



1 John Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

John opens the letter with one of the most eloquent and remarkable descriptions that gives evidence of Christ's excellent and divine character. For those who accept Christ their initial reward is to come into communion with him and with our heavenly Father. This is a reason for the joyful nature that should be apparent in all disciples.

John goes on to give the description of God that Jesus had passed to him especially that God is pure light. Although this is just one of the many characteristics of God, it is one that John wishes to make clear at the outset of his letter, as it is the light of God that penetrates the hearts of mankind to reveal their faith or their evil intent. Those who choose to live in that light will know what true life is.

No one should be foolish enough to be self-deceptive. It doesn't fool God but it portrays him as a liar, thus the Gospel has no place in their hearts. Those that choose to accept their fallen, sinful nature and come before God to confess their sins, accepting Christ, will be forgiven and be rewarded with eternal life in the presence of the Father.

I. 1 John 1:1-2:17 - God is Light and Christ is Love

John commences his letter by drawing attention to the divinity and incarnation of Jesus as the Christ of God, his sacrificial death, and his position at God's right hand, where he is interceding for those who call on him. John also stresses God's ineffable brilliance and the ubiquity of human sin.

John's focus shifts to God's call to love and the demands of living a Gospel centred life in a world where darkness and moral decay seem to reign supreme.

I.a 1 John 1:1-4 - The Word of Life

The brilliant light of God shines through his Son into every aspect of life. This remarkable and beautifully scripted introductory passage demonstrates the role of

Christ as the living Word, ever-present with God since eternity past, a key part of God's creative power, who has chosen to abide with humanity forever.

John is revealing to the church the truth about the eternal life, God himself, as he was revealed to John through Christ. This is a succession of witness statements, which John faithfully passed on so that each generation then becomes the next witness for Christ. The message is that which was given in the beginning. It is unchanging and must be proclaimed fully and effectively to each generation. John was handed the baton and he handed it on through his teaching here and elsewhere. The church must be careful never to drop the baton.

A dozen or so first-person plural references, i.e. we, our, us, highlight the eyewitness testimony of John and other early Christians, particularly the apostles. They knew fellowship with the Father and with his Son (v.3), and yearned to see it extended to the readers of this letter, throughout all generations.

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

1 John 1:1

Unlike most NT epistles, the author does not name himself, although in his other two epistles he does refer to himself simply as: <<**The elder**>> (2 John 1a and 3 John 1a). Some scholars believe this to be out of humility, or that the intention is for the readers to accept the truth of what is written by discernment of the content without being swayed by the authority of its author. This was a view similar to that which John the Baptist held: <<**He must become greater; I must become less**>> (John 3:30). It is likely that those who received the original letter knew it was from John and needed no further introduction in written form.

The other point of interest is that he does not identify his intended readership, thus many term it a 'general epistle'. It is believed he wrote the letter from or near to the thriving but idolatrous port city of Ephesus. Many believe it was intended for the church groups in and around Ephesus, but it could have been sent to many other cities and towns throughout the Roman province of Asia. Historically, there are those who thought that the recipients lived in Parthia.

Whoever the recipients were, they were clearly loved by John as a senior church elder and pastor; some may well have been personally known to him, and he was certainly well known by them, as indicated before.

That which was signifies Jesus' continual existence and that he is not a created being. The past tense in no way denotes that Jesus is no longer living.

Some commentators believe that from the beginning refers either to the time of Jesus' birth or the beginning of his earthly ministry. However, it seems far more likely that it refers to the predawn of time, as John indicates in his Gospel: <<**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that**

life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it>> (John 1:1-5).

The Septuagint uses the same Greek expression, *ap' archēs*, to say that the Lord existed from the beginning: <<*O Lord, are you not from everlasting?*>> (Habakkuk 1:12a), and that the origins of the Promised One would be from the beginning. In other words, John is pointing to Christ's pre-existence in that he was from eternity; and so is, in scripture-account, necessary, essential, uncreated life.

Heard. The apostles spent more than three years in the very presence of Jesus, not just listening to his public teaching but to the words of wisdom that he must have poured into their hearts during many hours of private conversations. However, their ability to understand was limited and so there was only so much that Jesus could share with them during that relatively short period of time. For example: <<*They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it*>> (Mark 9:30-32), and: <<*Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father?'" They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying"*>> (John 16:17-18).

