

Living With The Light On 1 John 1:5-2:2

A telemarketer called a home one day, and a small voice whispered, "Hello?"
"Hello! What's your name?"
Still whispering, the voice said, "Jimmy."
"How old are you, Jimmy?"
"I'm four."
"Good, Is your mother home?"
"Yes, but she's busy."
"Okay, is your father home?"
"He's busy too."
"I see, who else is there?"
"The police."
"The police? May I speak with one of them?"
"They're busy."
"Any other grown-ups there?"
"The firemen."
"May I speak with a fireman, please?"
"They're all busy."
"Jimmy, all those people in your house, and I can't talk with any of them? What are they doing?"
"Looking for me," whispered Jimmy.

(www.sermonillustrations.com)

All too often, we act just like Jimmy with the exception that instead of trying to keep our location secret from other people, we are trying to hide our sin. We do everything we can to avoid exposure. We know it shouldn't be this way, but we live in hiding just the same. Just as it wasn't a good idea for Jimmy to hide from his parents and the authorities, neither is it a good idea for us to try to hide our sin. When we try to hide our sin and refuse to deal with it, we find ourselves out of fellowship with God and other believers and forsake the joy that results from such fellowship.

The book of 1 John is written to tell us how to enjoy life more. It was written to a group of people who aren't enjoying life. They claim to know God and to be believers, but their lives don't give evidence of what they profess. What John writes indicates he believes most of his original audience is truly saved, but not enjoying fellowship. They aren't living holy lives. They have a love for the world and the things of the world. They are criticizing and attacking one another instead of loving one another. When we live like this, when we continue in this kind of pattern, we will never experience the complete joy that comes from fellowship with God.

John writes for two main purposes:

That we might enjoy fellowship with God Himself and other Christians (1:3)
(The result of such fellowship): That we might have complete joy (1:4)

John's message: To enjoy fellowship with God, we need to be like Him—the way we are needs to be in sync with who He is

God's nature is that which determines the conditions for fellowship with Him. John tells us four things about God and four ways we need to be like Him if we are to enjoy fellowship with Him. God is light (1:5). To enjoy fellowship with God, we must be holy. God is love (4:8). To enjoy fellowship with God, we must love each other. God is life (5:20). To enjoy fellowship with God, we must possess eternal life. God is the true God (5:20). To enjoy fellowship with God, we must believe the truth revealed about Him through Jesus Christ.

Light is the realm in which we must live in order to enjoy fellowship with a holy God (1:5-3:10)

Description of God (1:5)

“This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you.”

As was mentioned in the previous sermon on 1 John, John writes based on his own experience with Jesus. Based on what John heard from Jesus, he declares the following message:

God is light => holy

John states not merely that God by nature has light or gives light, but that He Himself is light.

There's no darkness in God

John is emphatic and uses a double negative to affirm that there is absolutely no darkness in God—not even the least little bit. As we observe God's essential being, we will find nothing but light, nothing but absolute holiness.

Implications of God's holiness for believers (1:6-3:10)

If we want to enjoy fellowship with a God Who is light, Who is holy, it requires that we live in the light, that we live a holy life.

Three hindrances to fellowship with God (1:6-10)

John addresses three false claims that are made which work to hinder our fellowship with God who is light if and when we make them. John treats these hindrances in ascending order of seriousness.

Hindrance #1-The claim to be enjoying fellowship with God while living in darkness (1:6a)

It is impossible to be in the light and in the dark at the same time. Light and darkness can't co-exist in the same space. They represent two separate distinct spheres of existence. As Hiebert writes, "Light and darkness represent two antithetical realms that cannot be mixed. They do not overlap, and there is no neutral zone between them."

When the light is turned on, the darkness vanishes wherever the light shines. Likewise, living in darkness and being in fellowship with God who is light cannot both be true at the same time. One cannot be exhibiting a continual pattern of living in the darkness and then rightfully claim to be enjoying fellowship with God.

This claim indicates two things about us (1:6b):

We are lying

We aren't living by the truth

How are we doing? Is our claim to be in fellowship with God consistent with the conduct of our life? Or Are there significant inconsistencies between the two? As John here points out, when there are inconsistencies between our talk and our walk, it is our walk that demonstrates how things really are. Forget about the things we have been saying. Forget about what we have told people in our attempts to leave a favorable impression. Let's evaluate our walk. It is our walk that indicates whether we are truly enjoying fellowship or not.

