

God is Light

1 JOHN 1:5-10

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This morning I would invite you to return with me to our study of the book of 1 John. Last week we learned that toward the end of the First Century, some people were starting to spread the idea that the soul and body are completely separate, that the soul is good and the body is evil. And as we learned last week, there were two main and very dangerous implications of this theory. First of all, since the soul and body are completely separate, the idea was: I can do whatever I want to do with my body, and my actions will have no effect whatsoever on my soul. That teaching is obviously quite convenient! And we see it somewhat today with the idea that we can be spiritual, but not religious – spiritual, but with no accountability; spiritual (worshiping God in some way), but basically doing whatever feels good to us at the moment. And the second main and disastrous implication of teaching that the soul and body are completely separate (good vs. evil) is this (in their view): God (as a Spirit) could not have come to earth in human form; therefore, Jesus must have been nothing more than a ghost, an apparition.

Well, in the opening verses of 1 John, John (as an old man now and as the last living apostle), John confronts this teaching quite forcefully. In the first verse, he very boldly claims that he personally had heard, seen, and touched the Lord (indicating that Jesus was, in fact, God in the flesh, in an actual human body), and then he gives us his motivation for writing this letter, explaining why all of this is so important, telling us why we should pay attention, and the reason is: John wants us to have fellowship with God! He wants us to have joy! If we do not understand that God really did come in the flesh, then we have really missed the entire point of the Christian faith.

Well, as we move into the last half of Chapter 1, we find that John continues, and in a very clear and forceful way, he directly addresses the other idea, this theory that we can sin with our bodies without it having some effect on our souls. If you will, please look with me this morning at 1 John 1:5-10. By the way, the picture on the wall up here is a picture I took on a hike with my sister out in Washington a few weeks ago. I started working on this lesson on God being light, and I thought back to our hike as the sun finally made it through the clouds and the trees out there. But referring to Jesus, notice, please, what John says (starting in verse 5),

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. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ 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.⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

This morning, I want us to look at the main idea here (that God is Light), I want us to then notice the problem this creates for us (and how some have tried to deal with this problem very ineffectively), and then I want us to close by noticing God's solution to this problem.

- I. **But first of all, we go back up to the beginning of this paragraph as we notice the apostle John's reminder (his announcement) to us that GOD IS LIGHT.**

And according to John, this is a message that they had heard from Jesus himself, ***"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."*** God, then, is pure and holy and perfect in every way. We think of Paul who explains in 1 Timothy 6:16 that God, ***"...dwells in unapproachable light."*** The light of God REVEALS. His light shines right through us.

Several weeks ago, we went to the Mueller home for dinner, and after dinner, Gary whipped out a new toy, a flashlight. Some of you know that I have a weakness for flashlights. I love flashlights, mainly because I want to see stuff; I don't want to be unprepared in the dark. But this flashlight was especially cool, because as Gary held it up to his hand, we could see his blood pumping through the veins! We could see the bones in his hand! I immediately pulled up Amazon.com, and the Pelican Model 1920B Generation 2 is now on my wish list! If you missed that, that is the Pelican Model 1920 B Generation 2 (in case you need any ideas for me for Christmas)!

We love having light when we need it, because light is often associated with safety and security, while the lack of light is often associated with danger. When we hear a strange noise in the woods at night, we sometimes assume the worst. I remember doing some bicycle camping over at Blue Mound State Park a few years ago, I remember coming under raccoon attack for several hours, and right as that settled down at maybe 4 in the morning, right as I thought I was about to get some sleep before the ride home, right as I was about to drift back off to sleep, I hear this heavy breathing coming from maybe 20 or 30 feet deeper in the woods. I didn't have the Pelican 1920B Generation 2 with me that day, so I just laid there praying that the sun would come up quickly. Light reveals. Darkness brings danger and uncertainty. This is why we have at least two headlights on our cars. If one side burns out, we hopefully have some time to make it home to change the bulb before the other one goes out!

