

Love is Light

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[0 : 0 0] If you have a Bible with you, if you would turn with me to 1 John, it's on page one, two, two, five of the Pew Bible. You may have your own Bible with you or Bible as an app, on your phone, whatever. Do look it up if you can with me today. Last week the title of the introductory study that we did in 1 John was that Love is Life and today the title is Love is Light. There's similarities between the two obviously and it's a continuation of the chapter and John's letter to the churches that he's giving. I think I mentioned last week that John likes contrasts. He often speaks about good and evil, life and death, darkness and light and light is very much one of the themes of this letter relating it to love as well. And here he's using kind of two themes. He's using light and darkness but he's also using walking and where we're walking and how we're walking in our lives as an illustration as well. And obviously he wants us to be Christians who are walking in the light and the light of God and the light of his character. Now I thought of a kind of illustration that brings that together. It might not be a very good one but I hope that it'll help to, in your mind's eye, to get where we're hoping to go today in terms of walking. You could choose to walk just about at the darkening, just as it's getting darker. You can walk there or you can also walk just as the dawn is happening in the morning. And the two in terms of light intensity might not look that different but they're absolutely different in terms of your perspective and where you're going because at night you're walking into the darkness physically is what I'm trying to say. But in the morning, in that kind of morning darkening if you can call it that, you're walking towards the dawn, you're walking towards the light. And in many ways that's what John is speaking about. He's saying our lives sometimes might not look that different. Whatever perspective, whatever direction, outwardly might not look that different. But the trajectory of our lives is absolutely crucial in terms of our deep seated foundational direction. Are we heading towards the darkness and sin?

Or are we heading towards the light and to God? So in other words what I'm saying, the direction of your life is everything. The direction of our lives is everything as Christians.

And so the question that I've asked and I asked myself and we ask ourselves as we come to a passage like this is what is the direction of your life? What's the trajectory of your life? Where are you walking? What is your walk as a Christian? You know we talk about that. The walk of our life being the kind of life we're living. The kind of people, what we are from the heart out. I don't mean our past, I don't really mean our outward things and the stuff we do. I mean more just our being, what we are, what direction we are going in and the trajectory that we're facing. And that's really what John's speaking about here and about the importance of walking in the light. And he bases that on the fellowship we spoke about last week. When we come to know Jesus we come into fellowship with God.

We are friends with Him. He ceases to be our judge and He becomes our father and we are in fellowship with Him. And so this is a continuation of that whole argument. And he reminds us that just as much as God is life, He is also light. This is the message we heard from Him and declare to you, God is light. And that's a great description of the nature and the character of God that He's this absolute standard of truth and moral perfection. That's really what light in the Bible often refers to. In Isaiah chapter 5, speaking about light and darkness, this kind of darkening is a nightmare for my eyes. I'm getting blinder by the day.

Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 20, we have this idea. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And it's talking there about the way that the people of God or the people to whom Isaiah was writing were turning the moral absolutes and the light and the purity of God upside down. And that truth that God is pure goodness, pure light, pure and absolute perfection. And it's a really important foundational consideration when we're thinking about God.

[6 : 01] Because we have to then conclude with God that there's nothing bad in Him. There's nothing unfair in Him. There's nothing wrong in Him. There's nothing unjust in Him. There's nothing unloving in Him. And don't you find that we shake our fists at God very often and accuse Him of these things in our lives? That we throw up these questions and say, how can God be like this? How can He be God good? How can He be just? How can He be fair? And so we struggle with this theological picture, which is absolutely real and meaningful that God is light. And it helps us to live our lives when we start with that foundation, because it's beginning to see that our lives are moving in perspective with Him rather than the other way round. It's not that we're asking God to change and move and manipulate Himself so that He agrees with us, but rather we're finding, and we'll go on to speak about that a little bit later, that we are finding ourselves walking in the light and the change that that brings to our lives. And that's not John's own take on who the character of God is. He says, this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you this is God's own self-declaration.

He gives us that. He says, I want you to know this is who I am. I want you to ponder this truth. And the reality is it becomes difficult for us to worship Him if it's not the case.

