

Walking in the Light

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1 John 1:5-2:2

It's good to take time to slow down and listen to God in times of prayer. Through prayer times, times of having fellowship with God, we can then naturally grow in fellowship with other people. The passage read today from the first letter of John gives us ideas on how we can grow in fellowship with God. It also represents an area where I often feel challenged. When I pray, I often make prayer requests for different people, and I am also used to giving thanks for God's many blessings every day. But I often struggle to include regular times of repentance and confession. I do believe we are all sinners. We all fall short of God's perfect will for us. We may be doing all sorts of good things, but God's will may be for us to be doing something different. It's easy to sacrifice the best and settle for just good. For me, one temptation is to spend too much time preparing a message when God's will may be for me to make a phone call and meet with someone with whom I might have a challenging conversation. Sometimes it's easy to avoid doing a difficult task and instead spend more time in other work. Message preparation is good, but it becomes wrong if extra time is spent on the message to avoid something else that I should really be doing. Another challenge is that I sometimes struggle with being impulsive. I love freely changing my plans to do things that I like. But that can end up being a self-centred way to live. It is much better to keep a disciplined lifestyle where I grow in letting go of myself to follow God's leading more closely. Instead of my own comfort being a priority, I may then be led to take a path that includes a time of self-sacrifice or facing challenges.

In 1st John we see a major theme represented by light and darkness. God is light and has no darkness at all. We could think of darkness as being a symbol for sin and evil. Sin is not easy to understand. It does not just mean crime. It means "missing the mark." So, like my temptation to replace God's best purpose for my life with something different, even if it's good, it's still related to sin. Sin is something that gets in the way. It can become a barrier between us and God if we ignore it.

In our passage, the author talks about sin using three different, negative "If we say..." statements, followed by three positive statements. I'm reading, starting in verse six, "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;" (a negative statement). Verse seven is the positive counterpart, "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." Verse eight begins with a negative statement, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Following this, verse nine is the positive counterpart, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Verse 10 begins with another negative statement, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Finally, starting in the middle of the next verse, (chapter two, verse one) we have the positive counterpart, "...But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Sin can be complicated but here the author concludes with the good news and hope that we have in Jesus Christ. He is our advocate, our helper.

How often do we admit our sin and our shortcomings? Whether we admit it or not, we all have areas of our lives affected by sin. We all have areas of brokenness, creating walls between us and God, and between us and other people. By admitting our brokenness, we can experience God's work in our lives. If we walk in the light (which means living according to what is right

and true, following God), if we confess our sins when we fall short of God's perfect will, and if we look to Jesus as our helper, we can have deeper fellowship with God and other people, we can experience the freedom of forgiveness, and we can trust more deeply in Jesus Christ.

"God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." This God wants to have fellowship with imperfect humans. The problem is that our sin gets in the way. That's why we need the help of Jesus. Our sin is often the source of our struggles. When things aren't going well, sometimes the problem is that we are refusing to let go of something that is in the way of our following God's perfect will. It's possible to get so used to going our own way that we become dull to hearing God's voice in our hearts. We may think that we're good enough for God, not realizing the depth of our own self-centred ways. Jesus taught that at the end of time we will be judged, not just by what we do, but even by what we've thought. Jesus knows the sin in our hearts that can lead us down a path to destruction. Some people have the problem that they feel "good enough" for God, others have the opposite problem, that they feel they are so bad that God could never forgive them. It's been said that "sin is a serious problem. But Jesus is a serious solution!"

Have you sensed the darkness around us? It's like blindness. We don't always realise when we've slipped into the darkness of sin's influence. A person may think he or she is alive, when they are spiritually on the dying side. Do we refuse to take God seriously? Do we assume that how we live doesn't matter? Do we see how our motives are sometimes corrupt as we point out the problems in others? Do we actually believe God?

If we look again at verse six, it begins, "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true..." but the original Greek meaning is closer to a, "When we say..." meaning. The assumption is that we will slip. We all fall at times because of the influence of sin in our lives. The phrase, "while we are walking in darkness" suggests that it is a continuous thing, rather than a one-time incident. We sometimes continually choose darkness over light; we choose the lie over the truth.

Note that walking in the light of God relates to having fellowship with one another. Our relationship with God through Jesus, relates to our relationship to other people. If we have trouble getting along with others, it could mean we have trouble in our relationship with God.

Jesus' blood is a symbol of his sacrifice on the cross for all people. He died and rose again as Lord of all. Before the time of Jesus, people would regularly follow God's command to make animal sacrifices as a ritual to remind them of the seriousness of sin. Now, in Jesus we see his final sacrifice of himself on the cross that represents the forgiveness of the sins of the world. We are now purified from all sin. This has a continuous sense, rather than a one-time thing. The effects of sin still influence us, but we are freed from the final condemnation which results from sin.

I came across an article where the author lists our "respectable sins," sins that we often do not think are really sins. Here are a few of them. Living with little or no thought of God, God's will, God's glory, or our dependence on God, another is anxiety and worry (evidence of our lack of trust in God), discontentment and failure to give thanks to God, self-righteousness, even in matters of what we believe, pride, selfishness, being inconsiderate of others, judging others, and so on.

God is more concerned about our hearts than about our external behaviour. "True repentance, like all good things, is a gift of God." We can ask God to grant us true repentance. We may often repent because we regret our mistake or our behaviour, but we also need to remember that whenever we sin, we are despising God. It's been described like an adulterer who has looked for

satisfaction in someone else rather than the One who can satisfy. Is God at the centre of our lives? As we seek the Spirit's leading, we can begin to recognise where we fall short, repent, and grow in relationship with Christ. Through Christ, we can then experience the freedom and joy of God's presence, knowing that we are accepted and forgiven. Let's pray.

Loving God, we confess that there are times when we walk in darkness, forgetting you. Forgive us for our lack of trust, for our self-centred ways, and for times when we've settled for something other than following your leading. Grant us the courage to take steps to follow you, even when it means facing new challenges. Thank-you that you do not let us continue in our blindness, that you challenge us until we realise where we have strayed. O Lord, you know us better than we know ourselves. You totally understand our weakness. Thank-you that you've given us Jesus Christ to be our helper. May we grow in fellowship with you through him, and may our relationships with others also grow, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.