



**“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” I John 1:9.**

## **Fellowship Maintained**

**Lesson Aim:** To see that fellowship is dependent upon the continual cleansing by the blood of Christ.

**L283. Date:** August 1971. **Text:** I John 11:10.

**Topic:** Confession: Of Sin; Fellowship: With God; Sin: Confession of.

INTRODUCTION—“What is fellowship?” the teacher enquired of her Sunday school class. Little Johnny answered, “I guess it is two fellows in the same ship.” And the lad expressed a fact of wisdom beyond his years.

Fellowship means joint participation between two or more and suggests a unity of spirit in the common project. It is a relationship existing between Christians which is based upon a likeness of nature (since each is a child of God with the divine nature within) that transcends external and temporary differences. In this sense, true fellowship can exist only between born-again believers in Jesus Christ.

Today's study deals with this blessed doctrine of Christian fellowship. Its aim is “to see that fellowship is dependent upon the continual cleansing by the blood of Christ.”

True fellowship is both inclusive and exclusive. It includes all those who are born again. Whether we are “Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female,” we are all one in Christ Jesus, Galatians 3:28. Christian fellowship is not based on sex, age, culture, race, nationality, nor other external distinctions but on relationship to Jesus Christ. Therefore it includes all born-again believers, 1 Corinthians 1:9.

But real Christian fellowship is also exclusive. It shares no common nature with any evil thing. “. . . **For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness. . .**” II Corinthians 6:14. The Scripture admonishes,

**“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,”** Ephesians 5:11. To have fellowship with God excludes the things of sin. To have fellowship with sin excludes the fellowship of God. This is why the cleansing by the blood of Christ is necessary to fellowship with God; our sins must be taken away to share a mutual spirit with Him. Now, asking God to teach us by His Spirit, let us turn to an exposition of the Lesson Text—I John 1:1-10.

## EXPOSITION

### I. ASSURANCE AND FELLOWSHIP, 1-3a

The lesson text deals first with the basis of our fellowship in Christ. It is concerned with the message of God which opens the door to divine fellowship. At this point there is an emphasis on the message of God for the truth of this message is the foundation of all Christian fellowship.

1. God's message is an assured message, verse 1. God has given a revelation of the Word of Life. According to John 1:1-18 that Word was personalized in Jesus Christ. The eternal Word became the incarnate Word that we might be saved. He who is eternally the Son of God came to earth as a man to reveal God to men.

This truth is positive and true. The disciples testified, “We have heard . . . we have seen with our eyes . . . we have gazed upon Him . . . our hands have handled Him . . . we have seen and heard and declare . . .” verses 1-3. The Apostle John is saying, “You can trust the message we bear to be true. We have known God in Jesus Christ by sight, sound and feeling.”

Our fellowship in Christ is not based on vague and misty imaginations of men. God made Himself tangible, visible, audible, and sensible to men in the person of Jesus Christ. And upon this revelation we have assurance.

2. God's message is a clearly revealed message, verse 2. Self-revelation is the term to describe it. Man did not find God by searching for Him. God “manifested” himself. This was His own act by which He made Himself clear and evident, plainly revealing to men what He is like. Christianity is more than a theory of religion. It is the revelation of a Person and an entering into personal relationship with that divine Person. It is not acceptance of a doctrine. It is personal acquaintance with a Person. It is more than a temporary and fleeting emotional experience. It is a continual state of harmony and peace and mutual interest between God and the Christian through Jesus Christ.

As if to underscore what is said in verse one, repeated in verse two, it is

once more stated in verse 3. John places a parenthesis to day, “Yes, what I said above is really true. Jesus Christ, the Son of God actually manifested Himself so that we saw and understood Him.” What grace! How God must love men.

3. God's message is a proclaimed message, verse 3. Verses 1-3 is a long and complicated sentence. The main verb of the sentence is not until we come to verse 3. That verb is “declare.” Others met God in Jesus Christ and entered into personal fellowship with Him. In Jesus Christ, I have met God, too. Others have borne witness of their experience in Him. This assures me that my experience is not unique or deceptive. What I have experienced, others have experienced.