If God is capricious, if He is untrustworthy, if He is morally dubious, then it's difficult for you and for me this evening to worship Him. Is it not? It's difficult for us to bow our knee to Him. Is it not? If we judge Him by our own imperfect standards of perfection, then it becomes very difficult to submit to His Lordship and to His kingly righteous light justice. This is the God who reveals Himself as a person of infinite truth and infinite love and infinite justice. Now for us that doesn't mean that the revelation of God is absolutely complete. We know enough about God to worship Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as God incarnate, God crucified and resurrected, but we don't know enough about Him to know

Him fully. Isn't that right? We will never know Him fully. And the reality of God being light is an infinite concept for us to consider. We know about Him enough about Him to live at peace with Him and with one another because of His grace and His goodness, but not enough to make sense of the mysteries of our lives and the experiences we face. So some of you this evening might think, it's all very well for Derek to speak about God being light, but he doesn't know the darkness that I'm having to go through. He doesn't know the pain and the suffering and the questions and the doubts and the fears. And there is much in life that drives us to Christ and to the cross and drives us to ask questions and have faith in Him. And we will find as we go through this that these are the truths that will keep us holding on when we are in the deepest darkness. God is light. And John is reminding the Christians here that it is our privilege and our responsibility also to walk in the light. In verse 7 he says that, 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. That's the definition, isn't it, of fellowship with God, of the gospel, of being a Christian. It's walking in the light. It's loving Him. It's loving His company. It's battling against the darkness that's in our own hearts and in the world in which we live. It's a walk of faith and obedience, a walk of forgiveness. You'll forgive me when I talk about forgiveness. You'll forgive me that there is unwittingly rather a strong overlap between this morning and this evening.

And that's not because I'm cheating and it's not because I'm doing half a sermon and cutting it into three. But it's just the way the sermons have come together in the programme of preaching.

[11 : 00] What we are encouraged to walk in the light and to walk in company with God and interestingly, isn't it, how He defines that walking in the light? Not, prime man, not first of all, or He chooses not to use fellowship with God as walking in the light here, but in 7b He chooses to say if we're walking in the light, as He in the light, well, we'll have fellowship with one another. So evidence and assurance that we're walking in the light of God's truth and in the light of His character is that we will fellowship with one another as believers and as Christians. That's a very interesting and worth pondering fact about the Gospel. We'll see a little bit more about that later. But the problem is that so often in our lives we're not finding it easy to walk in the light. And the challenge here is to examine ourselves about the walk of our life, to examine ourselves about which we were facing. Are we facing in the darkening? Are we facing the night or are we facing the day? Are we looking towards God? Even in all the kind of, the fact that the sun hasn't fully risen yet. Are we facing Him or are we facing away from Him? What is the direction of our lives? Who is the standard by which we are making the choices? Are we for Christ or are we for ourselves or the world in which we live? Are we walking with our Bibles open to learn about the Word and the Person of the Word? Are we learning with our lips opened towards heaven or is our Bible closed and are our lips sealed towards heaven? To whom are we looking for the guidance of our day to day living and lives? What is the walk?

What is the direction? What is the trajectory of our lives? John was speaking in a particular context where there was false teachers who were saying you don't need to worry anymore about sin. Sin isn't a problem. I don't want to go into all the different teachings and thinkings that may have been around at that time. But if you see in verse 6, if we claim we have felt fellowship with Him but yet walk in the darkness we lie. And then in verse 8, he says if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. And then in verse 10, if we claim we have not sinned we make Him out to be a lie and His Word has no place in our lives. So there are these claims that we are being made about sin. Basically saying that we don't need to worry about sin anymore.

Either we have moved beyond that, it is an old fashioned concept or we don't need to worry about anything that God will be unhappy with. It is fine, Jesus has paid the price, we don't need to worry anymore about sin. Or we just think the whole concept is rather prickly and uneasy to deal with. There is no sin that we need to deal with, no need to feel that sense of dependence and the sense of difference between ourselves and God. So the teaching was dulling people's conscience against our need for fellowship with the Father because the Father is one who is light. There was no sense of this spoiled relationship with God, a God of love. There was no sense in which the way we walk and the way we live our lives matters to God. We could live anyway because it doesn't really matter how we live because sin isn't really a problem. There was no concept of grieving God's spirit or quenching the spirit or feeling his displeasure at a life that is turned against him. But these are claims which John very powerfully and very strongly denies here. His experience and the experience of God's Word and the truth of God's Word and our own experience, let's be honest, is that sin is always a barrier to fellowship with God who is light. If we are deliberately choosing to sin against the living God, if we deliberately choose to rebel against Him, we will find that fellowship with Him is problematic, is difficult because

He is light and because He is chosen for us to deal with our lives in a certain way. John uses strong language here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He says if we think it doesn't matter how we live, he says we are living a lie. More than that, we are calling God a liar. We are on a deceitful road. It's a pretense and he is warning himself and others that it's not a good place to be because we are facing the wrong way. We are not living by the truth and we are out of fellowship with our loving, precious, heavenly Saviour who is light. And so the question is who are we believing? Who are we following? Who are we submissive to? To whom do we subsume our lives? Is it to our own thinking or is it to the living God and the longing to do what He wants? Because this isn't a council of legalism by any means. John recognises the danger for his fledgling people, for his church and for us in our Christian lives also. And he wants to describe also what it means to be walking in the light. He challenges against the danger of walking, facing the darkness and choosing to dull our conscience and not care about our relationship with Him. And then he describes walking in the light, in this passage, in this chapter. And there's a few things and I'm just going to use the illustration of rays of light to help us to make it, you know, the importance of rays of warmth and light and stuff. Rays? You with me? You got it? Okay, rays. So there's going to be rays of forgiveness, rays of obedience, rays of love and rays of encouragement. And that's walking in the light, walking close to God in our lives rays. And isn't it great that He's not bashing us here? But He's saying, look, when you're walking in the light, you will walk in the light of His forgiveness.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. If we confess our sins, He says, He's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins. Verse 2, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. Isn't that great?

