

1 John Chapter One: “Being Sure About God and You”

This first letter (epistle) of the Apostle John was written between 85-95 A.D. and opens as does his Gospel. When John began his Gospel, he recalled how he (*and the other disciples, for whom he was a spokesman*) had beheld the Son's glory, the glory as of a unique Son from the Father (John 1:14).

John writes with this purpose: “*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” (1 John 5:13). Similarly, he begins by saying, “*That which we have seen and heard declare we to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you, that your joy may be full.*” (1John 1:3-4).

John wants Christians to “know” that they have eternal life. He desires that we come to a fuller understanding of what it means ... to be in fellowship with God and what is required to maintain that fellowship. By so doing ... we can be confident as Christians and sure of our salvation (cp. Hebrews 4:16; Romans 8:1-3).

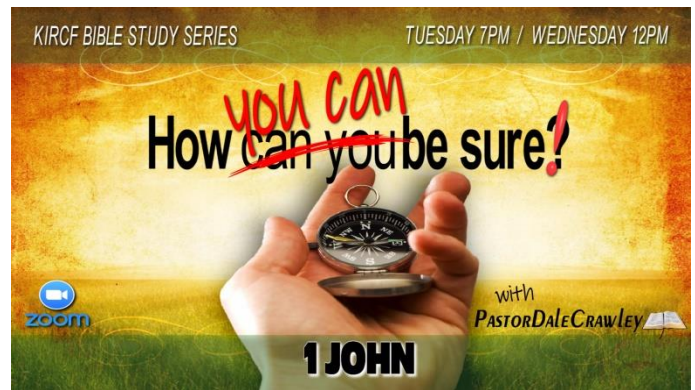
Verses 1-4 – NOTICE THE ORDER OF THINGS THAT LEAD TO ETERNAL LIFE

First ... there is that which John saw and heard — the **proofs** that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1). He came in the flesh for man's redemption (cf. 4:2; Hebrews 2:14).

Second ... there is the **preaching** of the proof — the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ, the Word of Life. John says, “***We bear witness, and declare unto you. . . declare we unto you. . .***” (1:2-3).

Third ... there is the **personal** reception of the preaching of the truths concerning Jesus Christ (1:3). **Belief** (i.e., faith **and** obedience, cp. Romans 1:5; 16:26) that “***Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God***” who “***became flesh and dwelt among us,***” is the basis of fellowship with the apostles, which is fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (cp. John 20:30-31; 1:14; Luke 10:16).

Fourth ... there is the **promise** of genuine fellowship with God, which will bring about the ultimate joy for the Christian — eternal life (1:4; cp. 2:24-25).



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After John introduces these important points, he focuses in the balance of the book on our fellowship with God. Christ has come. We can enjoy eternal life with God through Christ. But we must receive the teaching of Jesus Christ in doctrine **and** in daily living.

Verses 5-10 – LIVING IN LIGHT OF GOD

The letter's main body begins with 1:5-10. Fellowship with God is not merely accepting and affirming the truths of Christianity; it is **also** adopting a way of life — a life consistent with God's nature and will. This is the kind of life that Jesus led.

From a study of these verses, we learn that the Christian life is more than a profession. *It is possible to profess something that is not true.* In order for us to **know** (cp. 5:13) that we have fellowship with God, what we say **and** what we do **must** correspond to God's will.

1 John 1:5 ... "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."^{NKJV}

John's message emphasized that God is light. Light enables people to do their work. It produces growth in crops; it reveals beauty and provides safety. Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Light reveals; light shines. God is so completely "light" ... that in Him is no darkness at all!

"Darkness" represents what is sinful and evil. *The Greek could be translated literally as "darkness is not in him ever."* God is untainted by any evil or sin. Thus, "God is light" means that God is perfectly holy and true and that he alone can guide people out of the darkness of sin. Jesus declared Himself to be the **"light of the world"** (John 8:12). This light signifies Christ's moral excellence and purity.

Light also relates to truth because light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. "Darkness" can also picture a certain hiddenness and secrecy. The false teachers claimed to have received special knowledge that God only gives to a certain few. The nature of light, however, is to flood and fill. That God has "no darkness" means that nothing is hiding in shadows or kept in secret.