The message came through many generations and across many miles from Palestine to come to my ears and into my heart. It must not stop with me. As those first knew the joy of divine fellowship bore testimony of their experience, so must you and I bear testimony, too. God's message must continue to be a proclaimed message that multitudes more may be assured of their relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

## II. PERSONS AND FELLOWSHIP, 3b-4.

Consider next the areas of Christian fellowship. These areas are two fold with a blessed consequence following upon them. John declares that fellow believers have fellowship “with us” (with one another) and “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

1. Fellowship is enjoyed with fellow believers, verse 3b. Those who share the common experience of eternal life are bound together in an affection which is more enduring than blood relationships! It finds expression in understanding, sympathy, helpfulness, and kindred feelings which one would never know otherwise.

This fellowship between believers is best seen in the congregation of the church. (For a member to dislike another member is a denial of this fellowship.) As members of the same body, with mutual care each for the other, they manifest the harmony and peace put in the heart by the Spirit of God. Thus the believer is able to love even the unlovely. Do you consciously enjoy the fellowship of fellow believers? If not, why not?

2. Fellowship is enjoyed with God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son, verse 3c. Fellowship with God begins in the redemptive experience. Before that man in his sins is an enemy and at enmity with God, Romans 5:10. But something happens when a person is saved. He becomes a New Creation in Christ Jesus, II Corinthians 5:17! Only then is fellowship with God possible.

Fellowship is based on regeneration.

3. Fellowship with God and men brings great joy, verse 4. Real joy is the result of one internal condition not his outward circumstances. Such a joy is possible in a world ruled by evil and filled with trials. It is not a frame of mind but a condition of heart.

For this reason the Bible has many references to the believer's joy. Paul wrote of believers rejoicing in the Lord always, Philippians 4:4. The Psalmist testified that in the presence of God there is fullness of joy, Psalm 16:11b. Jesus said His teachings were for the purpose of bringing joy to believers: **“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full,”** John 15:11.

Do you experience day by day the deep joy of knowing Jesus? Do you rejoice in spirit when you share fellowship with your fellow Christians? This is your birthright as a believer in Jesus. Don't let Satan rob you of that joy.

### III. CONDUCT AND FELLOWSHIP, 5-7.

1. Our conduct must be based on the nature of God, verse 5. What is God like? Whatever He is like determines what we must be like if we would enjoy fellowship with Him. **“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”** Amos 3:3. John answers the question thus, **“God is light and in him is no darkness at all.”** In Biblical symbolism, light is the symbol of righteousness and dark is the symbol of unrighteousness. The Bible testifies, **“God is holy and there is not the slightest trace of sin or unholiness in Him.”** That is what we must be to enjoy His fellowship!

The Bible makes it clear that in salvation the believers become **“children of light,”** I Thessalonians 5:5. This is because the very nature of God (Who is light) dwells in them, II Peter 1:4.

2. Our conduct must be, in accord with the way of light, verses 6-7a. **“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. . .”**

There it is concisely stated. Fellowship with God is maintained only by purity of heart and hands. No wonder the Apostle Paul admonishes, **“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the- Lord: walk as children of light,”** Ephesians 5:8.

What is a walk in darkness? It is a manner of life which is outside the Word of God (I John 2:4), outside the way of God (John 14:6), and outside the will of God, (II Corinthians 6:14-17)

The proof of a man's professed fellowship with God is not in his words,

but in his walk—his manner of life. Claiming fellowship with God involves walking in the light of God. How does your life measure up to this standard? Could this be the reason why so many believers are not conscious of personal fellowship with God and their Christian brethren?

3. Our conduct needs to be cleansed over and over in order to maintain this fellowship with God and other believers, verse 7b. Observe that the reference here is to the cleansing of believers, not the salvation of sinners. The sinner is cleansed once-for-all when he comes to Jesus and is born again. But daily walk in this world affords dangers of defilement. So the believer needs continual cleansing in order to maintain unbroken fellowship.

