

1 John 1:5-2:2

INTRODUCTION: Did you know that according to a Gallup Poll 74% of Americans claim to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ.

If 74% of Americans are saved, born again, or walking the light then how come the moral standards of our country is on decline like never before?

How can that be?

For many years polls have shown that a very high percentage of Americans have claimed to be born again.

So-called “seeker” churches are thriving, with thousands flocking into their huge auditoriums each week. You would think from the numbers that Christianity is alive and well in the United States.

But in his booklet, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church* [Banner of Truth], David Wells reports that, pollsters added a few questions to, “Are you born again?”

→ They also asked, “Do you go to church with some regularity, do you pray with some regularity, and do you have some minimal structure of formal Christian belief?”

The number claiming to be born again dropped to 8 percent.

→ Wells goes on to speculate, based on research, that if you added a few more basic questions (such as, “Are you regenerate?”) the

numbers would drop to one or two percent. (I highly recommend Wells' books, *No Place for Truth*; *God in the Wasteland*; and, *Losing Our Virtue* [all Eerdmans].)

The sad reality is that there are many people today to claim to be born again, or to use John's terms, "walk in the light" or "have fellowship with Him" but in reality when you look closer they are deceiving themselves.

Many claim to have fellowship with God but they really do not.

Many claim to be "walking in the light" and in reality they are walking in darkness.

Notice: 1 John 1:5-6

→ Three times in these verse we see the expression, "If we say..." v. 6, 8, 10.

✂ In other words there are many people making false claims. They might say one thing but their lives reveal something opposite of what they claim.

v. 8 - John says there are some that are deceiving themselves and in actuality the truth is not in them.

Again that is an expression that is synonymous with salvation.

A true believer is someone who has the truth in them, they have fellowship with God, they walk in the light.

~~John is not writing this letter to be critical of people who make such claims.~~

He is writing this letter because he wants everyone to experience true fellowship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Notice 1:3-4

John's Purpose is Certainty!

John wants you to be certain about your relationship to God. He wants you to be certain about your fellowship with God.

1 John is a certain word in an uncertain age.

And the first certainty that John affirmed for us in the opening four verses was the certainty of the incarnation, the certainty of God in flesh, the living word of life, the manifest eternal life which was with the Father and manifested to us, none other than Jesus Christ.

The first certainty then is the coming into the world of the Son of God.

The second certainty that John addresses himself to is this matter of the certainty of salvation.

He is certain that God in the flesh came. He saw Him, he heard Him his hands handled Him.

Then it becomes a matter of are we certain since we know that God did come into the world in human flesh in the form of Jesus Christ,

are we certain of our salvation in Him?

- So the matter of certainty with regard to salvation becomes the theme of the rest of the epistle, although he will again on several occasions cycle back through the certainty concerning Christ.

The rest of the epistle spends most of its time dealing with certain proofs of salvation **that we are actually in Christ and the beneficiaries of the incarnation.**

John wants to make sure that you are experiencing real fellowship with God.

Many Claim to Have Fellowship With God But Don't

- Many people say they have fellowship with God but they really do not!

It is easy to say you have fellowship with God.

ILLUSTRATION: Some times when I ask people about their salvation, they will say things like, "Me and the man upstairs are fine. We are ok with each other."

John makes it clear that fellowship with God is not a matter of being chummy with your good buddy in the sky!

He asserts that God is absolutely holy.

- To have genuine fellowship with the holy God, we must walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light.

It's easy to *claim* to have fellowship with Him, but to be mistaken or deceived.

- The false teachers were claiming to have fellowship with God, but their claims were false.

There was in John's day, as there is today, the peril of profession, the danger of claiming to know God, but of being deceived.

So John is dealing with this one issue: "What does it mean to have fellowship with God?"

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE: I want you to notice with me three marks of a person that has real fellowship with God.

A person who has real fellowship with God:

I. Recognizes the Holiness of God. 1:5

Notice v. 5

Notice two things about this verse.

