

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(January 6, 2019)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Walking in the Light with Jesus

(Studies in the Apostle John's first letter)

### **True Things About You (and light and darkness and sin)**

(Introduction to 1 John; 1:1--2:2)

Study #1

#### Introduction: 2019 relevant...

Every January, New Year's resolutions are all the rage. We determine and promise and resolve to do "x" - and we *really mean it* this year.

I've got a few resolves in mind and you may have some resolves, too. But I'm also still stuck on Christmas, and there are a few gifts that would really help here at the beginning of 2019.

A long winning streak from the Spurs would put San Antonio in a good mood. I'd like to see that. I'd also like to find a healthy diet that consists of nothing but good-tasting food and a fitness plan that is always fun. I want my tech stuff to just work and my car to just run.

But I want other, meatier things, too. So do you. And we want these other things more than we want faster internet and low-calorie Krispy Kreme donuts.

- We long for homes where Jesus reigns supreme and for tight, connected relationships with family and friends.
- We dream of our church making increasing impact for God as we love and serve in Jesus' Name - especially at this time when many people are skeptical of the church.
- We want to see everyone here taking giant next steps with Jesus.

You know, it would really be great if we could find a book in the Bible that would point people like us toward submission to the Lordship of Christ, tight Jesus-centered relationships, impact for God in the world, and how to take next steps with Jesus...

Today, we start exploring the book that may best meet all of those benchmarks. 1 John is one of the most intriguing letters in the New Testament. It is provocative in all of the best ways and it could have been written last week. It's exactly what we who want to lead God-honoring lives need.

Before cracking open this letter, though, let me give you some of its backstory.

*Some backstory...*

#### Written by John

For the last two thousand years, Christians have agreed that this letter was written by John.

Not John the Baptist. His role was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. And not John Mark. (See Acts 13) He was an early Christian who faltered and was then restored to usefulness.

The man who wrote this letter is John, son of Zebedee, by trade a fisherman. He was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Along with his brother, James, and Simon Peter, he was also a member of the inner circle of the three apostles who were closest to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

John was probably in his twenties when Jesus called him to follow and promised that he would become a "*fisher of men.*"<sup>2</sup>

During the first three years that he followed Jesus (the years before the Lord's crucifixion), John was a diamond in the rough.

---

<sup>1</sup> John self-identified as "*the one whom Jesus loved.*" (John 13:23; 19:26:20:2; 21:7, 20)

<sup>2</sup> John evidently had personal ties to the Jerusalem priesthood. (John 18:15)

He and James were known as the “*sons of thunder*” (Mark 3:17), which gives a picture. John may have had some prejudices against those who weren’t of his tribe (Mark 9:38), at one point, wanting to call down fire from heaven to consume Jesus’ enemies. (Luke 9:54)

He, along with his brother and their mother, were ambitious enough to have asked Jesus for prominent places in the coming kingdom. (Mark 10:35-37)

According to the Gospels not written by John (Matthew, Mark, Luke), the young Apostle John was a young, zealous, hot-headed leader.

But times change and so do people. And, thanks to the Spirit’s work, the older Apostle John’s zeal was tempered by love and grace.<sup>3</sup>

Church historians tell us that for many years John had pastoral oversight of a group of churches in Asia Minor.<sup>4</sup> During these years, John came to be known as “*the apostle of love.*”

In the latter years of his life, before he was exiled to the island of Patmos as punishment by Rome for preaching the Gospel, John was often carried to the front of a meeting place where people had gathered to worship, too weak to walk, and would give one-line sermons, “*Beloved, let us love one another.*”<sup>5</sup>

### Written when?

When John sat down to write this letter, he was probably well into his 80’s and the reigning Emperor of Rome was Domitian, a cruel ruler who referred to himself as “lord and god.”

---

<sup>3</sup> John is prominent early in Acts, but fades to obscurity. Acts 1:13 - he owned a house where the disciples prayed before the Day of Pentecost; 3:1 - he went with Peter to the temple to pray and to heal; 4:13-19 - he was recognized, along with Peter, for his boldness; 8:14 - he went with Peter to Samaria to visit and to confirm new converts to Christ. This is the last we see of John in Acts. In Galatians 2, he is referred to as a “pillar” of the early Jerusalem church.

<sup>4</sup> This, from the church father, Irenaeus, and other witnesses. (ZPEB)

<sup>5</sup> Jesus’ New Commandment was front and center in John’s mind and heart.

