

SESSION 2 – WEEK OF 24 JAN 2021

CAN SINNERS LIKE US WALK IN GOD'S LIGHT?

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 1:5-2:2

Theme:

The theme for this session is on the question of whether sinners (like us) can actually walk in God's light given that light and darkness cannot co-exist at the same time. The questions underlying this theme are: what does it mean to walk in the light and is it possible to walk in the light every day, every minute of our life? We should not need to "hide" our wrongdoings and sins because of Jesus and what He has done for us. Yet we do have to deal with our sins and face up to them – on one extreme, it may fill us with condemnation, self-loathing and the impression that we are not worthy. On the other extreme, we might deny our sin, rationalise it even. There there is that middle ground where we enter into indifference

Key Verse:

"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, purifies us from all sin." (1John 1:7)

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. What was the message that was heard and declared by John (v.5)? What does 1 John refer to when it uses the term "light"?
 - In this first question, it would be useful to introduce the concept of "light" and what it means that God is light.
 - For this session and from the sermon of 24 Jan 2021, "light" is defined in terms of truth and righteousness. The light of God displaces all darkness, thus the imagery here is that it is not possible to be in darkness when there is light.
 - John's use of light and darkness is intended to illustrate that we have to make a choice in the way we live. We can choose to live in the light of God (God is light) and by so doing, dispel darkness.
 - In 1 John 2:9-10, John associates living in the light with love for brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. In verses 6 to 2:2, John sets out a set of 3 conditional indicators that start with “if we claim...” that highlights how we can know we have fellowship with God. Can you identify these indicators and the key message of how we can walk in the light?

- The structure set out by John with the distinct terms “if we claim...” appears as follows:

vv. 6-7 – if we claim ... but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ purifies us.

vv. 8-9 – if we claim ... [but] if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness

vv. 10-2:2 – if we claim ... But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

“As the aged Apostle began to write he was living over again his first happy experiences with the Savior... and John tells us that we may enter into the same close partnership with the Father and the Son. But no impurity or insincerity is permissible to those who enter that fellowship. Our one aim should be to maintain such a walk with God that the union with God may be unimpaired. If there are still sins of ignorance, the blood of Jesus will continue to remove them. Sin differs from sins, as the root from the fruit. God does not only forgive, He cleanses. He is faithful to His promises and just to His Son. Notice the ifs of these verses and in 1 Jn 2:1; they are a compendium of the blessed life.” F.B. Meyer's 'Through the Bible' Commentary on 1 John 1:1-10
<<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/fbm/1-john-1.html>>.

- The main takeaway through this pattern is that we, as people who call ourselves Christians, are in need of and can receive forgiveness of sin; to claim otherwise is simply falsehood.

3. In verses 6-7, what type of person is John describing by their “walk”? Are these persons “Christians” in reality, or only in name?

- Perhaps it may be useful to clarify who these people John is describing are:

- Christians who are either in or out of fellowship with God, or
- those who really do not know God at all?

- John is describing two lifestyles, which are distinguished or distinguishable by error and sin versus truth and righteousness. John will continue to contrast this living in darkness and light in other parts of this epistle (e.g 2:3-6; 2:8-11, 3:6-9) with similar terms used to describe those who do or do not enjoy fellowship with God (vv.6, 8, 10).

- It seems clear therefore that John’s contrast is between true Christians (who enjoy fellowship with God) and those who merely profess to be Christians but do not manifest evidence of fellowship with God and other Christians.

- This is why John states that those who walk in the light – those who walk in the true light of Christ (see 2.8) – are purified by the blood of Christ, and have fellowship also with one another.

- The main takeaway, is to understand that we are made in God's image and therefore totally in the light. However, things do not, in reality, work out that way it should, so how do we deal with it? Or is God the one that actually deals with it? It is in fact God who has already dealt with our sin. We need to confess, which is to agree to what we have done.

- A subsidiary question that you may raise if time permits, is whether we, as a community – small group – are responsible for being accountable to one another?

4. At vv.8-10, John highlights an attitude towards sin that reveals the reality of our fellowship with God. What does our denial or confession of sin reveal about our attitude and relationship with God?

- Our attitude towards sin (as noted in the theme above) can be on one extreme, self-loathing and discouragement; on the other, denial and rationalising of the sin; while there is that middle ground of indifference. In each of these, the attitude could lead to not wanting to deal with the darkness: Indifference or Denial.

- Perhaps when facilitating the discussion, it would be useful to frame the question within the terms of each person's attitude towards sin and confession. It may also be useful to define the term "confession" as a judicial term: "a formal statement admitting that one is guilty of a crime". In this context, to confess is to admit to the offence or sin.

The Bible teaches that there are traits that God's people have that show they are in fact God's people and do truly belong to Christ — truly born again, truly united with Jesus. These traits are how we can know that our sins were fully paid for and that our forgiveness is fully secured by the death of Jesus.

