

Walking in the Light 1 John 1:5-2:2

Have you ever walked in the dark? I'm usually the last to go to bed at my house. I think one reason I do that is that I'm the only one who cuts off lights anyway, so I might as well stay up and make sure no lights are cut on after I've gone to bed. So the other night I cut off all the lights, walk into my bedroom and someone has moved the wooden rocking chair from the side of the room to my normal pathway. You know, there are many ways to stub your toe. You can take a full step and begin another step and hit an object. There's not too much momentum in that kind of step so a stub is a subdued stub. Then again, you can be right in the middle of a full-throttled long step when your foot is hitting its maximum stride. It's in the air and there is nothing going on but pure acceleration. I call that a siren stub, because someone has just been hurt. I had a siren stub. It was not pleasant.

That wouldn't have happened in the daylight. I would've seen the chair and walked around it or moved it. Light makes all the difference in the world. Light is a means to avoid danger and injury. We take it for granted during the day, walking freely, driving fast with no headlights, appreciating the colors of the azaleas and shapes of clouds. It's no wonder that light is one of the Bible's great metaphors for the power and purity of God. Light is used to convey God's glory, power, purity, and truth. The very first words God ever spoke recorded in the Bible are "**Let there be light** (Gen 1:3)." It was as if nothing else could be done until there was light. It would be three days later before God would create the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night. In the desert God provided a fire to guide the Israelites by night. The Psalmist uses light to describe salvation from God and his righteousness. God's word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. When Jesus shows up he's called the light of the world. John's gospel speaks of light more than any of the others, quoting Jesus saying, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (Jn 12:46). At the end of John's last NT book, Revelation, we're told that the new Jerusalem won't have a sun for the glory of God will light up the place.

John the beloved apostle, the old man and last living person who talked to the earthly Jesus is writing a letter to the church. He has a message from Jesus he wants to pass on, he has to pass on. In fact, his joy won't be complete until he has passed it on. The message is the same message God had been communicating to the world from the beginning of time. The message is: **God is light and God wants us to walk in the light.** That's what this letter is all about. John is giving us his thesis statement. He's trying to sum up the Christian faith for us. This is what he wants us to know and this is how he wants us to live.

That's the same message we need to hear and understand today. We need to listen to this old man, because he's been with Jesus. He knows Jesus. He knows what Jesus wants us to know. He knows what Jesus is trying to get us to do. So today's sermon is simply a reiteration of John's message to the early church. If we're going to follow Jesus we need to understand who God is and what God wants us to do. These verses begin to reveal that truth to us. Let's take a look at them.

Walk in the Light

First, John calls us to walk in the light. There are two ways to live. We can walk in darkness or we can walk in the light. God is light. There is no darkness at all in God. God is pure and true and everything that is good. Darkness is the summation of evil. God has nothing to do with evil. There is no darkness in God. Just as a white wedding dress is meant to convey the purity a bride brings to a marriage, the light of God describes his purity in all things. In John 3:19 Jesus uses this understanding of light when he says, "***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.***" Darkness has to do with evil deeds. Light exposes all our deeds, the good and the bad. Frederick Buechner, one of the great Christian writers of the 20th century wrote something very similar to Jesus in his book *The Hungering Dark*: "If there is a terror about darkness because we cannot see, there is also a terror about light because we can see. There is a terror about light because much of what we see in the light about ourselves and our world we would rather not see, would rather not have been seen." This is why Jesus was killed. All sorts of socio-political-racial reasons are given for the crucifixion of the light of the world. But the fundamental reason Jesus was killed, from the human side of the equation, is that men loved darkness, and Jesus exposed the darkness with the light of his life. And today, we are still loving darkness and wanting to avoid being seen doing what we are doing.

Dallas Willard writes about a 2-and-a-half-year-old girl in her backyard who one day discovered the secret to making mud (which she called "warm chocolate"). Her grandmother had been reading and was facing away from the action, but turned around and saw the mess. She began to clean up her granddaughter and the mess she had made. Then she told little Larissa not to make any more chocolate and turned her chair so she could be facing her granddaughter.

The little girl soon resumed her "warm chocolate" routine, with one request posed as sweetly as a 2-and-a-half-year-old can make it: "Don't look at me, Nana. Okay?" Nana (being a little co-dependent) of course agreed.

Larissa continued to manufacture warm chocolate. Three times she said, as she continued her work, "Don't look at me, Nana. Okay?"

Then Willard writes: "Thus the tender soul of a little child shows us how necessary it is to us that we be unobserved in our wrong."

Any time we choose to do wrong or to avoid doing right, we choose hiddenness as well. It may be that out of all the prayers that are ever spoken, the most common one—the quietest one; the one that we least acknowledge making—is simply this: Don't look at me, God.

It was the very first prayer spoken after the Fall. God came to walk in the garden, to be with the man and the woman, and called, "Where are you?"

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid," Adam answered, "so I hid." Don't look at me, God.

