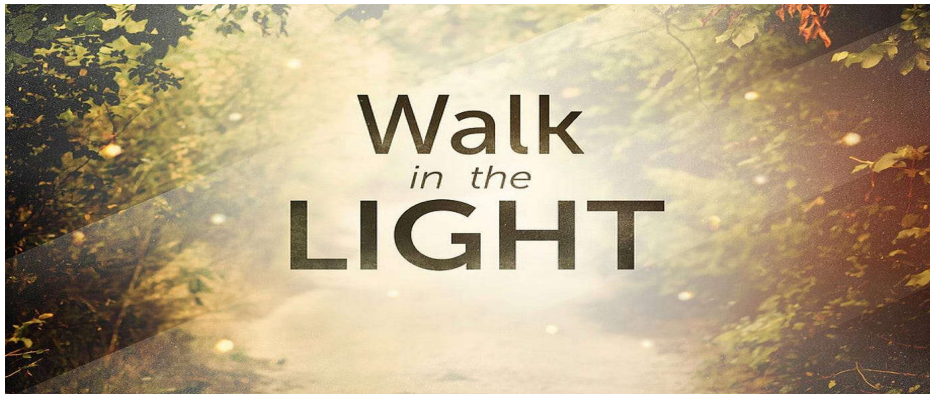


Walking in the Light
1 John 1.5-2.2

First John is all about fellowship with God. John had experienced it, and wanted us to know it, too. How can we? John begins by establishing the basics of fellowship with God. What does “walking in the light” entail? What does it produce? How can we sustain it? Let’s see...

1. God is light – in Him there is no darkness at all! (1.5)
2. The condition for fellowship: Walking in the light (1.6-7)
3. Maintaining fellowship: How to keep in the light (1.8-2.2)



1 John 1.5-2.2

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

What is God like? If you were asked to describe God, where would you begin? These days, even people who don’t believe in a God, still describe Him. And many churches spend time describing what God is like, too. For some progressives, God is like a cosmic grandparent who winks at sin and tells us not to worry, just be happy. The commands in the Bible are just a bunch of outdated ideas. Some modern theologians even view God as evolving along with the world – He used to condemn sins like adultery or sexual immorality, but He’s changed. Today God knows better, and we do, too.

As wrong as this is, there is a more dangerous teaching about God in many churches today: This is the view that Augustine invented, that because God is sovereign, He has determined

everything that happens in the universe! Has God determined everything that happens? John Calvin accepted this view, and said, “Creatures are so governed by the secret counsel of God, that nothing happens but what he has knowingly and willingly decreed.” (*Institutes*, Book 1, Ch. 16, Para. 3).

“But wait!” someone will say. “Surely they don’t mean God caused sin, do they?!!” Yes, they do. Calvin writes,

“The devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are...held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived...unless...in so far as he commands, that they are...even forced to do him service” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Ch. 17, Para. 11)

“I admit that in this miserable condition wherein men are now bound, all of Adam’s children have fallen by God’s will.” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Ch. 23, Para. 4)

“...individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction.” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book. 3, Ch. 23, Para. 6)

I realize this sounds bizarre to most of us! I wish I could say that this awful view of God had gone away, but it hasn’t. It is still taught in many churches. A book entitled *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* states this: “God...brings about all things in accordance with his will... he himself brings about these evil aspects for his glory...(he) even brought about the Nazis’ brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz... and even the sexual abuse of a young child...” (Mark R. Talbot, “All the

Good That Is Ours in Christ,” in John Piper and Justin Taylor (eds.), *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), p.42.)

Calvinist theologian James White was asked, “When a child is raped, is God responsible and did He decree that rape?” His reply: “Yes.” (<https://soteriology101.com/2015/03/08/purposeless-evil/>)

John Piper was asked: “Has God predetermined every tiny detail in the universe...including all our besetting sins?” His response? “Yes.” (“The God of Calvinism!,” *Faith on Fire* podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stcbk40d34s>)

Brothers and sisters, when theology goes so far off the rails that we blame God for Satan’s fall and our sin, we’ve lost the plot. After all, who wants to know a God like that, much less have fellowship with Him? It’s time to get back to the Bible. And a great place to start is 1 John 1.5.