John was writing during a time when the church faced growing unpopularity as Domitian made life miserable for Christians, just like Nero and Titus had before him.

### Written to whom? Why?

John never mentions the intended destination of his letter, but I think he was probably writing to the people in those churches of Asia Minor that John was serving.

It is very clear, though, that he wrote this letter to people who believed in Jesus.

John’s Gospel was written to tell someone how to come into a vital relationship with God - by believing in Jesus.

John’s first letter was written to tell someone who has believed in Jesus how they are to live.

As we read through this letter, you’ll notice simple sentence structure and small words. Don’t let the vocabulary fool you. There is an elegance to this letter. And John’s writing style is simple. It is anything but simplistic.

People often say that John’s Gospel is written in such a way that a child can wade in to its waters and not drown AND the most learned theologian can swim and never touch bottom.

The same is true for 1 John.

Some who have studied this letter accuse John of randomly putting thoughts together with no thought to development of themes or flow. Don’t believe it.

As Bible scholar Zane Hodges writes, “...no book of the New Testament - not even Romans - has been structured with more care than this letter.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Page 33 of commentary.

Here are the first words of 1 John.

### **An Invitation to Rich Fellowship (1:1-4)**

#### **An Eye Witness to the Word of Life... (vv. 1-2)**

***[1] What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life [2] and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify<sup>7</sup> and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us***

*John, writing as one who was there*

John writes as an ear-witness to Jesus' teaching. He heard all the parables given to outsiders and he heard the teaching that only the apostles heard. He heard Jesus speak to large and small groups.

And John was an eye-witness to miracles. He saw Jesus cleanse lepers, calm seas, multiply food, give sight to the blind, raise the dead.

John also was with Jesus during all the non-miraculous moments, the hanging-around times when they walked the streets of Jerusalem and the country roads of Galilee together.

John spent three solid years with the One we have come to worship today and refers to Jesus as the ***"Word of Life."***

*The Word of Life*

#### Philosophically

That is the ***"logos"*** of life.

Scholars will often point out that *"logos"* was a philosophical term, used in the first century to refer to "the divine."

In one particular philosophical system that came to be known as Gnosticism, the *"logos"* was the key to deep, secret knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

But John didn't write with Greek philosophy in mind. He wrote as a Jew who was thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament.

#### Biblically

When the prophets of the Jews - men like Jonah and Isaiah and Ezekiel - spoke God's message to the people of their day, they would often use as a preamble, ***"The word of the Lord..."*** - and the Greek translation of that Hebrew word ***"word"*** is *"logos."*

The *"logos"* is the communication of God to people. That is what Jesus is. He is God's message to us. And this living message was ***"manifested"*** to John.

*A "manifestation"*

Appropriate for early January, John's reference to the Word's manifestation takes us back to December 25 and our celebration of the birth of Jesus when God sent His only begotten Son to the world.

Jesus was *manifested* during the thirty-three years of His life. He was *manifested* by His death and resurrection.

And what John had heard, seen, and what he knew firsthand, he just had to share with his younger brothers and sisters in Asia Minor.

#### **...Writes in Eager Anticipation of Joy! (vv. 3-4)**

***[3] what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. [4] These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.***

<sup>7</sup> The word here is "martureo", from which we get our English word "martyr." One who testifies, sometimes at great personal risk, to what he knows to be true.

<sup>8</sup> However, with respect to Gnosticism, we have no record of formal Gnosticism before AD 200, well over a century after this letter was written.

You can hear John's excitement to tell what he knows about Jesus. He's an eyewitness giving testimony to people like us and he's certain of the joy that will follow as we apply what he has to say.

Joy always accompanies sharing God's message with someone else. Joy is always present when we deepen our fellowship with each other in Jesus.

You and I can expect deeper and deeper fellowship here as we, together, follow what John has to say about how to walk with Jesus.

That is the introduction to the letter. This that we have just seen is just the opening salvo. In what follows, John jumps into the meat of the letter. And, as Bible scholar Zane Hodges says, it would be hard to find any single passage of Scripture more crucial to daily Christian living than what follows.

### **Walk in the Light or in the Darkness - Your Choice (1:5-7)**

#### **God Is Light (v. 5)**

***[5] This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.<sup>9</sup>***

In a formula where "light" = holiness and "darkness" = sin, John assures us that there is nothing about God that is anything but light.

As light, God exposes what is in the darkness. There's no such thing as dirty light. Light is pure, unalloyed. But it will light up dirty deeds, thoughts and motives.

