

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Whether you realize it or not, this passage speaks about one of your greatest needs – and mine too: It's about fellowship with God and the forgiveness that makes it possible. In our series on *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, we've come to the last part of our journey. Two weeks ago, I finished the last of Paul's epistles with 2nd Timothy. While we do not have definite dates for all the New Testament Epistles, it is believed, on sound evidence, that 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and the book of Revelation, also written by the apostle John, are the last books in the New Testament. The apostle John would have written the gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and the Revelation. The ESV Study Bible says the theme of 3rd John is faithfulness despite opposition. 2nd John is Living in God's love. And the book we're looking at, 1st John, the basics of the Christian life: truth, obedience, and devotion. This morning, in 1 John, we begin with something as crucial as it is basic: the relationship between forgiveness and fellowship with God.

I. BECAUSE GOD IS LIGHT, WE CAN ONLY BE RIGHT WITH HIM THROUGH THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS.

1 John 1:1-2 begins by telling us the author is an eyewitness of the life of Jesus and that Jesus came to make manifest eternal life.

1 John 1:3-4 says what follows is written so we can have fellowship with him and with the Lord and have our shared joy made complete. Then, in **verse 5**, we're given this powerful statement about who God is. **Verse 5** says, *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.*

That statement is what leads to all that follows and ties all together. In the verses that follow from **1:6-2:2**, there are six conditional clauses or phrases that begin with the word "if." The idea is because God is light, all of these things follow. Beginning in **verse 6**, **If** we say we have fellowship with him while we 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, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ **If** we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. **2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But **if** anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. These six “if”s tie the passage together as a unit. In this one unit, “sin” is mentioned five times and “darkness” twice. So the conclusion of all of this is that because God is light and there is no darkness in him, all these conditions control our relationship with him. One unifying issue is that sin needs to be faced honestly and forgiven graciously. All of this leads up to the concluding statement of the gospel in **1 John 2:2**. *He (Jesus Christ the righteous) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* That’s good news.

Let's begin with the end - the truth of the gospel clearly in mind.

A. The good news of the gospel is that we can be forgiven because Jesus is our satisfaction.

The word “*propitiation*” means a source of satisfaction. Have you ever talked with someone who is struggling with forgiveness? Maybe it's your forgiveness for someone else. It could be you've hurt someone, and they struggle to forgive you. Or perhaps it's a third person you are trying to help. But it's hard. There is something unsettled and unsatisfying that makes it hard. Sometimes an apology is enough, but sometimes it doesn't satisfy. With God, it's not just an emotional thing. *God is light*. God is perfectly righteous, and our sins create an unsettled debt. There is a need for his righteousness to be satisfied before we can be right with him. The gospel tells us that the satisfaction we need is not found in us. We are not righteous. Jesus is righteous. He shed his blood, dying sacrificially to pay for our sins. Over ninety times in the gospel of John, John tells us we receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith alone.

Illustration: A pastor got a call after midnight from a man who was desperate for counsel. He had committed what he said was a serious sin (I have no idea what it was) and pleaded with this pastor to come and talk with him. When the pastor arrived, the man kept on admitting what he had done, his sinfulness, but he also kept on making all kinds of pledges so that God would forgive him. Finally, the pastor said, *"You are wasting your breath. You can't keep the commitments you're making, and no matter what you promise, that doesn't change the sin you have committed. You have to entrust the problem of your sin and your forgiveness to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only one who can and will forgive it, blot it out, and cleanse it."* He finally seemed to understand and prayed, with the pastor, a prayer of faith accepting God's forgiveness and receiving Christ as His Lord and Savior. The next day he called the pastor at his office. He said, *"On the way home, I turned on the car radio, found a Christian station, and heard 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me.' I pulled over, rested my head on the dashboard, and cried. I finally understood. I can't earn forgiveness. I receive it as a gift through faith in Jesus."*