God is light – in Him is no darkness at all! (1.5)

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

John begins this letter saying that he and the apostles have fellowship with God, and he wants all his readers to have that same fellowship (1.1-4). In 1 John 1.5, he begins explaining *how* we can experience fellowship with God, and with His Son Jesus Christ. If a Christian does not know *how* to have fellowship with God, they’ll be easy prey for Satan’s schemes to keep them from ever experiencing that fellowship.

So John begins in v5 with a statement about the character of God. The message that he and the apostles heard from Jesus, and that he declares, is this: *God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*. Note: Jesus didn't teach spiritual mumbo-jumbo about finding peace, hope, and love, or exhort the disciples to have a religious experience. He revealed objective truth to them about God: *God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*. What does this mean?

It establishes two truths about the character of God. First of all, God is absolutely holy. 'God is light' means God is "set apart from" sin; He is totally "free of any and every moral defect" (Hodges, 57). The second phrase in v5 doubles down on this truth – in the original Greek it is emphatic: *Darkness is not in Him, not at all!*

This was important in the first century, because pagan ideas about God were creeping into the early church. One of these pagan ideas was that God's nature included both good and evil, both 'light' and 'darkness.' In Greek mythology, gods were both helpful and harmful. This is like the panentheistic god of *Star Wars* – 'The Force'. The Force had a 'light side' and a 'dark side'. One was 'good' and the other 'evil,' but *both* were "The Force"! But God is NOT like "The Force"! Good and evil do not both originate with or exist in God!

The result of this wrong teaching made moral distinctions meaningless! After all, if God is both good and evil, then how you live doesn't really matter. You can be in "fellowship with God" whether you live a moral life or an immoral life! As a result, some early Christians were ignoring the moral commands of Scripture.

This truth is critical today, too. Churches today flaunt moral commands of Scripture. They ignore sin, and in some cases openly endorse what God condemns! For example, they say that God made people the way they are, and thus He approves of whatever lifestyle they choose. The moral commands of Scripture are turned into suggestions. In particular, in contemporary culture, biblical commands concerning gender and sex and marriage are under attack. Satan's fingerprints are all over this. The idea that God (if there is a God) is part good and part evil, so it doesn't matter how you live, is here dispelled. John will have none of it. *God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*.

The second thing that "God is light" means is that He reveals everything that is wicked and evil in the world. This is why those who endorse evil hate God and His Word so much. This is why they try to hide from God. Adam and Eve did this in the Garden, and we still do this today. We don't want to have our sin exposed by the light. Jesus said that "everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3.20).

I cannot emphasize this enough: This simple truth about the character of God is crucial to having fellowship with Him. We must recognize that *God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*.

The condition for fellowship: Walking in the light (1.6-7)

In verses 6-7 John states bluntly the condition for a Christian to be in fellowship with God. He writes, *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He*

Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If a person says they have fellowship with God, but “walk in the darkness,” they are lying. Why? Because God is not there. God is light – that is where He is. He is holy. But if we “walk in the light,” the result will be that we have fellowship with other Christians and with God, and we will also be cleansed from all sin!

“Wait a minute!” someone is thinking. “How can anyone live a life like that – without any sin?!” Answer: You can’t. To walk in darkness doesn’t mean to do nothing but sin, and to walk in the light doesn’t mean you never sin. We’ll see that in the next few verses.

To “walk in the darkness” means to knowingly choose to sin, to live outside God’s presence. To “walk in the light” means to knowingly pursue a moral life, to deal with sin, to agree with God, to be in His presence. No hiding. No justifying. No pretending. No faking. Authentic and transparent.

If someone says they’re in fellowship with God, but is living in a way God condemns, they are lying. If a person is walking in the light, they will have fellowship with other Christians and with God, and they’ll be dealing with the sin God exposes in their lives.

