

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Fellowship with God is characterized by a life of holiness, confession, trusting Jesus, and obedience.



➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Actions speak louder than words. This frequently repeated phrase emphasizes the importance of backing up what we say with what we do. Parents often use the phrase to remind children that although people hear the words we speak, they're quicker to evaluate us by our actions. Inconsistency in our statements may cause others to evaluate us in a negative light. Ultimately, it's what we do that reveals our actual values.

John wrote the Epistle of 1 John to a group of confused believers in the first century. False teachers were spreading heresy about the Christian life by claiming to have fellowship with God while living in disobedience. Sensing the negative impact this practice could have on his readers, John wrote to give them a correct understanding of sin, the nature of God, and the work of Christ. John connected right believing with right living. He exposed the erroneous teachings of the heretics by emphasizing core truths of Christianity, and he gave some simple tests to help his readers distinguish true believers from unbelievers. John's teachings are relevant in helping people today determine the characteristics of true believers.

John introduced several metaphors that relate to God, true belief, and sinfulness. For example, John compared God to light (see 1 John 1:5). *Light* here refers to God as the source of all life, which is similar to the way John used the word in his Gospel when referring to Jesus (see John 1:3-9; 8:12). Wherever God is, there is life, because light is the source of life. Those who wish to embrace this life must walk in fellowship with God (live in the light). Conversely, walking in darkness, according to John, means living a sinful life that's out of fellowship with God. Because God is light, only those who walk in the light (practice holiness) have true fellowship with God. A positive benefit of such fellowship is the cleansing of sins through the blood of Jesus. John's assertions about God's nature render impossible the false teachers' beliefs that people could maintain fellowship with God yet remain in the darkness of their sinful choices.

"BEFORE WE CAN BEGIN
TO SEE THE CROSS
AS SOMETHING DONE
FOR US ... , WE HAVE
TO SEE IT AS SOMETHING
DONE BY US."

—John R. W. Stott

➤ 1 JOHN 1:5–2:6

Think About It

Circle characteristics that mark genuine believers.

Underline the "If we say" statements.

Whom was John speaking to or targeting when making these comments?

1:5 Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. **6** If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. **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. **8** If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say, "We don't have any sin," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. **2** He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world. **3** This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands. **4** The one who says "I have come to know Him," yet doesn't keep His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. **5** But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: **6** The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.



► EXPLORE THE TEXT

DEMONSTRATE HOLINESS (1 John 1:5-7)

⁵ Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him.

John and the other disciples had heard Jesus proclaim that He is light (see John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36,46). John frequently used light as a metaphor to refer to God's righteousness, truth, and knowledge, while he also commonly used darkness as a way to describe lostness, sin, and ignorance. Light also refers to God's holiness. Because God is light, or the standard of eternal truth and righteousness, by His nature He exposes the darkness of sin and falsehood. John's teachings about God's nature lay the foundation for a person's fellowship with God. By His nature God reveals His righteous character and His expectation of holiness for His people.

⁶ If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

John's use of "If we say" was his way of referring to the false teachers' shallow statements. Because God is light and therefore the standard of truth, perfection, and righteousness, no one who walks in darkness, or practices evil, falsehood, and rebellion against God, can have fellowship with God. To walk in darkness is to practice a habitually sinful lifestyle, showing no reverence for God's commands.

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.

In contrast to walking in darkness, which leads to alienation from God, walking in the light, or living in obedience to God's commands, produces positive results. First, obedient Christians enjoy fellowship with God and with one another, a primary consideration for John in writing this epistle. The evidence of having fellowship with God is to live in obedience to His commands. To demonstrate holiness is to walk in the light of God's character (see Eph. 5:8-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-21). The evidence of true fellowship with God is obedient living to the teachings of Jesus.

A second result of walking in the light is the cleansing of sin by Jesus' blood. John's statement that obedient believers are cleansed from all sin refers to an ongoing cleansing by Jesus' precious blood. Believers who continue to walk in the light experience progressive sanctification as the stains of sin are removed and their character is changed into the likeness of Christ.

What common practices today illustrate what John meant by walking in darkness?

What practices illustrate walking in light?

How can you be sure that you're walking in the light of God's truths?



