

*The story is told that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, maybe in China, an abbot was disciplining two monks for some infraction of the rules, and so he imposed upon them the punishment of silence. They were not allowed to talk for a long period of time, but even so, they tried to figure out some way to fill the quiet hours.*

*Finally, one of them gathered 28 flat stones from the courtyard, and putting different numbers on them, he devised a game. By using gestures, the men agreed on certain rules, but the most difficult part was keeping silent when one of them scored a victory.*

*Then they remembered that they were permitted to say aloud the prayer, “Dixit Dominus Domino Meo” – and by using one word of this Latin expression meaning “Lord” or “Master,” the winner was able to signal his triumph by yelling, “Domino!”*

*The monks gave the impression that they were praying, when in reality, they were just playing.*

Last week we began our study through this first letter by the Apostle John. If you remember, false teaching from the Gnostics had crept into the early church and these Gnostics suggested that Jesus was not a real man – not flesh and blood, but something more like an apparition. It was crazy talk, and so John shot right out the gate explaining that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses to the earthly ministry of Jesus from the very beginning. They were there from the start – they saw what Jesus did and they heard what He spoke. They walked with Him, and talked with Him, and they touched Him. Jesus was no apparition. John and the other apostles could confirm that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God – God in the flesh – they had fellowship with Him, and John wanted his readers to experience this same fellowship.

Now surely, many claimed to be in fellowship with God – and quite frankly, anybody can make that claim, but unfortunately, like this game of dominoes played by these monks under a false pretense, we can claim to be one thing when in truth we are another. We can claim to have fellowship with God, when in reality, we’re just playing games.

That’s what we are going to explore this morning – claiming one thing yet doing another, so if you have your Bible, let’s pick up where we left off from last week. Turn to **1 John 1**, beginning with **verse 5**. We are told,

**<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.**

As you can see, there is a lot in this passage, but before we jump into the deep end of the pool, I need to put this into some context and that brings us right back to the false teaching of these Gnostics.

The Gnostics claimed to have a secret knowledge from God that ordinary Christians did not have. They had some crazy ideas about Jesus and they had some crazy ideas about themselves. In their teachings, the Gnostics promoted this idea that our human spirit – our inner being is naturally good – it’s really the only thing that counts; whereas, our physical bodies – our flesh, is evil and completely separate from our human spirit, and what that meant for many of them was this:

As long as their human spirit was connected to God – and that’s all that mattered, their physical bodies could live like the devil. So, they’re claiming, *“You’re just seeing my body doing what it wants, when it wants, and with whom it wants. That’s my body doing all of that – but my spirit, well it’s sinless.”* So, no harm, no foul.

That’s the false teaching John is confronting in his letter, but what he says is very relevant to you and to me just as well. In **verse 5**, John tells us,

**This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.**

If we are going to have fellowship with God, it might be beneficial to know who we are dealing with, so John makes it clear that he is not sharing his own ideas of what God may be like, rather he says – this is God’s message about Himself.

This was a message taught by Jesus, it was heard by His disciples, and now John shares it with his readers – and the message is this: **God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all.**

Many biblical writers, from both the Old and New Testaments, tell us a lot about what God has done and what God will do, but here John is focused on the nature of God – describing the essence of His character in one single word – **God is Light**.

**Now, what does that mean – God is Light?** Well, as you might imagine, there are a lot of thoughts about this, but I agree with Charles Swindoll that this expression of **Light** tells us that God is all good, with nothing bad. He is all pure, with nothing corrupt. He is all clean, with nothing dirty. He is all right, with nothing wrong, and He is all truth, with nothing false.

God has revealed Himself in the flesh, and in this revelation – in this Light, He makes His righteousness, and His holiness, His goodness, and His purity known to us. In this Light, God brightly shines and makes visible – in the person of Jesus Christ, His moral perfection. Because He is Light, there is no **darkness** in Him at all – not even a microscopic speck – no sin, no falsehood, no ignorance, no error, and no evil in any shape, form, or fashion – there is no dark side to God, period.

**Do you see where John is going with this?** Just based this one single aspect of God’s character, since **God is Light and there is no darkness in Him**, no person – to include these Gnostics, can claim they are living in genuine fellowship with God while at the same time living a sinful life. It’s inconceivable for it contradicts the very nature of God. Then John continues beginning with **verse 6** and he says,

**<sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

In **verse 6**, John puts an emphasis on what one says in relation to how one lives, and he tells us, and I am paraphrasing here: *“You can say what you want – you can claim to have fellowship with God, but if your walk does not match your talk, you’re lying and you are living a lie.”*

Now just for clarification, the *walk* does not refer to a single action – whether the action is good or bad. A single action might best be described as a *step* – like a *“step in the right direction”* or a *“step down the wrong path”* but in the Bible, the image of walking speaks to one’s manner of living – it’s synonymous with one’s lifestyle – how one lives their life on a normal routine basis.