Seen, looked at, touched. Jesus had come to earth to witness for God the Father: <<*Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does"*>> (John 5:19), and: <<*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*>> (John 15:15). Jesus then called twelve men to serve him. One of them, John, was therefore an eyewitness to the physical and historical reality of Jesus' life on earth. He had witnessed Jesus' baptism, where the Lord received God's Holy Spirit: <<*As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"*>> (Matthew 3:16-17). Along with his brother James and with Peter, John saw Jesus in his majestic glory: <<*About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered*>>

the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen>> (Luke 9:28-36), which is confirmed by Peter: <<We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain>> (2 Peter 1:16-18).

John also witnessed many other great historic events: healings, Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and he was in the empty tomb. He also encountered his Risen Lord on a number of occasions. Therefore, his message is not based on an ecstatic vision, grand idea, or mere human religious conviction, but on the reality of his own personal experiences.

John was present in the upper room when Jesus invited Thomas to look at and touch his wounds: <<A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed">> (John 20:26-29).

We proclaim. The role of all disciples is to tell others about the good news - the Gospel message. Many of the OT prophets had foretold the coming of the Christ but it was from the time of John the Baptist that witness testimony was needed: <<There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world>> (John 1:6-9). It was how Jesus announced his earthly ministry had commenced: <<"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour">> (Luke 4:18).

Part of an apostles' duty was not simply to proclaim what they had seen and heard, but also to interpret what it meant so that their own readers and listeners can understand it. That is why they were so thoroughly taught by Jesus. However, as related before, Jesus was unable to tell them everything that they needed in such a relatively short period of time, therefore he sent his Holy Spirit to continue their education: <<But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you>> (John 14:26). Of course, the Holy Spirit is much more than their teacher.

The Word of life refers to Christ, who was with God since before the creation of the world, as already noted. It indicates him to be the source of all intellectual

life, a light that would shine into the darkest recesses of the human soul. The Greek phrase *logos prophorikos* gives the indication that, just as God's speech is issued forth from within his being, so too the Christ is sent forth from within the Father, i.e. he is God himself but manifested in human flesh through the person of Jesus.

² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

1 John 1:2

John can state the life appeared because Jesus was fully human in his coming on the earth. John would also come to understand and testify that Jesus was also fully God.

John was not just called to record what he had witnessed but to reveal its meaning to his readers, and what John saw was Jesus. If he were to sum up what it was he witnessed in Christ it would be life. Jesus himself is the life of God and came to give eternal life to those who would believe in him.

The repetition of appeared, i.e. made manifest or publicly seen and known, stresses the revelatory nature of Christ's coming; he was sent from and revealed by God.

Life, eternal life refers to the nature and quality of life in fellowship with God: *<<I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life>>* (John 5:24), as revealed primarily in the life of Christ and then experienced secondarily by his followers. Such fellowship grows out of the vital and dynamic existence enjoyed by the Son with the Father: *<<I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one>>* (John 17:11). Jesus came to procure eternal life for all mankind, in order that he may confer it on those who would accept him as their Lord.

We proclaim to you the eternal life is taken by some to be the reward given to those who repent of their sins and turn to God through Christ. However, it seems more likely that John is simply stating that Christ, who is the eternal, unchanging God, has finally arrived in the form of Jesus, not just the giver of eternal life but eternal life itself - its true author.

³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:3

John is moved to proclaim what he has witnessed in keeping with the commission he and other apostles received: *<<Therefore go and make disciples of all*

nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age>> (Matthew 28:19-20), <<He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation>> (Mark 16:15), and: <<But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth>> (Acts 1:8). Although it was not necessary for Jesus to instruct them to do this, as Peter and John would later say to the Sanhedrin: <<For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard>> (Acts 4:20).

Again, the statement that John has seen and heard what he is proclaiming to them, will help to strengthen the faith of those who have not had such a privilege for themselves. Paul wrote to the Colossians and Laodiceans knowing that they had not personally seen or met him, and how much difference that could make in his teaching about Christ: <<*I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge>> (Colossians 2:1-3).*

The purpose of this proclamation is not just forgiveness of people’s sins, as a simplified view of evangelism would have it, but is far richer, for the Gospel message binds together those who receive it: so that you too may also have fellowship with us. Yet the purpose is still richer than mere human fellowship, for believers’ fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. Such fellowship is personal communion with the Father made possible by the mediation of the Son.

