

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; 1 John 2:1–6

I. True Fellowship

1 John 1:5–7

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out 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, purifies us from all sin.

5. 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; in him there 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.

Those in the original audience would have interpreted John's use of light and darkness metaphors as representing good and evil.

6. This verse introduces the first of

six total *if we* clauses in today's texts. 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 *lie*. Such a lie may or may not fool other people, but it won't fool God. To *walk in the 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. An emerging heresy of the time claimed that the actions of a person's physical body could not taint a person's spirit. We're not sure if John is opposing this particular heresy as he writes. But he leaves no doubt that it's "either-or," not "both-and."

7. We come to the second of the six *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. John comforts his audience in this regard. 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 claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

8. We now arrive at the third of the six *if we* clauses. Some commentators view this verse as addressing an error certain false teachers were 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, with more than 40 percent occurring in John's Gospel and epistles. This is noteworthy given the relatively small percentage of the New Testament that these books comprise.

9. In the fourth *if we* clause 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 singular 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.

The language used implies that sins are confessed to God, who is the one who forgives sins. Furthermore, the forgiveness offered by God transcends mere pardon; it involves a cleansing of the believer from all acts of unrighteousness.

10. This verse contains the fifth *if we* clause. From this verse 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 dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world

1. The term *dear children* is a favorite way for John to address his audience. John explains Jesus' ongoing role in heaven as *an advocate with the Father*. The word translated *advocate* is a term unique to John. 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 translated as *atoning sacrifice*. This indicates something that "turns away wrath." This term appears twice in this epistle (here and 1 John 4:10). Closely related words are found in Romans 3:25 and Hebrews

9:5 (as nouns) as well as Luke 18:13 and Hebrews 2:17 (as verbs). 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 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

3. Here we have the sixth *if we* clause. It shows up in the second half of this verse. Keeping *his commands* is evidence *that we have come to 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 "commands" in this context, John implies that following the commands is not the way of salvation; it serves as evidence of that relationship. This aligns with teachings found throughout Scripture. Moreover, John's emphasis on the certainty believers in Christ possess contrasts starkly with the uncertainty propagated by false teachers.

4. John now elaborates on his earlier remark, 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.

Some commentators suggest that John is addressing the heresy of Gnosticism here. The followers of this heresy claim exclusive enlightenment, secret knowledge. However, their conduct fails to align with the elevated knowledge they claim to possess.

5. John continues to distinguish between those who adhere to *his word* and those who do not. The central element in this verse is *love for God*. Three main interpretations of what this love entails are proposed: (1) God's 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 found in believers. 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 what it means that love for God is *made complete*. This word is used in John 4:34; 5:36; and 17:4 to refer to something that is finished. 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 live as Jesus did* is to follow Christ's example. The author fronts this conclusion by using a Greek word often translated as "remain" or "stay"; 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 a 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 2:1–6 that instruct believers to action.

Write down statements from 1 John 2:1–6 that are assurances or promises.

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

Key Text

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify 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!