The city of Damascus has a river flowing through its midst. In ancient times the city served a dual purpose. Near its source it afforded drinking water for the city. As it passed through the city, however, it was used as a convenient sanitation device and the garbage from the city was thrown into it to be swept away. Its constant flow was strong enough to carry away the refuse of the city and keep it clean.

Just so, the blood of Christ provides both the water of life and the water of cleansing to the believer. It flows into the believer's soul to bring eternal life. Then it becomes in him an artesian well of water which flows unceasingly to keep his life clean and pure. Thus fellowship with God is unbroken.

Have you trained yourself to take advantage of this continual cleansing? When the Holy Spirit identifies a sin in your life confess it that very moment, ask for forgiveness, and go on with the defilement cleansed away. Thus fellowship with God will remain pure and fresh every day.

#### IV. CONFESSION AND FELLOWSHIP, 8-10.

The preceding comments indicate the importance of confession to forgiveness and cleansing, as well as the importance of cleansing to fellowship. In verse 8-10, John points out that the confession of sin must be made in two areas for forgiveness to be realized and enjoyed.

1. Admit your sin to your self, verses 8, 10. Here are two false claims often made by men. The first is the claim that one's sins do not affect his relationship to God and therefore that one has no sin to confess, verse 8. This takes the popular form today of the denial of the reality of sin. They excuse sin as a mistake and deny its seriousness. John says that such ideas are mere self deception and that all who hold this idea have “no truth in them.” People who talk like this are out of touch with God, He who lives near God readily sees and admits his defilement,

The second false claim, expressed in verse 10, is that one has not sinned at all and so has no need for forgiveness. This is very serious. People who make such a claim deny the very Word of God. Read Romans 3:9-23 noting the repeated “all . . . all . . . all” as the Bible points out the universal defilement of sin among humans. Even if one denies his sin, **“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief. . .”** Romans 11:32. And He must be satisfied concerning the sin question.

The first step in cleansing, therefore, is for each person to admit to himself a personal need for cleansing.

2. Confess to God your sin and ask for His cleansing, verse 9. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** What a blessed, blessed promise!

This verse expresses a condition (“If we confess our sins”), an assurance (“He is faithful and just”), and a promise (“to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”). Greater words of grace than these will never be spoken.

God calls for confession, not enumeration, of our sins. You do not have to name each individual sin for which you need forgiveness. Just confess to God that you have sinned, are sorry for it, and ask for His forgiveness. Remember, too, that confession is made in private before God, not to any person on earth unless you seek forgiveness for a wrong against that person. That is our part, confession. God's part is forgiveness.

How can we be sure God forgives when we confess? John answers, “He is faithful and just. . .” To say God is faithful means He is honest, true, and worthy of trust. He is always dependable. To say God is just means He is right, fair, always doing the right thing.

John is saying, therefore, “If we freely admit that we have sinned, God is upright and can be depended on to forgive us our sins, and purify us from everything wrong.” This is how fellowship with God is maintained!

**CONCLUSION** — God is ready to enter into personal fellowship with any person who will come and receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ. If a person reads these words that has never trusted Jesus as personal Savior, this promise is to you. If some believer reads who has lost the joys of salvation and fellowship with the Father, this promise is to you. God loves you and wants to share your life in blessed fellowship. Seek Him today and He will be found.

**“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy,”** Proverbs 28:13

## QUESTIONS

1. What is fellowship?
2. What is Christian fellowship?
3. How is conversion related to this fellowship?
4. Why is daily cleansing necessary to this fellowship?
5. How does conversion bring fellowship with other believers?
6. What does it mean to “walk in the light”?
7. Why is daily cleansing needed by the believer?
8. How can we be sure God forgives when we confess?
9. What three elements are mentioned in I John 1:9?
10. How has this study helped you personally?