

DISCERNING ONE'S STANDING WITH GOD 1 John 1:1-7

Introduction

MESSAGE THEME – *Living with certainty in God's fellowship.*

REVIEW vs. 1:1-4

An Overview

- John opens his letter without a salutation, as typical in other N.T. epistles. He gets right to business in **verses 1-4**.

A More Detailed Look

1. The Object

- The opening verses emphasize the "Word of Life" (vs. 1), which John will proclaim.
- What is the Word of Life? It is the person of Jesus Christ. John 1:1-4 & 14.

2. The Relative Clauses vs. 1

- *What was from the beginning,*
- *what we have heard,*
- *what we have seen with our eyes,*
- *what we beheld* (partial glorification at His transfiguration)
- *and our hands touched* (His post-resurrection existence)
- **John is stressing the reality of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.**

3. The Parenthetical Verse vs. 2

- He also calls the "Word of Life" the "Eternal Life," which was historically and physically manifested to him and his colleagues.
- We have seen, attest to, and proclaim that this eternal life became flesh."
- Jesus declared that He is the way, the truth, and the life. – John 14:6 He's God!
- Jesus defined "eternal life" in John 17 2-3 as knowing (experiencing) God & Jesus Christ.

"Eternal life is not to be thought of in terms of duration, but "kind" or "quality" as the sharing of a living fellowship or life with the Father."¹

- This life, the essence of God, was shared by Jesus Christ as He himself is God.

4. The Proclamation and its Purpose vs. 3b-4

a. The immediate purpose was "fellowship."

- This fellowship is found in the shared life of God the Father and Son, and thereby one another.

- John desires to proclaim the Word of Life – Jesus Christ so that the readers experience and enjoy the fellowship, the shared life with God and, therefore, each other.

ILLUSTRATION – Regarding Fellowship

- *It is similar to branches on a vine. The branches mutually share the life of the vine, as do those who have fellowship in the shared life of God the Father and Son.*
 - The fellowship created by Christ in the days of His flesh within the Apostles and deepened by the coming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, was not to be limited to them. It was to extend to the next generation (so *that you also may have fellowship with us*).ⁱⁱ

b. That Ultimately Fulfilled Joy

- **Note:** John says that the eternal life is grounded in the historical events of Jesus' life.
- Eternal life is not the by-product of spiritual enlightenment or knowledge acquired by an exclusive mystical experience but in the historic life and person of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD vs. 5-7

Understanding God's Essence vs. 5

1 John 1:5 (ESV) 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.

- He now states that what he heard from this historical, physical experience of hearing, seeing, and beholding the “Word of Life” **is the message that “God is light.”**

Deity and The Image of Light

- In the O.T. *light* represented God. (Ps. 119:105; Is. 9:2; Ps. 43:3; Ps. 27:1)
- God is characterized by such inapproachable light. (God's glory – Tabernacle)
- Described as such by Paul.

1 Timothy 6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

- This is an appropriate symbol for one who is pure, righteous, and holy.
- But also, among the *gnostics*, “light” was the primary metaphor for gods, deities, and spiritual, mystical enlightenment.
- “Light” imagery formed the conceptual basis of Near Eastern dualism.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Satan always tries to mimic and hijack that which is of God or represents God.

2 Corinthians 11:14 (ESV) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Evil and the Image of Darkness

- The categories of *light and darkness* belong to the universal language of religious symbolism.

- Light is true life and the realm of holiness and good, while darkness is the realm of evil, sin, and wickedness.
- In *gnostic* thought, man, who is darkness by nature and in physicality, must liberate the elements of light within his soul or spiritual being and free them from the material to attain true life.
- In this regard, *light* and *life* are inseparably connected.^{iv}
- So, the use of the term *light* would have had an appeal and association to both those of Jewish background and pagan Greek background.

God As Light

- John's statement that *God is light* is a penetrating description of God's being, essence, and nature.
- He did not say that God was a light, but He is light. It's His essence, demonstrated at the **Mt. of Transfiguration**.

Luke 9:29 (ESV) And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

- John then, in no uncertain terms, states that in Him, *there is no darkness at all*.
 - He is absolutely pure, perfectly righteous, and holy. (**Isa. 6:1-6**)
- God is pure light, not diluted or at all mixed with evil, untruth, or unrighteousness.