CONFESS SIN (1 John 1:8–2:2)

1:8 If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say, “We don’t have any sin,” we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

The witness of Scripture is that everyone sins (see Rom. 3:23) and that the penalty for sin is death (see 6:23). Because everyone struggles with sin, to deny its presence in our lives is to deny the truth of the gospel. Two aspects of salvation can be seen in John’s statement in 1 John 1:9. First, salvation encompasses justification (being declared righteous before God). Being declared righteous before God is the act of God’s attributing His righteousness to a person who acknowledges Jesus as Lord by trusting in His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (see Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 1:7). Second, salvation also includes sanctification (a believer’s progressive transformation into the character of Christ). God’s promise, as expressed by John, is to hear the confession of sinners and, on the basis of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross, to forgive their sins.

In 1 John 1:10 John reinforced what he said in verse 8, with additional emphasis on the consequences of claiming to be without sin. John taught that anyone who claims to be without sin is setting himself on an equal plane with God, an impossible effort since His Word says there’s no one like Him (see Isa. 45:18). Whoever considers himself to be without sin is guilty of deceiving himself, calling God a liar, and refusing to submit to God’s truths.

2:1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. **2** He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

John expressed that his purpose in writing this epistle was to help his readers avoid sinning in the same way as the heretics. In addition, John encouraged believers not only to confess their sins but also to be aware that Jesus speaks to God on their behalf. John calls Jesus our *advocate*, a word that means *one who represents us before the*

KEY DOCTRINE

Justification

Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal on principles of righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.

BIBLE SKILL

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major concept.

Light (*phos* in the original Greek language) was a central symbol for John, both in His Gospel and in his first epistle. Study the following passages.

- Verses in 1 John in which he used *phos*: 1:5,7; 2:8-10
- Verses in John's Gospel in which he used *phos*: 1:4-5,8-9
- Verses in John's Gospel in which Jesus spoke of light (*phos*): 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36,46

Is John's use of *phos* in his epistle identical to or different from his use of *phos* in chapter 1 of the Gospel of John? Summarize the usage of *phos* for the apostle.

How did Jesus use *phos*? Is it personal or impersonal? Is it identical to or different from John's meaning?

Father. Jesus' defense isn't based on any ability we have to be sinless but instead on His sacrifice of Himself on our behalf. John described Jesus as the propitiation for humanity's sins, which means that through His substitutionary death on our behalf, Jesus has provided the means by which all people can be saved.

Why is ongoing confession of sin important in a believer's relationship with God?

What encouragement did John give to believers who struggle with sin?

SEEK TO OBEY (1 John 2:3-6)

³ This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him by keeping His commands. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," yet doesn't keep His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

The heretics were fond of claiming they knew God, but made no effort to practice God's commands in their daily lives. John provided an accurate test that believers could apply to their lives to see whether indeed they knew God: obey His commands. Obeying God's commands isn't a condition of salvation but a result of salvation.

Verse 4 amplifies John's previous thoughts from a different perspective. Anyone who claims to know God but doesn't keep His commands exposes himself as a liar. Anyone who is consistently disobedient deceives himself and reveals by his actions that he has no relationship with God.