Our fellowship applies to everyone who truly believes in Jesus as the Christ. Here, it also demonstrates that fellowship is something that runs throughout the worldwide Church of Christ, for each individual believer shares in the same fellowship with everyone else in terms of being in communion with God, sharing in common participation of privilege and dignity, for in Christ there is no difference whether a believer is the Pope, a global evangelist a mega-church leader, or simply a member of a local congregation, as Paul confirms: <<*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference>> (Romans 3:22), and: <<You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise>> (Galatians 3:26-29).*

Another aspect of the fellowship that John speaks of can be seen in a different light when studying the first three verses together. Anyone who does not hold on to that which was from the beginning, i.e. either does not accept the Gospel message or changes it in anyway, cannot have the fellowship with those who are true to the message they have received. Neither can they claim to have fellowship with the Father or the Son.

⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

1 John 1:4

We write this. One of First John's several stated purposes is to promote joy. Jesus promoted joy as well: <<*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*>> (John 15:11), and: <<*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete*>> (John 16:24).

It was for joy that Jesus' birth was first proclaimed to the shepherds: <<*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people"*>> (Luke 2:10), and it was with even greater joy that they saw him return to heaven: <<*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God*>> (Luke 24:50-53).

To make our joy complete. This statement gives a remarkable insight as to how John and his fellow church leaders felt about sharing their knowledge of Christ and the Gospel message. They did not do so just to bring something to other people but they did so out of a love for their fellow man, which would bring their own joy into fullness by doing so. However, in translating this passage, it is difficult to decide between 'our joy' and 'your joy', for several very early and reliable manuscripts have one reading, and several equally reliable early manuscripts have the other, with the only difference being one letter in Greek. It seems more likely that 'our' includes the readers of the letter when taken in the same sense as: <<*our fellowship*>> (v.3).

John also states that he feels great joy in knowing that other believers are living out their faith by staying close to the truth: <<*It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us*>> (2 John 4), and: <<*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 4). Such joy was also felt by King David, even if he was speaking prophetically about the Messiah: <<*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand*>> (Psalm 16:11).

Biblical writers continually looked for the day when they would know joy, when they would rejoice. But John writes in this epistle that the expected joy of fellowship with God is now available to those who fellowship with God through Jesus. There is no need to wait any longer; full joy can be ours through Jesus Christ. A long-awaited blessing of the messianic age is here. Joy is not given to us apart from the circumstances of our earthly life, or as a substitute for pain or an escape from sorrow. Joy does not depend upon the elimination of the things that weigh us down or trouble us here. Joy comes from the deep trust of knowing that precisely in the troubles of this world, one is nevertheless in touch with the God who has given us life in the midst of the death that surrounds us. As with the psalmist, the author of the epistle would gladly say that there is joy in the presence of God. We have joy now as we experience

God's presence in Jesus. Sharing in God's presence together, which is God's gift of life, completes our joy.

I.b 1 John 1:5-2:14 - Walking in the Light

God had brought light to the world at creation but following the fall it became an increasingly dark place spiritually. Jesus brought light back into the world, shining into the darkest recesses of the human soul, bringing joy and hope to many, but signalling great danger to those who had grown to love and thrive in the dark.

I.b.i 1 John 1:5-10 - God's Nature and Human Sin

God is light (v.5) reflects an OT background where light symbolises both knowledge and purity, brought to the fore in Christ, for: <<*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it*>> (John 1:4-5), and: <<*The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world*>> (John 1:9), reveals Jesus as the light and brings to this dark world true knowledge, moral purity, and the light that shows the very presence of God, while Christ's own self-designation: <<*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"*>> (John 8:12), fulfils OT promises of the coming of the light of salvation and the light of God, such as that by David: <<*The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*>> (Psalm 27:1), and the prophet: <<*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned*>> (Isaiah 9:2).

All of John's writing flows from the reality of God in his spiritual perfection, moral excellence, and utter transcendence – his light: <<*who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen*>> (1 Timothy 6:16). This will contrast sharply with errant humans protesting their innocence that will be discussed in v.6, v.8 and v.10.

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

1 John 1:5

The message we have heard from him. Throughout history, God had spoken mostly to his people via angels and prophets; now he had come in person to give them the Gospel message. The apostle John had personally been instructed by Christ and was in the perfect position to declare it to others. Jesus not only taught his apostles but he spoke publically to all who would listen: <<*"I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret"*>> (John 18:20). It was for this purpose that God had chosen apostles, to send them out into the world to bring the good news to all who would listen. Men like John were fulfilling what the prophets had said they would: <<*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God*

reigns!”>> (Isaiah 52:7), and: <<Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!>> (Nahum 1:15a).

