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The Way of Fellowship

When Adam and Eve fell and chose to make themselves, rather than God, the center of their life, the effect was not only to put them out of fellowship with God, but also out of fellowship with one another. The story of the first quarrel with God in the third chapter of Genesis is closely followed, in the fourth chapter, by the story of a man's first quarrel with his fellow man—Cain's murder of Abel. Simply put, the fall can be described as: "We have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isa. 53:6).

If I want my own way rather than God's, it is quite obvious that I shall want my own way rather than the other person's. One does not

assert independence from God to surrender it to another, if it can be helped. But a world in which each person wants their own way cannot be anything but a world full of tensions, barriers, suspicions, misunderstandings, clashes and conflicts.

Now the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross was not only to bring us back into fellowship with God, but also into fellowship with each other. Indeed, it cannot do one without the other. As the spokes get nearer to the center of the wheel, they get nearer to one another. But if we have not been brought into vital fellowship with our brothers and sisters, it is a proof that to that extent we have not been brought into vital fellowship with God.

First John (what a new light revival sheds on this portion of Scripture!) insists on testing the depth and reality of our fellowship with God by the depth and reality of our fellowship with each other (see 2:9; 3:14–15; 4:20). Some of us have come to see how utterly connected our relationship with one another is to our relationship with God. Everything that comes as a barrier between us and one

another, be it ever so small, comes as a barrier between us and God. We have found that when these barriers are not put right immediately, they get thicker and thicker until we find ourselves shut off from God and the other by what seem to be veritable brick walls. Quite obviously, if we allow new life to come to us, it will have to manifest itself in a walk of oneness with God and our brother or sister, with nothing between.

Light and Darkness

On what basis can we have real fellowship with God and each other?

Here, First John 1:7 has come afresh to us. *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* By light and darkness, we mean that light reveals, while darkness hides. When anything reproves us and shows us up as we really are, that is light.

As we read in Ephesians, “When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible” (5:13). But whenever we do anything or say anything—or don’t do or say anything—to

hide what we are or what we've done, that is darkness.

Now the first effect of sin in our lives is always to make us try to hide what we are. Sin made our first parents hide behind the trees of the garden, and it has had the same effect on us ever since. Sin always involves us in being unreal, pretending, duplicity, window dressing, excusing ourselves and blaming others—and we can do all that as much by our silence as by saying or doing something.

This is what First John 1:6 calls “walk[ing] in darkness.” With some of us, the sin in question may be nothing more than self-consciousness. Anything with “I” in it, or anything that focuses on self, is sin. And the hiding may be nothing more than an assumed heartiness to cover that self-consciousness. It is walking in darkness nonetheless.

In contrast to all this in us, First John 1:5 tells us that “God is light.” That is, God is the all-revealing One, who shows up all people as they really are. This verse goes on to say, “In him is no darkness at all.”

That is, there is absolutely nothing in God that can be one with even the tiniest bit of

darkness or hiding in us. Quite obviously then, it is utterly impossible for us to walk in any degree of darkness and still have fellowship with God. While we are in that condition of darkness, we cannot have true fellowship with our brothers and sisters either—for we are not real with them, and no one can have fellowship with an unreal person. A wall of reserve separates them and us.

The Only Basis for Fellowship

The only basis for real fellowship with God and humankind is to live out in the open with both. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7).

To walk in the light is the opposite of walking in darkness. Spurgeon defined it in one of his sermons as “a willingness to know and to be known.”¹

As far as God is concerned, this means that we are willing to know the whole truth about ourselves and are open to conviction. We will bend the neck to the first twinges of conscience. Everything He shows us to be sin, we will deal with as sin. We will hide

or excuse nothing. Such a walk in the light will only increasingly disclose sin in our lives, and we shall see things to be sin that we never thought of as sin before. For that reason, we might shrink from this walk and be tempted to run for cover.

But First John 1:7 goes on with the precious words, “and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Everything that the light of God reveals as sin we can confess and carry to the fountain of blood and it is gone—gone from God’s sight and gone from our hearts. By the power of the precious blood, we can be made more stainless than the driven snow. And thus continually abiding in the light and cleansed by the blood, we have fellowship with God.

But the fellowship promised to us in First John 1:7 is not only with God, but “with one another”; and that involves us walking in the light with our brothers and sisters too. In any case, we cannot be “in the open” with God and “in the dark” with them. This means that we must be as willing to hear and know the truth about ourselves from others as we are to hear and know it

from God. We must be prepared for fellow believers to hold the light to us and challenge us in love about anything seen in our lives that is not the highest—and we must be willing to do the same service in return.

We must be willing not only to know, but to be known by others for what we really are. That means we are not going to hide our inner selves from those with whom we ought to be in fellowship; we are not going to window dress and put on appearances; nor are we going to whitewash and excuse ourselves.

We are going to be honest about ourselves with them. We are willing to give up our spiritual privacy, pocket our pride and risk our reputation—all for the sake of being open and transparent with our fellow believers in Christ.

It means, too, that we are not going to cherish any wrong feeling in our hearts about another, but we are first going to claim deliverance from it from God and put it right with the one concerned.

As we walk this way, we shall find that we have fellowship with one another at an

altogether new level, and we shall not love one another less, but infinitely more.

No Bondage

Walking in the light is simply walking with Jesus. Therefore, there does not need to be bondage about it. We do not necessarily have to tell everybody everything about ourselves. The fundamental thing is our *attitude* of walking in the light, rather than the *act*. Are we willing to be in the open with our fellow believer—and be so in word when God tells us to? That is the “armor of light” (Rom. 13:12)—true transparency. This may sometimes be humbling, but it will help us to a new reality with Christ and to a new self-knowledge.

We have become so used to the fact that God knows all about us that it does not seem to register with us, and we inevitably end by not knowing the truth about ourselves. But let us begin, as God guides us, to be absolutely honest about ourselves with just one other believer.

We will come to a knowledge of ourselves and our sins that we never had before, and

we will begin to see more clearly than ever where the redemption of Christ must be applied progressively to our lives.

This is the reason why James tells us to put ourselves under the discipline of confessing our sins to each other” (James 5:16).

In First John 1:7, of course, the purpose of “walk[ing] in the light” is that we might “have fellowship with one another.” And what fellowship it is when we walk this way together! Obviously, love will flow from one to another when each is prepared to be known as the repentant sinner at the cross of Jesus. When the barriers are down and the masks are off, God has a chance of making us really united.

But there is also the added joy of knowing that in such a fellowship we are “safe.” There is no fear now that others may be thinking thoughts about us or having reactions toward us that they are hiding from us. In a fellowship that is committed to walking in the light beneath the cross, we know that if there is any thought about us it will quickly be brought into the light, either in brokenness and confession when there has been wrong and unlove, or else as a loving challenge that