

Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5-7

January 21, 2018

Last fall I was really excited to set up one of my deer stands back on a little peninsula of land that borders Grant Creek. I hadn't hunted out there in a few years and I knew nobody else had either. So, I got all my gear loaded up and headed down the logging road, through the woods, across the field, through some more woods, across the swamp, through some more woods, and then up a little hill to my "ultimate secret spot!" I set my tree pegs, cinched my portable stand tightly around a sturdy tree, and then climbed in and sat down to admire my vantage point. "Yes, it was perfect!" I could already taste the venison! A while later, it was opening day. I jumped in the van with my daughter Callie, my friend Barry, and his daughter, Kate, and we headed out bright and early. I'm always more eager that very first day. I like to be one of the first ones in my stand. Once I had dropped everyone else off, I parked the van, grabbed my gun, and started walking, in the dark. It wasn't too long before I realized a small flaw in my planning. When I'd gone out to set up my deer stand, I'd parked at a friend's house and walked from there. But, because I was dropping off other hunters this time, I had parked on a whole different side of the woods. Well, I thought to myself, I know this woods like the back of my hand. No problem. So, I kept walking. I stumbled down an old logging trail but it seemed as though a tornado had come through recently. I kept tripping on downed trees, scratching my face against overgrown brush, and getting my feet pinned under various debris. Finally, I realized it would be much better if I just used my headlamp. I like to turn it on anyhow because other hunters are less likely to think you're a deer when you have a headlamp on. Well, this headlamp made all the difference. Suddenly every fallen tree was easily avoided. The overgrown branches were easily pushed back with my gloved hands. All the tripping hazards and snow mounds and random holes in the ground were illuminated by my handy dandy headlamp. What a great piece of technology! **And what a difference walking in the light can make!** Speaking of walking in the light, 1 John uses this imagery of Walking in the Light as a metaphor for some important spiritual truths. Today, we're going to talk about that. Please turn in your Bible to 1 John.

We serve the God who is light. 1 John 1:5 begins, "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 Don't miss the significance of this: our God is light. In many ways John's message could feel overly simplistic. Ok, what's the big deal? God is light. So...? But, if we really think about this, it should blow our mind: there is no darkness in God, at all! None, zilch, nada. That is incredible! Can we actually even imagine that? Probably not. But, it's worth meditating on; the very nature of the God we serve is light. Of course, by light, we don't mean mere physical light or earthly light. We're talking about the light of perfect righteousness. "Light emphasizes especially the splendor and glory of God, the truthfulness of God, and his purity."² He is like nothing else we could compare Him to. The fact that God is light, teaches us some key truths:³

1. God is uniquely holy. He is different than us, completely pure with no darkness at all.

One day, Peter, James, and John were out fishing together, and Jesus caused them to catch so many fish, that their nets began to break. Luke 5:8 tells us, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁴ Somehow Peter knew, through this miracle, that there was something very special, very holy about Jesus.⁵ There's a powerful reality to God, that the nearer we come to Him, the more we feel our own sinfulness and need for

¹ When John says we have heard this message "from him," the him is referring to Jesus. In fact, Luke 2:32 teaches us that Jesus was "a light of revelation to the Gentiles." And, in Jn. 8:12, Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world."

² Glenn W. Barker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 309.

³ See discussion by William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude, Rev. Ed.*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 26.

⁴ Some other examples include Exodus 3:5-6, Job 42:5-6, and Isaiah 6:5.

⁵ At first, Peter cringed when he got so near to Jesus. The light of God exposed his sin and he asked Jesus to go away. But, Jesus did not go away. It's a mistake for us to think Jesus is repelled by us because of our sin. In fact, He is just the opposite. This is what so differentiated Jesus from other religious leaders of His day. The religious elite would judge and scorn and look down on other people for their sins. But Jesus, He would simply recognize their need for help. He had a rep as a "friend of sinners."⁵ Mark 2:16-17 tells us, "When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

forgiveness.”⁶ Because He is light, and we are not. But here’s some good news, the fact that God is light, also teaches us that...

2. “God is self-revealing,” He wants to be known by us.⁷ If God’s nature or essence were different, perhaps His existence would be veiled. He could have remained distant, unknown to us. But He didn’t. God revealed Himself to us. This is good news because we need this God of light to rescue us from the darkness. Colossians 1:12-13 says,