So, John is telling us that if we say we have fellowship with God and yet live our lives as if God doesn’t matter – then we are lying about our relationship with God.

Jesus spoke about this in one of the most terrifying passages in the entire Bible. I have shared this passage with you on several occasions and I'm going to share it with you again. Jesus said in **Matthew 7**, beginning with **verse 21**,

<sup>21</sup>*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”* <sup>22</sup> *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’* <sup>23</sup>*“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*

Did you notice that Jesus put an emphasis on what one *says* versus what one *does*? Just as John has been explaining, you can say what you want, you can call Jesus your Lord, you can even do some amazing religious stuff – Judas did, but if there is no difference in your life and if you continually and habitually *walk* in darkness, or as Jesus said *“practice lawlessness”* – you have no fellowship with Him. That's not being judgmental – it's just the truth in light of the nature of God.

So, John has explained the terrible consequences of walking in darkness, but now he shares the benefits of walking in the Light, and in **verse 7**, he says,

**but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Walking in the Light is walking with God and it describes our manner of living whereby we are abiding in Him, we are following Him, and we are obeying Him – all the while, we are growing and being gently bent in His direction, like a plant grows and bends towards the light of the sun.

In our walk in the Light, we stay in close contact with God, and the longer we walk with Him, the more He rubs off on us – our fellowship with Him deepens, and as we walk in the Light, we also experience the continual cleansing of sin that the Light reveals in our lives. Through our union with Christ, we have forgiveness of **all sin**.

Now, why is John bringing this up? Well, it should come as no surprise to any of us, that just because we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ – just because we are new creatures in Christ with new natures – our old desires, our old tendencies, our old impulses are still very present. Our old fallen nature did not magically disappear when we became Christians – it still lingers. Now,

fortunately, we are not powerless against our old nature – we don't have to give in to it, but be that may, it still challenges us, it taunts us, it whispers to us, and it pulls us towards disobedience against God, and we know this to be true because we experience it. I think this little prayer best sums it up.

*“Dear Lord, you're really going to be proud of me! I haven't gossiped, lusted, or lost my temper today. I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, or selfish. I'm doing pretty good. Now Lord, in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on – all bets are off. I'm pretty sure I'm going to need a lot of help!”*

As Christians, our salvation does not mean the end of our struggle with sin – in fact, I would argue it's just the beginning. It's a battle, and in this battle, we have those occasional moments where we stumble, we make mistakes, we get tripped up – we sin, and as terrible as that is, John tells us that the blood of Jesus **cleanses us** – that's present tense, meaning the blood of Jesus *keeps on* cleansing us from sin. It's a statement of fact – on the cross, Jesus paid the full penalty for **all sin**, and that's why the Apostle Paul can say in **Romans 8:1**,

***Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***

For those who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, for those in union with Him, for those who believe, there is **no condemnation** from God. Another word for condemnation is “*judgment*” – so there is no judgment because our sin has already been judged on the cross. Yes, we may still struggle with sin, but we are declared “*not guilty*” by God because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross which provides a continual, on-going cleansing of sin.

Now, John may have anticipated that someone would read this letter and say, “*Well, the Gnostics claim we don't sin,*” to which John responds in **verse 8**,

**If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

If we say that we have no sin – if we claim we have no fallen nature, we are lying, and sooner or later – and here's the disturbing part, we start to believe our own lies. We aren't just deceiving others, we're deceiving ourselves – convincing ourselves that everything is fine with God even though we are living like we don't even know Him.

John MacArthur explains it well. He says, “*People today minimize and redefine sin, often alleging that the 'failures' of their lives and certain 'disorders' exist*

*because of how others have treated them. The victim mentality reigns supreme as popular culture comforts itself in affirming that people are basically good and whatever may be wrong is not really wrong, but merely a preference of personal freedom. Instead of accepting responsibility for their behavior, people demand to be accepted as they are.”*

That’s a reality check, **isn’t it?** A person walking in the Light does not deny their sin, try to justify it, or attempt to cover it up. They don’t blame others for it, or make excuses about it, for if they do – they aren’t just deceiving others – they are deceiving themselves, but then to make matters much worse – if we can jump to **verse 10**, John tells us,

**If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.**

So, by denying our sin, we not only make ourselves liars – now we try to make God a **liar** by contradicting **His word** which says “*for all have sinned.*” We need to be honest about our sin – intimacy with God begins with honesty, and that brings us to **verse 9** where John says,

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

The cure to denying our sin is to do exactly the opposite – **confess** it, and let me explain what John means by that.