B. The essence of that faith is dependent trust in Jesus as Savior.

You have to trust in Christ alone. You never have been and never will be, by your own human efforts in any measure or for one second righteous in the eyes of the God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all! That sounds like a terribly negative thing to say, but there is a deep psychological and spiritual insight behind this. In our deepest heart, we know that nothing but perfection can satisfy an infinitely perfect God. That's why when we attempt to feel "all-right" about ourselves by minimizing or excusing our sins or trying harder to be better, our confidence is undercut by deep currents of uncertainty. God offers us something better: God is satisfied with Jesus. When you are in Him when you have received him. God is completely satisfied. Jesus is all the satisfaction you need.

Because God is light, we can only be right with him through the forgiveness of our sins.

II. BECAUSE GOD IS LIGHT, THE WAY HIS CHILDREN WALK IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM IS BY CONFESSING THEIR SINS.

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."* Over the years, I've had people ask, If we receive complete forgiveness the moment we receive Christ, why do we have to keep confessing our sins?

To answer that...

A. We need to distinguish these two different kinds of forgiveness or cleansing.

1.) The Apostle John writes about a forgiveness that is complete- because you have believed and are born again. **1 John 2:12** says: *"My little children, I write unto you because your sins are forgiven you for His namesake."*

2.) The same Apostle writes about a forgiveness that is conditional and requires your continual confession. **1 John 1:9** says: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

There is no contradiction. The complete forgiveness that we already have has to do with our eternal salvation. The forgiveness that we continually need to receive through confession has to do with our daily walk with Christ and our everyday experience of closeness to Him.

Illustration: I want to revisit an illustration. Imagine I'm a teenager and my father is a judge in the local traffic court. One night I take his car without permission. Go joyriding with my friends recklessly crash into a parked car and total it. I'm brought before him in court. As a good judge, he can't just let me off. He wouldn't want to, so he sentences me to a heavy fine that I have no way to pay. But then he steps down from the bench and writes the check to pay my fine. The court is satisfied. The penalty has been paid. I go home free, and later that evening, my father comes home. Do you think we need to talk? The court of law is satisfied, but the loving heart of the Father wants more. God has paid for our sins through the sacrifice of Christ, so he offers us complete *judicial-legal* forgiveness for the asking and receiving. But, *paternal-relational* forgiveness, which is the forgiveness that we need to receive daily to keep close to God as our Father, that requires honest talk

because what we have with God the Father and with Christ and with the Holy Spirit is a real relationship.

B. There's a place in the life of Jesus where both kinds of forgiveness are powerfully pictured.

It is in **John 13** where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. They are gathered in a borrowed, torch-lit upstairs room for their last supper. Jesus does a fantastic thing. He gets up, wraps a towel around his waist, and begins to wash the disciples' feet.

In Biblical times the sandals they wore were really just soles attached to the feet with leather straps. No one wore shoes or socks to keep their feet clean. The streets were not paved, and there were no sidewalks. It was dirty and dusty, sometimes muddy. The streets were shared with horses, donkeys, goats, and camels. No matter how clean you were at the beginning of the day when you walked through that world, your feet got filthy. What a picture Jesus gives us -- that the God to whom the angels cry "Holy, Holy, Holy, -- the creator of the sea and the skies, the mountains and stars humbles himself in human flesh, enters our world, and kneels at our feet and washes away our filth. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus is dramatically showing us the truth about His love and God's. **John 13:6-8** says: *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 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." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. As Jesus interacts with Peter, he's picturing two kinds of cleansing or forgiveness we all need. According to **verse 10**, one kind of cleansing is like a total bath, and the other is like washing your feet.*

What does this mean?

1. First, We all need a radical and total washing away of our sins. Jesus talks about this in when he says that when a person has had a bath, their whole body is clean. This is Salvation, the total cleansing of forgiveness through new birth and faith in Jesus Christ.