[18 : 34] He says, walk in the light and He says, confess the things that are darkness in your heart and soul and you'll know forgiveness and grace and glory in your life. That's really the only thing God asks of us at the beginning of our day with Him that we are honest. He simply wants honesty under His verdict of our need. That we are a people who confess that we need Him and He's faithful and not just faithful and loving but just, He justly forgives us because He's already paid the price for our sins, He's already been paid for. And He says, confess my friends, that's what I'm asking. You know, He says, take the dark heart and the broken moral compass and the rebellion against the truth and this aggressive shaking off of our need for grace and let His light shine into our hearts and confess our need for healing and forgiveness. He's a healing and forgiving God. That is the light of the walk. He says, walking in the light is not that we're somehow morally superior that we're better than others but that we're people who are honest with the living God.

Let's be honest with Him and confess our need. I wonder in our prayer lives, I wonder in your prayer life and in mine, if we thought back on the prayers that we've offered to our Father in the last few days, I wonder how much confession there's been. I wonder if we've tricked off a long list of desires and requests or demands but I wonder how much time and I wonder how much time I've spent confessing before this God who is light.

Well, I don't need. I've got too many things to do. I've got this list. I must give Him in prayer. But He says, the light exposes as His light shines in our darkness. It pleasingly and healingly and powerfully exposes our need and exposes His wonderful, faithful and just cleansing. Isn't that great? He's our advocate. He's our paraclete. It's the same word that is used of the Holy Spirit in John where Jesus says, I am going but I will give you another comforter. Someone else, he says, I'm your comforter but I also give you the Holy Spirit and it's the whole idea here of Jesus being our advocate before the Father. So Jesus pleads our cause before the Father and says, look, this child of yours is confessing their need and their sin and their lostness. Lord, you must accept them because of what I have done.

There also is the idea of Him being an advocate against the accuser of the saints. Satan who says, this guy is not a Christian. Have you seen the way this guy thinks? Have you seen that? They're not a Christian and Jesus pleads and advocates on behalf of, yes, they are.

They are covered in the precious blood that I shed for them on the cross. He's our advocate. Isn't that great today? Isn't that great? Do you feel that your life, nobody cares about your life? Jesus is your advocate as a Christian and he is advocating that you might know injustice and in purity and in God's faithfulness, forgiveness. That's lovely. We should bask in the rays of God's forgiveness as Christians. But also in the rays of obedience, the kind of section from verse 3 to 6 speaks about that, that we know, that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. I know Him, says somebody, but doesn't do what He commands.

[22 : 31] God again uses strong language and says, well, that's inconsistent. It's a lie. So there's, walking in the light is walking in the rays of obedience. You know, that's common sense.

It kind of nails the idea that we can say, oh Jesus died for my sins, but I can live any old way I want. It doesn't matter anymore because we love Him and we walk in the light and we walk in His moral and ethical light and we follow His ways because there are ways that are good for us and precious and right. Now, how do I sum that up? Because I touched on it very briefly earlier. How do we sum up walking in the light of obedience? Well, here John says, whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus. I don't need to preach this sermon. This sermon is very clear from the word. Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. Do you wonder what it means to walk in the light, the rays of obedience?

It means to walk as Jesus did. Jesus is the Son of God. What does it mean? I think it's summarized best by Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. That's how we walk as Jesus did, not my will, but yours be done. The same prayer that He offered the church as a model prayer. Your will be done, your kingdom come. And that is how we walk in the light of obedience by looking at our lives and saying, I want to do what He wants me to do rather than simply what I want to do. Now, the great thing about growing in grace and being sanctified is that these two things come together. The closer we are to Him, then the more of what we want is the more what He wants, or the more that what He wants is the more what we want, because we're walking towards the light. But if our life is faced away from Him, then that's becoming a bigger and bigger struggle, because we're walking the opposite way. And we are kind of rebelling against Him and sticking our kind of talons in and stopping this walk forward in the light. Not my will, but yours be done. Now that's tough, isn't it? It was tough for