And in this passage, since we already know where we are heading with this, the emphasis here is that light reveals sin. ***"God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."*** With God, we have nowhere to hide. It's like that little flashlight shining through Gary's hand. It is God's nature to illuminate sin. With God, we have no little compartment over here to the side where we can sin and get away with it. But instead, his light shines completely through us. And this creates some level of conflict. We think of what John said about Jesus over in John 3:19-21, where he wrote these words,

¹⁹ This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But he who practices

the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

II. Well, this sets us up for the PROBLEM in this passage, AND THE PROBLEM IS: WE SIN!

So, God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all, but there is some darkness in us. So we have this conflict: God is perfect and holy, but we are not. And in this passage, using a series of “*if*” statements, John starts explaining some of the ways that certain people have tried to fix this problem (this conflict) on their own.

A. First of all, for example, some will simply live lives of HYPOCRISY.

In verse six, we have those who say that they have fellowship with God, and yet they walk in the darkness. They are hypocrites – saying one thing but doing another. John says that if we say we have fellowship with God and yet we walk in darkness “***we lie and do not practice the truth.***” Remember: Last week we discovered John’s purpose for writing – he wants us to have fellowship with God. God, though, is Light, and light is incompatible with sin. Some, then, have tried to fix this problem by lying, by faking it, by telling people they are all good with God, when really, they are not. To do that is to lie, and lying, of course, is a sin!

While we’re on this verse, I should probably clarify what is meant by, “***walking in the darkness.***” We’ll get to this on the positive side in a little bit, but for now, I should point out that “***walking in the darkness***” is more than an occasional sin here and there. Walking indicates ongoing progress in a certain direction. When we walk, we are moving, and for most of us, when we walk, we move somewhat consistently. We are headed somewhere. And so, to “***walk in darkness***” is to be continually and consistently moving in the wrong direction, a pattern, a way of life. And so we sin, we try to hide ourselves from God, and this is a lifestyle for us, this is the way we are living. This is the “***walking in darkness***” that John is warning about here. If we claim to have fellowship with God but we are actually living a life of continual sin, John says that, “***we lie and do not practice the truth.***” And isn’t that ironic, that by lying, we would actually cut ourselves off from the One we are claiming to be in fellowship with? So John, then, is pointing out how ridiculous this is – to claim to be close to God (who is Light), all while doing everything we can to try to keep ourselves in the dark!

But it can easily get to be a continuous cycle. The more we sin, the more we try to hide. For those who continue in sin, the dark is like camouflage. The dark provides cover. While we were out driving this week, my daughter gave me a science lesson, explaining why we don’t see color in the dark. And it was completely over my head, it all sounded very sciencey (something about rods and cones and all that), but the truth is: We have a hard time seeing and distinguishing certain things in the dark. And so a life of sin is described as “***walking in darkness,***” walking where we feel as if no one will see what we are doing. So, this is the first way some have tried to handle the sin problem – by faking it, by walking in darkness while claiming to have fellowship with God.

B. The next man-made solution to this problem of God being light and us being sinners is to DECEIVE OURSELVES.

Notice please, verse 8, “***If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***” Again, this is similar to verse 6, but what happens here is not that we simply try to deceive others, but it can even get to the point that we deceive ourselves. Perhaps we get to the point where we think, “I have outgrown sin,” or perhaps we think, “Yes, I am doing something that is not really ideal, but I have this under

control.” Or maybe we try to redefine sin, “What I am doing is not quite as bad as what that guy over there is doing,” or maybe, “I have a good reason for what I am doing,” or maybe we reason, “What I am doing is not really hurting anybody.” John, though (in verse 8), explains that any attempt to rationalize sin means that we are **“deceiving ourselves.”** I think of what Paul said over in Galatians 6:7, **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”** Self-deception, then, is no excuse, and like the emperor who wore no clothes, there is a time coming when everything will be revealed.

- C. We come, then, to John’s final example of how we sometimes might be tempted to escape responsibility, and that is: We straight up **REJECT THE WORD OF GOD.**

Notice verse 10, **“If we say that we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar and His word is not in us.”** So, this is the kind of rejection of God’s word where we reject even of the concept of sin, rejecting God’s clear statement through Paul in Romans 3:23, that, **“...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** And so, to say that we have not sinned is to say that God is wrong. To say that we have not sinned is to say that the word of God is not really our standard of judgment. Because when we look at the word of God, it’s obvious that all accountable people have definitely sinned.