No Darkness in God

This is our dilemma. John, the old man, is telling us that God is light: in him there is no darkness at all. God is pure light, not diluted or mixed in any way with evil, hatred, untruth, ignorance or hostility. God is light is not a theoretical statement about the nature of God, but a statement that drives us to the heart of what God is like. God doesn't just

emit light, God is light. God is the source of power, purity, and everything good. There is nothing bad, evil, or immoral in the being and essence of God.

John follows this by saying "***If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth***" (v 6). This is a disturbing word on the surface of things. It appears to mean that if we sin we don't and can't have fellowship with God. But it can't possibly mean that. "Walk in the darkness" is not synonymous with sin. In fact, John is going to follow this overarching summation of the Christian life with some practical guidance for the confession of sin in the next few verses. He says here you're a liar in you claim to follow Jesus and walk in darkness. But in the next verses he's going to call you a liar if you claim to be without sin. Clearly walking in the darkness is not the same thing as sin. So what does John mean here?

John is not telling Christians they do not sin or cannot sin. He's not equating "walking in the darkness" with sin, although there are certainly some parallels. Walking in darkness is a lifestyle choice of sin. It's not a falling down, it's not a moral failure, it's a deliberate choice to live, act, and speak in opposition to God and the ways revealed by Jesus. It is the arrogant attempt to walk our own path, following our own ways regardless of what God reveals to us. You see, John is telling us to ***walk in*** the light, not ***be*** the light. Only God is light. Only God is completely pure. Our calling as followers of Jesus is to walk in God's light, to walk toward the light, to become focused on moving toward the light of God's truth, morality, and glory. John doesn't spell out exactly what he means by walk in the light but he most certainly would agree with Paul that evidence of walking in the light is seen in the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). That fruit demonstrates we are walking in the light, but we will never be the light, or be on par with God. We are not the light, though we are called to walk in the light.

Believe it or not, there are some people who get this confused. I went to the hospital one day to see a young lady who had recently received a double lung transplant. Her nurse came to me out in the hall to inform me she was currently undergoing a procedure and I would have to wait. The nurse was a young man about 25 years old and he spoke with an eastern European accent. He said, "You do good to come and shepherd this family."

"I try."

"You know what Jesus' last words were right?"

I gave it a stab, hoping I would get the right answer, so I quoted the Great Commission, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

I waited, sure that I had impressed the young European with my quick knowledge of the Bible.

He said, "I mean what he said to his flock."

This confused me, so I acquiesced and said, "No, what did he say?"

"He said, 'Feed my sheep.' That means you flock them, you bring them out of the world and into the flock. You shepherd them, you guide them. And you feed them."

This guy had a 3 point sermon going. I was intrigued so I asked him, "What is your name?"

"Theo."

“Theo? That means ‘God’ in Greek you know.” I’m sure he knew that. He seemed to know a lot.

He said, “Yes, I am God.”

Only 20 years of pastoral counseling, listening to all kinds of extraordinary tales enabled me to keep my composure. In a few seconds I gathered myself and repeated what he said with a dose of bemusement, “So you’re God.”

“Yes. Regeneration. God has put his spirit in me. I now have the life of God in me. So I am God.”

Well, I hated to burst his bubble but I had to. I just flat out said, “You’re not God. You may be born again and be regenerated by God’s Spirit, but there’s only one God.”

This didn’t seem to phase him too much. He then began talk about the Trinity and the relationships among the Godhead. The conversation finally ended when he recognized he had to get back to caring for patients in ICU. Theo/God was busy.

Denying Sin

I should’ve asked him if he sinned. My guess is that he’s a modern day Gnostic, someone who is serious about their faith, but becomes so spiritual they lose a sense of physical reality. John, the old man, had these people in the early church. They believed they had received special knowledge (gnosis) which enlightened them and saved them from the carnal trappings of the world. They were people of the light, their spiritual beings were immunized against evil in the world. Some of them believed they didn’t sin because their enlightenment enabled them to rise above fleshly temptations. They believed they didn’t sin because their spiritual selves was the only reality. Whatever their bodies did was immaterial, a non-issue, unimportant. They might mutilate the flesh, punish it because it was evil and needed to be destroyed. Or they might indulge themselves in any carnal privilege, because only the spiritual things mattered. Their flesh may have done it, but their flesh didn’t define who they were. They were spiritual beings, not physical beings.

That’s why old John had to correct the thinking of some in his church. He said, in verse 8 “***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***” I don’t know what my new friend Theo would say about this verse. Our modern day Gnostics are probably not as serious a threat to the unity and integrity of the church as the individualists, those who create their own standard for judging whether or not something is a sin. People today don’t deny being sinners as much as they redefine what was once considered a sin as simply a disease, or mistake, or misjudgment. Today, most of us would readily confess to being a sinner, but we usually mean it in a general way. We don’t recognize, much less confess any specific sins. And so we are like Augustine, the great 4th century Christian leader who described his early adult years in this fashion: “My sin was all the more incurable, because I did not think myself a sinner.” Today, many people’s sin is all the more incurable because they don’t think of themselves as a sinner. John wrote this is a deception and those who make the claim are without the truth. They are walking in darkness.

