

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**

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**So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John**

**Walk in the Light**

**1 John 1:5-10**

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Last week, we began our verse-by-verse study of First John. John wrote this letter to Christians who were being targeted by a group of deceptive teachers. Like a bunch of online scam artists, these false teachers were twisting and distorting the truth in a way that threatened to rob these believers of blessings Jesus desired to share with them – the blessings of fellowship with God Himself that enables us to have a fulfilled joy.

And John isn't messing around in his response. Do you remember the nickname Jesus gave John and his brother, James? He called them the "Sons of Thunder." Most scholars believe "Sons of Thunder" was a reference to their fiery personalities. And, though John is an old man by the time he writes this letter, and his heart has been transformed by the love of Jesus, there's still a bit of thunder in there. He wants these people he loves to experience the joy of fellowship with God. So, he writes this letter to confront the deception and lies that are threatening those very things.

And our text for this morning is the first paragraph of his letter after the introduction. And, in it he confronts a person in our lives who is capable of telling some of the biggest lies of all. It's us. It's you. It's me.

John delivers a sober and difficult truth for all of us in our text. We aren't just vulnerable to the deception of false teachers. We are vulnerable to the deception of our own, sinful natures.

**1 John 1:5–10**

***This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 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 cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.***

John begins by sharing the message that he received directly from Jesus. Verses 1-4 emphasize the fact that John was an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry. He got his message from Jesus – who John says is God in the flesh. And the message begins with the truth about God. You can't have fellowship with God or true joy unless you know who God really is.

He says God is light and in him is no darkness at all. What does John mean when he says, "God is light?" My first response is "a lot." Way more than we can cover this morning. So, let me just give you three things I believe are represented in God being light.

Light is truth.

**1 John 1:6**

***If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***

John says if we are walking in darkness, we are not practicing the truth. Here, darkness is the opposite of truth which means that light is the same as the truth. God is truth. He is the source and standard of truth. If you want to know truth, you won't find it apart from the revealed truth of God. God is truth.

Light is goodness.

**1 John 1:6**

***If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***

John says that to walk in darkness is to not practice the truth. To practice the truth is an action. It's not just intellectual truth, it's how we live and what we do – it's moral action. That's why sin is such an emphasis of this text. To live in darkness is to live in sin. To live in light is to live in goodness or righteousness. So, I take light to represent the holiness of God.

*John 3:19*

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

Darkness is the place where evil hides. The light of God is the truth of His holiness that exposes the evil of sin. So, when John says that God is light, I take him to be saying that God is the source and standard of truth and goodness. We aren't the source of truth or goodness. Reasoning and philosophy aren't the source of truth and goodness. God is the source of truth and goodness. So, we don't know or experience the fullness of truth or goodness apart from God.

Light is life.

Before John says that God is light, he says that, as God, Jesus is life.

**1 John 1:2**

*the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—*

Jesus is the eternal Life. That's one of the ways that John expresses the deity of Christ. He has existed forever and is the Source of life. That makes Him equal with God. He is Life. Now, listen to what John says in the Gospel of John

**John 1:3–4**

*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

**John 8:12**

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Jesus came to bring us real life, eternal life, abundant life. It's a life that is rooted in the truth of who God is and expresses the holiness and goodness of God. Jesus says that light will be in us. In other words, He will be in us producing His life as we trust in Him. (that's the promise of the Gospel)

So, when John says, "God is light," I take him to mean God is holy, He is the source and standard of truth and goodness. He is life itself. In Him there is no darkness. No falsehood. No sin. No error. And Jesus came to unite us to His life, which is the life of God, so that we could share in His life. That's the joy of fellowship with Him. (Fellowship means to share in something with someone.) And that serves as the foundation to what John says next. It's a warning about deceit.

### **1 John 1:6**

***If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***

John says that if we claim to be in fellowship with God while we walk in darkness, we are lying. The word "walk" is often used in the bible to describe a way of life. It's a lifestyle. And John says if we claim to be in fellowship with the true and holy God while we live a lifestyle of darkness, we are living a lie.

Skip to verse 8 (Notice a style here that is signature John. He isn't linear. He tends to circle around subjects...that's why you have to sometimes skip verses to keep his thoughts/topics together.) Verse 8 says if we claim to have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves.