We think of those statements made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5,

²¹ **“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.**

And on and on. Can any of us say that we have never been angry with a brother? The same goes for looking at someone with lust in our hearts. The same goes for the Lord’s command that we love our enemies. And on and on. Is there any chance that any of us can say that we have never broken God’s law? No! And so to claim to have never sinned is to reject the word of God. Or, as John says, **“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”**

So, going back to our text, God is Light, which presents a problem. The problem is: We sin, and these are some ways (suggested by John), that we have tried (unsuccessfully) to avoid taking responsibility – hypocrisy, self-deception, and outright rejecting the word of God.

- III. As we come near the end of this passage, we need to close with **GOD’S SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.**

God is perfect, we are not, so what do we do about this? How do we resolve this conflict? Obviously, the solution proposed by John’s first readers is not acceptable. We cannot simply claim that what we do with our bodies has no effect on our souls. So, what do we do? Well, in this passage, there are two thoughts that lead to the cleansing of sin.

- A. The first reference to cleansing comes in verse 7, **“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.”** So, first of all, we must make every effort to **WALK IN THE LIGHT.**

As I mentioned earlier with reference to walking in darkness, walking implies movement, steady progress in a certain direction. And that is what John is calling for here. We are to ***“walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light.”*** We are to walk with God, side by side, in the Light. And the idea is: We open ourselves up to be inspected by God’s light. Again, it’s like holding that flashlight up to our hand. As the Psalm says, ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart”*** (Psalm 139:23). I think of going to the doctor. I didn’t go to the doctor for several years, because I really didn’t want to know. I was enjoying living in medical darkness. I didn’t go to the doctor, because I like bacon. But last year I went, and the numbers don’t lie, do they? It went pretty well, but she was just slightly concerned about the blood pressure. And so we came up with a plan. I take it once a week, I record it in the calendar on my phone, and now we have something to work with. The light has been turned on, so to speak. And that is what God is asking us to do spiritually. He wants us to open up.

He wants us to walk in the light, constantly turning away from sin and keeping our eyes on God – continually walking alongside God in the Light, knowing who God is, doing what God wants us to do, allowing God to guide our thoughts and attitudes, allowing God to shape every word spoken, every decision we make – walking in the Light, a lifestyle, the way we live.

And since the Christian life is described here as walking, we need to ask ourselves: Are we stronger in our Christian faith than we were a year ago, or maybe ten years ago? Am I closer to God now than I have been in the past? Am I more active in the church than I was a year ago? To our teens: What about at home? Are you honoring your father and your mother more now than you did a year ago? Remember: Walking implies progress, movement from one place to another.

And notice what happens when we do walk in the Light. According to John, we automatically ***“have fellowship with one another.”*** If we are good with God, then we are also good with each other. I believe we could also flip this around a little bit: If we are not in fellowship with each other, if we are not getting along with each other in the church, then we need to reevaluate whether we are actually walking in the Light. I have read that someone once found some words from a medieval church manuscript, “The church is something like Noah’s ark: If it weren’t for the storm outside, you couldn’t stand the smell inside.” Yes, we might have to work pretty hard at getting along from time to time (and some people are easier to get along with than others), but walking in the light causes us to have fellowship with one another.

There is a second blessing that comes when we walk in the Light, and that is: The blood of God’s Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Let us not miss the fact that our sins are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. His blood purchased our freedom. Our sin (in a sense) caused the shedding of Jesus’ blood. We are responsible. This is not something for us to take lightly. And I also love how John specifically points out that his blood cleanses us from ***“ALL”*** sin – not just few sins here and there, not just the old sins or new sins, but ALL sin. His blood covers everything! And I would also point out that his blood cleanses us continually. Yes, our sins were washed away at the point of baptism, but as we continue to walk in the Light, the blood of Jesus ***“cleanses us from all sin.”*** It is an ongoing process. And that tells us something: As Christians, we will sin. That doesn’t mean that we have crossed over to the dark side every time we fail, but if we keep on making progress, the blood of Jesus continually ***“cleanses us from all sin.”*** In the past, I have compared it to the difference between a picture and a video. A picture might capture us in a moment of weakness, but it might be more accurate to say that we are judged by the video. Yes, we might fail from time to time, but are we ***“walking in the Light”***? So, first of all, we are to walk in the light. We are to do the best we can to make constant progress in living our lives according to the light of God’s word.