In addition, as light, God directs. Like a flashlight on a dark night shows us the way home, God's light shows us the way to live.

Jesus was "***a light of revelation***" to the world (Luke 2:32) and John wrote in his gospel that Jesus is the light that continually shines (John 1:4-9).<sup>10</sup>

Here, John puts the only two ways of living in Christ, the God-Man who is light, in stark contrast: darkness or light.

### **In Which Realm Will You Choose to Walk? (vv. 6-7)**

*Walk in darkness (v. 6)*

***[6] If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth***

The 2019 in which we find ourselves is a broken world that is full of darkness. Just like 2018 was and just like 2020 will be.

But the Bible calls us who have believed in Jesus "***light in the Lord***" (Ephesians 5:18). John would never call us "*darkness.*"

But John does hold out as a real possibility that we might walk in the darkness. In fact, we are all tempted, to one degree or another and in one way or another, to flee light and to walk in darkness.<sup>11</sup>

You might hear Christian teachers today who will tell you that it is not possible for a Christian - much less an apostle! - to walk in darkness, that no one who is a Christian will ever walk in darkness.

The Apostle John speaks here of a Christian saying, "*I have fellowship with God*" while at the same time walking in the darkness.

And what do we mean by "*walking in darkness*"?

---

<sup>10</sup> Light is also powerful, helping my garden grow by photosynthesis and aiding the power grid by solar panels.

<sup>11</sup> By using the word "we" the Apostle John includes himself in the group of people who might walk in darkness.

---

<sup>9</sup> See Psalm 36:9 ("*by / in Your light we see light*") and 1 Timothy 6:16 ("*[God] dwells in unapproachable light*").

Well, to walk in *physical* darkness is to blow out the candle, flip the switch, and turn off the light. So, to walk in *spiritual* darkness is to walk through life as if God isn't.

Don't read or meditate on God's Word. Don't pray. Don't pursue soul-to-soul connection with brothers and sisters in Christ.

In other words, don't invite God's light to expose the darkness that is present in your life. Don't allow God's light to direct you into maturity and wisdom.

That's what it means to walk in darkness. And if we say we're enjoying rich fellowship with God while we're walking in the darkness, we're lying.

But we have a choice. We can lead the life Jesus redeemed us to live. We can walk in the light.

*Walk in light (v. 7)*

***[7] 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.***

To walk in the light is not to be perfect.

But, to walk in the light is to be perfectly willing to lead a reflective life. It is to live honestly. It is to allow the light of God's Word to shine on our lives. It's to live in submission to that Word.

And John lists some amazing upsides to walking in the light.

For one thing, if you and your friend are both walking in the light, you're going to have great connection with each other. Your hearts will be united in the pursuit of God's best.

You and your friends - you and people you have just met! - will have better fellowship with each other as you and they have better fellowship with your heavenly Father.

The key to great fellowship here in our church is for each one of us here to walk in the light with Jesus.

The other upside to walking in the light is that we will consistently experience cleansing forgiveness. This is so important.

Walking in the light doesn't mean that we don't sin. If having rich fellowship with God is dependent on sinless perfection, we all might as well throw in the towel.

The reality is that as we walk in God's light, we will become conscious of our sin. Then, becoming conscious of it, we will deal honestly with it before God, and will find God more than willing to clean us up.

Walking in the darkness is to talk about love and joy and power while turning away from God. Walking in the light is to have everything open, exposed to God. Walking in the light is freedom.

We keep listening to John as he keeps telling us truth about ourselves. And the truth is that we often tell ourselves little lies.

**About You, About Your Sin, About Your Jesus (1:8--2:2)**

**True Things About Our Sin (vv. 8-10)**

*Lying to ourselves about our sin (v. 8)*

***[8] If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.***

What we are saying when we say "we have no sin"

One foolish, false thing any of us might say is, "I have no sin."

If, at any given moment, we look at ourselves and see nothing wrong, we might be tempted to think that there is really nothing wrong. John says we would be wrong to think this.<sup>12</sup>

It is true that when you trust in Jesus for eternal life, your identity changes. You are no longer what you were. You are a new creation in Christ. You are God's child. So, you no longer primarily self-identify as a sinner.

But to think that because you are God's child, sin is no longer an issue in your life, that you've got sin beat, is a terrible self-deception.