The word “*confess*” literally means “*to say the same thing,*” that is – to agree with God that our sin – is sin. Remember, it is God who determines what is sin, what is right and what is wrong – not you and me. So, when God exposes our sin, when He calls it out, when we become aware of it, we need to say the same thing about our sin that God says about our sin. That’s what it means to confess.

When we sin, we honestly call it what God calls it, we take responsibility for it, and we turn from it – and then John tells us that God **forgives us** and cleanses us from **all unrighteousness**.

Now, let me say that **verse 9** is not as simple as it first appears, and I will admit that maybe I am making this harder than it has to be, but I want to take a stab at it.

We’ve already been told in **verse 7** that the blood – referring to the death of Jesus on the cross cleanses us from **all sin**. That’s what John just said – all sin – *all* means *all* – past, present, and future. For those who believe, Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin in full – our punishment was put on Him. If that’s true – and it is

true, if all our sins were forgiven at the cross, **then why does John now mention the confession of sins and forgiveness?**

Well, let me try to answer that from a teaching moment given by Jesus. Turn with me to the **John 13**, beginning with **verse 5**. This is the occasion where Jesus is with His disciples during the last Passover meal, and sometime during this meal – I don't know exactly when, we are told this:

*<sup>5</sup> Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. <sup>6</sup> So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, **"Lord, do You wash my feet?"** <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."*

Okay, let me explain what's going on. In that culture, before coming to a dinner engagement like this, a man would take a bath to get clean, and when he got to his destination for dinner, after walking in sandals in the dirt, a lowly servant in the house would wash his feet.

In this passage we are told that Jesus took on the role of a lowly servant and began to wash the feet of His disciples, and before Jesus could get to Peter's feet, Peter put them in his mouth in so many words and said, **"Never shall You wash my feet!"** Peter couldn't handle it – **how could the Lord stoop so low as to do such a humble thing?** Well, Jesus answered him and said, **"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me"** to which Peter replied, **"Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."** Then in **verse 10**, and this is where I want to focus, Jesus responds and says, **"He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean."**

During His earthly ministry, in His teaching, Jesus often took something that was common and practical in His culture and applied some deep spiritual truth to it, and this is no exception as He takes routine feet washing and presents a picture of spiritual cleansing and forgiveness, and what He teaches is this:

When a person trusts Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, they are fully bathed so to speak, completely clean – their sins are washed away and forgiven by the blood of Jesus just as John said; however, as a believer walks in this world and struggles

with sin, it's easy to collect dirt on our feet along the way. Jesus said, "You don't need to be bathed again" for He knows that will be settled on the cross once and for all – instead, "one only needs to wash their feet," and that's where **1 John 1:9** comes into play. Again, John says,

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

The closer we walk in fellowship with God, the more we will become conscious of our own sinfulness – it's just part of the spiritual growth process, and given what we have covered thus far, as we are honest with God, as we agree with Him, as we call sin a sin – we know that in light of God's character and because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross, we are continually forgiven and cleansed, or said in another way – we can come to God in all honesty and confess our sins because we are forgiven.

*There was a little boy visiting his grandparents on their farm. He was given a slingshot to play with, and he practiced in the woods, but he couldn't hit a thing. Getting a little discouraged, he headed back for dinner, and as he was walking back, he saw Grandma's pet duck, and out of impulse, he let the slingshot fly, hit the duck square in the head, and killed it. He was shocked and, in a panic, he hid the dead duck in the wood pile, only to see his sister watching! Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.*

*After lunch the next day Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes together," but Sally said, "Grandma, Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen." Then she whispered to him, "Remember the duck?" So, Johnny did the dishes.*

*Later that day, Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing and Grandma said, "I'm sorry but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally just smiled and said, "Well that's all right because Johnny told me he wanted to help." She whispered again, "Remember the duck?" So, Sally went fishing and Johnny stayed to help.*

*After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he finally couldn't stand it any longer. He came to Grandma and confessed that he had killed her duck. Grandma knelt down, gave him a hug, and said, "Sweetheart, I know. You see, I was standing at the window and I saw the whole thing, but because I love you – I forgave you. I was just wondering how long it would take for you to be honest about it and come to me."*

For those in Christ, we are forgiven and because we are forgiven, we can be honest with God. Intimacy begins with honesty.

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