Verse 10 says if we claim that we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar. Basically, we are calling God a liar.

So, three times in this opening paragraph, John says we are capable of being dishonest or deceitful. We can lie to others, we can lie to ourselves, and we can lie about God. And it's all connected to how we approach our own sin. We can't make false claims about our sin and experience the joy of fellowship with the God of truth and goodness. Those things are incompatible. And when you put all of that together, it gives you the big idea of our text.

**BIG IDEA: TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST DEAL HONESTLY WITH OUR SIN.**

So, up until now this sermon was going pretty well. But it just turned into something that is about as unpopular as anything you can preach in our world today. We all have a sin problem, and we will never experience the joy of fellowship with God until we get real about our sin. And the truth is that it's never been a popular message. But it's a necessary message. If we want to experience the joy of fellowship with God, then we have to stop making dishonest claims about our sin.

And John highlights two dishonest claims that people make about their sin.

Dishonest Claim #1 - The claim of Sinful Indifference.

***6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***

Apparently, some of the people who were influencing these believers were living in patterns of sin and claiming to be in a healthy relationship with God. They acted like it was no big deal and God is fine with it. But John says that if we live indifferent to our own sin (minimizing it, excusing it, justifying it) and claim to be right with God, we are living a lie.

And it doesn't take you long to look around our world and see this kind of indifference all around us. At Christmas, I was driving to the store with my dad. We were in a small, historic downtown that's just

a few minutes from my parents' house. As we turned a corner, right in front of us was a big LGBT flag prominently displayed at the corner of two main streets. As I drove closer, I realized the flag was being flown over the entrance to a church. There's an indifference that is literally celebrating something God grieves as sin. People are saying, "We are good with this and so is God."

But be careful not to move too quickly here. Indifference to sin is a subtle thing. We would never say it out loud or fly a flag over our doors, but almost all of us are tempted to be indifferent to patterns of our own sin. Greed. Materialism. Gossip. Lust. Ungodly Anger. Drunkenness. Lying. Gluttony. Be careful not to assume there's no indifference toward sin in your heart.

If you say you are right with God while you live in the darkness of sin, John says you're living a lie. That's the first dishonest claim we can make about our sin – "it's no big deal." Beware of Sinful Indifference.

### Dishonest Claim #2 – The Claim of Sinless Perfection

#### **1 John 1:8**

***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

#### **1 John 1:10**

***If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.***

John goes to the other extreme here. He says you are deceiving yourself if you say you don't sin. Even worse, he says you are calling God a liar.

Remember, some of the false teachers that John is confronting were believed to be early Gnostics. And one of the teachings of Gnosticism is that if you achieve a level of divine knowledge, you can escape the evil of this world. In other words, they basically claimed to be able to reach a state of sinlessness - that they no longer struggled with sin.

These people didn't claim that God is good with their sin, they claimed that God was good with them because they didn't sin. And John says if you try to make the claim that you don't have any remaining sin in your life - that your thoughts and words and deeds are all perfect all the time – you are lying to yourself. I think it's pretty funny that he says you are deceiving yourself. Because the only person who could ever believe the claim that you no longer sin is you. Our spouses and our kids and our co-workers aren't buying it. This lie only works on ourselves.

When we get to chapter 2, we'll see that John brings up one, specific sin that shows we are in darkness – a lack of Christ-like love toward other believers. Sin isn't just an expression of wrong things we do. It's an expression of Christ-like things we don't fully do, like loving people the way Jesus loves them.

But you aren't just lying to yourself when you say you never sin. John says you're lying about God. God says you have sinned and will be in a fight with sin until the day you die.

So, there are two ways we can be dishonest about our sin. We can be indifferent to it and claim that God is good with our sin. Or we can delude ourselves into thinking we are good with God because we don't sin. Both of those are lies that will keep us from enjoying fellowship with God.

And so long as we live in a place of dishonesty about our sin, we will miss out on the joy of fellowship with God. So, what do we do? John tells us.

### **1 John 1:7**

***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, [Who is this fellowship with? Primarily, it's with God. In verse 6, John says we don't enjoy fellowship with God when we walk in darkness. He's talking about fellowship with God here. I believe it certainly includes our fellowship with other believers, but the primary person is God.] and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***

### **1 John 1:9**

***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

In these two verses, we find at least three things we do to deal honestly with our sin. You can think of them as the ABC's of dealing with sin.