And one of those traits is how we deal with ongoing sinning in our lives... "Well, if you are a true child of God, and if your sins are truly and fully paid for — covered, canceled — what will you feel? What will your thoughts and actions be toward your ongoing sinning? What trait will mark you?" Here are two biblical answers.

Colossians 3:3: "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." That's a description of wonderful, completed salvation. We're already home. Then comes Colossians 3:5: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire." So, one trait of those whose sins are fully paid for is that we make war on our sinning. That's the mark of those whose sins are fully canceled: We make war on our sinning. We put them to death. But you can't do that if you don't admit — that is, confess — that you have any.

The second trait is confession (1 John 1:9). You have to confess your sins in order to make war on them. If you don't think you have any, if you're not confessing, "Yes, I have sinned and I'm sorry," you won't make war. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

So, confessing our sin is the agreement with God that we have sin and it must be fought and killed. If we don't confess this truth, we're living, John says, in an illusion. We're lying, we're deceived, we're calling God a deceiver, and we're not saved. If we believe we have no sin and that it doesn't need to be killed, we're living in an illusion, not in salvation. So, confession of sin is not the basis of our forgiveness; it is one of the traits that show we are truly in Christ, where all our sins are covered by his blood. "Ask John Piper: Why Do We Confess If Our Sins Are Already Forgiven?"

<<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-do-we-confess-if-our-sins-are-already-forgiven>>

- Exploring this question may also raise other questions because of Verse 9 which states that if we confess, God is righteous and just, and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Some common questions that may arise from this passage is: If I am already forgiven, why do I still need to confess my sins? Some may revisit their anxiety reflected in a question like: What if I sin, didn't realise it, and didn't confess it, will I keep that sin, forever?
- As we will discuss further below, at 2:1-2, John writes specifically to believers and reminds them that if they do sin, they can rely on Jesus and His atoning sacrifice for our sin. It is clear that the confession of sin applies certainly to Christians, and is an ongoing requirement and an avenue of grace in those moment when we do sin.
- Our confession is our recognition of how we have fallen short and our acceptance of what Christ has done for us.
- It would be useful to remind that the foundation for our salvation is the atonement by Christ on the cross. He has paid the price for our sins and the sin of the world.
- It is likely that John has the same contrast (i.e. vv.6-7) in mind in as with verses 8-10. Just as our moral lifestyle determines the reality of our claim to have fellowship with God, so also does our attitude toward sin. If we confess the guilt of our sin, John assures us that we have entered into fellowship with God (v. 9). But if we deny that we are guilty of sin or that we are in need of God's forgiveness, John concludes that we have no saving fellowship with God at all (vv. 8, 10).
- John Piper addressed the issue of confession in 1 John 1:9 in terms of having "traits that God's people have that show that they are in fact God's people and truly belong to Christ – truly born again, truly united with Jesus." (Please see box)

5. At 2:1-2, we can be assured of God's grace and provision when we do sin. What does Christ, speaking on your defence, and His atoning sacrifice mean to you and the way you deal with day-to-day sins that you may commit?

- God is faithful and JUST (not just merciful). God will fix the "broken mirrors". He will restore and clean us up.

- The Greek word translated "atoning sacrifice" at verse 2 expresses the idea that when Christ died as a sacrifice for sin, He "satisfied" God's justice. Wesley in his Explanatory Notes on this verse said, "The atoning sacrifice by which the wrath of God is appeased."

- It is because of this work of atonement that Christ can and does perform as an Advocate for us.

Sacrifice & Atonement: How does sacrifice and atonement in the Bible work?

Read the BibleProject explanation on how the death of Christ was able to atone for our sins.
<https://bibleproject.com/learn/sacrifice-atonement/>

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=62&c=2> Jesus on the cross provided a solution for the sin of the world by satisfying God's wrath through an act of atoning sacrifice.

- Confession as a sincere expression to God should provide us a relief like an unburdening after carrying a heavy load, as we ought to take assurance from v.9 and 2:1 that God is faithful and just and He will forgive us. It is intended to free us from that yoke of slavery to sin and bring us into the loving fellowship with our God.
- True confession should also be accompanied by repentance. A determination to turn away from our sin and to walk in the light.

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

6. *If You Have Time ...*

- a. Reflecting on the discussions above on sin, confession and the assurance of forgiveness, how might I answer the question that is the title for this session: can a sinner like me walk in God's light? (At the next session we discuss the question: "Are we living in Him and in the light?")

- b. In our previous session, we discussed about deep fellowship – yet why do we feel uncomfortable confessing our sins to one another (such as in our small groups)?

Suggestions for Prayer

7. We could pray for:

- a. Ourselves: Do you need to confess your sins to God? Do we need to make or renew our commitment to walk in the light – are there habits or attitudes that we need to renounce, repent of, turn away from?

- b. Others: Do we friends or family that need to hear the words that they can have fellowship with God and with other Christians? Can we pray for opportunities to share this message of what Christ has done for them, His atoning sacrifice, the forgiveness of sin, which opens the way to fellowship with God?