Illustrating the Light/Darkness Concept

- God is pure light, and this will have some significant implications for John.
- *It is crucial to grasp this fundamental truth.*
- John is saying that darkness is incompatible with God.
- The light-darkness concept through the image of circles.^v
 - **Before the circles are drawn on a blank piece of paper, there is only space.**
 - **But a circle drawn, then includes and excludes space.**
- **This circle gives shape to space.**
 - **One is a circle of light; this circle of light contains.**
 - *truth* (1:6, 8; 2:21),
 - *love* (3:1; 4:7-12),
 - *righteousness* (1:9; 2:1, 29; 3:7),
 - *eternal life* (1:2; 2:17, 25),
 - *hope* (3:30),
 - *purity* (1:7, 9; 3:3),
 - *confidence* (2:28; 3:21; 4:17),
 - *discernment* (2:27).
 - This is God's circle, the sphere of light.
 - **The other circle is darkness,** this circle contains.
 - *falsehood* (1:6,8),
 - *hatred*, (1:9; 3:13, 15; 4:20),
 - *impurity* (1:7,9),
 - *fear* (4:18),

- *sinfulness* (2:16).
- This is a sphere of evil and darkness.
- This sphere consists of all that is at enmity with God.
- These circles share nothing in common; there is no fellowship between the two, and they do not overlap at all.

Understanding Your Position and Conduct

vs. 6-7

- In 1:6-2:2, three false claims by the false teachers are exposed and corrected.
- These tests are keyed by the phrase “If we say” (NASB) or “If we claim” (NIV).

1. Error Expose

vs. 6

1 John 1:6–7 (ESV) *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

- Walking in the Sphere’s
 - “Walk” is the Greek word *peripateo*.
 - This is in the **present tense**, communicating that it is a habit of walking or a way of life.
 - These people were living and conducting their lives in darkness.
 - They lived habitually in darkness, which implies a determination to choose darkness rather than light or sin rather than God as one’s constant sphere of existence.^{vi}
 - It speaks to a lifestyle or way of life.^{vii}

The Practical Ramifications

a. The first false claim

- That you can have fellowship with God while walking (habitually living) in the darkness.
- Some early *gnostics* believed the body was a mere shell to the human spirit, and the body’s deeds could not contaminate the spirit.
- According to an early church father named Irenaeus, some also taught that if one truly became “spiritual,” they had passed beyond the possibility of any defilement. You could *be* righteous without *doing* righteousness.^{viii}
- *They said that communion of your spirit with God was independent of the body’s morality.*

b. The Correction

- *John is saying that one who makes such a claim is living a lie.* They are not practicing truth.
- *One should be suspicious of those who claim a relationship with God of any kind yet walk in darkness. Such a person does not know the truth.*
- John is letting it be known **that light and dark cannot legitimately coexist.**

ILLUST.: Going to pick grapes off the grapevine only to find lemons. IMPOSSIBLE!

- Important Note: John is not discussing incidents of darkness or sin.
- The following verses show that we are sinful and can confess that, which is different from the *gnostics*, who believe they could reach nirvana, a state of perfection, but the solution for that sin is provided.
- Here, John is saying that light and darkness are two opposing and competing spheres, and the question is, “In which sphere do you exist?”
- You cannot have fellowship with God and exist or conduct your life in the sphere of darkness.

2. The Truth

- If we are truly walking in the light, John says two things will be the result;
 - a. *We will have fellowship.* (with God and one another like branches in the vine)
 - b. *We are cleansed from all sin.* (by the blood of Jesus Christ – truly forgiven and righteous)
 - In other words, “walking in the light” is not saying that one does not have sin but that a person’s sin, all of it, is cleansed from those who are in the light.
 - If one exists or lives in the light, one can be assured that the totality of one’s sins is cleansed by the blood of Jesus, God’s Son.

“The author asserts that not every experience claimed as an experience of God is, in fact, fellowship with God. Fellowship with God will always be characterized by walking in the light, doing the truth, and living as God desires.”^{ix}

- To walk in the light means to shape your entire being, actions, decisions, thoughts, and beliefs according to the life and standard of God, who is light as you live in the sphere of that light.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The Fundamental Distinctive of Christianity

- The irreducible distinctive or truth that makes Christianity unique is fellowship with the infinite Creator, God.
- It is not a mere religious activity, ritual, or keeping of religious rules.
- John appears to be saying that having “fellowship with God” is more than a verbal assent or mere religious experience.