God is light. This should not be understood that God physically consists of light particles nor is he creation itself. Nor can it be said that light is God as many pagan religions would have, especially those that worship sunrises and solstices. King David’s view is: *<<For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light>> (Psalm 36:9).* Science can tell us all sorts of properties of light but what is perhaps key to those properties in relation to God is that:

1. Light can be pure, although not as pure as God. The psalmist reveals a God that is wrapped in pure light: *<<Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment>> (Psalm 104:1-2a).* To which Paul adds: *<<In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen>> (1 Timothy 6:13-16).*
2. Light reveals. People can see in the light but not in the dark. God reveals things that are hidden from the naked eye and even from science.
3. Light measures. Light can be used to measure all sorts of things because its own properties are true. God too measures the hearts of those whom he created. He does so with a light that penetrates heart and soul.
4. Light is a key source of energy. God energises too, through his Holy Spirit, which comes to indwell believers.

As well as the excellence of his divine nature, these are the types of properties that John probably had in mind to say that God is light. God did of course create light: *<<And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light>> (Genesis 1:3),* and there will come a time when he will be the only source of light: *<<The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp>> (Revelation 21:23),* and: *<<There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever>> (Revelation 22:5).* Jesus has these properties for he too is God: *<<When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”>> (John 8:12),* as recently noted, and: *<<While I am in the world, I am the light of the world>> (John 9:5).*

In many ways the statement that God is light is the thesis of the epistle. It includes a definition of God’s character as well as implications for the life of Christian discipleship. Those who choose to follow Jesus aspire to be more like him in nature, to imitate what is called the moral perfection of the divine nature, which should have a strong influence on the kingdom work they undertake. Jesus once said of his disciples: *<<You are the light of the world. A*

city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house>> (Matthew 5:14-15), which calls his followers to action so that the world can see and take note of their driving motivation.

⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

1 John 1:6

If. In the rest of this chapter there are five if clauses, with a further concluding if clause in 1 John 2:1b <<***But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One***>>. Three of them give rise to false deductions that someone might make following on to the statement that God is light. These claims may be those being made by the people who have left the fellowship that John refers to or just false believers in general. That John uses the first person plural does not necessarily imply he is including any true believers that have remained faithful.

If we claim. 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. In fact, they do not welcome the light at all: <<***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God***>> (John 3:19-21).

Fellowship with God is not mystical communion with a vague divine entity but a commitment to a righteous God, a commitment that in turn lays the demand upon disciples to walk in the light. Those who walk in darkness but claim to have fellowship with God are either delusional, are certainly misguided or are perhaps in fellowship with something that is not of God. Satan still maintained contact with God but it cannot be termed fellowship: <<***One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it”***>> (Job 1:6-7).

Having just proclaimed that God is light, the challenge that some will now walk in darkness reveals a polar opposite to the character and nature of God that cannot coexist within a true believer’s heart. Darkness after all represents fear, hate, lying and sin; all the activities that no decent human being would want to reveal but which can lie even within a believer who has not fully come into the light and life of Jesus as the Christ. It is worth repeating the words from John’s Gospel: <<***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God***>> (John 3:19-21).

Just as light shows the way in darkness, so also by virtue of God's revelation are believers able to know God and the path in which they are to walk, a path that leads to God. To have knowledge of God and to walk in the way that God requires constitutes salvation. And this is the message, the word of eternal life, which the author of the epistle has heard and declares. God is pure light, and for John this statement rings with implications for the Christian life. Thus it is crucial that believers correctly grasp this basic truth.

It is impossible to serve God while dwelling in the darkness, where darkness is not just seen as sin but a place that is opposed to the will of God; a place where no positive relationship with God is possible. Those who choose to do so need to heed the warning that light will always repel darkness, a fact of natural physics, although it may well cause some shadows for those who would use them as temporary hiding places.

⁷ 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, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:7

Walk in the light means to reflect God's perfection in the human sphere and includes both correct doctrine, that is, truth, and moral purity, i.e. holiness. The symbolism of light as knowledge also implies that when Christians 'walk in the light' their lives will be known, and will not contain hidden sins, falsehoods, or deception. Such walking 'in the light' results in deep divine and human fellowship, and progressive cleansing from all sin. C. S. Lewis once wrote: "We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we can see everything else". Humans cannot see the light; but by and in the light they too can see everything else.

We have fellowship with one another. John is underlining a point of fundamental importance for all disciples of Christ, and that is to make sure they belong to a good local church that is growing spiritually in the grace of God.