#### Saying "we have no sin" is denial of reality

The reality is that it - sin - is in us. And the deeper we walk into the light with Jesus, the more conscious we will be of the sinful patterns in place in our lives.

Something fascinating happens as we grow in grace. I've seen it over and over again that as someone's walk with Jesus grows deeper, she or he becomes more sensitized to their sin.

C.S. Lewis saw the same thing and wrote, *"When a man is getting better, he understands more and more the evil that is still present within him; but when a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less."*

John confronts me with the reality that all is not well with my soul. My eternal soul is safe and secure with God. But in that redeemed soul, there is sin. I'm redeemed, but still a mess.

The Russian dissident and Nobel Prize winner, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, wrote of the evil of the Soviet-era imprisonment and torture of millions of Russians in his book, The Gulag Archipelago.

But in that book, after detailing the horrors he saw and experienced, he still couldn't simply point at all those evil people who did such horrible things.

He wrote, *"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"*

John does us the favor here of opening our eyes to the reality that sin is alive in us, sons and daughters of God.<sup>13</sup>

We should never say we have no sin. John goes on to mention something else we might say, but never should say.

*Lying to others about our sin (v. 10)*

***[10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.***

#### What we are saying when we say "we have not sinned"

John's not accusing us of saying that we have absolutely never sinned.

What is in view here is our committing an act that God says is sin and saying that it is not sin. It is disagreeing with God (what a thought!) and calling Him a liar.

#### Saying "we have not sinned" contradicts God and His Word

A rose by any other name smells as sweet, and sin by any other name is as putrid. Re-labeling toxic waste "milk" doesn't make the poison safe.

---

<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2; Titus 3; 1 Peter 4 and other passages highlight the reality of sin in us all.

---

<sup>13</sup> Of course, if you still think that you have no sin, ask your spouse...

But we sometimes sugarcoat our behavior when we misbehave.

- Others are prejudiced; I have strong convictions.
- Others are presumptuous; I take bold initiative.
- Others lose their tempers; I display righteous indignation.
- Others are conceited; I have a healthy sense of self-respect.
- Others gossip; I share honest prayer requests.

When I re-label my sins, I allow them to become a cancer that eats away at my soul. If we do this here at church, it will poison our relationships.

Better to call sin “sin”. Better to admit that we do sin. And when we sin, it is far better to follow the counsel John sandwiches between two foolish possibilities. Better to confess.

*Living honestly before God when it comes to our sin (v. 9)*

***[9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

#### To confess

To confess is, literally, to agree. It is to say the same thing about our sin that God says.<sup>14</sup>

And confession is specific, not general. It is to be particular, not vague.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Notice that John doesn’t call us to repentance here. Christian repentance is appropriate when a pattern of sin persists and needs to be changed. Here, though, John writes about someone who discovers sin while in fellowship with God.

<sup>15</sup> Have you heard this little poem? I present it here as a perfect example of what confession is NOT:

If I have wounded any soul today; If I have caused one foot to go astray  
 If I have walked in my own willful way Dear Lord, forgive.  
 If I have uttered idle words or vain, If I have turned aside from want or pain,  
 Lest I offend some other through the strain, Dear Lord, forgive!  
 If I have been perverse, or hard, or cold, If I have longed for shelter in the fold,  
 When thou hast given me some fort to hold, Dear Lord, forgive!

To confess is to say:

“I spoke truly to my wife today, but I didn’t speak lovingly.”

“I disrespected my husband this morning.”

“I violated a covenant I have made with my eyes and looked at pornography today.”

“I drank to the point of drunkenness last night.”

“I lied when I spoke about my spiritual disciplines to make myself look good to my friends.”

That’s confession, and John doesn’t see it as a slam dunk that we will confess our sins. There is an “***If...***” at the start. We might not confess. It’s a choice we have to make.

But he wants us to know that God shows His true colors when we do confess. When we confess, God forgives.

#### To be forgiven / cleansed

This is not a reference to the once-and-for-all forgiveness we receive when trust in Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life.

John is talking about the daily cleansing that is necessary to maintain fellowship with God.

And he gives us the best picture of what this means in his recounting of Jesus’ last night on earth, when He was with the disciples in the upper room of a home in Jerusalem preparing for the Last Supper.

***[John 13:2] During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, [3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, [4] got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. [5] Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.***

Of course, Jesus was modeling servanthood by washing His disciples' dirty, grimy feet. But He was doing something else, too.

He was picturing the repeated need for cleansing we all have after we get ourselves "dirty" through sin.

