

“Walking in the Light”

(1 John 1:5-10 ~ Part 1)

Introduction

- One significant problem with the contemporary evangelical church in America today, is that it is fundamentally man-centered. It is (wrongly) presumed that the church – as well as God – is supposed to meet all our felt-needs; to fit our worldly paradigm; to comply to all our selfish demands; to never offend our fragile egos; to never oppose our sinful desires. Consequently, with this reasoning, church leaders have modeled their services (and preachers their sermons) to conform to a man-centered religion. Subtly, yet devastatingly, they have turned Christianity into a Christless Christianity – a false religion that holds the vestiges of Christianity but does not truly worship Jesus Christ as the one and only Son of God, and one and only Savior from God.
- ✓ Illust: I remember, years ago, hearing a story about a man who got up to speak at a conference, and he asked the crowd of people attending this question: “Who is God?” One man stood up and answered the question by saying things like: “To me God is like ...”, “I like to think of God as ...”, “I’ve always thought that God is ...”. After a short while, the speaker interrupted the man, saying, “What you have just given us is a description of you – who you are. The question is, “Who is God?”
- Humans are inclined to think of God on their own terms, and according to their own thoughts and desires. As the saying goes, “God made mankind in His image, and mankind has been trying to return the favor ever since.”
- ✓ Illust: “Man has been put in the centre, and all thinking and all philosophising has tended to start with man; he has been placed at the centre of the universe. Man, if you like, has been placed on the throne and everything, God included, has had to be put in terms of man. Man has set himself up as an authority; it is man and his ideas that count; it is always man in his need and condition that seems to be the starting point.
- Now that is the very initial error and the source of most misunderstandings. The Bible is constantly reminding us that we must start with God. If ever I start with man, I must ultimately go wrong in all my thinking about truth; because if I start there, everything accommodates itself to my doctrine of man. Yet the doctrine of the Bible is that I can never know man truly unless I look at him in the sight of God and in the teaching concerning God.
- So I must always be careful not to start with myself. It is very difficult not to do so; our whole approach to the gospel and to Christianity naturally tends to be from that self-centred and selfish standpoint. We argue like this: Here I am in this world with its troubles and I am ill at ease. I am looking for something I have not got. I am aware of my needs and desires; I am aware of a lack of happiness, and the tendency for most of us is to approach the whole subject of religion, to approach God and Christian truth and everything else, in terms of my desires and my demands. What has He to say to me and to give to me? What can I get out of this Christian faith and religion? Is there something in this that is going to ease my problems and help me in this dark and difficult world?
- But that, according to this verse [1 John 1:5] and indeed according to the whole of the Bible, is the root source of error, it is the initial fallacy, it is indeed almost blasphemy against God” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones; *Life in Christ*; p.95).
- Rather than starting with man (and reasoning upward to God), the Bible exhorts us to start with God (and reason downward to man). For us to have a correct view of God, and of His will for our lives, we must have biblical worldview (e.g., of God, of man, of salvation, etc.). This begins with a right (biblical) understanding of God.
- As we see demonstrated in John’s Gospel and epistle, John starts with the nature and character of God! John desperately wanted his readers to know who God is – who He actually is according to sacred Scripture – not who we imagine or want Him to be. So, as he did with His Gospel and the book of Revelation), John started the book of I John with God.

1 John 1:1-4 ~ “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – ²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – ³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:5-10 ~ “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. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But 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. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

John 1:1-5, 9-15 ~ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

➤ As we study 1 John 1:5-10, we find God – the doctrine of God – front and center, first and foremost. John first declares the doctrine about God, and then teaches us how to apply that doctrine.

A. The Doctrine Stated (vs.5)

➤ At the outset of this passage, we see John declaring a central and supreme doctrinal truth. First, notice that this truth did not originate with John or any of the apostles: *“This is the message we have heard from him”* (vs.5). The *“message”* (*angelia*) that John, and the apostles, *“proclaim[ed]”* (*anangellō*) came directly from the mouth of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God (see vs.3; cf. vs.1).

John 8:12 ~ “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (see Jn.9:5)

John 12:35-36 ~ “So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

John 12:46 ~ “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”

➤ Jesus not only declared that God is light, but that as the Son of God He Himself is light. This is yet another reference where Jesus unambiguously and unapologetically declared Himself to be God (see Jn.5:18; 8:58-59; 10:30-33).

1. Affirmations

➤ This is that message: *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (vs.5). This is a simple, yet profound statement. For, by analogy, it is declaring a precious and powerful truth about God. It speaks to who God is, in His divine character and nature, as God. In fact, John here is stating the same thing twice – in two different ways – first positive and then negative.

Positive - *“God is light”* (vs.5).

