

The Requirements of Christian Fellowship

1 John 1:5-10

1 John 1:5-10 - *“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. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”*

Background Notes

It's not easy to make an outline of 1 John. In fact, I challenge you to read the entire epistle and try to outline it - without using study Bibles or commentaries! You'll find that 1 John is not as easy to outline as most of the other New Testament books.

However, the **purpose** of 1 John is quite easy to recognize, because John directly told us his purpose for writing this letter. Look at 1 John 5:13: *“These things I have written to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God that you may know you have eternal life.”* The plain and simple purpose of 1 John is to give believers assurance of their salvation, and to encourage them in their faith.

So if you have doubts about your salvation, and if you need assurance of your salvation, read the epistle of 1 John!

Compare the purpose of the Gospel of John with the purpose of 1 John. The Gospel of John 20:30-31 says: *“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

The purpose of John's Gospel is to lead people to salvation in Christ. That's why the Gospel of John is a good book for your non-Christian friends to read. So if an unbeliever ever promises to read any book of Scripture that you give them, I would suggest the Gospel of John rather than Leviticus! Of course Leviticus is Scripture, and God can certainly use the book of Leviticus to lead a person to Christ - but that's not the primary purpose of Leviticus. However, the stated purpose of the Gospel of John is to lead an unbeliever to belief and faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

The purpose of 1 John is to give the believer assurance of salvation. 1 John is not “how to be saved” but “how the saved should be.” The Gospel of John is about **relationship and union** with Jesus Christ. 1 John is about **fellowship and communion** with Jesus Christ - and with fellow believers.

1 John is like a family picture album. Open a family picture album. If you’re in the family you’ll see your picture. Read 1 John, and there you’ll see your “picture” or your family resemblance if you’re in the family of God. It will give you assurance of your salvation.

The theme that emerges from the pages of 1 John is “Christian fellowship” – who is in the fellowship and who is not in the fellowship. We’ve already discussed Jesus Christ as the basis of Christian fellowship, and joy as the result of Christian fellowship. Now let’s look at the requirements of Christian fellowship.

Doctrinal Points

1. “Walking in the light” is a requirement of Christian fellowship.

Remember that when we say “requirements of Christian fellowship,” we mean requirements for enjoying and experiencing Christian fellowship - **not** requirements for entering Christian fellowship. To enter the Christian fellowship, you must become a Christian. You must acknowledge that you’re a sinner and in need of salvation, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Then you’re in the Christian family.

But once you’re a Christian, if you are to enjoy and experience Christian fellowship, you must **walk in the light**. *“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (v7).*

What does it mean to “walk in the light”? Does it mean to walk outdoors in the sunshine? Obviously not. Let’s start with verse 5: *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”* So “light” is figurative language for **moral perfection**. God is absolutely holy and righteous and pure – no darkness at all and no moral imperfection! And as Christians, we are to walk in the light (v6-7).

God is perfect in every way. *“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”* Even though God allows sin to continue at the present time, He does not condone sin in any way, and He is not responsible for it in any way. Some people have a problem with this truth, but this is what the Bible teaches here. If you attribute even the slightest moral imperfection to God, you have an unbiblical and warped idea of God. God always does the right thing, even though we may not understand His ways at present.

Walking in the light doesn't mean to just **believe the truth** – it also means to **practice the truth**. Do you say that you're a Christian and that you're in fellowship with the Lord, but you're living in sin? Well, you may be a Christian - but you certainly are not in fellowship with the Lord! In fact verse 6 says you're lying. You can't be in fellowship with the Lord if you're living in sin, because you're not walking in the light.

Is it possible that you are a Christian – but you're lying? If you think and say that you're in fellowship with the Lord, but you're involved in sin, you're really lying. But *“if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

Walking in the light does not imply that we are sinless. In fact, anyone who claims to be sinless is deceived (v8-10)! Walking in the light means that we are **practicing purity and righteousness as a way of life**.

Do you try to do the right thing - even when you know won't get caught? Do you check your impure thoughts before they become sinful fantasies? Do you guard what you see on the internet - even though no one else is around? Do you really want to enjoy and experience fellowship with the Lord and fellow believers? Walking in the light is a requirement for Christian fellowship.

2. Confessing our sins is a requirement of Christian fellowship.

Verses 8-10: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”*

In these verses we have **our responsibility** and **God's promise** for dealing with our sins.

a. Our responsibility is to acknowledge our sin and confess our sin.

- Verse 8 has to do with our sinful nature: *“If we say that we have no sin, [i.e. indwelling sin, our sinful nature], we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* We are not only sinners because we sin - we sin because we are sinners by nature. We are born with a sinful nature. When you were a child, did you parents ever have to tell you to be bad for a change? Of course not - because we're born with a sinful nature.

- Verse 10 has to do with our sins. *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”* A man once told me that he hadn't sinned for two weeks, but he was ignoring sins of *omission*! So I asked him about the sin of omission: “Have you loved your wife as Christ loved the Church, according to Ephesians 5:25?” He essentially said, “Yes! Why don't you ask my wife?” A few weeks later, I just happened to talk to his wife, and I got a very different picture

of their marriage. Obviously this man hadn't really comprehended the teaching of 1 John 1. So our part is to acknowledge our sinful nature and confess our sins.

b. God's part is His promise to forgive us and cleanse us.

Verse 9: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

If we confess our known sins, God promises to forgive these sins. Further, He promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness in our lives – even the unrighteousness that we may not be aware of.

The similar thought is at the end of verse 8: *"...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."* What a wonderful promise!

Do you confess your known sins? Some Christians overlook this important aspect of living as a Christian. Confessing our sins is a requirement of Christian fellowship.

Practical Application

Let's practice the presence of the Lord.

Do you practice the presence of the Lord as you go through your daily life? An important part of walking in the light is practicing the presence of the Lord in your life.

When you watch TV and DVDs, do you consider that the Lord is right there watching with you? He is! When you talk negatively about fellow believers, do you realize that the Lord is right there listening? He is! When you fill out your income tax or your expense report, do you remember the Lord is looking over your shoulder? He is!

Philippians 4:5 says, "The Lord is at hand."

Do you talk to the Lord throughout the day - not just at "prayer time"? He's with us, and we can talk to Him at any time. He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). I love to talk to the Lord when I'm driving alone, or when I'm running. Praying often is a good way to practice the presence of the Lord.

So let's remember to practice His presence. Practicing the presence of the Lord is an important part of walking in the light.