There is a Certainty of Evidence of Fellowship with God.

- One who is in “fellowship with God” will live a life that is characteristic of sharing the quality of life that is characteristic of God.
- That is living in the light.
- John will begin delineating what characterizes the realm of light and the realm of dark for us.

LIVING IN DISCERNMENT AND CERTAINTY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD is grounded by living with certainty in God’s fellowship.

- This truth provides discernment to you.
- This truth provides certainty for you.

Endnotes

ⁱⁱ⁵John R. W. Stott, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary: The Letters of John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 68.

ⁱⁱⁱ⁹.Ibid., p 67.

^{iv10}.H.C. Hahn, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, 4 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 2:490-491.

^{v11}.Marianne Meye Thompson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; 1-3 John*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 42-43.

^{vi12}Gary Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 70.

^{vii13}.Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1985). s.v. “peripateo.”

^{viii14}.John Stott, *TYNTC*, p 79.

^{ix15}.Marianne Meye Thompson, *The IVP NTCS; 1-3 John*, p 46.

KINGDOM OF LIGHT

- truth (1:6, 8; 2:21),
- love (3:1; 4:7-12),
- righteousness (1:9; 2:1, 29; 3:7),
- eternal life (1:2; 2:17, 25),
- hope (3:30),
- purity (1:7, 9; 3:3),
- confidence (2:28; 3:21; 4:17),
- discernment (2:27; 4:1-2).

KINGDOM OF DARKNESS

- falsehood (1:6,8),
- hatred, (1:9; 3:13, 15; 4:20),
- unrighteousness & sin, (3:10)
- impurity (1:7,9),
- death (5:16)
- fear (4:18),
- deception (4:1),
- cowardice.

the epistle of
1 JOHN



LIVING IN DISCERNMENT AND CERTAINTY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

1

1 JOHN

MESSAGE THEME – *Living with certainty in God's fellowship.*

2

1 JOHN

REVIEW

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A More Detailed Look

1. The Object
2. The Relative Clauses – vs. 1
3. The Parenthetical Verse – vs. 2
4. The Proclamation and its Purpose – vss.3-4
 - Fellowship
 - Joy

3

1 JOHN

FELLOWSHIP





4

1 JOHN

REVIEW

Eternal life is not the by-product of spiritual enlightenment or knowledge acquired by an exclusive mystical experience but in the historic life and person of Jesus Christ.

5

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UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Understanding God's Essence vs. 5

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6

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 Deity and the Image of Light

1 Timothy 6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

7

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8

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 Evil and the Image of Darkness

9

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10

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11

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD 1 JOHN
 Understanding God's Essence vs. 5
 Understanding Your Position and Conduct vs. 6-7

12

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Understanding God's Essence	vs. 5
Understanding Your Position and Conduct	vs. 6-7

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13

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD **1 JOHN**

Understanding God's Essence	vs. 5
Understanding Your Position and Conduct	vs. 6-7

Error Exposed

Walking in Spheres

14

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD **1 JOHN**

Understanding God's Essence	vs. 5
Understanding Your Position and Conduct	vs. 6-7

Error Exposed

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Practical Ramifications

The First False Claim

15

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Understanding God's Essence	vs. 5
Understanding Your Position and Conduct	vs. 6-7

Error Exposed

Walking in Spheres


Practical Ramifications

The First False Claim

The Correction


16

1 JOHN



17

1 JOHN



18

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD **1 JOHN**

Understanding God's Essence vs. 5
 Understanding Your Position and Conduct vs. 6-7
Error Exposed
The Truth

19

UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD **1 JOHN**

Understanding Your Position and Conduct vs. 6-7
Error Exposed
Walking in Spheres
Practical Ramifications
 The First False Claim
 The Truth
Fellowship
All Sin Forgiven

20

1 JOHN

To walk in the light means that your entire being, actions, decisions, thoughts, and beliefs are shaped according to the life and standard of God, who is light, as you live in His realm of light.

21

1 JOHN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION
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22

1 JOHN

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 There is a Certainty of Evidence of Fellowship with God

23

the epistle of **1 JOHN**

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24