Notice that John does not declare God as a light (i.e., a light among many lights), or even that God is the light (i.e., the greatest of all lights; though He is), but that He is light [translated literally: “The God is light”]. In other words, in His divine character and nature as God, God is light. Light is not something that God does, but something that He is. That is, God does not merely produce light, or shine (radiate) as light, but is – in and of Himself – light (e.g. God is Spirit; God is love, God is holy, etc.).

Again, John is not declaring a new truth about God (or his personal opinion about God). The teaching that God is light runs throughout Scripture:

Ps 27:1 ~ “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ...”

John 1:4-9 ~ “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

John 3:19-21 ~ “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Rev 21:22-23 ~ “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”

Rev 22:5 ~ “And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

As we see, God is not partially light, sometimes light, or even mostly light – He *“is light”* in fullness and perfection. Likewise, God does not merely shine light but He (in and of Himself) *“is light.”*

✓ Illust: “When Scripture speaks about God’s attributes it never singles out one attribute of God as more important than all the rest. There is an assumption that every attribute is completely true of God and is true of all of God’s character. For example, John can say that “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and then a little later say also that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no suggestion that part of God is light and part of God is love, or that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should we think that God is more light than love or more love than light. Rather it is God *himself* who is light, and it is God *himself* who is also love” (Wayne Grudem; *Systematic Theology*; p.178).

Negative - *“in him is no darkness at all”* (vs.5).

On one hand, this is just another way to say the same thing. However, it is also more descriptive. For light dominates darkness. Light extinguishes darkness, darkness (by itself) cannot extinguish light. God’s light is so pure, so intense, so pervasive, so awesome, there is not a single speck, or trace, or shred of darkness (or shadow) in Him.

✓Illust: “This is a metaphor, a figure of speech. And in that view, it might suggest a world of varied analogies between the nature of God and the nature of the material element of light. Light is diffusive, penetrating, searching; spreading itself over all space, and entering into every hole and corner. It is quickening and enlivening; a minister of healthy vigor and growth to all living creatures, plants and animals alike, including man himself. It is pleasant also; a source of relief and gladness to those who bask in its bright and joyous rays” (A.W. Pink; *An Exposition of 1 John*; p.15).

➤ As light, God is pure and full and perfect.

2. Interpretations

➤ Since the reference to *“God is light”* is analogous, metaphorical – as opposed to God is love, God is holy, God is Spirit – it can be a bit difficult to understand. To put it simply, as we see in Scripture, God as *“light”* symbolically refers to two different aspects of God’s divine nature.

Intellectually - *“light”* refers to biblical truth while *“darkness”* refers to error or falsehood (see Ps.119:105; Prov.6:23; Jn.1:4; 8:12).

The Bible reveals God as absolutely, perfectly, and infinitely knowledgeable. The doctrinal word for this is omniscience (i.e., all-knowing). There is literally nothing that God does not know. God’s knowledge is absolutely comprehensive, and utterly incomprehensible to us. Scripture repeatedly declares both of these truths:

Ps 139:1-6 ~ “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! ²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. ⁵You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.” (cf. Jer.1:5)

Rom 11:33-36 ~ “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? ³⁵Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Ps 147:5 ~ “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.” [note: “beyond measure” lit. without number, innumerable, infinite]

Ps 147:5 ~ “Our Lord is great and has awesome power; there is no limit to his wisdom.” (NET)

1 John 3:20 ~ “[God] knows everything”

Only a being that is infinite and eternal, as God is, is capable of knowing everything. The doctrine of God’s omniscience teaches that God has perfect, exhaustive and infinite knowledge of all things past, present and future. God’s omniscience not only encompasses His absolute and eternal knowledge of us, but also of all creation. He not only has supreme and comprehensive knowledge of the past and present, but also of all future actions (inactions), events and choices – all actual and possible future outcomes.

✓Illust: A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, “... [God] knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn.

God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.

Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything. He is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions” (p.56).

Since “*God is light*” and “*in him is no darkness at all*” (vs.5), we know that God is never ignorant, nor does He ever lie. In fact, Scripture not only states that God does not lie (Num.23:19; Tit.1:2) but also that “*it is impossible for God to lie*” (Heb.6:18). God does not deceive; He does not error; He is never surprised, bewildered, or mistaken. He is never – absolutely never – “in the dark” about anything. God never scratches His head in confusion, nor is He ever pacing in heaven with anxiety. He knows all things perfectly, and is in absolutely control of all things (see Ps.115:3; 103:19; Rom.11:36).

Morally - “light” refers to holiness or purity while “darkness” refers to sin or wrongdoing (see Rom.13:11-14; 1Thess.5:4-7).

God is also absolutely, perfectly, infinitely holy. God never sins – in any way or to any degree. God is absolutely holy in His nature and character, and absolutely holy in everything He does and says. He is never guilty of sin, of wrongdoing, of evil, or of any impurity.

Ex 15:11 ~ “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

Ps 111:9 ~ “He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!”

