

Test of Fellowship 1John 1:5 –2:2 bible-sermons.org October 11, 2009

John's letter to the churches dealt with a number of issues the churches were facing. After his introductory remarks that refute the idea that Jesus was some kind of apparition, he throws his next punch at those who taught that our actions are of little consequence. There were those that believed that the enlightened spirit could allow the body to do as it pleased because the body was naturally carnal and the spirit was unaffected by the bodily actions.

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* It is important for us to understand the Hebrew way of seeing the physical world as a picture of spiritual things. (Romans 1:20) John is not saying that God equals photons. In Genesis 1:3 God created photons, light. But God has always been light, that is, the spiritual representation of what light is to us. Light illuminates. It shows what is real. It vanquishes the darkness. It is necessary for life. Darkness relates to evil and deception as light is to goodness and truth. (1Thessalonians 5:4-8) John is declaring that the God of the Hebrews is unlike the gods of the Greeks or Egyptians. The Hebrew God does not steal, lie, or commit adultery as their gods are reported to do. It is essential for us to understand our God is holy, and therefore, we are expected to be holy. (1Peter 1:15-16)

Isaiah the prophet pronounced a warning against *"those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness."* (Isaiah 5:20 NIV) This is precisely what the false teachers were doing. It is common with cults to teach that some lust of the flesh is a righteous act, or at worst a neutral one. It seduces those seeking truth and may even for a time deceive believers into compromising with sin that is falsely labeled as righteousness. The consequences are costly.

The seduction is that one can think they are godly (a form of pride) while indulging their carnal nature. The most common seduction of cults, like the ones the church of the end of the first century and even today face, is that of pride. They claim to have secret knowledge that the common people don't have. That teaching is then used as an excuse to look down on others and act without love toward them. It has been used to justify all manner of immoral behavior, or in John's language, "darkness". Unlike their secret knowledge, John has said in the opening of this letter that he **proclaims** the Word of Life. Christianity has nothing to hide. We proclaim it from the rooftops. (Isaiah 45:19)

In our town, you can pay various groups to teach you enlightenment. (John 18:20) They have various degrees of secret wisdom that you can purchase. The Gospel on the other hand is to be proclaimed openly for all because God loves the world and would have all come to the knowledge of the truth, not just those who can afford it. (1Timothy 2:3-4)

The psalmist declared, *"The LORD is my light and my salvation..."* (Psalm 27:1) Micah said, *"Though I have fallen and sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light."* (Micah 7:8 NIV) Jesus proclaimed, *"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12 NIV) We can

Commented [notes1]: 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.
Romans 1:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
Gen 1:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.
5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.
6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.
7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.
8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.
1 Thess 5:4-8 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;
16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.
1 Peter 1:15-16 (KJV)

Commented [notes5]: 19 I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.
Isaiah 45:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.
John 18:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,
4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
1 Tim 2:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?
Psalms 27:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light.
Micah 7:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
John 8:12 (NIV)

see that Jesus was claiming Himself to be the LORD of the Old Testament, completely pure, uncompromisingly holy.

One of the major issues John seems to be addressing is the false teaching of Cerinthus. Cerinthus was a man who was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians and incorporated the story of Jesus, and the language of the early church, into his heretical teaching. He taught that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary but that the Christ came upon him at the baptism and departed before the crucifixion.

This false teaching has many similarities to modern attitudes toward Christianity. Very few would dare to attack the character of Jesus, but many will deny the virgin birth and the atoning work of the cross. It is common to hear that Jesus was a very enlightened man that was killed for being ahead of his time, kind of like a Gandhi. This letter from John clearly and emphatically declares this kind of thinking to be evil, even antichrist. (1John 2:22) He pulls no punches in declaring that Jesus' teaching was unambiguous and could not be interpreted to please or pacify the world. (1John 2:15)

Commented [notes11]: 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:22 (NIV)

The fact that God is light and that there is no darkness in Him implies that we should live in the light. John already told us that he is proclaiming what he saw and heard so that we will have fellowship with the Father and the Son. To have continued fellowship with God is to remain in the light. (John 3:19-21) ⁶ *If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.* Why? It's because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. We can't commune with holiness and walk in sin. Light dispels the darkness.

