



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: 1 John 1:5-10*

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. 6 If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. 7 If we walk in the light as he himself 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 are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous 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.

### I. Introduction

A. John is addressing issues in the church – no church without issues

B. John is writing to believers within the church – 1 John 5:13

13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

C. Purpose of 1 John vs. the Gospel

1. The Gospel seeks to lead to belief in Jesus

2. The epistles seek to give assurance of eternal life based on belief and practice

- “The Gospel seeks to lead to belief in Jesus (see Jn. 20:31) ... The Gospel does this through giving a narrative of the life of Jesus... By contrast... 1 John was written primarily to reinforce the assurance of the readers in the wake of the departure of the secessionists & its subject matter focuses on issues of assurance & current belief & practice in the Christian community.” [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p. 266]

- “The stated purpose of 1 John [is] ‘I’ve written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.’ (1 Jn. 5:13). This verse is clearly written

to encourage Christians; by the contrasting form of its expression, Jn. 20:30-31 sounds evangelistic... The first purpose clause of 20:31 should be rendered 'that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus'." [DA. Carson, Intro. to the NT, p. 270]

- "The purpose of 1 John may... be summarized as primarily an appeal to the faithful: to strengthen the faith & resolve of true believers in the Johannine community by encouraging them to maintain the apostolic gospel." [Stephen Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. xxviii]

D. John corrects their misunderstanding of the gospel

1. We must believe, unbelief in John's gospel is the unique sin

2. However, belief does not make us sinless.

- Raymond "Brown argues that... to the secessionists [who left], the only sin was refusing to believe in Jesus... [They] interpreted passages such as Jn. 3:18 & 5:24 to mean that the believer is already judged & already has eternal life... Through believing, they claimed they had an intimacy with God to the point of being sinless or perfect." [Paul Trebilco, Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius, p. 276]

3. It is Jesus' death (blood), which is the atonement for our sins that gives us forgiveness and cleansing from sin. (more on this next week)

## II. The nature of God: v. 5

*1 John 1:5 "This is the message we have heard from him & declare to you: God is light, & there is absolutely no darkness in him."*

A. John's message not based on personal authority; he's conveying God's message

- "John... understands his authority to be that of passing onto others what he first heard from Jesus. ...He writes, 'This is the message we have heard from him & declare to you: God is light, & there is absolutely no darkness in him.' (1:5). This is the message that John received from Jesus, & it is also what he passes on to everyone else. Robert Yarborough comments, 'John speaks of the message that he & other apostles were commissioned to convey to those who did not have direct experience of Christ that the Twelve did.' He [John] ... does not speak from himself or ever claim any special authority for himself. John only appeals to the authority of Jesus' own teachings & testifies to them as a witness. This means that...disobedience to these teachings is not disobedience to John so much as a disobedience to Jesus: 'If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make Him a liar, & His word is not in us.' (1:10). The denial of sin is principally a denial of Jesus & not a denial of the apostles as Jesus' witnesses in the world." [Steven Nemes, Theological Authority in the Church, p. 80]

B. Knowing eternal life includes knowing the nature of God

C. The nature of God is light

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

- "The primary implication of John's introductory statement about God is that, if God is light, then God himself by virtue of his being and character defines the moral standard of human life." Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 65

- "Both in [these letters] and in John's gospel, the moral dimension of the metaphor is clear (John 11:10; 12:35, 36, 46). Jesus expected his followers to be "children of light" (12:36), children who have been given life by the Father and who therefore reflect the moral attributes of their Father. To be in darkness is to be without the light, which results in evil thoughts and behaviors that cannot claim fellowship with Jesus Christ or the Father." Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 65

- "'God is light'. ...John made this statement against certain professing Christians who had lost touch with moral realities and were claiming that nothing they did was sin. The force of John's words is brought out by the next clause, 'and in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). Light means

holiness and purity, as measured by God's law; darkness means moral perversity and unrighteousness, as measured by the same law (see 1 Jn 2:7-11; 3:1). John's point is that only those who 'walk in the light,' seeking to be like God in holiness and righteousness of life, and eschewing everything inconsistent with this, enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son; those who 'walk in the darkness,' whatever they may claim for themselves, are strangers to this relationship (1 Jn 1:6-7)." J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 121-122

