

God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all

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1 John 1:5-2:2 - ESV

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say 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 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. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

This past summer, we visited my sister and her family down on the farm. They live in South Eastern Alberta. They farm the land that my grandparents homesteaded in the early 1900's. A few buildings remain on the property. One is the farmhouse Grandpa built in 1914 that you can see from a distance on this slide. It was quite an ambitious project. It had 3 or 4 bedrooms upstairs. On the main floor there was kitchen, 2 more bedrooms and a sitting room. Underneath was a cellar where they kept all their preserved goods.

Now from a distance the farmhouse looks kind of quaint and unique. But it hasn't been lived in since the 1950's. The years have taken their toll on this house. Inside, you can see the plaster falling off the walls. Birds nest inside. And the foundation is crumbling. From a distance, this house may look okay. But a close up view in the fullness of daylight reveals its true condition.

A similar thing happens with people's lives. We can look at others from afar and conclude all sorts of things about them. They may have a nice house, car, clothes, phone and looks. Or they may have an average house, an older car, some nice but not designer clothes, an older phone, if one at all and average looks. We can conclude that one person must be happy and the other not. Yet closer examination may reveal that the family with the nice house and car is coming apart. Or the person who has the latest phone uses it to send along hurtful information. Or the person with the average looks is really okay with themselves. Or the family in the average house is really content with where they live.

Closer examination reveals what's really there. If Jesus closely examined your life what would he find? Would the image presented externally match who you are internally? Today we have opportunity to invite God's light to examine our lives and reveal what's really there. For some of us this could be scary and others it could be very encouraging. But it's what we really need. We all desperately need God. John takes God's light and shines it on our lives as he continues his letter.

Last week, we met John one of the Lord's closest disciples. He sat right beside Jesus' at the Last Supper. While he prayed in the garden, Jesus asked John along with Peter and James to watch and pray with him. John was at the cross, took care of Jesus' mother and went into the empty tomb. He also had several encounters with the resurrected Christ. John now nears the end of his life. He writes Christians in churches needing encouragement. Some left these churches claiming they are the true Christians. So he writes these churches to strengthen Christians with assurance and awaken those who think they're Christians to the possibility that might not be.

Last week, we saw him claim that true Christians had to fellowship with the eyewitnesses like him if they wanted to fellowship with God. We learned fellowship meant receiving and accepting the message of the apostles passed down to us through the New Testament. Now John continues with declaration about God's character. Then he unpacks the implications or effects that God's character has on our lives today.

An incredible declaration about God's Character

John begins in verse 5 by referring again to a message. This is no ordinary message or something he just came up with. This message was given "from him" or from Christ himself. Again John speaks of something that the apostles must proclaim. We might expect it to be the message of the Gospel or a message urging our need for God. But instead it's a message about God.

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. What does this have to do with anything? Where does the sense of need arise from a message or declaration like this? This seems to have little to do with the original readers. It may seem to have little immediate relevance to our lives today. But upon closer examination, we discover that this message has a huge amount to do with us if we grasp what it says.

God is light. What does that mean? To the original readers, this may have at first seemed very unoriginal. The pagan religious systems of the day had gods and goddesses associated with light. The sun was a god along with the moon and different stars. And light is part of the universal language of religious symbolism. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Gnosticism all speak of light.

But John means something very different when he says God is light. We know that partially from the Old Testament. It described God as light in 2 ways. Light could refer to revelation/revealing. So God as light reveals Himself and his truth to people who would otherwise be in the dark. So God's light stands for truth and darkness stands for error or ignorance. So God's teaching is light. In the Old Testament, you might know Psalm 119:105 which declares "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

But there was another way the Old Testament referred to God's light. This was in the area of morality. God's light described his purity, righteousness, moral excellence and holiness.

John could be referring to both uses of light. So God is light means God is true and reveals truth. God is light means God is spiritually perfect, morally excellent and majestic. God is absolutely holy and completely pure. God as light is not like the pagan gods of light – the sun, the moon or the stars. God is spirit and personal not the material and impersonal fire of daytime sun or the pale gleam of stars or moon. God created those lights. But he is not those lights. He is true, morally perfect, holy, glorious and righteous. This description applies not only to God the Father but to Jesus in John's writings. In the Gospel, Jesus declares "I am the light of the world." John declares about Jesus, the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. So God is light. Jesus is light.

