



Growth Group Questions

January 4, 2026

“Falling Short”

CONTEXT

It's hard to determine exactly when 1-3 John was written (though probably at the end of the 1st century) because the false teaching that is addressed would have taken some time to develop. False teaching had created confusion and crisis in the church, with deceptive voices coming from former followers so John writes to bring believers back to Jesus. The author is most likely the apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation. Church tradition holds that John was in Ephesus when he wrote these letters and that he pastored churches in Asia Minor which would have included the churches talked about in Revelation.

1 John begins with fellowship—shared life with God and shared life with one another. There is both a vertical and horizontal relationship talked about. When this vertical and horizontal relationship is happening John writes that his joy is complete. John roots all of what he is saying in real history. He was a participant in the life and ministry of Jesus, and he writes with authority because he was an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus.

John then moves to images of light and darkness, which we will see throughout the letters. The world can be a dark place. The heretical teaching happening in these churches is creating darkness. Darkness happens when we stop living truthfully—when we hide, deflect, minimize, or pretend sin has no impact. When that happens, we break our fellowship with God and with one another.

Walking in the light does not mean never sinning. It does mean living openly before God, without trying to conceal things or justify oneself. That is why confession matters. Confession is simply telling the truth—bringing what is real into God's light. And in that light, forgiveness happens - “God is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This cleansing happens because of the work of Jesus.

When we belong to Christ, we can be secure. Sin may disrupt fellowship, but we never cease being God's child. The path forward is remembering to abide in Christ. We don't need to

pretend as though everything is fine. Rather, we seek to walk in the light, acknowledge our sin, receive the forgiveness Jesus offers us, and let our faith be seen by the people God brings our way.

SCRIPTURE

1 John 1:1-4

¹That 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. ²The 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. ³We 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. ⁴We write this to make our^[a] joy complete.

John 17:20-23

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

1 John 1:5-10

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But 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^[a] sin.

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr – *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*

"Sin is disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all, sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God, and it does all this disrupting and resisting in a number of intertwined ways."

Colossians 1:9-14

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[a] ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[b] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from

the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

QUESTIONS

1. In 1John 1:1, the John refers to Jesus as the “Word of Life.” What does that mean to you?
2. What does “fellowship” mean in the context of 1 John 1:3?
3. What kind of things can block your fellowship with God and with other believers?
4. What steps can you take to strengthen your fellowship with God and other believers?
5. In 1 John 1:5 John says that “God is light.” What does it mean that God is light?
6. John goes on to say that we must “walk in the light” in order to have fellowship with God. What does it look like to “walk in the light”?
7. In contrast to walking in the light, John talks about walking in the darkness. What does it mean to “walk in darkness”?
8. Pastor Paul quoted Cornelius Plantinga Jr’s definition of sin. How does this definition of sin compare with the way in which you may have defined sin?
9. In 1 John 1:9, John says “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. What does it mean to “confess our sins”?

PASTOR PAUL’S SERMON QUESTIONS

1. Is there a place in your life where you are resisting God?
2. What would you like God to help you with this year?