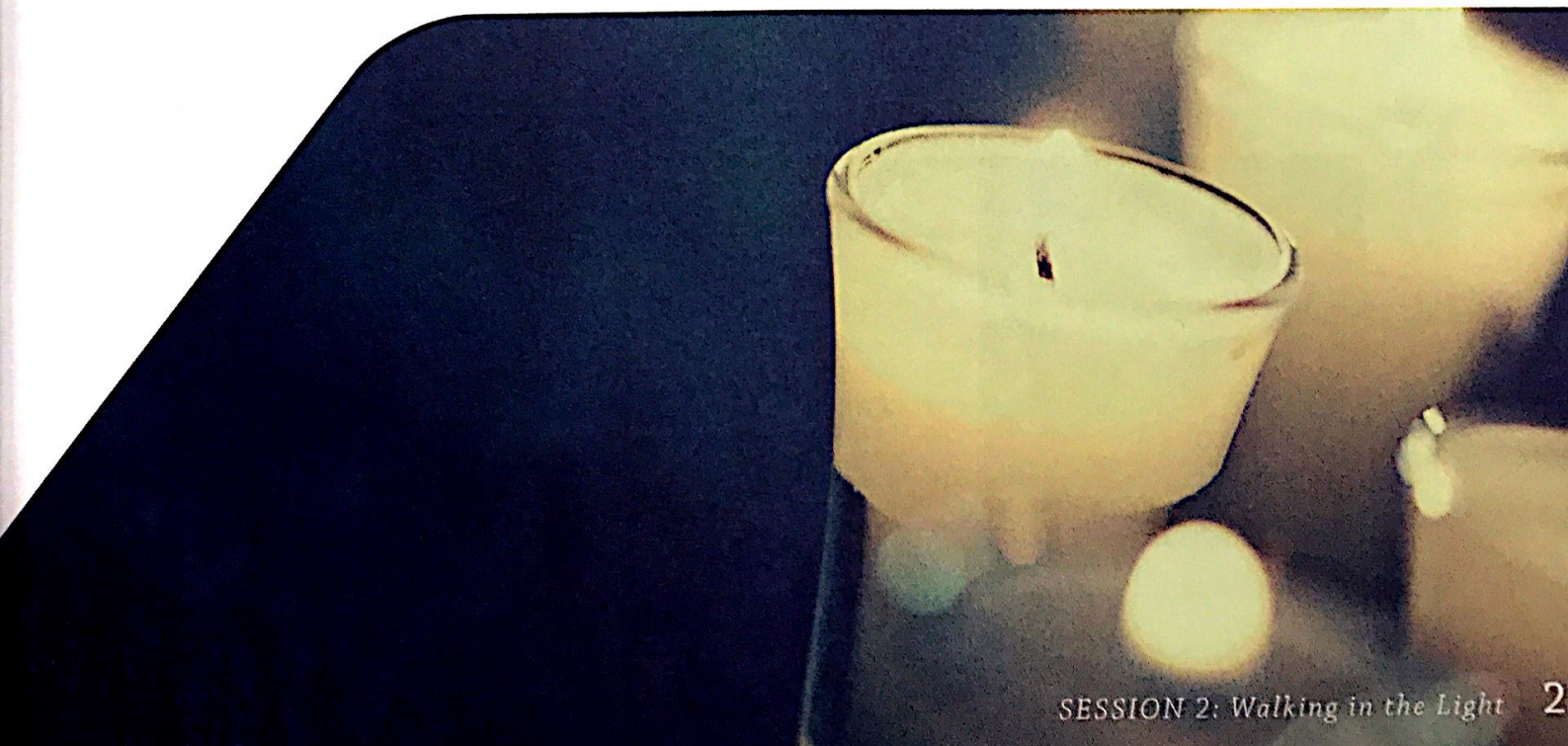
⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: ⁶ The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.

John concluded this section with a message of reassurance to believers: anyone who takes God's commands seriously and obeys them reveals that he or she has a growing relationship with God. "The love of God" referenced in verse 5 can be both love for God and love that comes from God. The idea of being perfected has to do with maturing in faith, not being perfect and sinless.

John stressed that to abide in God, we must experientially know Him through a growing relationship with Him, evidenced by patterning our lives after Christ's. A relationship with Christ enables us to put His commands into practice in our lives.

In what ways has obeying God's commands strengthened your faith in Him?

What promises can believers expect God to fulfill when they confess their sins to Him?



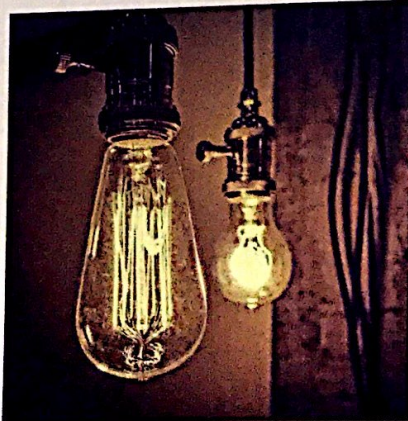
➤ OBEY THE TEXT

The evidence of a Christian's fellowship with God isn't sinlessness but holiness, which is a result of obedience to God's commands. Obeying God's commands includes confessing our sins. When believers regularly confess their sins to God, we can be certain of God's forgiveness. Demonstrating holiness is essential in a Christian's life.

Evaluate your life by the standard presented in 1 John 1:5–2:6. If there's no evidence of fellowship with God, consider whether you need to commit your life to Christ. If you've already made that commitment, ask God to help you demonstrate evidence of fellowship with Him.

What sins do you need to confess to God? Ask God to show you the sins in your life. Confess those sins to Him as He reveals them.

What are some ways your Bible-study group can encourage one another to live obediently to God's commands? Discuss how you can graciously hold one another accountable.



MEMORIZE

"This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands." 1 John 2:3

Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you will put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

