

The Epistles of John and Jude
I John 1:5-10 Notes
Lesson 3 Walking in the Light

Introduction:

In the opening pages of Scripture we see the subject of light introduced almost immediately. The familiar words of Genesis 1:3-4 read, **“Then God said let there be light and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”** While it is clear from the context that the light which God spoke into existence was literal, and the means by which God established the order of night and day, there was clearly much more going on. As Jackman writes,

“Here is the earliest expression of the nature and will of the Creator. His words execute his purposes; both words and actions reveal his character. The God who creates begins with light. Without light, no growth, no activity, no beauty would be possible. All creation owes not only its existence, but its sustenance, to the God who is light, and the Christ who declared Himself to be the light of the world.”

It is within this basic framework that the apostle John wrote his epistle, and articulated the message he and the other apostles had learned from Jesus.

As an eyewitness, John had experienced first hand what Jesus meant when he said, **“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12)**. He had seen countless lives transformed by the Lord, and knew that as an apostle he had the responsibility to proclaim the truth he had learned from Jesus. At its core, the message that Jesus had proclaimed and entrusted to his followers was not an entirely new message, but rather a fuller and final

expression of the Father's will (Heb. 1:1-2). This message, regarding salvation and the means by which believers maintain fellowship with one another (I John 2:7-8) is set forth clearly in today's passage and lays the foundation for the whole book of I John.

The message declared

The apostle says in I John 1:5, “ **And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.**” As we consider verse 5, we must first remember the reason John was proclaiming this message: it was so that his readers would be assured of their fellowship with God and other believers, and in turn experience joy (1:3-4). The phrase, “**God is light**” while simple and straightforward, is actually quite nuanced. As Macarthur notes,

“The description of God as light captures the essence of His nature and is foundational to the rest of the epistle. However, unlike the straightforward expressions of ‘God is spirit’ and ‘God is love’ the idea that God is light is more complex.”

Jackman explains wonderfully the complexity of the truth when he writes,

“Light became a frequent symbol of God's presence in the Old Testament, finding one of its clearest expressions in the exodus, when Israel experienced that **‘the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day and night’ (Exodus 13:21)**. This function, as a source of illumination and guidance, probably lies behind John's emphasis here on walking in the light as an essential of Christian fellowship. The other major significance of God as light in Scripture is as a picture of his perfect moral righteousness, his flawless

holiness. John's thought here is paralleled by Paul's assertion in I Timothy 6:16 that God **'lives in unapproachable light'**. His 'otherness' is demonstrated by the prophet Habakkuk's conviction, **'Your eyes are too pure to look at evil; you cannot tolerate wrong' (Hab.1:13)**. A foundational stone of right Christian believing and living then, is that intellectually, morally, and spiritually God is light, unsullied and undiluted. It speaks of holiness and purity, of truth and integrity; but also of illumination and guidance, warmth and comfort... Such light scatters all our darkness. It is the truth against which all other claims must be tested. For it is the nature of light to penetrate everywhere unless it is deliberately shut out. This light reveals the reality, and while it dispels darkness, it also exposes what the darkness would hide. The point is well made in one of CS Lewis's insights when he comments that we believe the sun has risen, not because we see it, but because by it we see everything else. There are no twilight zones in God. If we interpret this verse theologically John is saying, 'God is good and evil can have no place with Him.'

True believers walk in the light

Moving onto verse 6, the apostle begins to address what it looks to have genuine fellowship with God. In short, he is describing the lifestyle and fruit of the genuine believer. He writes, **"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."** Here John addresses the claim of those who profess to know God but continue to walk in habitual sin. The word "walk" in the Greek, *peripateo*, refers to "the whole round of the activities of life" (Vines), the lifestyle of a person. Here is the person who flippantly says with his mouth,

“I know God,” but has no regard for holiness. His daily conduct reveals unbroken patterns of sin and a continual rejection of truth. John boldly calls this type of person a liar, for he does not practice the truth or allow it to change him.