Solution-Walk in the light as He is in the light (1:7)

When the first hindrance John mentions is a problem in our life, the solution is a consistent daily walk in the realm of light. Please notice that the standard of this walk in the light isn't left for us to determine, but is established by God's nature—"as He is in the light." Because God is by nature light, He is always in an environment of light and it is when we live in this same realm that we enjoy the fellowship God intends for us.

When we walk in the light, we enjoy fellowship with one another

When we walk in the light, we enjoy fellowship with both God and other believers. Thinking of how our fellowship with God and our fellowship with other believers are related begs the following questions: Are we enjoying fellowship with other believers who are living in the light? Or Are we having trouble maintaining fellowship with others living in the light? If we are having trouble, perhaps we should examine our claim to be in fellowship with God. When we are really walking in the light, fellowship with other believers who are also walking in the light won't be a problem.

When we walk in the light, we enjoy God's cleansing of our sin

We want to be careful to note here that it is not our walking in the light that produces the purification of our sin. It is Christ's blood alone that brings about our purification.

When we as believers in Jesus Christ walk in the light, it does two things: First, it makes us more aware of our need for cleansing. Second, it makes us aware of the sufficiency of Christ's provision in order that we might experience this cleansing. Walking in the light makes us aware of our need for cleansing in that the closer we get in our fellowship with a holy God, the more we are aware of our own sinfulness. The more we step up to the light, the more we see our sin, and the more we realize that we can never perfectly walk in the light this side of heaven. Because of this, we need to be purified, we need the provision God has given us—the shed blood of Christ which purifies us from our sin. Walking in the light makes us aware of the sufficiency of Christ's provision for our cleansing in that no matter the sin that His light uncovers as we draw closer to Him, if we have trusted in Christ as our Savior, it is covered—the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from **ALL** sin. Understanding the depth of our need for cleansing and the sufficiency of Christ's shed blood to meet it, we experience complete joy as we walk in the light and repeatedly experience His cleansing.

Hindrance #2-The claim to be without sin (1:8)

Any claim a person makes not to have sin in his or her life is false. John warned that such thinking is indicative of self-deception. We are kidding ourselves if we claim we don't sin anymore. All people sin, including children of God. If we claim we don't have sin in our life, it also indicates that God's Word isn't in us—His Word isn't the controlling influence in our life at that moment. Our hearts might not be conscious of sin, but that does not mean we are without it. On this side of heaven, we will never be perfect and without sin.

Solution-Confess sin so as to experience God's cleansing and forgiveness (1:9)

What does it mean to confess our sins? To confess our sins is to agree with God about them. It is to share His perspective on our sins. It is to say the same thing about our sins that God does. When we confess our sin, we acknowledge the specific sins we have done. Our acknowledgement is more than admitting, "Yeah, I did that." We also need to acknowledge that what we have done is wrong. Not only do we need to acknowledge our wrong doing, but we also need to agree that the sins we have been doing have to go—they must be gotten rid of and not tolerated any longer.

A person can admit his or her sin and yet give no indication that he or she intends to do anything differently in the future. A person can admit sin and at the same time be plotting how they will do it again. It could be said that this is admission of sin, but this does not represent confession of sin in the Biblical sense.

If we really say the same thing about our sin that God does, we will acknowledge what we have done, we will acknowledge it is wrong, and we will realize that something needs to be done to get rid of it.

Psalm 51 is a good example of a genuine confession of sin:

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom
in the inmost place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a
broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.
- ¹⁸ In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

If and when we confess our sins, God will purify us from all unrighteousness and forgive us. This result is sure to be ours understanding the character of God. God is faithful—He is worthy of our complete trust and confidence. He said he will purify and forgive us when we confess our sins and we can count on Him to do so.

The forgiveness and cleansing of God which we receive when we confess our sins is in no way in violation of God's justice. God is just in forgiving and purifying us. Certainly God's just nature requires that payment be made for our sins—He can't just ignore sin or sweep it under the rug. It has to be dealt with. Death is required as payment for our transgressions. That payment has been made for us by Jesus Christ. Since God's just demands have been satisfied in the life of the believer by Christ's death on the cross, His justice is not violated in purifying and forgiving sinners.

God's purifying of us means that He cleanses us from the pollution and guilt of sin that was getting in the way of our ability to fellowship with Him. Notice, He purifies us from all unrighteousness—no matter how heinous the believer's sins may be, he or she can experience His purification by confessing them.

When God forgives us of our sins, He sends them away, He lets them go and never holds them against us. God never again allows these to stand between us and our fellowship with Him. His forgiveness allows for the restoration of our fellowship which our sins negatively affected.