Commented [notes12]: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15 (NIV)

Have you noticed that when you are compromising with evil, you avoid prayer? You won't have any problem going through the ritual of prayer, but you can't come into God's presence and dine with Him, pour out your heart to Him and hear His heart for you. The only way you can come to the table with Him after you've been walking in sin is when you come in contrition asking for mercy and forgiveness. (Psalm 32:4-5)

Commented [notes13]: 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John 3:19-21 (NIV)

John was also denouncing dualism, a Greek philosophy that denied the reality of sin and evil. Sound familiar? It is so nonsensical that we won't spend time on it. To deny evil is to have your head in the sand, in other words, in darkness. (Malachi 2:17)

Commented [notes14]: 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah Psalms 32:4-5 (NIV)

⁷ *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.* John will lay out for us a number of tests for us to empirically know if we are in the light, in Jesus. Most of us don't like tests, but we know we need to take them if we really want to know how we are doing. John is giving us some tests to help us know if we are in touch with reality or fooling ourselves. You might not want to take it, but know you need to be sure about eternity. (2Corinthians 13:5)

Commented [notes15]: You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?" Mal 2:17 (NIV)

This is the first test. Are you in fellowship with other believers? Here is where we really begin to get a feel for John's emphatic sense of truth. We are in fellowship

Commented [notes16]: 5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? 2 Cor 13:5 (NIV)

with God and one another, and are walking in the light, or we are not. If we say we are and yet are avoiding fellowship, we are liars! Fellowship rarely happens on Sunday morning. We spend the time in worship and study, though I must add that our Sunday morning Bible study sometimes ends up being real fellowship. It is in the small groups and when we meet one on one and share our lives that fellowship takes place. It's where we really experience our oneness in Christ. I hope every one of you is connected to a small group or spends some time with brothers and sisters that you can share your walk with Christ on a regular basis, at least weekly.

Fellowship with one another is the natural outcome of walking in the light. John Wesley was known for saying that "the Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion." The natural desire of a person who walks with Jesus is to be with others that walk with Jesus and to talk about that walk, both the trials and the victories.

To walk in the light is to live by the truth of Scripture. God is said to be the God of truth. (Psalm 31:5) Truth guides us to God. (43:3) Jesus said He is truth. (John 14:6) The Word is truth and Jesus is the Word made flesh. (John 1:14; 17:17) No wonder John is so emphatic about truth. He lived with Truth in the flesh for 3 years! Are you in Jesus? Then you will have fellowship and will see the purifying effect of the truth of Jesus in your life. (Romans 6:12)

Notice that as we walk in the light, the blood of the Son purifies us from all sin. No matter how we stumble in this walk, "all sin" is **all** sin. His blood is enough. It is the most powerful cleansing agent there is. Nothing else will do. In answer to Cerinthus' claim that it was not the Christ who suffered but Jesus the man, John declares it is the blood of the Son of God that purifies from all sin.

But just in case we think John is talking about sinless perfection, he goes on to instruct us that ⁸ *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* You won't be free of all sin in this life. (Romans 3:10) You can be free from the habitual slavery of sin. The power of the life of Jesus in you enables you to say "No!" to sin. The proverb tells us that the path of the just is like a shining light that shines more and more until that perfect day, the day we see Jesus. (Proverbs 4:18) John will tell us later in this letter that that is the day we will be perfected, the work in us will be completed. (1John 3:2) Until that day, we deal with sin on a daily basis, and yet unlike the unbeliever, we are not enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:14) The patterns have been broken and we are a new creation. Christ has set you free! (John 8:36)

There is a branch of the church that teaches sinless perfection in this life. I've heard the explanation they would give for this verse, and to tell you the truth, I just can't understand where they are coming from. Again, we have to be honest about our experience. Walking in the light does not mean your heart never deceives you. It does not mean that you will not fail the occasional test. It means that your tendency is toward godliness and sin is an aberration. It means that we find sin disgusting and abhor the fact that we fall into it. It also means that when we sin we are quick to run to Jesus, not hiding it like a treasure. If you secretly desire to live in habitual sin, you are walking in darkness. (Ephesians 5:11)

Commented [notes17]: 5 Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth. Psalms 31:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 3 Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Psalms 43:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Romans 6:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; Romans 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 18 The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. Prov 4:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. Romans 6:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. Eph 5:11 (NIV)

⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* What a reassuring scripture! Memorize this one! Catch the flow of this. We aren't supposed to go on habitually sinning if we are in the light. We do, however, fall into sin. When we do, to keep from having our fellowship with God and others from being broken, we confess our sins, and we are purified. Hallelujah! Christianity matches our experience. We don't have to put our brain on pause. It is practical and real.