Because God is light, those who have genuine fellowship with Him, cannot help but be changed for as the Psalmist proclaimed, **“For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down. For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness” (ESV Psalm 18:27-28)**. At its core, this is the very essence of saving faith for newness of life is always the fruit of genuine belief. (James 2:17) John affirms this truth when he continues, **“but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”** For the person who has genuinely come to know God through Christ, his lifestyle is marked by a submission to the truth which is primarily manifested in doctrinal purity and obedience. As the MacArthur study Bible summarizes,

“Genuine Christians walk habitually in the light (truth and holiness), not in darkness (falsehood and sin). Their walk also results in cleansing from sin as the Lord continually forgives His own. Since those walking in the light share in the character of God, they will be habitually characterized by holiness (3 John 11), indicating their true fellowship with Him.”

While it is clear that the primary result of saving faith is personal life transformation, the apostle is quick to remind his readers that walking in the light also has one added benefit: fellowship with other believers. This is no small matter to John, for he will continue to build on this thought throughout his epistle.

True believers acknowledge sin

Moving onto verses 8-10, John continues to discuss the lifestyle of the genuine believer, and highlights additional false claims that some were making. He writes, **“If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and His word is not in us.”** Here we see that the false teachers were going so far as to entirely reject the existence of a sin nature in their lives. Additionally, they were also boldly claiming to have never even sinned! (vs 10) These prideful, arrogant claims were in clear opposition to the truth of the Word, for the Bible has always taught the ultimate depravity of every human being (Gen. 6:6, Ps. 58:3, Is. 53:10-11, 64:6, Jer. 17:9, Rom. 3:12). As MacArthur notes,

“By making that ridiculous assertion they blasphemously make God a liar (Titus 1:2, I John 5:10-11) in two ways. First they explicitly deny His teaching that all have sinned and second, they implicitly deny the need for a Savior. After all, why would they need a Substitute to take the punishment for something they claim to have never committed?”

While this rejection of truth may seem obvious to us, the self-deception that John was addressing in his epistle is still rampant today as many professing believers continue to reject these same truths. As proof, consider these findings from a recent poll conducted by George Barna in May 2021 for the Family Research Council. Of those surveyed who claimed to hold to a Biblical Worldview:

1. 33% believe that human beings are born with a sinful nature and can only be saved from the consequences of sin by Jesus Christ.
2. 29% believe that the best indicator of success in life is consistent obedience to God.
3. 47% believe that when they die they will go to Heaven only because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.
4. 49% accept reincarnation as a possibility after they die.
5. 48% believe that it is very important for their religious faith to influence every dimension of life
6. As a summary, only 9% of those who claim to have a Biblical worldview, actually have one!

While the reasons for these results have various contributing factors, the bottom line is that unregenerate people have no taste for truth. In fact, apart from the Lord, every human being desires to live according to their own wisdom rather than Gods. As John says, **“And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light: for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19).**

In contrast to those who reject the truth, we see that those who have a genuine relationship with God not only make it their practice to walk in truth (vs 7), they also acknowledge that sin still resides in them and make confession and repentance their ongoing habit (vs 9). As Matthew Henry wrote long ago,

“The Christian religion is the religion of sinners, of such as have sinned, and in whom sin in some measure still dwells. The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, humiliation for, and mortification of sin, of continual faith in, thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer, and hopeful joyful expectation of a day of glorious redemption, in which the believer shall be fully and finally acquitted, and sin abolished forever. The denial of our sin not only deceives ourselves, but reflects dishonour upon God. It challenges His veracity. He has abundantly testified of, and testified against, the sin of the world. But God has given his testimony to the continued sin and sinfulness of the world, by providing a sufficient, effectual sacrifice for sin, that will be needed in all ages, and to the continued sinfulness of believers themselves by requiring them continually to confess their sins, and apply themselves by faith to the blood of that sacrifice.”

Conclusion

In short, these verses out of I John have much to teach the believer about the true nature of God, and what it means for a person to have a genuine relationship with Him. Through Christ, God has graciously provided a way for sinful man to be restored to Him- yet that restoration has undeniable effects! Regardless of other claims people will make, the Bible emphatically teaches that genuine Christians walk in the light, rather than darkness. They embrace truth and obedience, and yet acknowledge they are still a “work in progress,” by confessing sin and trusting Christ to continue cleansing them. This very process, called sanctification, is the living proof that they are indeed children of God. (I John 2:1-5, Rom. 8:29)

References

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