

Sin and Forgiveness

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1–8

Background Scripture: Genesis 3:1–24; 1 John 1:5–2:6

Today's Scripture: 1 John 1:5–10; 2:1–6

I. True Fellowship

1 John 1:5–7

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

5. The correct understanding of this verse depends on how that little preposition *of* is understood. It could be understood as referring to *the message which we have heard about him* or *the message we have heard from him*. The immediate context and other usages in this letter indicate that “of” signifies “from” in this instance, as it does also in 1 John 2:27 and 3 John 7 in the *King James Version*.

The message to which John refers was not a revelation to a singular individual. Rather, the plural pronoun *we* suggests it was confirmed by many witnesses. While the Gospels do not provide a direct quote of Jesus speaking the particular message *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, it is understood that not all of Jesus’

words and actions were documented. In fact, the phrase “God is light” is found nowhere else in the Bible. This statement indicates that light is not just a characteristic of God but a fundamental part of His being, similar to how “spirit” and “love” are essential attributes.

6. This verse introduces the first of five consecutive, and six total, *if we* clauses in today’s text. To *have fellowship with* God implies a profound relationship or communion with Him. However, a lifestyle that is inconsistent with God’s nature and expectations results in a false representation—a *lie*. Such a lie may or may not fool other people, but it won’t fool God. To *walk in darkness* is to sin habitually. Sin has consistently severed the bond between God and humanity.

The true nature of a person’s beliefs, declarations, and position of the heart is revealed through behavior that aligns with Jesus’ teachings. These actions do not result in salvation but result from it. The internal transformation becomes visible externally, guided by the work of the Spirit.

7. We come to the second of the five consecutive *if we* clauses. We might assume that *walking in the light* would represent a renewal of fellowship with God. That’s true, but it’s not John’s aim here. Rather, John challenges the reader by stating that walking in the light is not separate from

having *fellowship with one another*. Fellowship with God and with other believers go (or should go) hand in hand.

The light of God reveals sin. As such, it also reveals our need for cleansing from that sin. That's exactly what *the blood of Jesus Christ* does in paying the penalty for sin we owe. This serves as a reminder that salvation is not achieved by our own efforts to walk in the light; instead, it is the cross of Christ that pays sin's penalty, enabling that walk.

II. Necessary Confession

1 John 1:8-10

8 If we say that 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 that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

8. We now arrive at the third of the five consecutive *if we* clauses. Some commentators view this verse as addressing an error that certain false teachers have been promoting. By claiming to be in the light while behaving contrary to it, they deny their sinfulness. This amounts to self-deception; not only do false teachers fool others, but they also fool themselves.

We should not miss the fact that *truth* is extremely important to John. The word *truth* appears (in Greek) more than 100 times in the New Testament as a whole, with more than 40 percent of them occurring in John's Gospel and epistles.

9. In the fourth of five consecutive *if we* clauses in today's text, John highlights the stark contrast between the self-deluded people of the previous verse and those who have received forgiveness from God. Whereas sin was stated in the sin-

gular there, here it is plural: *sins*. Some commentators propose that this distinction underscores the idea that those who admit to their personal sins are fully aware of the seriousness of their condition apart from God's pardon.

10. This is the fifth consecutive *if we* clause in our lesson (a sixth appears in 1 John 2:3). Again, some commentators see a corrective to claims by false teachers. Opinions along that line vary on how this "if we" clause differs from the one in 1 John 1:8, above. One proposal sees that verse opposing denials of humanity's sinful nature, whereas the verse now before us is seen to deny having engaged in sinful behaviors at the individual level. Ultimately, however, we must conclude that (1) sin is a real thing, (2) we are guilty of committing it, and (3) to disbelieve makes God *a liar* in our eyes as we sink deeper into self-deception.

1 John 2:1-2

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1. The term *little children* is a favorite way for John to address his audience; he uses this designation also in 1 John 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; and 5:21. It occurs on the lips of Jesus as well, but only in John's Gospel (John 13:33).

John explains Jesus' ongoing role in heaven as *an advocate with the Father*. The word translated *advocate* is also a term unique to John, occurring in the New Testament only here and in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. It refers to a mediator or intercessor who speaks on behalf of another. After Jesus offered

Himself as the sacrifice for sin and rose from the dead, He took His place at the Father's right hand. There, He continuously advocates (intercedes) for believers. The unique sinlessness and righteousness of Jesus enables our purification from sin.

2. John builds on his previous statements with the rare word *propitiation*, which means "something that turns away wrath." This term appears twice in this epistle (here and 1 John 4:10). The foundation of Jesus' serving as our mediator lies in His sinless offering of Himself on the cross, which paid the penalty for the sins of all who would believe. This doctrine is often referred to as "substitutionary atonement."

III. Obedient Walk

1 John 2:3-6

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

3. Here, we have a sixth *if we* clause in the second half of this verse. Keeping *his commandments* is evidence *that we know him*. Perhaps John has in mind Jesus' answer to the question about the greatest commandment Love is the hallmark by which Jesus indicated the world would recognize His followers. Additionally, the apostle Paul regarded love as the law's fulfillment.

Regardless of the specific interpretation of "commandments" in this context, John implies that following the com-

mandments is not the way to salvation; it serves as evidence of that relationship.

4. John now elaborates on his earlier remark (1 John 1:6, above), drawing it to a logical conclusion. This might be summed up by the old axiom that actions speak louder than words. Anyone who professes to know God yet whose life contradicts God's commandments is making a false claim.

5. John continues to distinguish between those who adhere to *his word* and those who do not. The central element in the statements in this verse is *the love of God*. Three main interpretations of what this love entails have been proposed: the love of God could signify (1) His love for individuals, (2) an individual's love for God, or (3) a divine type of love that individuals have for one another. Evidence exists for each of the three alternatives. But given John's portrayal of this love as a distinctive sign, it is likely that he is referring to the divine love among believers (see John 13:35). This form of love is poured into a person's heart by the Spirit when one comes to faith in Christ.

We also acknowledge differing opinions regarding the interpretation of the word *perfected* in this verse and in 1 John 4:12, 17. Given the nature of the fallen world in which we live, our growth in love for one another will be perfected in an ultimate and final sense only after Jesus returns. Until then, we continue to grow and mature in our expressions of that love.

6. To *walk even as he walked* is to follow Christ's example (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21). The author fronts this conclusion by using a Greek word translated as "abide"; he uses this word 23 times in this letter, and this is the first. In doing so, he speaks of a close, ongoing connection. Those who abide in Jesus will live consistently in ways that reflect His love and teaching.

Involvement Learning

Sin and Forgiveness

Into the Lesson

What is the significance of light and darkness in the physical world?

What is the significance of light and darkness in the metaphorical sense?

John often employs the metaphors of light and darkness in his writings to create a clearer mental image for his readers. In today's lesson, we'll explore a passage where John uses light to represent God and the daily life of Christians while portraying sin and unrighteousness as darkness.

Into the Word

Write down statements from 1 John 1:5–10 that are about truth (light).

Write down statements from 1 John 1:5–10 that are about falsehood (darkness).

Write down statements from 1 John 2:1–5 that instruct believers to action.

Write down statements from 1 John 2:1–5 that are assurances or promises.

What does "walk in the light" mean, as mentioned in 1 John 1:7?

Key Text

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:8–9

Into Life

One way to walk in the light is to maintain fellowship with other believers. What is one thing you can do this week to walk in the light and seek fellowship with another believer?

Thought to Remember

Praise God for the light of the gospel!