But just in case we miss this, John makes this clear in the last phrase of verse 5. "In him there is no darkness at all." There is no dark side to God. He is not like the conflicted heroes of movies and novels today where there is some good and some questionable. There is no shadow side to God that will one day be uncovered.

This is what makes God absolutely unique. Every one of us has something we've done, thought or said that we'd like to keep from others. Every person we've ever dealt with or met has a shadowy side. But with God, there is no dark side. He is only good; only right; only holy. God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. This is the message John heard from Christ and proclaims to us.

We might say “so what?” People we know might say “so what?” Well brilliant, perfect, glorious light exposes what’s hidden by darkness. When shined on our lives, it reveals what’s really there. We may compare ourselves to other people generally and conclude we’re pretty good compared to them. But standing in the brilliance of God’s light is quite a different story. How we respond to God as light reveals a lot about where we’re at as Christians. Thankfully, John lays out the “so what” or implications of God is light for us in the next verses. The first thing he points to is our lifestyles.

With the Holy Spirit’s help, **we must examine whether our lifestyle reflects walking in darkness or the light.** Remember last week the 4 question true Christian test? Question #4 – Do our lives show change and growth towards Christlikeness? Well John first examines lifestyle in verses 6 and 7.

If we say we have fellowship with Him (God) while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (1:6) We can say we’re Christians all we want. We can claim that we’re good with God. But a lifestyle contrary to God and His Word puts that claim into question.

This connection between religious claim and lifestyle was a radical concept in the ancient world. You could claim to be a spiritual or religious person with no impact on the way you lived your life. You just went into the temple and did the religious thing. Then you could walk out and live your life however you wanted. That was normal.

Fast forward 2000 years. Don’t we live in a culture that now practices the same thing? People claim to be Christians. But if we live in a way that’s against His Word given through His Son and proclaimed by the apostles. We’re walking in darkness.

John says that people who do this are lying and do not practice the truth. What are they lying about – that they have fellowship with God. Walking in darkness, human sinfulness makes fellowship with God impossible. You cannot combine the claim to be close with God with the scandalous action of defying his will.

I remember one of my friends went on an exchange to a foreign country. He became friends with a group of students. One of them was a married guy. His wife lived in another city while he went to school in this city. My friend noticed that this guy would flirt with other women when they were out and even go home with some of them. So one day my friend asked the guy how important he thought it was to be faithful to his wife. The guy answered “I am faithful to my wife.” So my friend said “but you flirt with all these women and sometimes you go home with them.” And the guy responded “I am faithful to my wife in my mind.” I wonder if his wife would conclude the same thing. He

said one thing but lived something completely different. Maybe he even believed it. But he was lying to himself and to her.

The examination of our lifestyle may reveal that we're actually walking in darkness. But it may also reveal that we're actually walking in the light. **"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sins."** There are some people, hopefully many of us here today, who do walk in the light. We strive to live a life according to the Lord's Word. We aim to live lives that do not contain falsehoods, hidden sins or deception. You'd think that John would say "if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with God." But instead he says "we have fellowship with one another." This means true Christians have close mutual relationship with other Christians who desire to follow Christ. So when people say "I'm a Christian but I don't need to go to church or be connected to other Christians," that doesn't add up.

Notice John does not claim perfection for those who walk in the light. "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." So the church is not a collection of morally perfect people. We are those who come together under Christ. We depend on Jesus' blood to cleanse us from all sin. So God doesn't just say "I forgive you." Through Jesus' blood, sin is scrubbed from our lives. It removes the stain of sin no matter what its background. We may think that saying no to sin is saying no to fun. But "God and Jesus preserve believers from the ravaging effects of sin." Think back 5 or 10 years in your life. I hope you can think of some sins that you've left behind. Imagine if God had not intervened and saved you not only from the penalty of that sin but from its practice. Think about how much damage that sin might have done in you and to others if Jesus' blood did not do its cleansing work in your life.

God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. Therefore under the Holy Spirit's guidance, we must examine our lives to see if they reflect walking in darkness or light. But then John gives us another way God's light reveals where we are at spiritually. The next three verses reflect on what a person says about sin. So **we must pay attention to our words about sin. If we have say we have no sin – we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1:8)** This is the person who says "I don't need the cross. I don't have sin." Very few people walk around saying, "I don't have sin." But there is widespread belief that there is no such thing as sin. It's now considered rude and intolerant to claim that there is a wrong way to live unless you do something really heinous. But John says people who say this deceive themselves and reveal that they're either not Christians or very far from God.