A. The Declaration: *It Begins With God.*

- Notice that in this verse John starts with an authoritative revelation of God to us.
- John is not sharing with us his opinion or speculations about what he thinks God might be like.

- He doesn't throw out an idea and suggest that his readers discuss it among themselves.

John is very straightforward.

v. 5 - "This then is the message that we have heard from him and declare unto you..."

- John is saying we heard this directly from Jesus Himself and now I am declaring it to you...
- It was not a suggestion.
- It was not a discussion point
- IT WAS AN AUTHORITATIVE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM JESUS TO US!

It begins with a revelation of who God is!

In order to have fellowship with God it must begin with God not us!

ILLUSTRATION: Stephen Cole wrote, "John does not begin with his hearers felt needs. He doesn't discuss where they may be hurting, or bring up how this message will help them have a happy family life or a successful personal life. Rather, John begins with God and he brings us face to face, not with God's love, but with His holiness."

ARGUMENT: Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this point (*Fellowship With God* [Crossway Books], p. 100), that we must *always start with God*.

He argues that our main problem is our self-centeredness, and so we come to the Christian faith looking to have our needs met. I'm not happy; can God make me happy?

- I'm looking for something that I don't have; can God give it to me?

How can Christianity help me with my problems and needs? But to approach the Christian faith in that manner is to cater to our main problem, which is self!

QUOTE: Lloyd-Jones says (p. 101), "The first answer of the gospel can always, in effect, be put in this way: 'Forget yourself and contemplate God.'"

He adds (p. 102), "The way to be delivered from self-centeredness is to stand in the presence of God."

ARGUMENT: The entire church growth movement, including one of its most famous leaders, blatantly contradicts this.

- Robert Schuller, in his heretical book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* ([Word], p. 64), argues that classical theology "erred in its insistence that theology be 'God-centered,' not 'man-centered.'"
- So he calls for a new Reformation that puts man, not God, at the center!

Following his lead, other church growth leaders have started with the "religious consumer."

They have gone to people with the question, "What would you like

in a church? What would get you to come back and try the church again?"

- People have responded, "We'd like a church that is a happy, upbeat place. We don't want to hear about sin or a holy God who threatens sinners with His wrath."
- We want help on how to have happy families, how to be successful in reaching our full potential, and how to recover from divorce, drug addiction, and sexual addictions.
- We don't want sermons that make us uncomfortable.
- Give us more drama and less preaching. In fact, don't preach at us; share with us. Tell more stories and jokes.
- Don't bring up controversial issues. Make it positive."
- So, the church marketers go back to the drawing board and re-design the church to meet the felt needs of the consumer.
- The result is amazing growth.

But, have people come face to face with the living God?

John says, first, to have fellowship with God, we must begin with God and His authoritative revelation of Himself, not with ourselves.

A. The Declaration: It Begins With God

B. The Revelation: *God is Light*

Notice v. 5 - "God is light..."

What does John mean when he says God is light?

EXPLANATION: In Scripture light is used as a metaphor to speak of many things.

1. Physically – It can refer to the glory of God.

When God made a physical appearance in the OT it was always in some great light called the Shekinah Glory.

The Bible says that God dwells in unapproachable light.

2. Intellectually – It refers to a source of knowledge or truth

Light and truth go hand in hand.

KJV Psalm 43:3 O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

KJV John 3:21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

ESV Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

KJV Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life:

3. Practically – light may speak of God's indispensability

(necessity)

Did you know light is needed for life.

➤ Science tells us everything started with light.

It is the primary source of energy in our universe.

Light is great, it is useful and it is mysterious.

Physicists have been fascinated by it and still can't figure out where it comes from. IT COMES FROM GOD!

God said "Let there be light! And there was light!"

We need light just like we need God.

ILLUSTRATION: Do you realize there is a physical disorder caused by lack of light? It is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.).

➤ It is caused by a lack of exposure to sunlight, which in turn alters a person's brain chemistry.

4. Morally – It refers to holiness

➤ I think this is John's main focus here.