Pete Rose, baseball's all-time hit leader, finally ended a 14-year streak of denying he bet on the game of baseball, admitting he wagered while managing the Cincinnati Reds. In his book, My Prison Without Bars, Rose says he felt banishment was too severe a sentence. "Right or wrong, the punishment didn't fit the crime so I denied the crime."

When Sports Illustrated asked Rose why he wagered, he replied, "I didn't think I'd get caught." During one three-week period, Rose wrote 11 checks for \$8,000 to a bookmaker in New York. But he never felt he had a gambling problem.

"I knew that I'd broken the letter of the law. But I didn't think I'd broken the spirit of the law, which was designed to prevent corruption. During the times I gambled as a manager, I never took an unfair advantage. I never bet more or less based on injuries or inside information. I never allowed my wagers to influence my baseball decisions. So in my mind, I wasn't corrupt."

What Pete Rose did with the laws of baseball, many people do with the laws of God. They do not bend their lives according to those laws. They bend the laws to rationalize whatever lifestyle they've adopted. They make themselves lawmaker, instead of lawbreaker. They are in denial.

Dealing with Sin

John, the old man, doesn't leave the early church in despair. He doesn't give them a condemnation without offering them a pathway to reconciliation. He offers his young church a way to deal with their sin. After he warns them not to deny their sin, he exhorts them to confess their sin. In verse 9 of our text John says, "***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***" Dealing with our sin means confessing our sin. And what does confession mean?

a. Agreeing with God about our sin

First, confession means agreeing with God about our sin. The Greek word translated "confession" in verse 9 is ***homologeō***, which literally means "same word." When we confess we are saying the same word about our sins as God. To confess our sins is to agree with God that they are sins. This is different than saying "I agree in personal sin" or "I agree there is sin in the world." To confess our sins means we agree with God that we have sinned and we agree what those sins are. We recognize that God sets the standards not us. It is we who live up to God's standards, not God adapting his standards to accommodate our experiences. Confession is agreeing with God that we have fallen short of standards in word, deed, and thought.

b. Depending on God

Confession also means depending on God for forgiveness. Although John writes in 2:1 "***My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin,***" he knows they have sinned and will sin. So he shows how God has established a means to deal with sin. Jesus is "***the one who speaks to the Father in our defense***" (2:1). Those 10 words in the NIV come from one Greek word *parakletos*. The *parakletos* is a legal advocate who pleads the case of the person on trial before the judge. In this case, the advocate is Jesus. But he is not just any advocate, he is the Son of the Judge. He knows the Judge intimately, so intimately in fact, that the mere fact that he is our advocate means the case is certain. Jesus never loses a case. He never requests anything of the Father that is not granted because he is one with the Father. And Jesus is not just an advocate with close ties to the judge. He also takes the punishment for our guilt. He doesn't go to the Father and try to demonstrate our innocence. He honestly forthrightly declares our guilt and then receives our punishment. John says in 2:2 "***He is***

the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” He pleads our cases, exposes our guilt, and takes our punishment.

Let me attempt to illustrate this profound truth by taking the risk of imagining how Jesus would handle the Ben Roethlisberger case. He is the quarterback with the Pittsburgh Steelers who was suspended by Commissioner Roger Goodell, for behavior inappropriate for NFL players. Roethlisberger had, for the second time, gotten in trouble at a late night party with a young college co-ed. In my theological imagination I hear Jesus say, “Your honor, all of these parties are my clients, both the plaintiffs and the defendant. I will also be providing legal counsel for the Pittsburgh Steelers and the NFL Players Association. Here is exactly what happened.” And then he begins to uncover not only the chronology of the events of the evening, but the motives behind every move. What people thought they could hide becomes completely exposed. There is no legal maneuvering. There are no lies. There are no conflicting stories. There is one narrative for all involved, and all are guilty at some point for breaking the laws of God. There is no amount of money and no manipulation of the legal system to protect anyone. Then the advocate who spoke honestly and uncovered everything says, “Your honor, I will take their punishment. All fines, all imprisonments, all stains on reputations, all aspects of humiliation I take into myself. I will pay the price for their sins with my life.” The *parakletos*, the advocate, known and loved by the judge, offers himself as the atoning sacrifice for the guilty

That is how sin is dealt with. It is confessed. We agree with God. We depend on God. And we repent, and turn toward God.

Conclusion

This is the message that God has for the world today. It has been summarized well by Tim Keller, author of the excellent book [The Reason for God](#). He says “Here’s the essence of the Gospel: You’re more sinful than you ever dreamed. You’re more loved than you ever hoped.” That is what the old beloved apostle is saying at the beginning of his epistle. God is light. God is good, holy, just, loving, and moral. Everything that is good comes from God. We are to follow God, to walk in his light. When we fail we should admit it, confess it, and trust that Jesus will forgive us of all unrighteousness. He is our advocate, who goes before the Father as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In truth and gratitude we accept his forgiveness and live with the joy and freedom of a once-convicted-felon declared innocent for eternity.

So my friends, walk in the light and have nothing to do with darkness.