



Imagine with me that we have two people: Lloyd Legalist and Liam Licentious. Yes, their names mean something. You have Mr. Legalist, and he goes to church whenever the doors are open. He reads his Bible and prays everyday so that he'll "grow, grow, grow." He is extremely disciplined, and he's always looking for ways to obey better and be more effective in his "spiritual growth." But while Lloyd is very disciplined and appears godly, there's a problem. He goes through seasons of immense pride, where he acts like everything's good and he doesn't really admit to his sins and weaknesses. Other seasons, he can be quite depressed because he knows he never measures up and he feels utterly crushed. Sometimes Lloyd wonders if this is what Christianity is all about, but he keeps pressing forward to try to be better so that he can feel better about his pursuit of godliness.

Enter Liam Licentious. Mr. Licentious raises his hands on Sundays. He has a smile on his face, and he often comes off as pretty happy – although he has seasons of despair, too. Interestingly, he doesn't have the same mindset as Lloyd, though. He tends to think his obedience (or, lack thereof) doesn't really matter. Whether he's in or out of church, meditating on God's Word or not, getting drunk on the weekend or not; he continually states that he's so grateful for God's grace! "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more" is his mantra. After all, Jesus paid it all, right? And, when Mr. Legalist says, "Yeah, and all to him I owe," Mr. Licentious says, "When God wants to change me, he'll change me."

You look at these two, and you might resonate with either (or maybe both of them). But is this what Christianity is about? Did Jesus enter into this world so that we can have despairing, self-righteous people? When we say that Jesus came to save sinners, what do we mean by that? Is that salvation real or not? And, is that salvation limited to Jesus only being able to provide forgiveness of sins or does salvation include God promising to empower people to obey him?

Debates between Mr. Legalist and Mr. Licentious have raged for centuries, but if we'd just go back to 1 John, we'd clearly see that Jesus didn't come to affirm either of these two. Instead, Jesus came to bring about a different way. He doesn't encourage legalism nor does he encourage licentiousness. Jesus came not to call people to just "attain to God's approval" like a legalist. And Jesus certainly didn't die on the cross so that we could tolerate sin. Jesus came to reconcile people to God and that reconciled relationship leads to change in desires, attitude, emotions, and behavior.

This is what John emphasizes in this letter. The false teachers have come in to say that their actions don't really matter. It doesn't affect their relationship and fellowship with God, and John has some very straightforward words towards these people. So, the main idea of this sermon today is that **If you have fellowship with God, you walk in the light.** With such simplicity and straightforwardness, John confronts the false teaching and also exhorts the readers to take their relationship with God seriously.

Now, in this section we're studying, John takes three arguments that professing Christians can bring, and shows how that's completely inconsistent with the nature of God. And he says that if you have a

relationship with the Lord, you cannot live that way. Before we get into the arguments, let's look at verse 5. This is the preface to this section: 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.<sup>1</sup>

Now that John began his letter emphasizing that Jesus came in the flesh and gave him a commission to teach the gospel, he now states the basic message Jesus taught him. This is also the basic message that John is compelled to proclaim to everyone. The message is that God is light. Before we try to understand what that means, I want to make sure that we see something important here. John doesn't begin his argument against false religious teachers by simply addressing their arguments. Instead, he starts with God. God is the standard. And he is taking them all back to the Source himself.

The reason why I want us to see this is because sometimes I think we can simply engage arguments by listening to the arguments and we don't compare the arguments with objective truth. Meaning, we can listen to people argue for abortion or for the LGBTQIA agenda or for their pro-recreational marijuana choices, and if we only listen to the arguments and we don't compare it the standard of God and the Bible, we might think, "Well, I think what they're saying kind of makes sense." Please hear me. Just because someone can make an argument that "makes sense," doesn't mean it's correct or God-glorifying. God made all things for his glory and our eternal good. We ought to always go back to him as the standard to see how everything we do lines up with him. John's response here serves as a wonderful example for us. He starts with God.

So, what does it mean that God is light? This idea of light and darkness runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. In John's usage "**light**" seems to refer to one of two things: **either revealing yourself/being transparent or being godly in behavior**. Here in this context, I think John is probably referring to both when speaking of God. God is light means that God has revealed himself. He's not a Being who tries to keep people in the dark about who he is. He's not a wizard behind a curtain. I say this because the false teachers were claiming they've come upon some "secret" knowledge. But God doesn't work that way. He's Light. He makes himself plain to people. In addition, because John says "in him is no darkness at all," that seems to indicate that there is no sin in him. So, for God to be Light means he has revealed himself and he is utterly perfect.