Matt 6:9 ~ “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed [*hagiazō*] be your name.’”

Hab 1:13 ~ “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong ...”

James 1:13 ~ “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”

Isa 6:3 ~ “And one called to another [i.e., the seraphim] and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’”

Rev 4:8 ~ “And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’”

It is important to note that God’s holiness is the only one of God’s attributes that is repeated three consecutive times. We never read that God is “love, love, love” or “good, good, good.” But in God’s holy Word we find that God is “holy, holy, holy.” Theologians call this the *trisagion* [tri-sagion], which simply means “three times holy.” No doubt the threefold expression of praise is a trinitarian reference, but it also emphasizes the utter and absolute distinction of God’s moral perfection. God’s holiness is the perfect culmination of all His attributes. Everything God does and everything God is, is motivated, undergirded and expressed by His holiness.

To be holy is to be separate. God is utterly unlike us, He is perfect (unblemished) in purity (Rom.3:10-12; Eph.2:1-3). Again, as with God’s perfect and absolute knowledge, there “*is no darkness at all*” in His holiness; only the unmitigated “*light*” of His purity. The seraphim covered

their eyes in the presence of God glorious holiness (Is.6:3). Moses' face radiated/glowed from having just seen a momentary glimpse of God's holy glory – such a terrifying, disturbing, sight to the Israelites that they made him put a veil on to cover it up (Ex.33-34; 2Cor.3:7ff).

It is important to know that God is not a slightly improved version of humans. God is the Creator, and we are His creation! God is light and Him is no darkness. We, on the other hand – apart from the saving work of Christ – are darkness and in us is no light. God is omniscient, we are foolish. God is holy, we are unholy.

Eph 5:8 ~ “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”

Col 1:13-14 ~ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

1 Peter 2:9 ~ “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

- God is both “intellectually” perfect and “morally” pure; He is all-knowing and all-holy. Again, in the divinely inspired words of the apostle John: *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (vs.5). There is no darkness of sin, or ignorance, or error about God.

Conclusion

- We desperately need to be confronted with the reality of God! We need to see Him as He is, and not as we want Him to be. God will not be conformed to our image or imagination. God will not change to suit our desires, He will not modify His will to appease our wants. *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”* (vs.5).
- ✓ **Illust:** In his book, *Ten Lies About God*, Erwin Lutzer wrote, “‘I believe in God’ is perhaps one of the most meaningless statements we can make today. The word *God* has become a canvas on which each is free to paint his own portrait of the divine; like [a] boy scribbling at his desk, we can draw God according to whatever specifications we please. For some He is ‘psychic energy’; for others He is ‘whatever is stronger than I am’ or ‘an inner power to lead us to deeper consciousness.’ To say, ‘I believe in God’ might simply mean that we are seeing ourselves in a full-length mirror” (pp.2-3).
- When most people hear of an idol, they probably think of some miniature figurine. To be sure, these types of idols still exist today even as we read about them in the Old Testament: *“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them”* (Ps 115:4-8; cf. Is.44:9-20).

We must understand that idolatry is birthed, first and foremost, in the mind. Idolatry is the worshiping of a false god, but an idol does not have to be a wooden or golden statue. An idol is something you worship instead of, or in addition to, the one true God. It is anything that is more important to you than God. An idol is something that promises to give you security or identity apart from God, or something that if you were to lose it would rob life of its ultimate meaning and value.

The truth is, God will not be diminished, distorted, or defiled in any way. However, it is a sad irony that those whom God has created will chose to blaspheme and dishonor Him by worshiping their own creation (or God's creation) rather than their Creator. Idolatry is a willful decision to reject God and put something or someone in His place.

- Idolatry does not begin with a sculptor's hammer, it begins with the mind.
 - ✓ Illust: “The Swiss theologian Karl Barth was right when he said there are only two ways to attain a knowledge of God: one is to begin with man and reason upward; the other is to begin with God and accept His revelation to us. ... Whenever we begin with man and reason upward, we manufacture an idol. Our temptation is to invite ideas of God into our minds that are either just wrong or are notions that diminish Him. Idolatry is more than dancing around a statue of silver or gold; it is constructing a mental idea of a deity that bears little resemblance to the God who actually exists. Idolatry is giving respectability to our own opinions of God, formed after our likeness. Idolatry is fashioning an idea of God according to our inclinations and preferences. It is to pare God down to ‘more manageable proportions’” (Erwin Lutzer; *Ten Lies About God*; p.3).

- We must guard against any false notion of God, His Word, or His will for our lives. In order to do this, we must be immersed in a faithful study of Scripture. For God has graciously and supernaturally revealed Himself through His Word. We must not let the Bible become a “quick reference guide” for answers or emergencies only. For this caveat rings with a sobering truth: “woe to those who see themselves in a mirror and proclaim that they have seen God.”