### III. Correcting the misunderstanding regarding sin

- "In 1:6-10 we meet three conditional sentences all introduced in a similar way (v. 6: "If we claim to have fellowship with him..."; v. 8: "If we claim to be without sin..."; v. 10: "If we claim we have not sinned..."), which reflect the author's understanding of the claims of the secessionists. In setting out the nature of these claims (and his counterhypotheses), the author not only addresses the false teaching of his opponents but also reveals what he means by saying that "God is light; in him is no darkness at all.'" Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, p. 67
- "The "if we say..." clauses need not be taken as direct quotes from the opponents, but may be understood as ideas that needed correction, regardless of their origin." Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 68

#### A. First claim (v. 6)

6 If we say, "We have fellowship with him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

- "It is only God himself, the creator and sustainer of all life, who can authoritatively define moral truth. To know God is therefore to know truth about how to live in the way that he intends. It is only within a life of obedience to God's moral truth that a relationship with God, what John calls fellowship, can be sustained." Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 65
- "John may be paraphrasing what some were falsely claiming. If God is light (v. 5), then those who walk in darkness are not walking with God, no matter what they say." ESV Study Bible
- "The challenge John puts before his readers goes beyond believing the truth. In our society, truth is a cognitive concept, something that one believes or that can be proven or falsified. John certainly emphasizes believing the truth, but truth for him goes beyond the cognitive to the way life is lived. Truth is something that should not merely have our intellectual assent but is something that believers in Christ do. If truth is the reality that Jesus has revealed, then it demands those who believe in him live according to that truth (1 Joh 1:6; 2 John 4; 3 John 4)." Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 69

#### B. Counter argument (v. 7)

7 If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

- "What it actually means to "walk in the light" and to "walk in the darkness" is not explained in this letter. Probably the best explanation of what it means is to be found in the Fourth Gospel: 9 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it,[a] so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God." (John 3:19-21). This suggests that "walking in the light" involves a willingness to be open toward God and his revelation in Christ, while "walking in the darkness" involves a refusal to do this." Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, p. 68

##### 1. Walking in the light

- "Denotes a life characterized by truth and holiness and a willingness to be open to God and his revelation, resulting in fellowship with one another and with God." NIV Zondervan Study Bible

##### 2. Results of walking in the light

###### a. We have fellowship with one another

- "Surprisingly, John does not say that by walking in the light one achieves fellowship with God, which

might be expected to follow from v. 6,...The more unexpected statement that mentions fellowship with “one another” introduces the thought that fellowship with God and fellowship in the Christian community are intimately related. Only when believers are walking in the light can we have fellowship with God, a fellowship that is embodied as fellowship with one another.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 68

b. The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin

- “By implication, sin and walking in the darkness are associated, but cleansing from sin is associated with walking in the light. Uncleansed sin breaks fellowship with one another and with God.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 70

- “One lesson that may be learned from this second consequence is that walking in the light does not mean that those who do so never sin, but that they do not seek to hide that fact from God.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 70

- “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses those who walk in the light of God’s moral truth and have fellowship with one another. “The blood of Jesus” refers to his death on the cross and argues against those who claim that it is Jesus’ ethical teachings that form the heart of the Christian gospel. To walk in the light means to be cleansed from sin. People don’t need just more good ethical instruction; rather, they need purification from all that separates them from the presence and purposes of God. Christ’s atonement for sin achieves a reconciliation with God that restores fellowship.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 70

- “God’s unique love was seen not so much in the coming as in the dying of his Son, whom he ‘sent... as an atoning sacrifice for our sins’ and whose ‘blood...purifies us from every sin’.” John R. W. Stott, The Cross of Christ, p. 37

C. Second claim (v. 8)

8 If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

- “What the secessionists were claiming was, not that they were by nature free from the sin principle, but that they were not guilty of committing sins, by which they probably meant they had not sinned since they came to know God and experienced the anointing.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 71

