

Sermon 7, Walking in the Light, 1 John 1:5-7

Proposition: If you walk in God's light with God's people, your sin will go away!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have already started to see the amazing and beautiful way in which John teaches us about what he saw, listened to, looked at, and touched in the ministry of Jesus. The key point from that ministry that's he's getting across right now is that God is light, and that God's light means that you and I need to be in the light too. While we've talked about that a bit over the last two Sundays, today we're going to discuss it more deeply. God is light: this is a foundational truth of the Christian life. God is light, which means that you too need to walk in the light, sharing fellowship with your fellow believers and cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus.

I. God's Light Excludes Darkness from His Company, vv. 5-6

The basic point we saw in vv. 5-6 over the last two weeks is that God's light keeps darkness out of His company. In one sense, it's even foolish to say that He doesn't like it or that it bothers Him. He quite literally annihilates it; any darkness that would survive can't afford to get too close to Him, because He is light.

I'm reminded of the old joke about the Smogarian astronauts who were going to visit the Sun. When told it would be too hot for them, they said, "Oh, silly — what do you think we are, stupid? We'll go at night!"

You can't go to God at night. You can't visit Him at a time when darkness can survive in His presence. Just as you can't look at a tree when it's not made of wood, so you can't be dark in the face of the infinitely bright one. He will illumine you; He will light you up. You can't imagine that the blinds on your windows are going to do much to keep the sun out of your house if a dragline or backhoe rips your roof off. In the same way, with the approach of God's infinite light, darkness must flee away.

II. It's Impossible to Retain Sin if You're Walking in His light, v. 7

The bottom line, then, is that it's impossible to retain sin if you're walking in God's light. That is what First John 1:7 says. It is our text this morning. What we're going to do is walk through and look at the four key phrases in which John teaches us that if we walk in God's light, we will not walk in sin.

A. Walking in the Light

The first of those phrases, of course, is "walking in the light." What does it mean to walk in the light?

1. Letting God See the Truth About Us

It's indisputable that the primary meaning of this phrase is to let God see the truth about us. We saw last week that the fullest meaning of "walking in darkness" was to be happily ensconced as a subject in Satan's kingdom. By implication, then, to walk in the light is to be happily ensconced as a citizen in the Kingdom of God. To live in God's Kingdom means to submit to His rule, to do what He wants, and to be obedient to Him. To walk in His light is to not reject the exposure that it brings, or try to hide from that exposure, but rather to let God see the truth about us as we live in His Kingdom of Light.

So you and I are called to live joyfully as Kingdom citizens in (to put it provocatively) the ultimate surveillance state. Often you'll hear people say "Who cares if the NSA listens to my phone calls and Google reads my email? I've got nothing to hide." But though there are many legitimate reasons that you may not want Google or the National Security Agency to read your email (much less your mind), if you don't want God to read your email or mind, you are not walking in the light. Indeed, you'd rather be a denizen of the Kingdom of Darkness, where you can hide your thoughts from the Devil and even from yourself. But the Kingdom of Light is not a kingdom of ignorance; it is the place where you fully know and are fully known. It is the place where you are fully known *and fully accepted*.

You see, though the Kingdom of God is a surveillance state in the sense that you are fully known, it is not really a surveillance state, for you too know fully.

Let me back into this discussion from another angle. You may have seen the recent announcement that Google was building a countertop device, a "smart screen," that would track your face as you walk around the house and would be able to tell who had just entered the room.

I asked my wife whether she wanted one, and she instantly said, “No way! That’s creepy,” as I’m sure almost all of you would.

I said, “I can instantly recognize you when you come into the room. I can see you walking around the house and know what room you’re in. Do you find that creepy?”

“Of course not.”

“Why not?” I asked this question because I was sure I knew the answer, and sure enough, my wife did not disappoint.

“Because I can see you just as much as you can see me.”

Brothers and sisters, in a surveillance state you can be and are watched by people you never see. But in the Kingdom of Light, you are fully known by those you fully know. You are fully exposed, but so are they. The surveillance state is anti-relational. It deliberately disrupts and prevents you from getting to know those who allegedly know all about you. But the Kingdom, as a Kingdom of Light, is a place where you let God see the truth about you because you are in Love and will not go out of Him, as C.S. Lewis put it.