2. But secondly, daily fellowship with Christ requires another kind of cleansing. In **verse 10**, Jesus says, "*A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.* Jesus is saying that through faith in Him, you are spiritually clean. You have eternal salvation! That is not something that has to be repeated over and over again. But as you walk through this world, your feet get dirty - you pick up the dirt of the world, and you need your walk to be washed so that you can enjoy fellowship with Christ. The Bible says that when you live your life with unconfessed sin, you are walking in the darkness instead of in the light. Your prayers are hindered by the sins you have not confessed. Your ability to receive, and rest in the love of God and as John said, have your joy made complete, is greatly diminished. In the same way that Jesus can say to Peter, "*you are completely clean - but you need to let me wash your feet,*" Christ can say to you, "*You are completely forgiven once and for all through faith in me, but you need to confess your sins to me each and every day so that I can go on cleansing you and so you can go on walking in fellowship with me and experiencing my presence in your life.*"

Every believer is linked up to the Lord Jesus Christ by two links: *Union* and *Communion*. Our union with Christ brings us eternal salvation. The link of union is so strong that the weight of the word cannot break it! In **John 10:27-30**, Jesus said, *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.* That is the power of your union with Christ. But there is also the link of *communion*. The link of communion is our moment-by-moment fellowship with Christ. The link of communion is conditional, any sin, if it is willfully persisted in, will break it, and the only way it can be reformed is by acknowledging and forsaking the sin that snapped it.

Conclusion

It is humbling to admit you need God's grace and to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior. But you can't know the power of that forgiveness unless you intentionally and personally receive it. And you have to make sure that you *have* received it. Don't think just because you come to church, you are a Christian, and you've really received the gift of forgiveness from God. It doesn't just grow on you like a barnacle or a beard or a few extra pounds. You have to pick it up and take it to heart personally, intentionally, and humbly. You have to very definitely turn to Christ and receive Him as *your* Savior, entrusting *your* salvation to him. Have you received forgiveness? He's offering it to you. Come to him.

And yes, It is humbling to have to confess your sins over and over again for years and years even after you first came to Christ, but that *is* what we have to do if we want to walk in the light have our joy be complete and live in unhindered fellowship with God. To walk in the light, you have to be honest with God and yourself.

It would not be Scriptural or spiritually healthy to live in constant insecurity, fearing that there is some deeply hidden sin that you cannot discover. **Psalm 139:23-24** invites us to pray for clarity. *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* So, yes, we have to be aware of our potential to excuse or overlook our sins. But we can pray for God to reveal those things to us. Sometimes friends help us if we let them. And we can *want* to know our sins.

At first, you may feel moved to confess something to God that seems small, but in so doing, you're allowing Christ to cleanse you in a fresh way for fellowship with Him. I find that once I quit making excuses and begin being honest in confession about even one sin, that Christ will often begin to show me more deeper sins to be faced. It's like the man I read about who had stolen a rope. He brought it back, but the next day he came again, this time bringing the cow he had been previously unwilling to admit had been on the end of the rope!

We would save endless time and breath and pain and joylessness if we would just keep coming quickly to Christ to be cleansed through honest confession and sincere repentance. It is to that place of humility and grace that Christ once more, lovingly and graciously, invites us as we come to observe the Lord's Supper.

Amen

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ.

God of light in whom no darkness dwells, thank you for the forgiveness of sin you offer me in Christ. In my darkened condition I could never have earned your love or satisfied your perfect righteousness through my own works or efforts. Thank you that, in my Lord and Savior Jesus you provided that perfect satisfaction for me. I receive and rest on Christ alone as my Lord and Savior. I praise you in his name, Amen

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

God of light in whom no darkness dwells, enable me to walk in the light. Help me to face my sins with humble honesty and also, at the same time, with deep assurance of your cleansing grace. The blood of Jesus, the righteous one, cleanses me of all my sin. Help me to never take that for granted. My hope and prayer is to walk in the light, knowing your presence through faith in Jesus, my joy complete and my soul at rest in him. Amen