1 John 1:6 ... "So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness. We are not living in the truth."^{NLT}

"God is light" and there is no darkness at all in Him (1:5). Therefore, those who claim to have fellowship with God are living in God's light, trying to live holy and pure lives for him. To claim to belong to God but then to go out *and live in sin* is hypocritical.

In fact, John says that people are lying ... if they claim fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness. Christ will expose and judge such deceit. Those who claim to know God must also be living in the light, for darkness and light are incompatible. People cannot live both in the darkness of sin and in the light of fellowship with God, in whom is *"no darkness at all"* (1:5). John often used "darkness" to refer to sin (1:5,6; 2:8,9,11). **Thus, one cannot live a sinful life and simultaneously claim to be a Christian!**

1 John 1:7 ... *"But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin."*^{NLT}

Those who claim to follow the Son cannot live in spiritual darkness; instead, they must be living in the light of God's presence. They must be illumined by the truth of God's character.

To *"live in the light"* requires constant contact with God ... and no tolerance for dishonesty, hypocrisy, or sin. Living in the light pictures a life of complete transparency, with no attempts to conceal anything from "the Light."

- To *"walk in the light"* (as it is translated in NIV and NKJV) cannot come from imitating other Christians; instead, it comes from continuous effort to take on Christ's qualities. This involves complete transformation from within.

Walking in the light leads to fellowship with each other. This fellowship among believers results from each believer's having fellowship with God. By living in the light, John did not intend that all Christians should be hermits or mystics, living in solitary contemplation of God. **Instead, their fellowship with Christ should produce the desire to join others in loving devotion.** **John's overall argument stresses this: True spirituality manifests itself in community fellowship.** **One cannot say that he or she communes with God and then refuse to commune with God's people!**

Another result of walking in the light is that the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin. John emphasized that the death of Christ ("the blood of Jesus") saves people, not the false teachers' knowledge. The verb "cleanses" also means "purifies." Sin is not only forgiven, it is erased.

1 John 1:8 ... *"If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth."*^{NLT}

John attacked the second claim of the false teachers (see also 1:6 and 1:10): that people could be "without sin." The false teachers refused to take sin seriously. In saying that they had no sin, they may have been saying that they did not need Jesus' death on the cross. They may have considered that Jesus' death abolished all sin,

including the ability to sin. Or, they may have been teaching the false notion that the spirit and body are completely separate ... and that whatever a person does in the body does not affect the spirit.

THE INEVITABILITY OF SIN ... This passage touches on one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith: the fact that although Christians are cleansed from sin, they still sin!

The struggle between the old nature and the new nature will continue until Christ comes to make his people perfect. Paul wrote about this struggle in Rom 7. Anyone who honestly looks at his or her inner life and claims to be sinless is refusing to accept the truth. John wanted his readers to understand that Christians still battle with sin, but God has provided the blood of Jesus to cleanse His people (1:7) and the promise of forgiveness when they do sin (1:9).

1 John 1:9 ... "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." ^{NKJV}

Being God's people does not mean denying sin (1:8), but confessing it! Because all people are sinners, Jesus had to die. Because sin is not completely eradicated from the lives of those who believe in Jesus, God graciously gave His followers provision for the problem of sin. John explained it here in a nutshell: If we confess our sins ... He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!

- To "*confess our sins*" means to agree with God that an act or thought was wrong, to acknowledge this to God, to seek forgiveness, and to make a commitment to not let it happen again.

Refusing to admit sin is self-deception. No one can fool God. By refusing to admit sin, however, people cheat themselves out of the possibility of fellowship with Him. So confession of sins is necessary for maintaining continual fellowship with God, which in turn will enable people to have good fellowship with members of the church community. Rather than denying the sin nature, believers are to confess their sins because God says they are sinners who need forgiveness. If this is not so, then His Son's death would be worthless. To confess sins means to agree with God concerning specific acts that have been committed; it means to admit sinfulness.

1 John 1:10 ... "If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts." ^{NLT}

John wanted his readers to understand that people who make such a denial of sinful acts ... do not have the Word of God permeating and changing their lives, because the Word of God clearly states throughout **that all people sin and all need a Savior**. People cannot be forgiven if they do not recognize their sin!