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

(1:9). True Christians admit our sins or confess them. We acknowledge before God we are sinners by nature and by practice. When we do that “He is faithful to forgive us.” But he’s also just which seems like it’s way out of place when it comes to forgiving sins. This is a stumbling block for many. How can a just God forgive sin without compromising justice? The only way is through a sinless substitute – Jesus. So if we’ve trusted Jesus and then confess sins, God is faithful and just in forgiving our sins AND cleansing us from all unrighteousness. There’s that scrubbing, blotting out, wiping away work of God again.

But there might be others who say “we have not sinned.” Some of us may agree that there is such a thing as sin. Some of the really wicked criminals and tyrants throughout history have done it. But we haven’t. We’re good people. This claim also has serious consequences. It basically calls God a liar. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and the truth is not in us. If we claim we have not sinned in light of God’s abundant testimony that we have, then one of us has lied. John says the person who has not believed God’s word about sin then claims God lies. Not believing God’s word amounts to not believing God or to accusing him of lying. But in light of the God who is light, such a claim reveals the person is not really a Christian. His word is not in us.

So John declares God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. Therefore we need to examine our lives to see if we are walking in darkness or light. We need to pay attention to what we say about sin.

But John recognizes something that could be done with verses 6-10. One could conclude that acknowledging the reality of sin and confessing it is all we need to do with our sin. That means we could just go on sinning because it’s real and we just need to confess it. So we could conclude that sin is tolerable in our lives because it’s a reality and we just need to confess it. We could justify our sin and even defend it.

But what does John say in the first phrase of chapter 2? “My little children, I am writing these things so that you may be aware of sin.”? No. “So that you may sin a little less.”? No. “So that you may not sin.” Basically John calls us to a high standard. **We must stop tolerating sin in our lives.** Have you and I ever woken up and said “by the power of the Holy Spirit, my goal today is to not sin.” John’s purpose is to prevent sin, not condone it. His references to the cleansing blood of Jesus emphasize how much it cost to pay for our sin. One commentator writes “Horror, hatred, fear and rejection of sin saturate this letter.” John longs that they shall not fall into sin. At the very least, We must leave behind

sinful lifestyles. (2:1a) If there is something in our lives that we know is habitual sin or some way in which we're living that is directly contrary to God's Word, we need to stop now. We're not growing in Christ until these habitual sins are confessed, forsaken and left behind.

But we will still stumble. We will still occasionally sin. But when that happens **we must continue to hope in Christ when we do sin.** John describes these great reasons why we have hope in Christ. I am going to develop these more fully next week. But briefly today, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. Jesus is in heaven and interceding for us before God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all. And Jesus himself is the propitiation for our sins. Suffice it to say for now that this is what happened on the cross when Jesus bore God's wrath that we deserved. But we'll talk more about that next week.

Today – we are about to approach the Lord's table, who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. He calls us to lives that are consistent whether others see us from a distance or close up. Some of you hear today may not be really struggling with rebelling against God. But something has happened in your life that has left you struggling about God. Maybe today you need to be reminded that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. So whatever has happened does not mean that God has a shadow side that you just didn't know about. Maybe you need to rest in the absolute purity and moral uprightness of God.

Maybe some of us have been woken up today by the Holy Spirit. We've been walking in darkness. If the Holy Spirit has revealed this to you, you need to repent of your sins; turn from them and put your entire trust in Christ and His work. His blood will cleanse you from sin. Will you put your full trust in Him now?

Maybe some of us have been harboring sin – we've been hiding it – denying it but know it's there. You need to confess your sin and he is faithful and just to forgive sin and cleanse us from all your unrighteousness. Maybe some of us have been quite tolerant of the sin in our lives. We know we can confess it and be forgiven. But a Christ follower doesn't settle for that. He or she desires Christ to continue His cleansing and transforming work in them. So maybe you need to confess a casual tolerance for sin and ask the Holy Spirit and other Christians to spur you on to not sinning.

God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. Thank God for who He is, what He reveals and how He saves!