When John says God is light he means God is holy.

This is indicated by the negative explanation, "in Him is no

darkness at all."

➤ Darkness meaning sin.

There is no sin in God whatsoever.

KJV Psalm 22:3 But thou *art* holy, O *thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

KJV Isaiah 6:3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.

Coming after verse 3, about having fellowship with God, you would expect John to say, "To have fellowship with God, you need to know that He loves you very much."

But, rather, he bluntly says, "God is light."

ARGUMENT: You may ask, "But why start with God's holiness? Why not start with His love, which is more inviting?"

- Because, if you don't begin with God's holiness, you will never understand God's plan of salvation through the cross of Christ.
- If God is only love, then the cross is unnecessary and meaningless.
- It is the holiness of God that makes the cross of Christ necessary.
- How else can sinful man have fellowship with a holy God. It can only happen because of what Jesus did on the Cross!

ARGUMENT: Since God is holy, His holy nature demands that sin be punished. Sin must be paid for.

— God's holiness demands that sin be punished by death.

ILLUSTRATION: That was the principle that God was teaching in the OT. When a worshipper brought an animal or a lamb to the altar what would the priest do?

He would kill that animal. The object lesson was clear a holy God punishes sin by death.

— So in order for sinful man to have fellowship with a holy God someone had to die.

— God's plan was to send His sinless Son Jesus to die for my sin and your sin so we can have fellowship with God.

God's holy wrath must be satisfied.

Notice 2:2

ILLUSTRATION: J. C. Massey told of when he was a boy growing up in the South how his mother and southern women loved their beds with white sheets and bedspreads.

— You weren't allowed to lay on your bed during the day because they didn't want the white bedspreads to be wrinkled or soiled.

That is why they made daybeds.

- One day as a boy he was playing in the mud. He was covered with mud from head to foot.
- He went into his house and walked down the hall passed his mother's bedroom and saw that beautiful white bedspread on that bed.
- He couldn't resist. He ran into his mother's room and did a swan dive into his mother's bed and rolled around on that white bed.
- He said, his Mother came down the hall saw him, grabbed a thick belt and she walked into that room as angry as he had ever seen her.
- He knew judgment was about to fall upon. She raised her hand up and was about to lay some strips on him.
- Suddenly his older brother came from out of nowhere and laid across his brother. He said, "Go ahead momma let him have it."
- He said, "She was so angry she began to lay strips on the back of my brother. Those stripes were meant for me."

He bore the wrath of my mother that was meant for me. He took my punishment!

- God loves pure white holiness! Our muddy sins anger the holiness of God.
- We were sinners, we deserved the stripes because it was our dirt and defilement that angered a holy God!

But on the cross Jesus took our stripes. The wrath that was kindled against us fell upon Christ.

By His stripes we were healed!

- God's Holiness was satisfied by the righteousness of Christ.
- God's wrath was satisfied because sin was punished. Christ bore the punishment.
- God's Love was satisfied because we were not punished.

Salvation is a gift paid for by the suffering and death of Christ.

Now we can have fellowship with God because of the cross of Christ!

A person who has real fellowship with God recognizes this!

A person who has real fellowship with God:

I. Recognizes the Holiness of God. 1:5

But also:

II. Realizes the Darkness of Sin. 1:6

Notice v. 6

EXPLANATION: To really understand this we must understand that John is writing against the false claims of false teachers.

- These false teachers were walking in darkness and sin and yet at the same time they claimed to have fellowship with God.
- This is the first of three false claims they make. Their claims are made by the phrase "if we say..."

Notice: 1:6, 8, 10

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: These false teachers were early Gnostics. They were called "gnostics" from the Greek word for knowledge.

- They were called this because they believe that salvation came through special knowledge.

ILLUSTRATION: One Gnostic writing, discovered at Nag Hammadi said "The key to God's kingdom is self-knowledge, and self-understanding, awakening produces life."

ILLUSTRATION: Another Gnostic Gospel [Thomas] reported that Jesus said, "Let him who seeks [knowledge] continue seeking until he finds...and he will rule over all."