“...[God] has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”⁸

I can still remember the time I was helping clean out a friend’s apartment down south. They’d been away for a few weeks and by the time I got there to help clean, the place was infested...with cockroaches. Now, I’m a northern boy, so I’m not used to cockroaches. Wood ticks - fine, mosquitoes – no problem, Lutefisk - I can handle it! But, these cockroaches were giving me the heebeegeebees. Every time I went to pick up a pop can or a half-eaten bag of candy, I’d uncover 10-20 more of them. Oofta! Nasty. Now, I’m sure they were more afraid of me because I was so much bigger than them. And, I was exposing them to the light, which they apparently hated. They would scatter to the first dark crevice or corner they could find. This probably isn’t too far from how we react when God’s light shines on our sin. Our frail humanity is overwhelmed by His awesome holiness. This spiritual light is powerful! It invades our darkness, exposes our hidden sin, and overcomes us like a flood. But here is what is so great about God, because of His gracious nature, He doesn’t squish us like a bug. Instead, he chooses to call us out of darkness by sending His son to rescue us. In fact, running with this illustration just a little further, Jesus agreed to become a cockroach, just like us, so that we wouldn’t be totally overwhelmed by His greatness. Jesus, as the light of the world⁹, demonstrates that God is self-revealing. Our God is light. In Him there is no darkness AT ALL. In fact, Walking in the darkness debunks our claim to have fellowship with God. Serving the God who is light, means we understand that nothing is hidden from His sight. He sees it all. This is why 1 John 1:6 tells us, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.” We are not fooling God and we’re probably not fooling other people. In fact, we probably aren’t even really fooling ourselves. John uses the word “we” in v. 6. He is addressing his concern for these dear Christians whom he cares about. He’s warning them but he’s also appealing to their common sense. If you are claiming to be a Christ-follower but you’re walking in darkness, something doesn’t add up. Verse 6 causes me to wonder, why did John even need to write this? Isn’t it pretty obvious that hypocrisy is wrong? That saying one thing and doing another just isn’t right?

1. Part of the reason John needed to write this is explained by something we learned last week. John’s readers were under immense pressure from false teachers. 1 John 2:26 says, “I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” As it turns out, one of the things these false teachers were apparently teaching was that sins of the flesh don’t matter. It was either some form of early gnostic heresy or quite possibly the teachings of a guy named Cerinthus or some combination of various heresies of that time. Regardless, there were people from within these churches that were going around teaching a lie: sin didn’t matter that much. “Breaking God’s law [is] of no moral consequence.”¹⁰ But Christians should never embrace darkness. We should have nothing to do with it because of the very nature of the God who has rescued us. Somehow, these dear

⁶ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1713.

⁷ The fact that God is light, teaches us a third thing. William Barclay says **God brings beauty and order to our chaos.**⁷ (*The Letters of John and Jude*, Rev. Ed., Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976, p. 27) 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” Paul is quoting here from Genesis 1:3, when God created the world. Genesis 1:2 said the earth was formless and empty, but then God’s light shined out of darkness, bringing beauty and order to the physical universe. Paul takes this idea and transitions it to the spiritual plane. In a similar way, God shines his light into the empty darkness of our hearts, bringing beauty and order to our souls.

⁸ 1 Peter 2:9 declares, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

⁹ See John 8:12.

¹⁰ *NIV Study Bible* 2011, p. 2123.

Christian Bros/Sis had been duped by their surroundings into thinking it might somehow be ok to live in sin.¹¹

2. Another reason John needed to write this, is the nature of humankind.¹² It is in our human nature to gravitate toward darkness. John wrote about this very thing in his Gospel. In John 3:19-21 he says, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people 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 their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." Our sin nature causes us to love the darkness and to practice evil. But when we come into God's light, He shows us how to live by His truth. So, John tells them, "if you are not living out the truth, then your fellowship with God is a lie." They are being deceived, either deceived by others or deceived by themselves.¹³

How about you; do you ever deceive yourself? You know that you want to be committed to God but then you live in wrong ways? If so, you feel this constant tension, a kind of seesaw battle. One minute you're desiring to be so close to God, the next minute you find yourself stumbling into sin. It's a frustrating and confusing place to be. When believers stumble, it grieves their conscience, it troubles the heart of God, and it grieves the indwelling HS. It feels like your hip is out of its socket; you just can't seem to walk with God the way that you really want to. Here's why it feels that way, you need an alignment. "Darkness has no place in God, so all that is of the darkness, is excluded from having fellowship with God."¹⁴ Your actions are out of sync with your spiritual union to God. It's like a bad garage band, the drummer is doing one thing banging away in the corner and the guitarist is jamming to his own rhythm. The volume is cranked up to 10, but it's NOT working. Perhaps you sense your offbeat hypocrisy. The way to get back on beat spiritually, is to walk in the light.¹⁵

Walking in the light allows us to have fellowship with God & with one another. 1 John 1:7 says, "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." When I first read, 1 John 1:7, I expected John to say "if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with God."¹⁶ But, he doesn't.... he says, "But if we walk in the light...we have fellowship with ONE ANOTHER..."¹⁷ Therefore, walking in the light has a direct correlation not only to our fellowship with God, BUT ALSO to our fellowship with ONE ANOTHER. In the next chapter, 1 John 2:9-11 tells us, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."

Walking in the darkness blinds us. Walking in the light binds us; not only binds us to God, but it also binds us to one another.¹⁸ Fellowship¹⁹ can be defined as a close relationship involving mutual interests and sharing.²⁰ When John talks about being in fellowship with one another, he is talking about something far beyond potluck dinners. He's referring to the close personal relationships we enjoy with each other through Christ. Every Christ-follower is able to walk in fellowship with God because she or he has been made acceptable to God through the blood of Jesus. This is our common bond: Jesus paid the price for each of us. That bond that Jesus provides for us is hindered though, when one or more of us is walking in darkness. Apart from God's light, we will encounter

¹¹ William Barclay says it well: "Darkness stands for the Christless life. It represents the life that a [person] lived before [they] met Christ or the life that [they live] if [they stray] away from him." (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, p. 27)

¹² Jeremiah 17:9 teaches us that, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

¹³ Read Ephesians 5:3-15.