Do you see, then, that though confession of sin and being honest about your failings is part of this, there’s so much more to it than that? This is what all of us are longing for — a place to know and be known, a place to love and be loved, a place where we are accepted and welcomed. What will Jesus say to those He sends to Hell? “Depart from me; I never knew you.” The ones He accepts are the ones already known in Heaven.

So in that light, do you want to let God see you? Do you want to cultivate a relationship with Him in which He knows you and you know Him? That, brothers and sisters, is the imperative that comes from the truth that God is light. Since He is light, you and I need to let Him see us. We need to come near Him, come into His light, and enter the deepest relationship we will or can ever know.

2. Letting Others See the Truth About Us

But walking in the light doesn’t just mean that you let God see you. It means that you let others see you too. We’ll talk about this more in a moment, when we get to John’s explicit statement that we have fellowship with one another when we walk in the light. But for now, under this heading of walking in the light, let me just say that if you say “God can know about such-and-such in my life, *but no one else in the church can,*” then I sincerely question whether you have any intention of letting God know about it either. Yes, obviously in this era people still have dark hearts and it’s not safe to engage anyone and everyone with the inmost secrets of your heart. That is something that will have to be reserved for Heaven. But if your attitude is “No one is ever going to know about this,” then I suggest to you that such an attitude is going to spill over into your relationship with God too. You’ve got something you’re hiding; you’re walking in the darkness. And that means that you are not practicing a free and unhindered relationship with the truth as it is in Jesus. Brothers and sisters, you and I need to let others see the truth about us.

There’s a flip side here as well, though. Let me put it this way: If you dump all your sins and problems on everyone you see, that’s not walking in the light. That’s spreading the darkness.

An unhindered relationship doesn't mean that you always and only discuss your own sins and problems. But it also means that you're not afraid of revealing those problems and sins to the right person at the right time.

There are errors on both sides regarding what walking in the light looks like. But there is no doubt that it requires *always* letting God see the truth about you and, in the appropriate circumstances, letting others see the truth about you.

3. Not Engaging in the Deeds of Darkness.

Yet, in the emphasis on the broader relational context, don't miss the obvious: to walk in the light means not engaging in the deeds of darkness. What are those deeds of darkness? Anything that shuns the light. Anything for which darkness is fitting. Anything that's better done when no one sees and no one knows. Those are the sins to shun. Those activities are incompatible with walking in the light.

B. God's Position in the Light

But, having said that we must walk in the light, we need to also see God's position in the light. He's not asking us to do anything He hasn't already done, or to expose Himself in any way He hasn't already exposed Himself in the light.

1. Fully Exposed to His Son and Spirit

Already God has fully exposed Himself to His Son and Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. Who has known the mind of the LORD? The Holy Spirit has. And though no one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son has exegeted Him. Brothers and sisters, God lives in unapproachable light, and in that light His Son and Spirit see Him completely and know Him fully, as they are fully known. Thus, the truth that God is light, like every truth about God, finds its fullest significance in the light of God's triune being. Not only is He light; there are always other persons there to see His light, and to admire and love His perfections.

2. Already Prepared in Christ for Full Exposure to the Bride

But not only is God perfectly known to Himself, and thus to His Son and Spirit — in Christ, He is already prepared for full exposure to His bride. Then we shall fully know, even as we have been fully known. Brothers and sisters, Christ will let us see Him, and whoever sees Him has seen the Father. When we see Christ, we will see God in His perfection, fully exposed to our gaze. What does that mean? It is hard to imagine the glory of seeing God in His perfections. But we will. God is light, and He is in the light — meaning that when our eyes can handle it, we will see His glory with the saints in light.

3. No Darkness at all in Him

Finally, God's position in the light means that in Him there is no darkness at all. He is in the light in a way that excludes darkness. We are not yet in the light that way — but we will be. Right now, there are still dark motives, dark impulses, even dark secrets lurking within our hearts. But when He appears, His light will burn those things out of us. Then, and only then, will there be no darkness at all in us. But for now, He is perfectly in the light, free from even the tiniest spot or stain of darkness. But we are not yet perfectly in the light.

