

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Fellowship with God and Other Believers: Inseparable

*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 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. (1 John 1:6-9)*

John immediately addresses the problem of ego at the beginning of this letter; notice the repeated "If we..." Think. A believer will either focus his life and emotions on himself or on the Lord Jesus Christ. The two are mutually exclusive. You cannot possibly live life focused on both. In fact, this impossibility lies at the heart of John's words in this passage.

A man with whom I once worked made an insightful observation to describe a very self-centered person, "Never believe your own press releases." A man's opinion of himself is one of the most unreliable assessments we could ever imagine. Example; a man once told my mother-in-law that he believed himself to be the most humble man he'd ever known. The fact that he made such a claim guaranteed that his claim was false! The truly humble believer lives a life focused on God, not on himself.

John shines a very bright light into the depth of our souls in these verses. Twice he writes, "If we say..." He adds "If we walk" and "If we confess." It is almost as if John recalls Jesus' words and turns them to us, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42) We can never think rightly of ourselves unless—and until—we think rightly of Him. John presses this point to the heart.

While fellowship in the setting of a church deals with a collective body of people, it must rest on the individual spiritual state of each person in that church body. A person can be a member of a church body, attend the gatherings faithfully, and live wholly out of fellowship with them. His will be a dreadfully lonely life. Do not overlook or ignore the obvious in the passage. Fellowship with the Lord, leading to fellowship with other believers, is directly linked to our willingness to confess our sins and to find a deep and valid sense of forgiveness. Our mental state does not determine if we are born again and forgiven or not, but it clearly determines our sense of that fact and our comfort in it. The self-focused believer will likely think that such self-denial and such pervasive harmony for the Lord is impossible in any given church. In this he reveals far more about himself than about that body of people. He knows that such fellowship is impossible with him, so he imposes his own sin onto all other

believers. He is so self-consumed that he would never so submit or work in harmony with others.

An anecdotal observation, but one that confirms the passage; it has been my observation that people who put themselves out of fellowship with both the Lord and other believers have the greatest difficulty confronting and confessing their own sins. Most often they reject any suggestion that they have sinned in anything they do and work to point the "Blame" finger toward others.

John's theme in this context is fellowship, not new birth. When he writes about the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all sin in this passage, he uses a present tense verb, not a past tense verb. When Paul wrote of our deliverance from the eternal consequences of sin, he used a past tense verb; "...which delivered us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:10) Our deliverance from the eternal consequences of our sins is a completed past event. Our conscious and emotional sense of our cleansing is an ever present event and shall be so as long as we live in this world. John's present tense verb focuses this passage and context on the experience or mental state of forgiveness that we may enjoy or wholly lose by our present disposition toward the Lord and toward other believers. (2 Peter 1:8-9)

When a whole church body of believers comes together with this wholesome and all-encompassing sense of regard toward each other instead of self, the experience is life-changing and glorious. It is this God-glorifying experience that John directs us to seek in our study passage.

*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.* What we say and how we live must be linked together. We can't live with one foot in the world of self and the other in the kingdom of God, and experience any fellowship whatever, either with the Lord or with His people. A word of caution; if we follow this passage, the believer who lives out of true fellowship with other believers is in fact also living out of fellowship with the Lord. A sobering thought, but true.

This idea of living or walking in light or in darkness lies at the heart of John's teaching. While light and darkness often in Scripture serve as

symbols of a person's general moral and spiritual conduct, John uses the analogy with a tighter focus.

*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:9-11)*

Remember the man who said he was the humblest man he ever knew. Have you ever encountered a believer who thinks—perhaps even says or acts out the self-promoting idea—that he is the most spiritual and enlightened believer in his church? It never fails. With this self-focused and self-promoting attitude you will also see the raw acting out of disdain toward other believers, never of love and respect toward them. Such a person may say he loves the brotherhood of the church, but his words and actions disprove his claim. In both verbs, love and hate, Scripture uses these words consistently to refer to how people act, not where their emotions lie. We may say as many times as we wish that we love our church family, but that same family will judge our true heart toward them by our actions, not by our words alone. Don't say you love the brothers and sisters and treat them with angry contempt when they dare disagree with you if you expect them to believe that you love them. They will judge your love by your actions, not merely by your verbal claim of love.