- “Those who seceded from the community were not claiming to have a sinless nature but probably claiming that they had not actually sinned since coming to know God.” NIV Zondervan Study Bible

- “The issue of self-deception regarding sin in one’s Christian life is perennial. Fallen human nature leads us to rationalize our sin and thereby deny it. Vigilance all throughout life is called for, with each decision to speak or act. How many ways are there to deny sin? One might claim perfection in Christ. One might reason that anything a Christian does must be okay. Or one might simply define what one does as not sin – a phenomenon increasingly seen in societies where what is legal is not necessarily morally righteous as God defines it.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 70

- “John is addressing believing Christians, and yet he explains that to deny one’s sin is itself an act of darkness. The truth cannot be in those who deny their sin, because by definition a Christian is one who lives by the truth that Jesus died to cleanse their sin.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 71

D. Counter argument (v. 9)

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1. Authentic Christians confess their sins

- “The author projects a situation in which people acknowledge their sins in a continuous way. He portrays authentic Christian living as involving honest acknowledgment of one’s sins.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 73

- “The alternative to denying one’s sin is to confess it. Denying one’s sin is inconsistent with walking in the light, which entails the recognition of sin and a willingness to confess it.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 71

## 2. The results – forgiveness and cleansing

- “The efficacy of confession of sin lies not in the confessor but in the faithfulness and righteousness of God, whose Son’s blood was shed for this very purpose (v.7).” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 71
- “Because of God’s character and his faithfulness to his promises that Christ fulfilled, cleansing from confessed sin is assured. Clearly, John teaches that walking in the light requires ongoing cleansing from sin in order to maintain fellowship with God, a fellowship that cannot be sustained if one concludes for whatever reason that one does not have sin and consequently that cleansing is no longer needed.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 71
- “Here the author sets out two aspects of God’s response to people who confess their sins: God forgives their sins, and he purifies them from all unrighteousness. God’s forgiveness means that he no longer holds people’s sins against them; he cancels their “debt” (cf. Matt. 6:9-15; 18:21-35). God’s purifying them “from all unrighteousness” (cf. 1:7, “purifies us from all sin”) means he removes the defilement that their sins had produced. The metaphor of defilement also denotes the removal of the impediment to fellowship with God through forgiveness of sins.” Colin G. Kruse, The Letters of John, p. 74
- “Honest acknowledgement of one’s sins is a prerequisite for forgiveness.” NIV Zondervan Study Bible

## 3. How and what do we confess?

- a. Specific things that we are aware of when we are in the light
  - b. Thoughts – we confess to God
  - c. Actions against others if they are aware or are affected
  - d. Do not need a priest to confess to
4. Believing in God’s faithfulness to forgive and cleanse
    - a. Not needing penance or to be sorry for a week
    - b. Believing Christ’s death was good enough

## E. Third claim (v. 10) – summary of vv. 6-9

10 If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- “The perfect tense of the verb “have sinned” suggests a persistent state of denial of sin in the past that has led to the present state, rather than an individual and temporary instance. It may hint that some of John’s readers were reconsidering whether atonement really is at the heart of the Christian gospel. If there was a way they could understand themselves to have never sinned either before their Christian conversion or after, the focus of their “gospel” might shift away from the cross and, perhaps, onto Jesus’ teaching or life example (as in fact has happened in liberal Protestantism). When sin becomes passé, atonement is unnecessary.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 72
- “[Verse 10] Basically restates what is found in v. 8 but indicates that such a claim involves more than self-deception. It implies also that God is a liar because he regards all people as sinners, for otherwise he would not have sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (2:2; 4:10).” NIV Zondervan Study Bible

## III. Conclusion:

A. God’s nature and being define the moral standard for human life

B. Jesus’ death for our atonement is central to having fellowship with God – this is the heart of the gospel

C. To deny the reality of sin in general or the sin in one’s own life is in essence to consider God a liar, thus destroying relationship with God.

- “God sent his Son into history to die the atoning death that cleanses sin and restores fellowship with

God, and so any claim that denies sin implicitly calls God a liar and is itself the essence of sin.” Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2 & 3 John, p. 60