

Expository Notes - 1 John 1:1-10

THEME: FELLOWSHIP

KEY IDEA: GOD IS LIGHT (Verse 5)

1 John 1:1 - That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life...

Similarities in verses 1 -3 to the first chapter of John's gospel are not coincidental. Verses 1 -3 appear to be a reference to his gospel account, a copy of which may have been before him as he wrote this first epistle. In John 1:1 John uses the phrase "**in the beginning**" as if he were placing himself at the beginning of time only to look back at eternity and describe what he sees before creation. In the first verse of this epistle John uses the phrase "**from the beginning.**" Here he looks back to the beginning and describes events since creation.

Jesus was "in the beginning" and "from the beginning" yet as the descriptive clauses indicate he became flesh and lived as a man. Still John shows that Jesus was no mere man but was nevertheless man, subject to those things that effect all men.

1 John 1:2-3 - (For the life was manifested, and we have seen [it], and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) ³That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Verse 2 is a parenthesis (an amplification) of the description found in verse one. In all John indicates that Jesus was manifested in this life and...

1. We have seen it - Experience
2. Bear witness of it - Testimony
3. Show you eternal life - Evangelize

(The word 'shew' (KJV) would best be rendered 'declare.')

John delivers the biography of Jesus in his gospel. This epistle was intended as a compliment to that gospel. His purpose in writing the gospel was to fulfill the desire of Jesus in John 17 where John says all believers should be "one" in fellowship just as the Father and Son are "one." The unity between the Father and the Son provides a pattern for our fellowship that we might be united in the same body, belief, knowledge, purpose and destiny. Hence, fellowship among Christians is as important as the fellowship between the Father and the Son.

1 John 1:4 - And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Verse four begins the epistle in earnest. Their “joy” is knowing they are not of the world but is “one” with “one another” and with the Father and the Son. The Gospel gives joy. Cp. 1 Th. 5:16 - “**Rejoice evermore**” and Phil. 4:4 - “**Rejoice in the Lord always: [and] again I say, Rejoice.**”

[“Full” (KJV) best rendered fulfilled.]

1 John 1:5 - This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The first main division of the letter is represented in the phrase “**God is light.**” The remainder of this chapter through 2: 6 provides the positive elements for walking in this light. The negative elements are described in 2:7-28.

“**God is Light**” - (lit – *the god light is*) - God is not ‘the light’ or ‘a light’ but “God is light.” There is no definite article used in conjunction with the word light. The word suggests illuminating pureness or clearness. This phrase represents the sum of God’s intellectual nature just as the phrase “God is love” (– lit – *the god love is*) describes his moral nature. Light and love are not mere attributes of God, but are God.

It is difficult to see the connection between this verse and verses 1-3 until comparing the gospel written by John. In the opening verses of his gospel three ideas are emphasized.

1. the word
2. - life
3. - light

In his epistle John emphasizes that God’s nature is ‘light.’ Light naturally introduces its opposite – ‘darkness.’ It is on the declaration that ‘the word’ () is ‘light’ () and the subsequent struggle between light and darkness that the Gospel revolves. Man has the invitation to live in this ‘light’ or reject it and live in ‘darkness.’

John’s unique application of God’s nature (that God is light) is interesting. In John 4:24 he quotes Jesus as saying “God is Spirit” and writes in 1 John 4: 8, 16 that “God is love.” Other men both inspired and uninspired offer peculiar descriptions. In James 1:17 the writer calls God the “Father of lights.” Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 indicates that God is the possessor of light. Paul tells Timothy (1 Tim. 6:16) that God dwells in the light. Many unbelievers make God a god of darkness who is distant, unknown to man and not to be loved and worshiped. Philosophers make God nothing more than an idea, a figment of imagination and not directly cognizant to man (Cp. Acts 17). To the Jews he is a God who hides behind unfulfilled promises, not a God of light but a God of consuming fire. It is only the Christian to whom God is revealed as light, free from all impurity, obscurity and gloom. In Genesis 1 as the Spirit of God hovers above the waters, God releases the first product of his divine energy. “Let there be light” he said, “and there was light” (Ge. 1:3). Light is the one thing that has and always will penetrate the darkness. What better way to represent the Lord of the Gospel who will penetrate and destroy the darkness of sin.