This is the basic message Jesus taught his disciples about God. This is foundational to who God is. John now will address the false teachers "new" beliefs by comparing it to the standard of God himself. But he's not only comparing it to the standard of God. He's seeing if these beliefs align with having a relationship with God. You see, John knows (and even these false teachers know) that being in relationship with God is the goal. What we discover through John's arguments is that these people actually reveal they have no relationship with God. They're much like Mr. Licentious and Mr. Legalist. They're actually just depending on themselves.

There's one more thing I want to say before getting into the arguments. Please don't treat these verses as statements from 2,000 years ago that don't matter for today. People can make the same, or similar, arguments today. John's words are just as true. Do you think you can be spiritual without a relationship with the Lord? Do you think a relationship doesn't matter? Do you think obedience is optional? If you think any of these, please listen carefully! I would also add, maybe you're tempted to embrace the mindset of legalism or licentiousness, I also find these words here to be comforting and freeing to the legalist, and also confrontational and freeing to the licentious. Now, let's get into the arguments:

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:5.

**Argument #1: But I can live with sin and it doesn't affect my fellowship with God (vv. 6-7).**

Read verse 6 with me: <sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.<sup>2</sup> Here we have a person who says that their behavior doesn't really matter. How they live doesn't affect fellowship with God. What could this look like in our day? I've had conversations with people who will say, "If I'm declared righteous because of Jesus' death on my behalf, then no sin ever affects my relationship with God." I get why you might think that, but that's wrong! It is true that Jesus died in the place of sinners, and if you trust him for your forgiveness of sins, you are forgiven and reconciled to God! It also means that you will never be rejected by God. But think of it this way. My children are my children. I will always love them. They will never lose my love as their father, but what they do can affect our relational interactions. The same is with God. We're taught in Scriptures that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. Our pride is like strongarming God and God resists that. That doesn't mean that we're hellbound, but it does mean that our relational experience is affected.

If you say you have fellowship with God while walking in darkness, you lie and don't practice the truth. Now, to "walk" refers to proximity and progress. If I go on a walk with Tracy, you assume that means that I'm with her on that walk. I'm not walking 50 steps ahead of her. We're on pace together. In addition, to walk means you're moving forward with something. So, to **walk in darkness means that you're in close proximity with sin and you're progressing with it.** Therefore, to say that you have fellowship with God while progressing in sinfulness is just a bold-faced lie. Why? Because God is light. If you were walking with God, you could not be walking in darkness.

I love how John emphasizes "fellowship" here. The point is not simply "If you say you are religious" or, "If you say you're doing religious things," he says "If you say you have fellowship with God." This is communion. This is relationship. Ventura, I hope you're hearing this. Who cares if you simply know about God but you don't know him? May we all long to fellowship with God.

John says this person who says living in sin doesn't affect fellowship is lying and they're not practicing the truth. Which means that they're not living in light of God, his Word, and Jesus. God's Word is truth. Jesus is the truth. To fellowship with God would mean the opposite of this mindset and behavior. So, John addresses this first argument by saying what walking in the light actually looks like. Let's read verse 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 cleanses us from all sin.<sup>3</sup>

**Response #1: Walking in the light involves fellowship and forgiveness.** If we walk in the light as he is in the light. Wait. I thought God was light. Why is John saying he's in it? Clearly God's relationship to Light is different than ours because God is light. But the emphasis I think John is making is our relationship with God. God doesn't stand off away from us, only shining his light, but he is with us.

Now, with God, he is light and there's no darkness in him. But what does it mean that we walk in the light? Does that mean that Christians are morally perfect? No. I like to use an illustration of being in a dark room. Try walking out of that room without the lights on. You might trip, stub your toe. You definitely can't clean up if the lights are off. But when the lights are on, you can see. Not only can you see the good. You can see the bad.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:6.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:7.

So, let's apply John's illustration. To walk means that we are in proximity and making progress. To be in the light means there's transparency and godliness. Transparency for God means he reveals himself and he is perfect. No darkness. Transparency for us is not the same. We still sin. We still have brokenness. So, we admit sin. But we don't admit sin to sit back and say, "Praise God for grace!" And by that we mean only forgiving grace. We don't mean we praise God for grace to obey or follow him or fight against ungodliness. Listen carefully, to walk in the light means there's transparency and progress. God's grace forgives and changes us.

