

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 2: Walking in the Light; Confession of Sin -- 1 John 1:5–2:2

Think of the last time you walked into a bright room after being in the dark. For a moment you squint and wince. The light is not unkind, but it does not flatter. It shows the dust on the shelf, the stain on the carpet, the smudge you never noticed. Light tells the truth. And that is exactly the word John reaches for when he wants to describe God: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

John had heard false teachers boasting about deep spiritual experience while living however they pleased. They claimed fellowship with God while walking in moral darkness. They claimed to have outgrown sin altogether. John will have none of it. To walk with the God who is light means to step into His truth about ourselves, and that is uncomfortable before it is freeing.

But here is the wonder of this passage. The same light that exposes us also cleanses us. John does not say, walk in the light and you will have no more need of cleansing. He says, walk in the light and “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin,” and he uses a tense that means it keeps on cleansing, day after day, as we keep walking with Him and keep confessing our sins. The light that shows the stain also points to the only thing that can remove it.

And when we do sin, John says, we are not abandoned. We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is Himself the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. This is the gospel in miniature: honest confession, ongoing cleansing, a living Advocate, and a sacrifice wide enough for all. Walk into the light, and you will find you are not condemned there. You are cleansed.

Group Discussion: John says that walking in the light leads not to having nothing to confess, but to ongoing cleansing by the blood of Jesus. Why do people so often expect that getting closer to God should make them feel more sinless, when Scripture says it makes us more honest about our sin and more dependent on Christ?

Personal Reflection: Is there a sin you have been keeping in the dark, telling yourself it is not really there or not really serious? What would it look like to bring it into the light through honest confession this week?

Read 1 John 1:5–2:2

Study Questions

1. John summarizes his whole message as “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (v. 5). What does this declaration teach us about the character of God, and why does John make it the foundation for everything that follows?

2. Walking in the light means living honestly before God rather than pretending. In what area of your life are you most tempted to put on a good appearance while hiding what is really going on? What would honesty before God look like there?
3. John names three false claims people make: “we have fellowship with him” while walking in darkness, “we have no sin,” and “we have not sinned” (1:6, 8, 10). What is wrong with each of these claims, and what does each one reveal about the human heart?
4. John says that if we confess our sins, God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). When you sin, do you tend to hide, to make excuses, or to confess? What keeps you from coming honestly to God?
5. John writes that “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:7), using language of ongoing, continual cleansing as we walk in the light. What does this teach us about how a Christian is kept clean before God after baptism, and why is this not a license to keep on sinning?
6. John says he writes “so that you may not sin,” and yet also makes provision for when we do sin (2:1). How do you hold together a serious hatred of sin with a real confidence in God’s forgiveness, without sliding into either despair or carelessness?
7. When we sin, John says we have an Advocate with the Father, “Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1). What does it mean that Jesus is our Advocate, and how is this different from earning back God’s favor by our own efforts?
8. Think about how you treat others who sin against you or who fail repeatedly. How does the truth that Jesus is patiently advocating for you, a sinner, change the way you should deal with the failures of the people around you?
9. John says Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (2:2). What does this teach about the reach of Christ’s sacrifice, and why does it matter that He died for the whole world and not only for a select few?
10. Look back across this passage, from God who is light, to honest confession, to the blood that cleanses, to our Advocate and propitiation. Name one specific way Jesus is inviting you, through this passage, to come out of hiding and live in the light of His forgiveness.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 32:1–5, the misery of hidden sin and the relief of honest confession; Proverbs 28:13, whoever conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them finds mercy; John 8:12, Jesus as the light of the world; Hebrews 7:25, Christ ever living to make intercession for us; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, Christ’s death for all and its claim on our lives.