

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part two
 Sunday, January 10th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2066
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TAKING THE HOLINESS OF GOD SERIOUSLY

1 John 1:5-6 - "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. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

My oldest brother could still tell you of the night I was with him in my 1962 Volkswagen when it died by the side of the road. It was a bitterly cold Saskatchewan winter night. Paul - "You haven't been putting gas-line antifreeze in the tank have you?" No I hadn't. We walked close to a mile to a garage for gas-line antifreeze. Nothing. The car still wouldn't start. We had no money for a tow truck. There were no cell phones. We pushed the car to the closest garage. They checked the plugs. They checked the battery. They even tried boosting the car. Nothing. Finally the mechanic got in to try starting the car - "***When was the last time you put gas in this thing?***"

You can have everything else right. But if you don't have gas in the tank, you're wasting your time. ***Some things have to be in place for anything else to work.*** You don't have to have ***everything*** right. But there are ***certain*** things you must have right.

First John is a letter about ***fellowship with God***. John will deal with the subject from many angles. He will deal with many hindrances. He will put forward many solutions and warnings. ***But there's something he wants to make clear first.*** When John says "***God is light***" he has no desire to enter a theological discussion about the Godhead. His concern isn't ***theology***. His concern is ***fellowship*** - fellowship with God.

1) **WHAT GOD IS LIKE DETERMINES WHAT FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM MUST BE LIKE.**

John tells us "***God is light***" so we will know ***what the terms of the fellowship are***. That's why **verse 5** is about ***God*** and **verse 6** is about ***us***. That's what John is writing about here - ***God and us - fellowship*** with God.

That's also why in **verse 5** John doesn't just say "***God is light***". John tips his hand by adding the negative as well - "***in Him there is no darkness at all.***" That's John's way of teaching that ***God never bends toward anything unholy***. There is no darkness "***at all***" in Him. It is impossible for

God to **compromise**. It is impossible for Him to **overlook**. It is impossible for Him to **excuse**. Those responses just aren't in God. He is light with no darkness mixed in. There is no darkness **"at all."**

And notice that this is the **first** truth John deals with. If you want to enjoy fellowship with God you must **start** with this point. You must start with what God is **actually like**. All of the myths and illusions must be stripped away.

If you are content to have a **pretend** Christianity you can define God on your own terms. You will have the same kind of relationship with God that I had as a small boy with cowboys and indians in my back yard on summer nights. But if you want to really **know** the true God you don't get to define the relationship. You can't create a God of your own liking - on your own terms. If you want to know God - enjoy God - fellowship with God - then focus on His holiness **first**. God's holiness **defines** the fellowship. It **sets the terms** for the fellowship.

Hebrews 12:14 - "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

There it is in plain terms. **Holiness determines fellowship with God**. You have to be constantly holy or the fellowship with God ceases. And the writer isn't talking about the **imputed** righteousness we receive from Jesus Christ. He makes that very plain by telling us we must **"strive"** for this holiness. If we don't we can go to church all we want and sing all we want and raise our hands as high as we want, but we will never **"see"** God.

2) **OUR NATURAL TENDENCY IS TO DECEIVE OUR HEARTS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLINESS FOR KNOWING GOD**

That's what John deals with in **verse 6** - **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."**

Take you index finger and run it under each word of that last sentence. Do it slowly - word by word. Lots of people **claim** to know God. Lots of people **claim** to be Christians. Lots of people pronounce themselves saved. **But if they continue to walk in darkness - in unholiness,**

they're wrong. They're lying to God and themselves. They don't know Jesus.

We don't think that way anymore. We hold a modified view of what the Scriptures actually teach.

What does cherished sin do to the Christian life? The common response to that question would run something like this - "Well, I used to be really on fire for the Lord. But things haven't been going too well lately. I've messed up in several areas. I guess I used to be a **9 out of 10** Christian. Now I've probably slipped to a **5 or 6.** But Jesus still loves me. I'm saved by grace not by works. I can live with a few less stars in my crown."

Let's imagine a scene at the judgement seat of Christ. Don has died and stands before his Maker. It comes to light that he hasn't been yielded to Jesus in his heart. ***Let's paint two pictures and you tell me which is the message of the New Testament:***

Scene 1 - The place and time is the final judgment. Don stands before the great white throne. Can you imagine God Almighty saying, ***"Well, you didn't do what I told you to do. You said you were a Christian all those years but you never did love Me enough to do what I said. You absolutely refused to turn from that secret sin in your heart. You took the moral direction of your life, not from my Word, but from the friends and peers you loved and admired. But you said all the while you were a Christian. So even though you are full of darkness, I guess I'll let you into my eternal kingdom."***

OR Scene 2 - Again at the last judgment. Imagine God saying, ***"I know you professed all those years to be My child. But you never did live under the Lordship of My Son, Jesus Christ. You used all the right words. You sang the songs. But you did whatever you wanted, not what I commanded. You thought I would just accommodate My standards to your lifestyle. You never did love Me enough to practice holiness of heart against the flow of the world around you. But I am light. In fact, there is no darkness at all in Me. My pure and eternal Word stand forever settled. Depart from Me. You're a worker of iniquity. I never knew you."***

What I'm submitting to you this morning is that second scene is the only picture the New Testament ever paints.