- They said Jesus didn't come as a Savior from sin but a Revealer of mysteries, he came to deliver from ignorance.
- So knowledge was the key, they had to enter into a process of self-discovery.
- This is what the Gnostics called "light" and "walking in the Light" and being "children of the light."

So to these false teachers there was no such thing as sin, there was only self-discovery.

There was only seeking after knowledge.

They would plunge headlong into sin in the name of knowledge.

ILLUSTRATION: One of the early church fathers Irenaeus wrote about this in his work "*Against the Heresies*"

They . . . hold . . . that men cannot be saved until they have gone through all kinds of experience. An angel, they maintain, attends them in every one of their sinful and abominable actions, and urges them to venture on audacity and incur pollution. . . And they maintain that this is "perfect knowledge," without shrinking to rush into such actions as it is not lawful even to name.

[Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., & Coxe, A. C. 1997. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol.I : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. The apostolic fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Logos Research Systems: Oak Harbor.]

These Gnostics were claiming to be "walking in the light" but John writes and says they are walking in darkness.

Jesus said "If your light be darkness how great is that darkness."

Notice v. 8 - They were claiming that they had not sin.

Notice v. 10 - They were saying we have not sinned right after they committed a sinful action!

- By doing so they were making God a liar. God's Word says this is sin and they were saying, "its not a sin."

EXPLANATION: When John says "we" here in these verses, he is not talking about the apostles.

- He is using a "hypothetical we." He is referring to anyone who makes such false claims whoever they may be.

We could say it like this:

v. 6 - "Anyone who says they have fellowship with God and walks in darkness, they lie and do not the truth."

v. 8 - "anyone who says we have no sin, they are deceived and the truth is not in them."

v. 10 - "anyone that says they have not sinned, make him a liar and his Word is not in them."

- So this refers to anyone making these false claims but specifically John is targeting the false teachers.

- **THEY WERE COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS AND THEY WERE LEADING OTHERS ASTRAY!**

So to "walk in darkness" means to practice sin.

"To walk" points to the general tenor of one's life. It is the pattern of your life, the practice of your life.

- To walk in the light involves confessing our sins (1:9), to walk in the darkness means ignoring or denying our sins.
- It is to block out the light of God's holiness, as revealed in His Word, and to live as the world lives, making up your own ideas about right and wrong apart from God (see Eph. 4:17-19; 5:7-12).
- It is to justify your own behavior either by redefining sin, by blaming it on other factors, or by doing away with the entire concept of sin.
- John says, anyone walking in darkness does not real fellowship with God.

ARGUMENT: As I told you before, John's epistle is very circular. He will repeat this again. This is the first cycle of argument.

- But he will come back around to it again and say the same thing in a different way.

Notice: 1 John 3:4

John is saying there is a such a thing as sin. It is when we transgress God's law, His Word.

ILLUSTRATION: The Westminster Shorter Catechism says

Q. 14. *What is sin?*

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Notice: 1 John 3:6

- John is saying the same thing here.

commiteth - present indicative active verb - continual action. If you abide in him, which is the same as "having fellowship with Him" you will not continually live in sin and ignore it, which is the same as "walking in darkness."

APPLICATION: So, we need to apply this personally. If as a way of life, I am not allowing God's Word to confront my sinful thoughts, attitudes, motives, words, and deeds, I am walking in darkness.

- If I dodge my sin by blaming others or making up excuses for why I sin, I am walking in darkness.
- And for John, to walk in darkness is not describing a "carnal" Christian.
- It is describing an unbeliever, no matter how much he may claim to have fellowship with God.

To have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy. And, we must not walk in the darkness.

A person who has real fellowship with God:

- I. Recognizes the Holiness of God. 1:5
- II. Realizes the Darkness of Sin. 1:6

But also:

A person who has real fellowship with God:

III. Receives the Forgiveness of Confession 1:7-10

Notice v. 7 - "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light..."