B. Secondly, though, John also tells us that when we sin, we are to CONFESS THOSE SINS.

I would say that 1 John 1:9 is probably one of the top ten verses that all Christians should probably memorize, ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** This verse has been referred to as “God’s Second Law of Pardon.” God’s first law of pardon is that we must repent and be baptized. But once we’ve done that, when we sin AFTER having obeyed the gospel, God’s plan is that we must ***“confess our sins.”*** As Christians, when we sin, the solution is not to cover it up. The solution is not to quit church and go run and hide. The solution is not to pretend like everything is okay. The solution is not to turn out the lights. But the solution is to confess our sins to God.

The word ***“confess”*** literally means, “to say the same thing,” or, “to speak together.” In other words, through the written word, when God tells us that we have sinned, the proper response is to basically say, “Yes, God, you are right! Yes, God, what I have done is wrong.” When I confess, I am saying the same thing God says about my sin, and the confession is to be specific, “Dear God, your word tells me not to be angry with my brother, and I am angry. Please forgive me,” and so on. When we confess, we say the same thing about our sin that God does, admitting that we have done what is wrong.

Now, this does not mean that we need to confess our sins to a priest. As Christians, all of us are priests. But there is a general principle in the Bible that any confession probably needs to be just as public as the sin. And so if I have committed a sin against God in my private life, if I have committed a sin in my heart, if I have committed a sin that nobody knows about but me, then I need to confess that sin to God privately. On the other hand, if I have committed a sin against my Christian brother, if I have lied or cheated in a way that involves somebody else, if I have hurt somebody with my words, then I need to confess that sin to that person and to God. Or, if I have sinned in some public way, if I have brought shame on my entire Christian family, if I have done something that has become known to everybody in a way that threatens to pull down the entire church, then I should confess that sin publicly and to God and work it out with the entire congregation.

And thankfully, when we confess our sins, John gives us a promise from God, ***“He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** That is a guarantee, a promise, from God. In other words, when we pour our hearts out to God, we have a guarantee that God will never say, “Oh. Oh no. You did what?” We have a guarantee that God will never say, “I am sorry, but that is a terrible sin. I can’t forgive that one!” God will never say that! Instead, we have this promise that God will forgive any sin that we are willing to confess. Of course, ***“walking in the light”*** requires that we take steps to get out of that sin, but forgiveness is promised if we confess, if we admit that what we have done is, in fact, sin.

Conclusion:

As we close, I would emphasize that as Christians, our goal is to walk in the light. When we sin, we are not instantly kicked back into the realm of darkness. I hope we understand this. We are not bouncing back and forth, back and forth, between darkness and light. Instead, as Christians, we are walking in the light, we are making progress, we are walking with the Lord, making our way to heaven. Along the way, there will be times when we sin. And when that happens, as John tells us here, we are to confess those sins, knowing that God is faithful and righteous to forgive those sins. Isn’t that amazing?

I don’t know about you, but this passage gives me so much more appreciation for some other passages in the Bible. For example, that passage in John 8:12 where Jesus said, ***“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*** Or where he said in John 12:46, ***“I have***

come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. Or the Lord's words to Paul in Acts 26:18, sending him to the Gentiles, ***"to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."*** Or Paul's words praising God in Colossians 1:13, ***"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."*** Or Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:9, ***"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."***

The good news is that God wants us to be saved. I recently read that the church is the most political organization on the face of this earth – as Christians, we are subjects in a kingdom that began many centuries before this nation, this kingdom will still be here long after this nation has fallen, and we are ambassadors, proclaiming pardon for all who have rebelled against the king, to all who are willing to repent. God wants us to join him in the light. If you are a Christian and there's some sin that you are hanging onto, the message this morning is: Confess it! Talk to God about it. Admit that, "Yes, this thing I am doing is wrong." And then ask for God's forgiveness. Ask for God's help in getting through it. If you have sinned against somebody or even publicly, confess it to those you've sinned against. Make it right.

Or maybe you are not yet a Christian. You still need the blood of Jesus to cover your sins. That happens at the point of baptism. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. If we can help you with any of this, we hope you will let us know either after the service today or as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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