For John, the message that the Holy Spirit poured into his words, darkness in this context and letter refers as much, perhaps more, to how we regard our brothers and sisters in the faith than to our moral conduct. It is quite possible to avoid the major moral snares of Satan, but yet fall prey to the great deceiver's favorite snare, pride and a contentious spirit toward other children of God. Living in darkness or living in the light in this context has everything to do with how we regard our brothers and sisters in the faith.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* Satan loves to deceive, to dupe believers into thinking in fantasy and not soberly according to the Lord's ways. It is quite likely in this context that the self-deception of which John writes has far more to do with how we regard—and actively treat—our brothers and sisters in the faith than with how we avoid the major moral snares of the devil, though Scripture commands that we control both. Many of the Jewish people whom Jesus confronted were quite religious. No doubt some of them were also hypocrites and immoral, as with the men who charged the woman caught in the act of adultery. (John 8:1-11) However, no doubt many first century Jews were highly and profoundly moral in terms of the moral teachings of the Ten Commandments. Their

deficiency that brought Jesus' rebuke against them had to do with their low and contemptuous attitude toward other believers coupled with the inflated regard for themselves. It is no accident that the very next verse following the account of Jesus' rebuke of the Jews regarding the woman taken in adultery deals with the same truth that we are studying.

*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)*

If we need to see the image of a self-deceived person, we need look only to the Jews who gathered around this poor woman with scowling, self-righteous looks, stones in hand ready to hurl them at her. Jesus rebuked them so sharply that they laid down their stones and quietly walked away. He has not changed; He does the same now.

Fellowship never occurs privately with self alone. It always involves someone else. No, the narcissistic person cannot have fellowship with "Me, myself, and I." This self-worship may be the greatest self-deception associated with John's point that we deceive ourselves if we do not practice our words. While you may hear someone who claims to be a believer say that he doesn't really need church, that he can worship God just as effectively by himself as in a church, Scripture does not at all agree. According to John's inspired teaching, fellowship is a "Stair-step" progression. When we believe the truth of Scripture's teachings (Not our private interpretation or fantasy), we begin by developing fellowship with the Lord. However, John doesn't stop the process at that point. Fellowship with the Lord based on Scripture's teachings inevitably leads the believer to fellowship with other believers, never to an isolated hermit's existence. It is for this reason that I believe that failure to grow and to maintain fellowship with other believers always indicates a graver failure to develop and to maintain fellowship with the Lord.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Think of the common prideful attitude of many modern believers, "I'll confess my sins to the Lord when I get ready, but I'll never confess them to you." This person clearly fails to understand that most behaviors listed in Scripture as sins involve another person. So you sin against the Lord and another person, often another believer, but you refuse to confess your sin to that believer? What was the consistent mark of those who approached John the baptist for baptism? They confessed their sins! And they believed in Jesus. Believing in Jesus is crucial to our spiritual health, but so is confessing to our brothers and sisters when we sin against them.

Think of just one example, anger. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus sternly warned the disciples against being angry with your brother or sister.

When you voice angry words at your brothers or sisters, should you pretend that you did nothing wrong? Or should you go to them and confess your sin and ask their forgiveness? Think of this passage in conjunction with our study passage. You can't possibly hold fellowship with the Lord so long as you refuse to restore fellowship with that offended brother or sister. Many years ago I witnessed a beautiful example of this truth. Some church people had gotten crossways and broke fellowship with each other. They eventually ended up at the same church meeting, a meeting where the Lord powerfully poured out His grace on the preaching and flooded the real fellowship of His mercy on the meeting. After the close of the service, touched deeply by the power of grace, the more legalistic and contentious of the two men approached his former friend, "How did we ever allow this confusion to happen? Do you think there is any way we could possibly restore what we once enjoyed?" The other fellow, fighting back the tears, opened the hymnal that he was holding, and replied, "Would it be asking too much to ask that we simply join together to sing one of these old hymns?" Fellowship when the Lord is at work is not difficult or complicated. It is far simpler than we could imagine. That, my friends, is the result of the Lord's ever-present cleansing when we confess our sins to each other and to the Lord, and live in fellowship with the Lord. He makes fellowship as easy and as natural as breathing your next breath of air.

A simple note. Occasionally misguided believers will claim that they can so reform their lives as to wholly live above sin, never to sin again. If you read this whole chapter, John sternly confronts and refutes the idea. Even in this simple verse, he also refutes it. If we are living above sin, we would have no sins to confess, and Jesus' blood would have no sins to cleanse!

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
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