When we fall into the mud of sin, we are to come to Jesus and confess our sin. He then pulls out the basin and towel and cleans us up.

This call to confession tells us that sin is a big deal, that we must deal with our sin, and that when we sin, something happens. Sin does something to our relationship to God to must be addressed. OK.

What, exactly, does sin do?

Sin doesn't affect our *standing* before God. He doesn't dis-own us, un-save us, or de-adopt us when we sin.

Sin does, though, affect our *fellowship* with God. Standing with God can't ever be lost. Confession is the way to restore fellowship after we have sinned.

There is a moment of pain in coming clean to Jesus and agreeing with Him that what we did was sinful. But the pain of coming clean is necessary if we're going to be clean.<sup>16</sup>

There's no future in pretending we don't sin or denying that sins we have committed weren't really all that bad.

The only way forward in Jesus when it comes to dealing with sin, the way to walk in the light with Jesus is to become a serial confesser.

But, as John goes on to say, *"For heaven's sake - don't sin!"*

## True Things About Our Savior (2:1-2)

*Aiming to not sin (v. 1a)*

**[2:1a] My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.**

As children of God,<sup>17</sup> you and I are to pursue holiness for all we're worth.

A superficial reading of what we've seen so far could leave us with the impression that John is saying, *"Look, you're going to sin. That's life. Don't worry about it."*

That's NOT what John is saying! True. We won't be sinless, but we should aim to sin less.

Be done with pornography! Say good-bye to gluttony and sloth. Choose generosity over greed and service over self-centeredness. Be a model of faith, love, purity.

And...

*Our Advocate - Jesus Christ the righteous (v. 1b)*

**[2:1b]...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate<sup>18</sup> with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**

When you sin, the accuser (Satan) goes to work. He kicks it into high gear and brings your sin before your righteous, heavenly Father.

Imagine the accuser ranting and raving, telling God all the true and terrible things you've done, demanding justice. He calls on God to treat you as your sin deserves.

---

<sup>16</sup> Pastor Ray Stedman wrote of the pain of bathing in the middle of Montana winters - and the pain caused to others if he didn't.

---

<sup>17</sup> By addressing his readers as his *"little children"* he is identifying them as his children in the faith. Again, 1 John is written to those who are saved.

<sup>18</sup> *Parakletos* = one who is called alongside to help. Usually used in reference to the Person of the Holy Spirit. Here, of Jesus.

It's at that point that Jesus - who is seated at the right hand of your righteous heavenly Father - stands and "advocates" for you. He goes to bat for you. He tells the accuser that justice has already been served.

Jesus, your Advocate, did what only God could do.

*The propitiation for sin (v. 2)*

***[2] and He Himself is the propitiation<sup>19</sup> for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.***

Explore the concept of propitiation

Since "propitiation" isn't a word you hear every day, let me take a minute to explain.

The idea of propitiation is central to every Old Testament sacrifice and to every part of the rituals of the Day of Atonement. J.I. Packer calls propitiation "the heart of the Gospel."

It's clearly a concept that is integral to the Bible's main message. So, here's the deal.

All of us have sinned against God. And God, being holy, is justifiably angry at us for this rebellion. His wrath is kindled against us.

(Some people find the idea of God's wrath repulsive. I would find repulsive a God in heaven who did not find repulsive acts of violence and injustice to be repulsive.)

If that wrath stays in place, we will suffer the results of God's wrath - condemnation! - for all eternity.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Other translations offered for "propitiation": atoning sacrifice - NIV; the means by which our sins are forgiven - Good News; personal atonement - Phillips; took God's wrath against our sins upon Himself - Living Bible; sacrifice - The Message; the sacrifice that atones - New Living Translation.

<sup>20</sup> Hell is the appropriate environment for the one who cannot live forever with God. Our Savior's universal sacrifice for sin makes eternal life available to all, but

The only way God's righteous anger can be turned away from us is by means of a sacrifice. And there is no offering any of us could make that is sufficient to turn away His wrath.

God's wrath has been turned away by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross

So, Jesus, God's perfect and holy Son, gave Himself up as a sacrifice to take the punishment that should have been laid on us.

Now, God's wrath is turned away. He is propitiated. And He can now justly shower mercy on anyone who simply believes.

Salvation is given as a free gift. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation and it is absolutely free - to us. But it cost Jesus everything.

---

not automatic...The universal extent of God's love is proved by the worldwide extent of this propitiation. (Hodges, p. 72).