- So if walking in darkness is practicing an unbroken pattern of sin, and ignoring the sin or explaining it away as if you have no sin....

Then

~~The~~ walking in the light is the opposite!

- It is recognizing our sin and dealing with it. It is being sensitive to sin in our lives and confessing it to God and getting His forgiveness!

EXPLANATION: Notice the contrasts to the false claims.

Verse 7 through 2:1 gives a series of contrasts to the false claims made by the false teachers.

A. The Contrast to The False Claim Made in Verse 6 is Found in Verse 7.

- While a Deceiver will make the false claim that he has fellowship with God yet walk in darkness. . . verse 6
- A true believer will walk in fellowship with God and other believers and allow the blood of Christ to continually cleanse him of his sin.

v. 7

ARGUMENT: We are saved and brought into light by the blood.

But the blood of Christ not only saves us it keeps us clean.

— The blood of Christ – in the NT is a one word term that describes all that happened at Calvary. The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

The blood of Christ shed at Calvary cleanses all my sins past, present and future.

So to walk in the light does not mean to be sinless, which no one can do.

Rather, it points to a habitual pattern of living openly before God, who examines the heart.

To walk in the light is to seek to be holy as God is holy.

But, what about when we sin?

B. The Contrast to The False Claim made in Verse 8 in Found in Verse 9.

EXPLANATION: The Deceiver will make the false claim that they have no sin, and they will deceive themselves.

— But in contrast to that the true believer will be extremely sensitive to sin and when they commit a sin they will confess it.

— When the true believer confesses their sin, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

ARGUMENT: The different between a saved person and a lost person is this, a lost person has no sensitivity to sin in their life.

They sin and it doesn't bother them in the least, they don't even acknowledge it.

But when a true believer sins they feel it deeply. It brings pain to their soul! They have to confess it, until they do they will not be right!

Salvation brings a new sensitivity to sin!

ILLUSTRATION: A Chinese man named Li Fuyan had tried every treatment imaginable to ease his throbbing headaches. Nothing helped.

An X-ray finally revealed the culprit. A rusty four-inch knife blade had been lodged in his skull for four years.

Years previous when he was attacked by a robber, Fuyan had suffered lacerations on the right side of his jaw.

He didn't know the blade had broken off inside his head. No wonder he suffered from such stabbing pain.

We can't live with foreign objects buried in our bodies.

But a true child of God cannot live with a foreign object in their soul.

Sin is a foreign object. It doesn't belong there for a child of God.

1. Sin Must Be Exposed

This man had an X-ray to reveal the foreign object in his body.

- What is the X-ray machine for the soul that reveals the foreign object of sin in our soul?
- It is the Word of God. *used by the Spirit*
- The Word of God is the only book that when you read it, it reads you back!

ILLUSTRATION: God's Word is like a mirror James said. It shows you your true self. It is an accurate reflection of your soul!

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) — 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's Word is a sword that cut not the body but the soul and spirit. I don't know of another sword that sharp!

Three kinds of Sins:

- (a) ACTS of Sin – committed with our WILL
- (b) THOUGHTS of Sin – committed with our MIND
- (c) MOTIVES of Sin – committed with our HEART

- Acts of sin are not hard to detect!
Thoughts are hard, Motives are extremely hard!

The Word of GOD will expose those sins hard to detect!

1. Sin Must Be Exposed

2. Sin Must Be Expressed

Notice v. 9 - The word confess - It is also present tense - continually confessing sin.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone said, "The Problem with many Christians is they sin retail and confess wholesale."

WE SIN GRIEVE THE HEART OF GOD THEN PRAY, "Father forgive me for all my sins."

ILLUSTRATION: College freshman went to the dorm laundry room with his dirty clothes bundled in an old sweatshirt. Embarrassed by how dirty his clothes were, he never opened the bundle but just pushed the clump of dirty clothes into the washing machine. When the washing machine stopped, he pushed the bundle of clothes into the dryer.