Jesus and He was perfect. And what's tougher is it for us that we are encouraged to do what God wants us to do, but He promises as we know Him and as we follow Him, we will walk in the light as He is in the light, and we will be blessed in so doing. It's the privilege of being a child of the King and the responsibility, but knowing He has given the resources. So the raise of forgiveness, the raise of obedience, the raise of love, verses 7 to 11, that next section, so it kind of works, I'm working in sections, verses 7 through to 11 there, where He goes on again speaking in warm terms, saying that if we're walking in the light, I give you this command. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. See, these are simple things, aren't they? But they're challenging things for us. So from the beginning, this has been the way, I'm writing a new command, but it's one you've had from the beginning. It's a kind of paradoxical thing to say. But really from the beginning, that's been the way. It's been the walk of love, but it's been renewed and made clearer when Jesus came because Jesus said, a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I've loved you. And yet that the summary of the

Ten Commandments, the old law, was that you love God with all your heart, so stay in the mind and you love your neighbour as yourself. So it's old and it's new. And again, He is changing the claims. For the fourth time in verse 9, He says, anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother, we can make great claims, can't we? We can make great claims in our lives. He said, beware of these things, but we're to be those who not so much say or talk a good game, but who in practice love their brother, love one another. A brief description, treating other people the way we would want to be treated ourselves. That is a good summary of loving one another. We have this responsibility to not hate and to not be divided from and not to be separate. Remember this morning we spoke about, this is what I talk about the overlap, we spoke a lot about peace and the peace of God, meaning peace horizontally. Well, that is how we love one another in our lives. And then I finish with this, the last section from verse 12 to verse 14, where he writes to different groups within the church. And this is really speaking about the raise of encouragement that he gives.

[28 : 00] So there's raise of love, there's raise of obedience, there's raise of forgiveness and there's raise of encouragement. And this is really a parenthesis. It's a digression. He's moving away from the main arguments and he's just stopping. And he said, okay, I'm stopping here because so far it's very self-examining here. And you're maybe feeling rough. And you're maybe, well, I wonder if I am, maybe they were wondering whether we're Christians at all. And so he digresses to encourage them, uses soft and gentle language, I write to dear children again. And he covers the kind of the different stages of people in the church.

He uses children maybe to signify all of them or it may be those who are very young in the faith. Then he speaks about young men and then he speaks about fathers uses male imagery.

But he's referring to maybe the fathers in the faith, the older people, the mature Christians, he's also speaking to the young people in the church and he knows that at different stages.

To be honest, I don't know why he repeats himself. He writes to dear children, to fathers, to young men and then he does it again. I'm not sure why other than maybe for emphasis or for reassurance that he does that. And he says different things, although he says the same thing twice to the mature, to the older, because you've known him who's from the beginning and he's simply reminding them, he's saying, look, I don't think any of you are walking in the darkness. I don't think any of you are facing the wrong way. Be encouraged and don't listen, he says, to the false teaching. Be encouraged at whatever stage you're at that you've known God, that you've experienced God, that you have won victory through God, that God's word lives in you, you've overcome the evil one. There's lots of encouragement there for them and there's lots of encouragement for us that we know that, that we are, as we look back in our lives, as we look back on what we're believing and what we're living, that we can see these things. We can see that we have known him. We can see that we love him. We can see that in all the battles and all the struggles we face, we are remaining strong because of who he is and because his word lives on and we have already overcome the evil one and that's there for encouragement and it's there as a digression and as they're repeated to remind them of that and may we be reminded and reassured of that as we walk in the light but may we also be challenged to keep on walking in the light by his grace and by his favour. He's a great, providing, loving, good, holy, just, perfect, honourable, passionate God. Let's keep walking in the light and if you don't know him, can I plead with you to turn round and face him and not be in the darkening towards the darkness of night but be in that half light, the battle that we're still in here but facing the rising sun and facing the fullness of the dawn with him. Let's pray. Lord God help us to understand you more, more clearly and with more passion and with more joy. Help us to walk in the light as you are in the light. May we not be battered or discouraged or browbeaten by your word. May we find it encouraging, may we find it realistic, may we be reminded that you know us and that you know our temptations and our struggles, may we know above all we have Jesus Christ as our advocate, pleading our name, pleading our cause, pleading our forgiveness not for any other reason than his love and his justice and knowing that he's already paid the price. And Lord may we never underestimate the amazing grace of

God when we think of God who is light being plunged into darkness on the cross both spiritually, metaphorically and physically when the sun refused to shine on the darkness of that moment. May we begin to understand how God as light in his sun could experience that level and that cost of pain and suffering in order to set us free and in order to change our habits and our hearts and our desires. And Lord may we see that power of resurrection available to us to be transformed and to persevere, to be strong in battle and to love the living God. So help us we pray and pardon our sins as we confess them to you. In Jesus name. Amen.