#### A. Agree with God

### **1 John 1:9**

***If we confess our sins,***

The word "confess" means "to agree; to share a common view or a common mind about something." So, at the most basic level, confessing our sins means to agree with God about our sin. To see it for what it is and to begin to share His view on it. It means you stop excusing or justifying your sin. It means you stop denying or covering it up. You stop claiming your sin is no big deal. While confession includes naming and saying your sin, we won't be able to specify every sin you have or ever will commit – you won't even be able to remember every single way you fell short last week.

But we can agree with God that we are sinners who have sinned and acknowledge the ways we know we have sinned. And we can agree that our sin is a big deal – it's the greatest problem we have because it will keep us from enjoying fellowship with God and will ultimately destroy every good thing God has created us to enjoy.

This is an essential part of repentance. To repent means to have a change of heart that leads to a change of direction. The change of heart that happens is when we begin to see ourselves and our sin the way God sees our it. When we begin to hate our sin the way God hates it.

James 1 says the word of God is like a mirror that exposes who we really are. Have you ever had that moment when you looked in the mirror and saw something startling? A few months ago, I was washing my hands in the bathroom and looked up. I must have been feeling really good that day because I smiled in the mirror. And what I saw was mortifying. I had a full chef's salad in my teeth. And I had a choice to make. I could blame the mirror. I could ignore the mirror. I could be delusional and think the mirror was wrong. Or I could let the mirror inform me about reality. I could agree with the mirror and deal with the cabbage in my grill.

And that's the first step to dealing with sin. Let God's word shine on your heart. Like into it like a mirror and agree with what God has to say.

#### B. Believe the Gospel

### **1 John 1:7**

***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 cleanses us from all sin.***

Don't miss the truth of this verse: God offers us cleansing from all our sin through the work of Jesus at the cross. He is the sacrifice that enables us to be forgiven and pleasing to God the Father.

**1 John 1:9**

***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

Jesus makes a way for us to be forgiven and cleansed from all our unrighteousness.

Next week...

**1 John 2:1–2**

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Our hope in dealing with sin is only found in the work of Jesus.

**Colossians 1:12–14**

*giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

When we come to faith in Jesus, we are forgiven and redeemed. We are transferred into a new kingdom. And we don't qualify ourselves to be there. He qualifies us through the work of Jesus. So, how do we deal with our sin? We bring it to Jesus and believe the Good News that He forgives and cleanses anyone and everyone who will trust in Him. We don't deal with our sin by overcoming it in our own power. We don't deal with sin by simply acknowledging it and moving on. The way we deal with sin is to humbly acknowledge that we can't deal with sin. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Jesus, we have Him because God so loved the world that He gave us His Son to live and die in our place so that whosoever believes in Him would not perish in their sin but have everlasting life.

Agree with God that your sin is sin. Don't hide it or deny it. Confess it and turn to Jesus.

C. Commit to Walking in Light

***7 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 cleanses us from all sin.***

Clearly, John wants us to choose to walk in the light. Remember, the light is the truth and goodness of God. So, we walk in the light by living our lives believing and depending on the truth about Jesus and reflecting His goodness as we say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to righteousness.

And, again, that's a work Jesus does in and through us. This verse is descriptive, not prescriptive. What I mean is that it is describing someone who walks in light – they have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. You don't earn cleansing by walking in the light. You walk in the light as Jesus cleanses you. That's part of the cleansing Jesus provides from sin. He doesn't just enable us to be forgiven of our past sins, He empowers us to live a life that is cleansed.

**Hebrews 9:14**

*How much more will the blood of Christ...purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

The blood of Jesus has a purifying effect on our hearts and minds. Not only does Jesus provide forgiveness, He purifies our hearts in a way that enables us to serve God.

So, listen, I know this passage is a heavy passage. It's hard to talk straight about sin in a room full of sinners. It's a hard passage. But it's a hopeful passage and it's the first step to experiencing joy. Yes, you've sinned. And not just in your ancient past. You sinned this week. And sin is serious. Don't deny it. Don't justify it. Don't excuse it. Honestly deal with it. Agree with God in confession and repentance. Believe in the Gospel of Jesus. Commit to walking in light by the power of Christ in you.