

Walking in Fellowship and Assurance: Understanding 1 John

Preacher: Caleb G

Date: July 21, 2026

Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: 1 John 1-2, 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:1-2; 1 John 1:1-3; 1 John 1:5-7; 1 John 1:8-10; 1 John 2:9-11; John 15:9-12

Introduction: The Misunderstanding of 1 John 1:9

Okay, so let's go to 1 John. In 1 John, there's a verse that I've always liked. 1 John 1:9 says:

[1 John 1:9 NKJV]

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I first memorized that verse when I was in college—Equipped to Serve program—so we had to memorize a whole bunch of verses, and it was labeled "The Assurance of Forgiveness." In that verse there, God's giving us the assurance that He'll forgive us.

And one of the things sometimes I've noticed that people misunderstand is what it's applicable to. So is this verse talking about God giving us salvation when we confess our sins? Show of hands, what do you guys think? Okay, well, either way, we're going to look at this chapter and we're going to go find out what this is all about.

Context: Who Is John Writing To?

First, let's look at Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, just to get a bit of context of who it's written to. So here, the writer says:

[1 John 2:1-2 NKJV]

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The author here is John. And we get a little bit about who he's talking to: the people who he calls "my dear children." And then later in verse 2, it says, "not only ours." So he's talking about himself collectively—so, the church. He is writing to **the church**.

And that's our first clue as to how to interpret chapter one. If it's about salvation when we confess our sins—but wait a minute, the church is already the people who are saved! So that's not really the right verse to be used for initial salvation. That's how we get our first clue: the context of who he's talking to.

Eyewitness Testimony and Eternal Life

We'll get a little bit more information from the first verse in chapter one:

[1 John 1:1 NKJV]

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, concerning the Word of life--

So here, the person who's writing, probably John, is saying, "I have seen, learned from the beginning, I've touched Him, I have heard Him." So in other words, he's an **eyewitness**. And the apostles were required to have been an eyewitness of Jesus. So likely this is John the apostle talking to the church. That's the first bit of context we need.

But also, one of the interesting things there is he's saying it's concerning the Word of life. Verse 2 continues:

[1 John 1:2 NKJV]

² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us--

There are interesting things here that he's talking about. He's speaking a little bit metaphorically. He's not really calling Jesus out by name, just saying, "the One who's from

the beginning, the One I touched, saw, and I'm now talking about—He's the life." He's giving lots of interesting attributes of this life, and now he is proclaiming it to us.

What Is Koinonia?

In verse 3, why are they declaring it?

[1 John 1:3 NKJV]

³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

There's a certain point here that I like—that concept of what fellowship is. You've probably heard people explain koinonia to you before, but in case you don't know, that's where we get the word fellowship. It has this idea of having things in common. People who might have a share—kind of like if you own an apartment, you're in a koinonia with the other shareholders there because you have a joint venture with them. Or it could even refer to intimacy, like between a husband and a wife. It's a very general term here, but koinonia is often used to describe church fellowship—a closeness—because fellowship with one another is actually supposed to be very close and a very amazing thing.

This koinonia is described as being with us, the Father, and the Son. Earlier it describes the Son as the One who is from the beginning, which is a Genesis 1:1 or John 1 sort of reference. And not only that, He is the eternal life.

This also reminds me of when Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life," like Roy was teaching last class. Here He's just described as the eternal life. Having koinonia with eternal life itself is pretty amazing. I work at a care home, and there are a lot of people there who don't really look like they're living their best life—it'd be cool if they had a lot more life in them! But at least we have koinonia with this eternal life, which is God. So I get excited when I see that, and John here wants us to have that. That's why he's writing to us.

He says, "We write this to make our joy complete"—or some translations say "your joy complete." I think NIV might be "our joy"—John's joy. KJV or NKJV says "your joy." Either way, people are getting happy when you have koinonia! If I have koinonia with the Father, I'm going to be happy. And the elders who see me having koinonia with the Father and the Son are going to get excited about that too. So both are true—we're all going to be happy out of it.

God Is Light: Holiness and Truth

Let's find out how we get this koinonia. In verse 5:

[1 John 1:5 NKJV]

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

Now John's throwing at us another metaphor, using comparisons of darkness and light. Typically, when darkness and light are used, they refer to two concepts:

1. **Holiness** (that's why we sang Holy, Holy, Holy today) versus evil.
2. **Truth** versus what is false or lies.

Both of those concepts run simultaneously throughout the book of 1 John and in this chapter as well. God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.

[1 John 1:6 NKJV]

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Naturally, God, who lives in perfect light and is light, cannot have fellowship with darkness. So we can't be in the darkness and have fellowship with Him. That's the first thing for us to learn when asking, "How do I have fellowship with God?"

Verse 7:

[1 John 1:7 NKJV]

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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Are we able to continuously maintain a holy life all the time? Are we? Do we always do good? No, I don't personally. Maybe some of you do, but I'm not aware of that—so good luck with that! But at least there is hope.