- 3) **WILLFUL, PERSISTENT SIN PLUNGES THE SOUL INTO DARKNESS EVEN THOUGH**

JESUS MAY BE VERBALLY CONFESSED TO THE POINT WHERE THE CONFESSOR BELIEVES HE IS FOLLOWING JESUS

I referred to a very important text in the last point. Let me quote it fully here because it is so compelling at this point:

Matthew 7:21-23 - “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'”

We need to know for certain what’s happening in this text. We need to see Jesus’ meaning with clarity. Jesus is not describing *hypocrites* in these verses. Hypocrites are *pretenders* who try to fool people into thinking they are the real deal. Jesus isn’t describing *pretenders*. He’s describing people who are *genuinely surprised* to hear such harsh words from the Lord. They thought they *were* followers of Jesus. That’s the only way to interpret their puzzled words in **verse 22** - “On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’”

These people are saying, “*What’s going on here?*” They’re stunned. But *why* are they so surprised? Were the instructions about holiness unclear? Did God not give proper directions?

No. That’s not the problem.

Hebrews 12:14 - “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Titus 2:11-13 - “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ....”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 - “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Even these few references are enough to make God’s mind clear. Sin and heaven don’t mix. No holiness, no relationship with God, no matter what religious speeches are made. So why are so many people confused about this? Remember, Jesus said **“many”** would be surprised on judgment day.

John starts his letter with the one truth about God we find the hardest to accept. For all the singing and talking and reading and praying we all do in church about the holiness of God, there’s a part of it we don’t easily embrace. We don’t like God’s **intolerance with sin**. We are all so uneasy with the kind of silly questions people ask:

“Do you mean God would send me to hell for one sexual indiscretion?” “Do you mean to say a good, loving God would send someone to hell just for telling one lie?” “Are you honestly saying God would bar me from heaven just because I got drunk at a party?”

And we all know how those questions make us back up a bit. We don’t want to sound stupid. We know how we’re being tricked. There are never good answers to silly questions. And so we all know the kind of unrest those questions bring. Of course, we all want to say, ‘No. God’s not like that, and that’s not how the Christian life works.’

And that’s probably a reasonably good answer to a fairly simplistic question. But it’s also a very **dangerous** answer. It’s dangerous because, in trying to not sound too prudish and legalistic, we’ve moved, bit by bit, away from some things the Bible **does** say about the drunkard and the liar and the sexually immoral. And what the Bible **does** say about all these people is **no, they don’t get in to heaven**.

But because the question cleverly takes these sins and **breaks them down into tiny events** - just **one** lie - just **one** act of sexual immorality - just **one** case of overindulgence - none of us wants to draw the line separating the sinner from God. But just because we all hate to blow the

whistle and draw the line **doesn't** mean God's heart toward sin has changed. Clever questions don't make God more tolerant of sin. Which is precisely why John wants to move the standard in the **opposite direction**. John wants to tell these Christians they need to exercise the greatest care possible about committing **any** sin because God is light - and in Him is **"no darkness - none at all!"**

It shouldn't surprise us that John opens this letter with such penetrating words about light and darkness. He didn't make this imagery up himself. He had heard Jesus give His life's mission in the same terms. Jesus told us His intention in coming into this world. He lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven to accomplish something on our behalf. And if you say His purpose was to forgive us our sins, you're wrong. That was only the **means** to another glorious **end**:

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

4) **THIS TRUTH - THAT ONLY THOSE WHO TURN FROM THEIR SINS CAN EVER KNOW GOD - IS THE DIRECTION SETTING TRUTH OF ANY LIFE**

There is something easily missed in the last phrase of our text:

1John 1:6 - "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

"If we say..." Clearly John is dealing with how someone **justifies** his or her lifestyle. They've been confronted at some point. They've been challenged and called to change their ways. That's the only thing that would cause them to **verbalize** their inner reasonings. And if you start living that way, says John, it's highly improbable that Biblical truth will ever sway your thoughts. That's what John means when he says this fake Christian will never be able to **"practice the truth."** You lock into a course of self-deception and eternal self-destruction.

You must learn to build everything about who you are in Christ Jesus around the holiness of God - around the fact that He is **light** and mixes with **"no darkness at all."** Whatever other mistakes you make in life, anchor on this. Make all mistakes on the side of safety and purity. You will never

lose being too holy. This is the only truth big enough to set the direction for everything else about your life.

There are far too many professing Christians walking around in the dark. Jesus gets no glory from their lives. The world sees nothing different - nothing glorious. And, perhaps the greatest tragedy of all, these people come to live - actually waste - large slices of a precious, only to be lived once life - not knowing God at all. They waste their precious lives in the dull powerless vacuum of pretend Christianity.

You can **come** to Jesus with the darkest life imaginable. He will cleanse and pardon. There is grace for every truly repentant sinner - even for repeated sin.

But you can't willfully **stay** in the dark. Clear your mind. Think Biblically about holiness. There's a reason John compares it to **light**. Life isn't **diminished** by holiness. Not ever. It's filled with creation's highest purpose and joyful fellowship with God.