The blood of Jesus, purifies us from all sin. Although all humankind remains immersed in all manner of sin, the purpose of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the Cross was to make those who would turn to God in true repentance through Christ appear to be holy and righteous in God's sight. This is no illusion but a substitutionary payment that had to be made to reconcile a holy and righteous God with his fallen, sinful creation: <<*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit*>> (Galatians 3:13-14).

Most disciples of Christ do continue to sin, for they still have their sinful nature that was imputed to all in the Adamic era. However, they do recognise the need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and should draw near to him in thanksgiving rather than sit back in self-condemnation. Those who walk in the dark will mostly deny the need for cleansing at all!

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8

Claim to be without sin. Although the hearts of those who are truly children of God have been so transformed that they desire not to live in a pattern of continual sin, this does not mean that they are ever completely free from sin in this life due to the ongoing conflict with their sinful nature. However, there are some who believe they are. One respondent to a survey on the question of sin in Christians said, “The day I die, I should only have to look up at my Maker and say, ‘Take me’. Not ‘Forgive me’”. He may be in for a big surprise when the books are opened!

We deceive ourselves. The devil, as will be noted in 1 John 3:8 <<*He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work*>>, or the world: <<*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*>> (1 John 2:15), may contribute to human straying, but in the end each individual bears responsibility for his or her own sin. Some sin remains in every Christian’s life, noted by the present tense claim to be without sin, even that of the elderly apostle John who writes in the first person ‘we’. The deception often comes in the form of trying to justify the sins that a believer still commits, which is often worse than the sin itself. That is just one step down from trying to blame someone else for that sin, as did Adam for the initial sin against God: <<*He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it”*>> (Genesis 3:10-12). Adam blamed God for putting the woman with him and then blamed the woman for giving him the fruit rather than taking the responsibility for his own sin and coming before God in true repentance. How would history have looked if Adam had said, ‘sorry, please forgive me?’

One problem that seemed to exist in the church in John’s time and is still true today is that many Christians see that God is light, that he repels all darkness and therefore come to the extreme conclusion that once a believer has asked for and received forgiveness everything is done and dusted. On the other extreme there have been people throughout the ages who remain totally mortified because of their sin before a pure God that they have no joy in the reality of their salvation and try to live a life of penance that is not needed because of the Cross of Christ. It is indeed an offence to the Cross, therefore the very sin the person is trying to seek forgiveness for!

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

All believers must confess their sins, initially to receive salvation through their repentance, and then to maintain a lifelong fellowship with God and with one

another. It is the recognition of sin and the need to come to Christ for forgiveness that brings honour and glory to the Cross.

He is faithful and just. It was said of God that: <<*The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion*>> (Numbers 14:18a), which indicates he will always forgive repentant sinners who come to him through Christ. Yet John also makes it clear: <<*No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him*>> (1 John 3:6), and: <<*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*>> (1 John 3:9), that persistent unrepented sin is not the mark of a Christian; God: <<*Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation*>> (Numbers 14:18b), is a just God, who will do what is right according to his will, in accord with his nature that is pure, holy, just, merciful, loving and inherently good. What can be said is that those whom he condemns will deserve their condemnation, and those that he forgives will not deserve that reward but can only give praise to God for his grace and mercy.

Will forgive us. As just discussed, God is gracious and merciful, God is love as well as light. However, John is demonstrating the attributes of God that have long been expressed through the Scriptures that show that he judges in righteousness and is faithful to his covenant promises: <<*He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he*>> (Deuteronomy 32:4), and: <<*Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the Lord your God sends you to tell us"*>> (Jeremiah 42:5). God will forgive those who call on his name in true repentance.

¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1 John 1:10

Have not sinned. Anyone who made such a claim would at best be fooling themselves: <<*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 3:22-24).

We make him out to be a liar. When a believer fails to take responsibility for their sin they not only deceive themselves but they bring dishonour to God through their actions and hypocrisy. God, speaking through the prophet, had said: <<*Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities*>> (Isaiah 53:10-11). God sent his Son, who faithfully fulfilled the role he was to undertake, with a promise from his Father that those who come through him would be forgiven on his account. But how can God keep on forgiving those who deceive

themselves in their sin and do not come to him in repentance. This makes God out to be a liar in terms of his promise to His Son.

His word has no place in our lives. A person may have heard and assented to the Gospel message, but until it brings him to acknowledge his sin, it has not taken root in his heart. The Word of God needs to live in a person's heart in order for them to fully accept it: <<***No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it***>> (Deuteronomy 30:14). Once someone comes to an understanding of this all the other negative issues that John describes will vaporise and vanish.