Now please notice: John is writing to Christians. His message is for all of us. If anyone, even an apostle, is out of step with God’s moral commands, they are out of fellowship with God. There are two spheres – the sphere of light, where God is, and the sphere of darkness, where God isn’t. John’s statement is

absolute: If you’re in the sphere of darkness, you aren’t where God is, and therefore, any claim to being in fellowship with God is a lie. As someone put it, “Christians are always subject to the temptation to justify sin and to claim fellowship with God at the same time” (Z. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 59).

Now this statement is so comprehensive it should jar each of us. There is no ‘gray area’ with God: We’re either walking in the darkness, or we’re walking in the light. Think of it this way: You’re walking on the ‘road of light,’ in fellowship with God. Then as happens to all of us, you face temptation. When we consciously choose to sin, we take an ‘exit’ off the road of light, onto the road of darkness. We are no longer walking in the light; we are walking in the darkness. And our fellowship, or companionship, or friendship, with Jesus is broken.

The question is, how do we get back on the road of light – the road of fellowship? How do we stay on that road???

Maintaining fellowship: How to keep in the light (1.8-2.2)

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

John ends v7 with a wonderful statement – *the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin*. Wow! That’s great! But wait a minute: What about when I’m walking in the light, and the light exposes a sin? Maybe I didn’t even recognize it as a sin before, but now I see that it is. What then?

Anyone who's been a Christian for long has experienced this. You're listening to a sermon, sitting in a Sunday School class, or reading your Bible, and the Holy Spirit brings to your mind some sin in your life. Maybe it's a hangover from before you were saved, or a 'blind spot' you never noticed before. But now you see it for the darkness it really is. What now?

John says in 1.8-2.2 that there are two things we should never say, one thing we need to do, and then one promise of what God will do for us.

First, in v8, John says we should never say that we don't have any sin in our lives. When we say that, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Listen, when you believed in Jesus as your Savior, you became a new creation (2 Cor. 5.17), and that is a wonderful truth. But in this life, we are still prone to sin – call it what you will, we still have a sinful nature. It's embedded in our temporal bodies. The 'war' with sin was won by Jesus through His death and resurrection, and we have eternal life, but the 'battle' with sin still rages. That's why we're told to 'put on the armor of God' (Eph. 6.10ff). So the first thing we should never say is that we have no sin.

The second thing we should never say is in v10: When the light of God exposes sin in my life, I must never say that it isn't really sin. If God's Word says something is sin, and I say it isn't, I am making God a liar – and His Word is not in me!

So what should we do when God brings to light a sin in our lives? The answer is in v9: Confess it! The Greek word here is *ὁμολογέω* (*homologeō*) – it means to say the same thing, to agree with, to admit. In other words, what God calls sin, I am going to call sin. No sugar-coating. Just admitting the truth.

When we confess sin that we are conscious of, God forgives it, and we are instantly back in fellowship with God, because He cleanses us from all unrighteousness: Our hearts are clean! Beyond this, God will reveal other sins we're blind to so that we can confess them, too. This is how, *if we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus God's Son cleanses us from all sin* (7)!

And this is where John ends up in 1 John 2.1-2. John says,

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

John is writing these things to us so that we won't sin, but if and when we do, he says we have an "advocate" with the Father, and it's Jesus! Let me put that another way: Jesus is on your team! He's in your corner! He has taken up your case! He's your defender!

Have you ever received a letter from a law firm in the mail telling you that you are liable for something, and unless you agree to pay damages, you will be taken to court? I have, and it can scare you. When that happens, you start sweating. What are you going to do? At that moment, what you want more than anything in the world is an "advocate." We call them lawyers!

In John Grisham's novel *The Client*, a boy who has found out about the murder of a senator is being pursued by government attorneys to testify against the murderer, who happens to be a member of a mob organization. At the same time the mob is trying to find the boy to kill him and permanently keep him

from ever testifying. In desperation, he looks for an attorney, and finds one who represents him in court, and goes the extra mile until he is finally safe and secure.