¹⁴ Barker, p. 310.

¹⁵ See Galatians 5:16-25.

¹⁶ Perhaps that's because walking in the light is fellowship with God; it would be redundant.

¹⁷ Someone who is not yet a Christian can't enjoy this fellowship. Certainly, they can attend church. But, until you personally give your life to Christ, it won't be the same experience of faith. People can't enter into Christian fellowship apart from actually knowing Christ; it's simply not possible. It's not meant to be mean or intolerant, but it's exclusive by the very nature of how God has structured a faith community to work. See 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

¹⁸ Barclay p. 16.

¹⁹ Κοινωνία. Philippians 3:10 translates this same Greek word "participation" in the sufferings for Christ. See also 1 Corinthians 1:9.

²⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 552). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

fighting and division. So if we are not in fellowship with each other, perhaps it's because we are not in fellowship with God. John was watching these beloved Christians being misled into darkness, and he knew it would threaten the unity they enjoyed in Christ.

Verse 7 also addresses our direct fellowship with God. 1 John 1:7 says, "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." John uses the present tense for the verbs 'walk' and 'purifies', which shows that both the walking and the purifying are ongoing activities. This isn't a onetime thing. Walking in the light is a daily walk. And purification from sin is a daily purification; our sanctification is a process over time.²¹ In other words, walking in the light does not mean that we will never sin, but it does mean that we will not try to hide our sin from God.²² Walking in the light is about living each day honestly before God, in the midst of our sin and our stumbling and our broken mess. We desperately depend on Him to help us to walk in the light and to overcome the sin that consistently seeks to woo us back to the darkness.²³ If walking in the light meant living a perfectly sinless life, then John wouldn't have written the very next verse. 1 Jn. 1:8 declares, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Walking in the light means that rather than loving darkness and hiding our evil deeds, we expose them to the light. We choose to live by the truth, even when it's painful and embarrassing; even when our sin is blatantly displayed in broad daylight.²⁴ Walking in the light means that we choose to be penitent when we fall into sin, that we "will never think that sin does not matter," but rather the longer we spend walking in the light, the more we agree with God that sin is indeed awful.²⁵ Understanding that nothing is hidden from the God of light,²⁶ we let our sin be seen plainly. Because we want to be done with sin. We want healing and rescue; we want deliverance from its bondage. And we now recognize that Jesus is our only hope, not just for our salvation but also for our daily Christian living. Jesus is the only hope that I have, and he is the only hope that you have. Though we may struggle to maintain constant fidelity, we continue to drag our infidelity back into God's light so that there will be no lasting hypocrisy within us.

Here's the scariest part though, sometimes we grow accustomed to this hypocrisy. We get in a cycle of the same sin for so long, that we grow comfortable with it. We settle for an attitude of, "It is what it is." The reason that this is so scary is that when this walking in darkness becomes consistent and long-term, it starts to debunk our own claim that we are in fellowship with God. It begins to build a pretty strong and convincing case, against whether we really have a genuine commitment to God. We begin to lose the assurance of our faith. In fact, we may even go so far as to wonder to ourselves, "am I even a Christian anymore?" And with that rattling around in our heart and mind, our resistance to sin diminishes even more. Sometimes, we give up the fight.

My advice? If walking in darkness has become the norm for you, tell God today that you miss your close fellowship with Him. Make up your mind that you want the LORD, more than you want your sin.²⁷ Otherwise, not only will this ping-pong vacillation drive you crazy, but you'll be miserable. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you of your sin, it's a good sign – it means that your heart is tender today and you're longing to renew your fellowship with God.²⁸ But, it's also a bad sign, this strong conviction confirms that you're already drifting into the darkness. Sin is our greatest threat. My Brother or Sister in Christ, we need to stop dipping our toe back into the darkness, we need to remain in the light! Let us walk in the light, for our God is light.

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²¹ For the lost, they can experience for the first time, their own salvation from sin. But, if they keep running and hiding their sin from the light, they'll never receive the purification from sin that Jesus' blood provides.

²² Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (pp. 64–65). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

²³ "Walking in the light' involves a willingness to be open towards God and his revelation in Christ, while 'walking in the darkness' involves a refusal to do this." (Kruse, C. G. (2000). *The letters of John* (p. 63). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.)

²⁴ Walking in the light reveals our willingness to be honest about our sin before God and others. It's a daily surrender; agreeing with God that we want to walk in His light, where there is no darkness. Our desire is to become faithful disciples of Christ.

²⁵ Barclay, p. 29.

²⁶ See Hebrews 4:13.

²⁷ See Romans 13:11-14.

²⁸ Read Ephesians 5:8-11.