Illustration: If we wreck our dad's car and don't tell Him about it, such an action will not destroy our membership in our family. We will always be our father's son or daughter. Likewise, our sin as believers doesn't destroy membership in God's family. Once His child, we are always His child! While sin doesn't affect family status, it can and does affect how much we are able to enjoy our family. How much will we be able to enjoy our relationship with our dad while we are hiding something like the fact that we have wrecked his car? Obviously, we won't be able to enjoy fellowship with him until we come clean and acknowledge what happened. Likewise, we can't enjoy the fellowship with God that He intends for us when unconfessed sin remains between us and Him. It's only when we confess our sin that we will be able to enjoy this fellowship once again.

Hindrance #3-The claim to have never sinned

It's bad enough for us to lie to or deceive ourselves by claiming we never sin anymore. It's far worse to make God out to be a liar. For a person to claim that he or she has never sinned in view of God's testimony that we are all sinners is doing just that—making God out to be a liar. A person who rejects God's testimony has given no place in his or her life for God's Word. The good news of Jesus Christ has found no lodging in this person's life. Such a person does not have a relationship with God.

They are unable to fellowship with God not only because they do not live in the light, but also because they do not have life through faith in Jesus Christ. We know for sure that John is referring to an unbeliever in verse 10 because if a person claims to have never sinned, then there would be no realization in such a person's life of a need for a Savior. This person clearly has not yet trusted Christ. His or her need is to do so if he or she desire to begin enjoying fellowship with God.

The best solution God gives for resolving the sin problem that hinders our fellowship with Him—Don't sin! (2:1a)

Yes, God has provided for our forgiveness and purification. Yes, Jesus has shed His precious blood so as to provide for the purification of our sins. However, these abundant, wonderful, gracious provisions in no way condone or deem acceptable a single act of sin. It is never appropriate for us to take part in any sin. Sin is a big deal to God. It is heinous in His sight. Sin is never a matter we should treat lightly or to which we should be indifferent. John writes this epistle for the purpose that we will not sin.

How can we begin to accomplish this solution in our life so as to enjoy fellowship with a holy God? We need to abide in Christ. We need to draw from Him all that we need to sustain our life and produce the fruit of a life like His. When we are abiding in Christ, when we are living in submission to and dependence on the Holy Spirit, we will not be sinning at that point.

Please observe that the problem isn't God's provision for helping us to live a holy life without sin. The problem is this: "How well do we do at taking advantage of the solution God has given to us to help us not sin?" None of us succeeds all the time. Therefore, God has provided a solution to our problem.

Recognizing we will fail and commit acts of sin, God has provided His Son (2:1-2)

Jesus is our advocate (2:1)

Jesus, the Righteous One, comes alongside us as our advocate to help us. He speaks to the Father in our defense. Satan comes along and makes accusations against us to the Father. Jesus speaks to the Father in our defense. He pleads our case on our behalf.

He defends us, not on the basis of what we have or have not done, but on the basis of what He has done as our atoning sacrifice. As Kress writes, “Our personal Advocate doesn’t just plead our case. Emphatically, He is our case.”

Jesus is our atoning sacrifice (2:2)

How is Jesus able to defend guilty sinners like us before the Father? He is able to serve as our advocate, He is able to defend us because of His being our atoning sacrifice. As our advocate, Jesus is not like a defense attorney who tries to get his client off the hook by sidestepping justice. Jesus, by dying for us, satisfied the just demands of the Father, thus averting His wrath away from us. God’s justice has been served by Christ for us, not sidestepped.

For the sins of believers and for those of the world, Christ died as our atoning sacrifice. The provision of His sacrifice is offered for all people, it is sufficient to cover all the sin everyone has ever committed, but of course it is only effective for those who trust Christ. Only those who have trusted Christ have their sins atoned for and forgiven. Only those who have trusted in Christ and have Him serving as their Advocate.

God is a holy God. To have fellowship with a holy God, we must be holy. We must live with the light on, if you will, as opposed to living in darkness. Problem! We are sinners. How can our problem with sin as believers be cared for so we can enjoy fellowship with a holy God?

A summary of God’s solutions to sinful people who want to enjoy fellowship with Him:

Don’t claim sin isn’t a problem—Acknowledge it whenever it comes up

Call on Jesus, our Defender, and remember His all sufficient provisions for us

“and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”

“But if anybody sins, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins....”

Abide in Christ

Returning to the question posed by the sign outside that is hanging on our church building: Can we know for sure we are right with God? Can we know for sure we are right with God in the sense of our being in fellowship with Him? The answer is Yes. When we are acknowledging our sin, when we are abiding in Christ looking to Him to enable us not to sin, we are right with God. Close fellowship with Him is ours to enjoy!