

Tests of Fellowship

Often the phrase "test of fellowship" is used to indicate differences between two groups of Christians which prevent them from working and worshipping together. While Scriptural judgments of others must not be neglected (cf. Jn. 7:24), the real "test of fellowship" should begin personally and internally (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5). Fellowship with anyone is dependent on his or her relationship with the Lord, and while communion with God is subject to several principles, the first epistle of John provides several practical "tests." If we are concerned about our relationships with the Lord, we should ask ourselves the following questions, testing ourselves:

The Truth Test: Am I believing and practicing the truth?

God is Light, and to have fellowship with Him, we must walk in the Light. Those who say they are righteous yet walk in darkness are liars and do not practice the truth. Christians who walk in the Light, however, are being cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:5-7). If we transgress God's law (sin), walking in darkness, and have the devil as our father (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4-10), yet if we keep the Lord's commandments (His word) and walk in the same manner He walked, "the love of God has truly been perfected in us" (cf. 1 Jn. 2:3-6).

The Sin Test: Am I acknowledging and confessing my sins?

The unsaved first come to God in baptism in order to contact the blood of Christ (cf. Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5), but we, as Christians, are washed clean by the saving blood when we walk in the Light *and* acknowledge and confess our sins (1 Jn. 1:9). To claim sinlessness is to implicate God as a liar and show the absence of His word in our heart (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). We must, like the sin-struck believer Simon the Sorcerer, repent and pray for forgiveness (cf. Acts 8:22). When transgressions are acknowledged, prayer for cleansing is offered, and examination for further sins is continued, the Lord "is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9; cf. Ps. 19:12).

The Love Test: Am I loving my brothers and sisters in Christ?

John says that those who claim to walk in the Light and yet do not love their brethren are in darkness (1 Jn. 2:9, 11). This is a recurring theme in 1 John: "Little children, let us not love with word and with tongue, but in deed and truth" (2:18). "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ... If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (4:8, 11, 20-21). Fellowship with God is definitely dependent on our love for His children.

Don't we all want to be in and stay in fellowship with God and remain ready for the Judgment? We must, then, make sure we are passing these tests of fellowship: "The Truth Test," "The Sin Test," and "The Love Test." Our eternal destiny depends on it!

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