- Finally, he took the still unopened bundle of clothes back to his room—only to discover that they were not clean.
- The moral of the story is don't bring your sins to God in a bundle and say wash them!
- Bring them out one by one and confess them so they may be cleansed.

THE SPIRIT CONVICTS SPECIFICALLY, WE MUST CONFESS SPECIFICALLY!

- You must NAME it and NAIL it to the cross!

ILLUSTRATION: We sing the song “Count Your Blessings, name them one by one...and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

We could sing, “Count your sins, name them one by one and it will surprise you what you have done.”

— Confess – in the NT is the Greek word “homologeō” meaning “to say the same thing as”

Confessing our sin is saying the same thing about our sin that God says.

In short it is agreeing with God about our sin! It is seeing our sin the way God sees it!

3. Sin Must Be Expelled

Again v. 9 - “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Cleanse – katharizo – where we get the catheter. It means to cleanse.

It is present indicative active. – It keeps on continuing to cleanse me of my sins.

Sin is expelled.

ARGUMENT: Someone asks, “What if a true believer doesn't confess their sins? Will they lose their salvation?”

— No friend, the cross cleansed all sin, past, present and future.

This is not a salvation issue. It is a fellowship issue. You can't have real fellowship with God.

— A true believer can't lose their salvation but they can lose their fellowship with God.

But here is the issue, a true believer is going to want to confess their sins immediately and stay in fellowship.

ILLUSTRATION: When you get something in your eye, you don't say I'll deal with it later, you cleanse it out immediately, even so a true believer doesn't want to wait to get cleansing.

A. The Contrast to The False Claim Made in Verse 6 is Found in Verse 7.

B. The Contrast to The False Claim made in Verse 8 is Found in Verse 9.

But also:

C. The Contrast to The False Claim Made in Verse 10 is Found in 2:1-2

A Deceiver will say they have not sinned but a true believer will recognize that Jesus Christ the Righteous is his advocate.

ILLUSTRATION: There is a legend of Martin Luther, that, during a serious illness, the Evil One entered his sickroom and, looking at him with a triumphant smile, unrolled a big scroll which he carried in

his arms.

As the fiend threw one end of it on the floor, it unwound by itself.

Luther's eyes read the long, fearful record of his own sins, one by one. He had to admit the record was true. That stout heart quailed before the ghastly roll.

- Suddenly the Lord intervened and said "Luther tell him to unroll the rest of the scroll."
- Luther commanded the devil in the name of Jesus to unroll the rest of the scroll." The devil reluctantly obeyed.

Printed in crimson **ink were these words:**

'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' "And as Luther read this, the Accuser of the Brethren and his heavy roll disappeared.

Jesus is our Advocate! He is our defense Attorney!

CONCLUSION: A person who has real fellowship with God:

- I. Recognizes the Holiness of God. 1:5
- II. Realizes the Darkness of Sin. 1:6
- III. Receives the Forgiveness of Confession 1:7-10

ILLUSTRATION: In the 18th century, an abbot was disciplining two monks for some infraction of the rules.

- He imposed on them the rule of silence.
- They could not talk to one another. They tried to figure out some way to fill the long hours.
- Finally one of them gathered 28 flat stones from the courtyard. Putting different numbers on them, he devised a new game.
- By using gestures, the men agreed on certain rules, but the most difficult part was keeping silent when one of them scored a victory.
- Then they remembered that they were permitted to say aloud the prayer, “Dixit Dominus Domino Meo.”
- By using the one word of this Latin expression meaning “Lord,” the winner was able to signal his triumph by yelling, “Domino!”
- The monks gave the impression that they were *praying*, but really, they were *playing*.

Thus the game of dominoes was born (From “Our Daily Bread” [8/77]).

- It’s easy to put on a religious veneer by claiming that you have fellowship with God, when really, you’re walking in the darkness and deceiving yourself.

John doesn’t want us to play spiritual dominoes.

- He wants us to experience genuine fellowship with the holy God by walking in the light, as He Himself is in the light.

How To Have Real Fellowship With God