John moves on to give two specific blessings as we walk in the light. Or, to put another way, as the light is on and we see the mess. The two blessings are fellowship and forgiveness. When I say fellowship, we might first think "fellowship with God," and this is actually something that is somewhat shocking to me still. When I read these words, I would expect John to say that if we walk in the light we have fellowship with God. But he says that we have fellowship with one another. Why does he do this? Well, I think he's already alluded to fellowship with God because he says that we walk in the light with God! That's fellowship. And because we're with God, we're with all who are with God. We have fellowship with one another. We learned the importance of community even as we looked at last week's text, too. Ventura, do you see the beauty and blessing of a community of believers? Let me get a little more specific, though. Sometimes Christians can seem to be more excited and committed to pastors, Christian agencies/groups more than they are with the ones they've committed to in real life. I have a concern about that because if you can't love and serve the ones you're with consistently, do you really love Christ's body? John emphasizes the great privilege of walking in the walk – of living in transparency and progress – and it's having fellowship with believers. Again, this isn't just having a close friend group. This is being united around people who love Jesus and we help each other to love and follow Jesus more.

Another blessing on the path of transparency and progress is forgiveness. Oh, this is glorious. Again, John isn't saying walking in the light means we're perfect. But it does mean that our sin is addressed (and we'll see how in the next few verses). So, listen, you might be someone here who has a tendency to despair, and you think you're walking in darkness simply because you sin or you battle against sin. That's not what John is saying. If you're turning to the Lord and following him in transparency and progress, you are fellowshiping with him and enjoying his daily grace of forgiveness. Rest in his love and grace, Christian! Now, we can move to the next argument:

#### **Argument #2: But I don't have any sin in my life right now (vv. 8-9)**

Let's read verse 8: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.<sup>4</sup> Here's a person who thinks there's no sin in their life. There are many people who can think this: both professing Christians and non-Christians. Maybe you think this today. You might think God's goal is to get you to a point to where you can not sin, and if you are at that point, you get points and God's proud of you.

Wait a second. Who's the focus on if that's the case? It's you! The reality is that we will not be perfect and sinless until we see God face-to-face. Some people despair when they hear that and think, "Well then, what's the point? Why even try to fight against sin?" Answer: because God is worthy and you can grow in relationship with him all the while. You might say, "I don't think we continue to fall short. I think I can be fine," and to that John says you're self-deceived and the truth isn't in you. This is more significant than the previous situation. It's not simply that you're lying. It's that you've chosen to squash your conscience and deceive yourself. And it's not simply that you don't practice the truth. John says the truth isn't even in you.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:8.

How can John be so bold? Let's read verse 9: <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>5</sup> **Response #2: Walking in the light involves confession of sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God.**

If we see our sin, we can't ignore it. To be in fellowship with God means he's going to point out sin in our lives. His light will shine. But he doesn't do it so that we wallow on the ground, only ever living in shame. No. He does it so that we would confess. Now, what does "confess" mean? Very basically, it means to agree with God. This doesn't simply mean saying a quick, "Sorry, God, I'll try better next time." To confess doesn't mean to be a legalist either where you say, "I'll prove to you that I'm better than this." No. To confess means to agree with God and his assessment. And, what's his assessment? Sin is heinous. Sin is treason. If in your times of asking God for forgiveness, you're not taking the sin seriously, you're not really confessing. Now, please don't become legalistic about this and think, "Ok, if I cry enough or hate it enough, God will forgive me." I know I don't hate sin with the intensity it deserves, but when I grow in hating sin, and pray that God help me to hate it more, I believe that's confession. Do you confess your sin? If you do, rejoice! Because apart from God, you wouldn't confess it.

Now, in confessing, you find forgiveness and reconciliation. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Look at these words. He's faithful. Oh, our God is faithful. He's not up in Heaven saying, "Well, we'll see if I forgive you this time." No! He always forgives his children. Thank God he is faithful and he doesn't give up on us. But notice that the text also says that he is just to forgive. When we think of justice, we might often think about a Judge. And, when we think of us getting justice from God, we might think of what we deserve. And, what do we humans deserve? Because of our sinfulness and rebellion against God, we deserve Hell. Yet, John says that God is just to forgive. How can that be? Because Jesus took the justice we deserved on the cross. And, by the way, if you're here today and you've never confessed your sin to God, you can right now! Trust Jesus who suffered the Hell you deserved on the cross. Because he took the place of sinners, God justly punished sin, and God also now justly offers forgiveness to all who confess.