That's the kind of 'advocate' every Christian needs! When it comes to fellowship with God, all of us have to deal with sin in our lives. If we say we're no longer sinners, we're lying. If we know of our sin, we need to confess it. If we pretend that we haven't sinned when God says we have, we make Him out to be a liar!

But listen: Even when we aren't conscious of our sin, we are still guilty before a holy God. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. That's how serious sin is. It can break our fellowship with God. Instead of walking in the light with God, we're walking in darkness. What can we do?

Satan loves to keep us in the dark; he wants to keep us blind to our sin. As long as we're walking in darkness, we'll never see it. He wants to steal our joy, kill our hope, and destroy our fellowship with God (Jn. 10.10). In this desperate situation, Jesus is the perfect "advocate." Why?

Because He represents us before the Father. When Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12.10), demands our lives in payment for our sin, our Advocate Jesus steps up and says, "Father, I've already paid for that sin!" Satan's demand is thrown out of court, and our fellowship with God is restored.

And not only that: Jesus went the extra mile. His payment for sin on the cross was so complete that it doesn't only cover the sins we commit in our daily lives as Christians. It covers the sins of every person in the whole world.

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

When I graduated from seminary, I went to a church in New South Wales, Australia. One Sunday night after I preached, after almost everyone had left, a young woman was sitting in the back row weeping. I asked what was wrong, and she said she wanted to be saved, but God wouldn't save her because she was such a bad sinner." I said, "You're telling me you're a really bad sinner? Well, what if I told you that God is in the business of saving really bad sinners?" I quoted a few verses: *The Son of Man has come to seek and save those that are lost* (Lk. 19.10). *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.* (Jn. 3.17). *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (1 Tim. 1.15). ...and *He Himself is the payment for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world* (1 Jn. 2.2). That night she prayed to receive Christ as her Savior (Jocelyn Freeman).

If you've never believed in Jesus, do it today, right now. He died on the cross for your sins – and He paid the price for all of them.

If you've believed in Jesus and received eternal life, but have not been living like it, confess your sins to Him, and start on a road to fellowship. You'll never regret it!

Digging Deeper

1. John begins his first letter by telling us why he is writing: He wants us to have fellowship with God like he and the apostles have had as a result of their time with Jesus. It's not enough for them to have it: He wants us to have it, too! But we can't be in fellowship with God if we're not 'where He is', so He begins by telling us that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (v5). What does "light" indicate about the character of God? See Gen. 1.3-4; John 1.1-5, 9-10; 3.19-21; 8.12; 9.5; 12.46; Eph. 5.7-14; 1 Pet. 2.9; 1 Jn. 2.8-11. What does "darkness" refer to? See Acts 26.18; 2 Cor. 4.3-4; Eph. 6.12; Col. 1.13. What other references to 'light' and 'darkness' can you think of in Scripture?
2. What does it mean for us to "walk in the light"? Since God is light (absolutely holy, without sin; v5), and He is "in the light" (v7), this suggests that it is possible for us to 'live in God's presence'! When do you feel totally 'at one' with God? What does it mean for us to "walk in the darkness"? While we're still subject to our sinful nature in our lives here on earth, what actions can we take, and what habits can we form, to help us walk *more* in the light, and *less* in darkness? See Gal. 5.16-25; 1 Thess. 5.16-22; 2 Tim. 2.15; James 1.21-25.
3. According to 1 John 1.8 and 10, how do we tend to respond when we become aware of our sin? Why is this so? What misconception about God do we often believe? What untruth about God did Satan deceive Eve into believing in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3.4-5)? How did Jesus characterize Satan? How does he counterfeit God's good desires for His creation to this day (2 Cor. 11.14-15)?
4. When we become conscious of sin in our lives, we should confess it (1 Jn. 1.9). "Confess" translates the Greek word *homologeō*, which literally means "to say the same thing." Classical Greek used it in legal contracts to mean an "agreement". Here, it means "agreeing with God" about my sin. What happens when we do this? What two things does God do for us? Why does John write this to us (see 2.1)? Christ's death on the cross is full payment for our sins; for whose sins is it full payment (2.2)? Is this 'good news,' or what?!!