If this were a situation where 1 John 1:9 meant "confess your sins to get initial salvation," that might be a problem. It would give us the impression that if we're not walking in the light, we're not saved, we don't have fellowship with God, and now we have no hope. But that's not really what John's talking about. We have to look at what he's actually saying: **How do we walk in the light when we're not walking in the light?**

Self-Deception vs. Confession and Cleansing

The next three verses explain that. Verses 8 to 10:

[1 John 1:8-10 NKJV]

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Starting at verse 8, self-deception is a big problem that people have, and it pretty much stems from **pride**. There are two types of defensiveness when people have done something wrong and are trying to hide: either you're afraid and just want to protect yourself so you lie, or—as is more likely here—it's a pride-based deception. Pride leads us to redefine our situation. We justify ourselves, think we're not actually wrong, and lie by saying, "No, I didn't sin." That pride causes us not to confess.

In verse 9, it contrasts those two things. You've got to put down your pride, and once you do, you'll be free to experience fellowship with eternal life—with God, His Son, and one another.

Walking in the light is great, but given that we don't always do it, we have to put our pride away and confess our sins. This resets our situation. We might be walking in the light for a while, realize we sinned, and step out of the light for a bit. Then we confess our sins, and look at what happens: **He is faithful and just.**

* **Faithful** means He is not going to stop doing what He does. You might think, "I messed up so bad that I don't think God will accept me anymore." Well, He is faithful—He won't stop forgiving us.

* **Just** means He is right to forgive us.

We don't have to be afraid to speak the truth. We just put our pride down, restoring our relationship with God. Then He will forgive us and purify (or cleanse) us.

Those are two different actions: **to forgive** and **to cleanse**. Is John just being redundant? Of course not!

* **Forgiveness** deals with relational status. If you offend a friend, you need to say, "I'm sorry, I'll try not to do that again," and they say, "It's okay, I forgive you." The friendship is intact.

* **Cleansing** gives us the power to succeed. What if you do it again? We want to walk in the light, but we fail. God didn't leave us merely in a forgiven state where we're bound to mess up again and feel bad; He gives us the power to succeed. It's like when the apostles were bathed in baptism, but Jesus said, "You don't need a whole bath again, you just need your feet washed." It's a restoration that changes our hearts so we aren't the way we used to be, enabling us to do what is right. God strengthens us to walk in the light as He is in the light.

Finally, verse 10: "If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar." Why did Jesus die on the cross? Christ died for sins to bring us to God, because our sins kept us from Him. If we say, "I don't have any sin, God," we are saying, "The point of You dying on the cross is insignificant to me; I'm already great." That's lying straight to God. We must lay that pride down.

Restoring Relationships with Others

This is vital for our relationship with God, but what about with other people? First John is very practical because it compares our relationship with God to how we treat one another. Let's skip ahead to verse 9 of chapter 2:

[1 John 2:9-11 NKJV]

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

How we treat and love our brother is a direct reflection of how we love God. It's hard to tangibly measure "I love God," but when someone says, "You're being mean to me," how you respond reveals whether you have a humble heart before God as well.

What helps our relationship with God is the exact same thing that helps our relationships with one another. To **confess** means "to say the same thing as" or "to agree." Usually in fights, both people are wrong, but each thinks the other is wrong. It's better to listen and agree: "You said I communicated that rudely. I thought I was fine, but I was rude. I agree—

that was wrong, and I shouldn't have done that." You need to confess, even if you think you're partly right.

When you confess what you did against someone else, you restore that relationship. In turn, that provides concrete evidence that your relationship with God isn't just in your imagination—it's real.

Christ Our Advocate and Atoning Sacrifice

Let's look back at 1 John 2:1-2. Those two verses are the gospel foundation that helps us interpret chapter 1:

[1 John 2:1 NKJV]

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.

That's why he writes: to encourage and help us. But he continues:

[1 John 2:1-2 NKJV]

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

John knows we are going to sin. Having fellowship with God means walking in the light, but when you do sin, Jesus is there for you as your **Advocate** and **atoning sacrifice**. As an Advocate, He defends you because He already paid the price as the atoning sacrifice. We don't have to live in fear thinking, "Oh no, I'm not walking in the light." The key is simple: "If I'm in the flesh, I need to confess and let God help me. I'll trust what God said: confess, and He will forgive and purify me."

Remaining in Christ's Love (John 15)

Let's turn to John 15:9-12. The themes in Jesus' Upper Room Discourse are very similar to 1 John. In John 15, Judas has already been sent out, and Jesus tells the remaining disciples:

[John 15:9-12 NKJV]

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

There are two main commands emphasized in 1 John that echo this passage:

1. Love one another as Christ has loved you (v. 12).
2. Have faith in Jesus.

In verse 11, Jesus says, "that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." That is virtually identical to what John wrote in 1 John—writing so that our joy will be complete.

How do we remain in His love? By obeying His command to love. Jesus walked in the light continuously and found joy in His closeness with the Father.

Remaining in His love speaks to a **relational fellowship**. While God's saving love for the world is unconditional (He loved the whole world and provided an atoning sacrifice for all), there is a special, relational enjoyment of His love when we walk in the light. If you aren't experiencing that closeness right now, it can be jump-started simply by confessing your sin and asking God to help you. Then you enter into that extra special fellowship, restored in closeness with God.

Closing Prayer

Thank You, God, that You extended mercy down to us—not just so that we can be with You one day, but so that we can be close to You today and close with one another. We often aren't close with one another because of our own sin that we do not confess to You. But we pray that You'll help us to be close to You and with one another, and help us to be aware of anything we've done so that we can grow in fellowship. In Your name we pray. Amen.