This is amazing, Ventura. I remember years ago listening to a guy talk about grace, and he was talking about what we deserved, and he said, that God's forgiveness isn't justice. It's grace. And I actually reached out to him and I said that it actually is justice. God is faithful and just. Or, Paul writes in Romans 3 that God is both just and the justifier. Oh, how amazing that Jesus came in the flesh to suffer in the place of sinners and shine forth God's faithfulness and justice. What amazing love, right?

Therefore, Christian, God's response to you when you sin can only ever be "forgiveness!" Why? Because it's just. To forgive glorifies his faithfulness and Jesus' sacrifice! So, to say you don't have sin in your life ignores the faithfulness and justice of God in Jesus. Now we can move on to the next argument:

### **Argument #3: I haven't sinned (vv. 10-2:2a).**

Read verse 10 now: If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.<sup>6</sup> Now, this argument could be "I haven't sinned ever." It could also mean that someone says we're not born sinners. Or, that we don't have a sin nature or a flesh. This would be the most brazen and ridiculous argument. This past week, I was meeting with a couple in our church, and the wife said that she doesn't know how anyone with children could ever believe that humans don't have a sin nature. However, that's

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:9.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:10.

our culture. Years ago, I read a portion of a book that was analyzing modern psychology, and the author (John Stott) commented on how in the 60's, I think, psychologists were trying to get rid of the concept of sin because they felt that guilt and shame were too strong. If they could get rid of sin, then they felt they could help people better.

I think we see this mindset in so much today, and John reveals to us that this is anti-gospel. It's anti-God! God is light and his light shines on us to reveal himself and to reveal who we are. To say we're sinless or that we don't have a sin nature isn't simply us lying. It's not simply us deceiving ourselves. When we do this, we actually are calling God a liar. God, who is truth, is not suppressed, and we embrace a lie. As a result, the word is not in those who believe this way.

**Response #3: Walking in the light involves having Jesus as our Advocate.** We are going to get into this text even more next week, but we have to touch on this response because it's part of this text. Some people might hear all of this and think, "Why is John emphasizing the fact that Christians sin?" Well, because in comparison to God, no one has no darkness in them. And for anyone to say there's no darkness in them is anti-God and anti-Christ. But some of you might say, "Well then that's depressing. I try hard to get sin out of my life. If you're telling me I still have sin in me, that makes me feel like I can't really talk to God or fellowship with him." If you think that way then you've forgotten the basis of your fellowship. Is the basis of your fellowship how good you are? Your obedience? Are you Lloyd Legalist? No! The basis of your fellowship is Jesus. And John says he's our Advocate. In the Justice System of God, Jesus Advocates for us! Praise the Lord, right? And, John says his blood propitiates. That means Jesus' death satisfied God's wrath against sin.

Oh, how glorious these realities. Christians admit they sin. Christians confess their sins. Christians experience forgiveness and hope in Jesus! But, you may be like me and think that John's arguments aren't making too much sense. I mean, the false teachers were basically promoting sin and licentiousness. And now confronts them by saying that Christians sin. How does that counter the false teachers? And how does this fit with John's statement in 2:1 where he says that he writes this letter so that we wouldn't sin? Well, listen carefully, John says that Christians confess that they sin and they have sin. Christians also admit that their sin affects their communion with God and they confess that sin. And they don't do this to gain God's love but because they already have it in Christ. John is arguing here on the basis of relationship. This past week, I was reminded of a quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said that when Christians sin, they sin not against law, but against love. Yes, Christians still sin. But sin grieves us and because we're in fellowship with God, we're transparent and progressing by God's grace in Jesus. As we grow in godliness, it's not simply because we tried harder. It's because Jesus is so good!

So, let's take what John says here. These false teachers who say they're Christians are basically hypocrites. And hypocrites are people who say things like, "my sin doesn't affect my relationship with God." They also might defend themselves and downplay their sin by saying it's not sin at all. Or, they'll just say, "I'm actually a good person. I don't have a sin nature." That's all hypocrisy. And that hypocrisy won't lead to growth in godliness.

**But if you walk with God, who is light, you will be transparent. You will confess your sins. You'll admit the sinfulness of sin. And you'll experience progress. Why? Because God has given you fellowship with other Christians who will help you grow. Because God is faithful and just to forgive sins! Because God promises forgiveness. Because you have an Advocate, Jesus. Fellowship with God leads to radical change. If you have fellowship with God, you will walk in the Light.**