C. Fellowship with One Another

Well, when we walk in the light, seeking to know God and be known by Him as citizens of His Kingdom, something happens: we start to make friends among other Christians. Literally, we “have fellowship” with them. As I said last week, “fellowship” means “the relationship that comes from having a fellow.” Specifically in this case, it’s the relationship that comes from having fellow walkers in the light. I’m walking in the light of God, and you’re walking in the light of God. That is the basis of our relationship, that you are my fellow walker in the light.

1. We Are No Longer Hiding from Each Other

Thus, we are no longer hiding from each other in the darkness. We are both in the light, and we can share fellowship and build a relationship over that commonality. I don’t have to hide from you, because I know that you are walking in the light like I am.

2. We Can Afford to Risk Getting Close

This means that we can afford to risk getting close to one another. I don’t have to say “Well, if I get too close to so-and-so he’ll find out what I’m really like and then the relationship will be over!” Instead, we can trust others because we are walking in the light. We already have seen their sins and weaknesses, and they’ve seen ours. Thus, we can indeed afford to risk getting close to one another because we know each other. I am your fellow Christian — so won’t you be friends with me?

3. We find cleansing only through living in the Church with other sinners!

Finally, then, let me point out that John puts fellowship with one another before cleansing with Christ’s blood for a very good reason. That reason is that there is indeed a logical sequence and connection between those two things. If you separate from your fellow believers, if you don’t have a relationship with them built on your common sharing in Christ with them, then you don’t have cleansing either. The way to be clean is not to leave the church and the awful sinners and hypocrites within it; the way to be clean is to stay right smack-dab in the middle of the church and its awful sinners and hypocrites! To walk in the light, pursuing a relationship with God and shunning the unfruitful works of darkness, is to create strong relational bonds with the people around you who are doing the same thing. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers! Is that how you feel about your fellow saints here at Harvest? If not, why not? Why don’t you want to have fellowship with these other followers of Jesus? After all, if you refuse that fellowship, Jesus’ blood will not cleanse you. His cleansing is for those in fellowship with one another as well as with Him.

D. The Blood of Jesus Cleanses Us

But if you are building relationships with others in the church, then, John promises, you get to experience this exceedingly great and precious reality: the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. Jesus the man is the Son of God, and His blood is therefore infinitely valuable and efficacious. Specifically, it takes away sin by cleaning it up. We’ve all taken stains out of carpet; that’s what the blood Jesus does. It attacks and destroys the stain of sin.

1. It Removes Sin's Guilt.

One aspect of that stain is its guilt, or liability to punishment. Sin makes you guilty and liable to be punished. If you're guilty, it means that you recognize that you deserve the consequences of what you did. But the blood Jesus shed in dying on the cross in your places removes your liability to punishment. You are no longer on the hook for your sins, because Jesus suffered and died the death they deserved. Your guilt is washed away. Hallelujah!

2. It Removes Sin's Filth

But this cleansing doesn't stop with the removal of liability to punishment. It also takes away the filthiness of sin. If guilt relates to punishment, filthiness relates to hygiene. Even after your guilt is gone, you are still morally impure. Your character has a big stain on it. But because Jesus died for you, His blood can and will remove your filthiness too. No longer is your character stained; no longer are you morally and ethically marked as someone who would do such a thing. You are forgiven; sin's stain is gone. There is no laundry soap on earth that can cleanse like the blood of Jesus.

3. It Will Someday Remove Sin's Presence

Indeed, someday it will remove the presence of sin entirely from our lives. Right now, we still sin all the time. We still fail to love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. But the power of Christ's death has been unleashed in the world, and it will never stop until it has eliminated all sin. It is doing that right now. Brothers and sisters, if you walk in the light, you will have fellowship with God and with each other, and Christ's blood will cleanse you.

Do you want that? Do you recognize that you need nothing less? Then come, and welcome, to Jesus Christ. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. Already you are clean because of His word; keep walking in His light, and I will see you in Heaven, in perfect light and joy. Amen.