Some one will ask, "If Jesus' death on the cross paid for all sins, and upon receiving salvation all our sins are forgiven, why do we need to continue to repent of daily sin?" This is a matter of our walk with God being cleansed daily. It is a part of our process of sanctification (the experiential part). Legally we are justified before God, but our heavenly Father desires to see our daily walk with Him pure and holy so that we may have unbroken communion. That's why we daily have our feet washed, though we have already been bathed. (John 13:10) The rock, Christ Jesus, has been struck like the rock in the wilderness, and we have drunk the living water. Now, again like that shadow of Christ, the rock in the wilderness, we must speak to the rock for our daily walk in the light (fellowship with God and fellow believers). (Numbers 20:8)

¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.* D.L. Moody was once approached by a man who claimed to have reached sinless perfection. Moody asked to speak to the man's wife to confirm the opinion. You can guess what happened. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) There is none righteous, no not one. But we can have the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, "for He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21 (KJV) Our righteousness is not our own, but that of Jesus. Yet, when we are in Him, we will continually grow in Christ's likeness. (2Corinthians 3:18)

It is common today for people to claim they have no sin. According to their definition, they don't, but according to the Bible's definition we all do. I had a woman tell me her children never sinned. She was shocked that I believed the Bible taught we were born in sin. (Psalm 51:5) I was shocked that she would make the claim!

The Way of the Master course that we had last week recognizes the contemporary need (also a problem in dualism of the first century) to help people recognize they are sinners. Our culture is trying to declare that sin is an old fashioned prejudice and that the teaching of sin is the real problem in the world today. NO! Sin is the problem. Denying it won't help. You wonder where they come up with this stuff. The Bible calls it doctrines of devils. (1Timothy 4:1) To say that violating another person, murder, theft, injustice is not evil, is evil in itself. This kind of insanity won't even answer when you ask them if Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot were evil. That kind of thinking denies reality to justify personal sin and avoid bowing the knee to Jesus as Lord. (Philippians 2:10) Denial of reality is a form of insanity!

Commented [notes29]: 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." John 13:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: 8 "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." Num 20:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes34]: 1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 1 Tim 4:1 (KJV)

Commented [notes35]: 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, Phil 2:10 (NIV)

¹ *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* This helps clarify what he has already said. John is not expecting sinless perfection, but he is expecting that those who walk in the light will run to their Savior when they sin, confess their sin, and trust Jesus to deal with it. We rush to restore communion with the Father through Jesus because we so desperately miss that fellowship with Him.

Jesus is our intercessor in heaven! (Hebrews 7:25) What a great defense attorney! He's never lost a case. Of course He only takes those cases that come to Him and repent of their sin and trust in His work on the cross to be their justification before God.

Commented [notes36]: 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Heb 7:25 (NIV)

² *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* The idea that God would have Jesus die in our place is also under attack today, even by much of the so-called Christian Church. If it is not true, the Bible is a lie, because atonement runs as a theme throughout the entire Bible. It is, in fact, the greatest theme, that God would love us so much that He would pay the penalty we could not pay. You wouldn't mind the idea of someone else serving your jail sentence. If someone paid your IRS bill this year it wouldn't seem barbaric to you. The real reason the world has a problem with atonement is the natural sense of indebtedness and gratitude that should follow.

Understand that John is not teaching that all will receive the atoning sacrifice. He has clearly said that some walk in darkness and that in God there is no darkness at all. Some, in fact many, will refuse the work of Christ. (Matthew 7:13) Nevertheless, Jesus died for them. They must be willing to embrace His gift.

Commented [notes37]: 13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. Matt 7:13 (NIV)

John has presented us with his first test and clarified some doctrine. He claims to speak with bold authority because he lived with Jesus and is passing on what Jesus directly taught him. Did you pass the first test, fellowship? Do you share your heart with God and walk with Christ and other believers as a way of life? If you say, "My religion is private," John declares you are not in the light but in darkness. The disciple that Jesus loved knows nothing of private religion.

Our community has a lot of people who claim to be Christians but refuse to have fellowship. I'm not saying they must come to an organized church, neither was John, but he was saying they need to share their life in Christ with other believers. The best place I know to do that is church. The real church is not an organization or building, but is the body of believers. Are you walking in the light? Are you regularly confessing to God the sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts you? (Matthew 6:12) Do you fellowship with other believers? Just because you are here this morning doesn't mean those things are true of you. ⁵ *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?* 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes38]: 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Matt 6:12 (NIV)