and most serious claim (cf. vv. 6, 8). It puts God's revelation of sin aside and makes people the authority for what is and what is not sin. This claim says that God is wrong in His judgment of people and is therefore a liar. The claimant dismisses His Word as invalid (e.g., Ps. 14:3; Isa. 53:6; John 2:24–25; Rom. 3:23).*
2] Zane Hodges, *This statement should be read in direct connection with verse 9. When a Christian is confronted by God's Word about his sins, he should admit them rather than deny them. To deny one's personal sin in the face of God's testimony to the contrary, is to "make" God "out to be a liar." By contradicting His Word, a person rejects it and refuses to give it the proper "place" in his life.*
3] I. Howard Marshall, *Paul's statement that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) is no isolated remark; it sums up the teaching of Scripture on the universality of sin. Not only so; the scriptural revelation of God emphasizes his character as a God who forgives sin, and this description would be pointless if men had no sins to be forgiven. Those who deny their sin thus fall into the serious sin of making God out to be a liar. By no stretch of the imagination can they be said to have his word in them. The message of God, mediated through Christian tradition, has not affected their belief or their conduct.*
4] Charles Spurgeon, *... what does the cross of Calvary mean, what do those streams of blood mean, what do those agonies to the death mean? God has acted out a gigantic lie if we have no sin, for He has provided a propitiation for a thing that does not exist.*
5] John Stott, *... John is as clear about the outbreak of sin in our behaviour as he is about its origin in our nature and its consequences in preventing our fellowship with God. To say that we have not sinned is neither just to tell a deliberate lie (6), nor to be deluded (8), but actually to accuse God of lying, to make him out to be a liar and to reveal clearly that his word has no place in our lives.*

6] David Walls, *A number of verses in the Bible tell us that we will sin after conversion (Phil. 3:12; Jas. 2:10; 3:2, 8; 4:17). Because a Christian will sin after salvation, he should not deny his sin. If he does, he makes God out to be a liar. When a Christian realizes, through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, that he has sinned, he should agree with God about his sin, confess it, and receive the restoration to fellowship that is promised in the previous verse.*

7] David Jackman, *In order to have any meaningful concept of sin we must accept that moral standards exist, that some actions are always right and others always wrong. But the only way in which such moral absolutes can be justified is by reference to a creator God, who has determined the structures of reality.*

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- Zane Hodges, *It would be difficult to find any single passage of Scripture more crucial and fundamental to daily Christian living than 1 John 1:5–10. For here, in a few brief verses, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' has laid down for us the basic principles which underlie a vital walk with God ...* What then is the principle of fellowship with God? Succinctly stated, it is openness to God and full integrity in the light of His Word.
- Matthew Henry, *The Christian religion is the religion of sinners. The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, of continual faith in, thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer.*
- William Barclay, *The essence of the Christian life is first to realize our sin and then to go to God for that forgiveness which can wipe out the past and for that cleansing which can make the future new ... God's righteous character remains absolute in his world, and deviation from that character, as revealed in God's law, remains sin. That law is not an arbitrary set of rules designed to restrict and inhibit human life, but the expression of God's will for human relationships in accordance with his own nature of light and love.*