Having revealed God as light, John in his usual style emphasizes an equally negative statement. He articulates in the last part of verse five, “in him is no darkness at all.” Notice he does not write that there is no darkness ‘in his presence,’ but he says there is no darkness “in him.” We know darkness exists - physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Doubtless this world is full of error, sin and death, but none of these are “in him.” Nothing can eclipse the divine light.

1 John 1:6 - If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth . . .

John makes a proposition based upon the information in verse five. Since “God is light” and “in him is no darkness at all” then it naturally follows that fellowship with Him excludes any fellowship with darkness. Therefore there can be no dabbling in sin. The phrase “if we say” indicates a situation that could and probably would occur in any man’s life. John includes himself with the pronoun ‘we.’ If our daily walk is in darkness and yet we claim to be in the light, we lie. Such a lie demonstrates the true ‘fellowship’ in which we live.

1 John 1:7 - 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.

In keeping with his writing style John now presents a reverse proposal. In verse six he described walking in darkness. He now reverses this thought and discusses the benefits of walking in light. We live in a world bound by time and change. God lives in eternity and knows no change. When we ‘walk in the light’ we walk in God’s domain and all who share that walk is in fellowship with God and with one another. In addition our daily walk in the light assures us of the cleansing from our mistakes through the blood of Jesus Christ.

This verse should be very important to every child of God. Those who walk in the light will make mistakes. We will sin. But, it is not our nature because we are in the ‘light.’ The blood of Jesus cleanses us from this sin because of our fellowship with the ‘God of light.’ For example, a Christian dies in a terrible accident. During the day he has walked in the light, faced temptation and resisted. But prior to his death he was irritable, feeling the pressures of his job and he lost his temper and said some things that were really out of character for him. His very nature made him feel bad about his mistake but before he could speak to God and ask his forgiveness, he dies tragically. Is he lost? The answer is obviously ‘no’ based upon John’s description of what constitutes fellowship. However, any Christian whose walk is in ‘darkness’ loses fellowship with God and the cleansing effects of the blood of Christ.

1 John 1:8 - If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Verse eight is a transitional verse where John begins to tell us what constitutes walking in the light.

1. Awareness of sin - “If we say that we have no sin . . .”
2. Confession of sin - v. 9
3. Forgiveness of sin - 1:9 - 2:2
4. Obedience - 2:3-6

“If we say that we have no sin” The present tense indicates the sins of those who are walking ‘in the light’ not the sins committed while walking in the darkness prior to conversion. The danger in such a denial is that we deceive ourselves or lead ourselves astray. If we deny our tendency to sin, we blind ourselves to the light which is God and an unbridgeable disparity forms between our sinfulness and God’s holiness.

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.

Again John addresses the near opposite of his previous statement. “If we confess our sins . . .” he writes. It is easy for a man to say ‘I am a sinner.’ It is something completely different to confess specific acts of sin. Yet John binds this upon those who would walk in the light. Upon confession of our sinful acts God is ‘faithful’ and ‘just’ “to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (The word ‘just’ is better rendered ‘righteous’ to contrast with the unrighteousness of this verse and to agree with “Jesus Christ the righteous” in 2:1.)

The words ‘forgive’ and ‘cleanse’ are not redundant. The Lord’s ‘forgiveness’ frees us from the consequences of our past sins. As a result we are justified. Our ‘cleansing’ frees us from the contaminating effects of sin. We are sanctified, set apart for God’s holy purpose.

1 John 1:10 - If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The beginning of verse 10 appears at first to be a repetition of the key idea in verse eight. John wrote in verse eight, “If we say that we have no sin . . .” referring to the soul’s general condition. We need to be sure we are walking in the light if we make such a statement. In verse 10 John wrote “If we say that we have not sinned . . .” refers to specific acts which occur during our walk in the light which must be confessed.

Notice the process described by John in this first chapter.

Verse 6 - If we say we have fellowship with God but walk in darkness we lie.

Verse 8 - If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves.

Verse 10-If we say we have not sinned we make God a liar.

Since the sin of Adam and Eve God has been working toward reconciliation. This is especially evident in Christ’s coming to earth to die for our sins. Therefore, to say we have not sinned is to say that God has perpetrated a great lie upon man from the beginning.