



2: I Cannot Live Comfortably in Sin

MATT BLACK, Wed, Oct 4, 2017

1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-2, "Real Christian" series

Introduction: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are in a new series in 1 John called "Marks of a Real Christian." Tonight's study is the final study for us in is entitled: "No Living Comfortably in Sin."

The book of 1 John was written to help true Christians discern between false Christians. The Lord told us in Matthew 7:21-23 that many preachers and people who know God's Word well will come to him on the Judgement Day. They'll say, "I've preached this, I've done this, I've cast out demons and done miracles." Jesus basically says, *"It doesn't matter what you've done or what you know. It matters that you know me! I don't know you, lawless people. Depart from me!"*

Evangelist Paul Washer says often: When we get a new relationship with God, we get a new relationship with sin. Our passage tonight 1 John 1:5-2:2 teaches us this truth. John opened up with our new relationship with God. When we are born of God, we have fellowship with God. We have a new relationship with God. We used to have a relationship of hostility. Paul describes us as God's "enemies" and that we are in our old nature "hostile with God."

Keeping Fellowship Sharp

In the summer of 1994 I began working for National Bullet Proof in Hickory Hills, Illinois. I did everything from landscaping to forming jambs for bullet resistant doors and windows. I learned an important lesson when I eventually got to work on the shipping dock years later in 1998. I had been cutting boxes for shipping for weeks with the same blade. As a newbie on the dock, I realized I needed to change my blade. The next box I cut, I ripped through not only the box, but also my hand. I was so used to cutting with a dull blade, I didn't realize how dull my knife was!

So it is with fellowship and our walk with God.

The great news is there is a principle in 1 John 1 that can help us keep our fellowship with the Lord sharp. Don't you want that? John calls it "walking in the light." I want my walk with God to be fresh and vibrant and growing. Let's see if you can find the principle as we study beginning in 1 John 1:5.

Fellowship is a Fruit of Regeneration

The theme of 1 John is that there is definable fruit that comes from regeneration. There is discernible evidence when someone is born again. They are a new creation. They have a new nature that radically transforms the behavior. This is what John is getting at: "So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in

spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth” (1:6). If there is no change in your life, you are not born again. You are lying to yourself and to others if you think you are God’s child, yet you practice a life of sin.

Repentance a Way of Life for the Born-Again Believer

One of the marks of a true believer in the book of 1 John is constant repentance from sin. 1 John 1:5-10 calls it “walking in the light.” All these evidences are linked together. Fellowship is the mark we learned last week. It means your walk or togetherness with God. It is the fruit of your union with Christ.

Scripture

Again we are reading from New Living Translation. I appreciate this translation for John’s writing because John in Greek is written very simple. I think the NLT helps you get the feel of what it would be like to read 1 John in his day.

1 John 1:5-10, “This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. 6 So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.”

2:1-2, “My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.”

I. A true Christian has God (who is light) indwelling him (1:5-6).

1 John 1:5-6, “This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. 6 So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth.”

John just talked about fellowship with God, which is literally “sharing” in God.¹ He wants his hearers to have the same joy from God’s fellowship that he has. Fellowship means share God’s company, his presence. We are “abiding in him” as John says (Jn 15). In other words, a true Christian doesn’t just have facts about God in his head, but has God himself dwelling in his being. Henry Martyn said that fellowship is the enjoyment of “the life of God in the soul of man.” We often don’t enjoy the deep fellowship with God because we don’t know that it’s available. If you are a true Christian, you will know

¹ Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013), “Knowing we know: three tests.”

his presence. God will let you know his presence. He will give you manifestations of his reality.

Fellowship is a lot like marriage. Thomas Goodwin put it this way. He said here are a husband and a wife walking down the street together. They're married. Then all of a sudden, one of them takes the other in their arms. One turns around and says, "I love you," and grabs and kisses them. At that moment, they're not more married than they were five minutes ago. Their legal relationship hasn't changed a bit, but their enjoyment of and their experience of that relationship has just gone through the roof.

A Message from Jesus

The message Jesus told his disciples is that "God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all." Jesus had come into the world to display the perfect righteousness, love, and goodness of God. "He is the image of the invisible God" (**Col 1:15**). John 8:12 gives his most direct statement: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**Jn 8:12**). God's nature is that he is absolutely holy. "There is no darkness in him at all" (**1:5**). Having fellowship with God has certain evidences. John says, if you are sharing in God, you must understand he is a holy God. This was Jesus' message: "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (**Jn 17:22-23**).

II. A true Christian lives in God's light that exposes sin (1:7-8).

1 John 1:7-8, "But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth."

Possibility of Greater Fellowship

John tells us in the opening verses about the possibility that we could have greater fellowship with God and others. Fellowship with God while we are on earth is in constant flux. **We have to understand that you cannot manufacture fellowship.** There aren't any shortcuts, and you cannot skip crucial steps. Sometimes we substitute knowledge or service for fellowship and we feel so distant from God. You cannot get to fellowship unless you take this step of "walking in the light."

What does that mean? If I asked you, have you been walking in the light this week, how would you answer and what evidence would you give to back up your answer? Or if I asked you, have you been walking in the light this year, how would you answer it and what evidence?

Walking in the Light Defined

There is so much at stake, you need to know what it means to be "walking in the light." So let's understand it. **Walking in the light means having an open**

attitude toward admitting your sinfulness. Continually, we are going to be walking with God in such a way that he exposes our sin, and we are open about agreeing with him and humbling ourselves in constant repentant faith about our sin.

As a believer you've been granted a new nature and you desperately want fellowship with God. You've been baptized in the Spirit. Your new addiction that has replaced all other addictions is Jesus.

Light Exposes

How does this work? As Christians we walk in the light of God's Word and in the fear of God, trembling in his presence, and we walk with him in the light. **Light exposes.** That was John's point in the gospel of **John 3:20** (ESV), "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." That's what light does.

The Dust Storm

Ladies, does your home appear to be cleaner at 9 o'clock at night or at high noon? I didn't ask you if it was cleaner, but does it *appear to be cleaner* at 9 o'clock at night or at high noon? We all know the answer to that, right? It appears cleaner at 9 o'clock at night. It's funny because that same house looks like some dust storm hit between then and the next day at noon. You go to the same house at noon when the light is shining through the windows and exposing all the dust, what's going on? The light exposes what was there all along.

Are You a Gen 3 or 1 John 1 Person?

So fellowship with God comes from walking in the light and **walking in the light** means you have an **open attitude toward admitting your sinfulness.**

It's the polar opposite of being a Genesis 3 kind of person. There's the contrast: a 1 John 1 kind of man or a Genesis 3 kind of man. What did Adam and Eve do when they sinned? Did they walk in the light? Did they have an open attitude toward admitting their sinfulness? Nope. They did the polar opposite, didn't they? They ran. They hid. They covered it up and they tried to blame it on someone else. I would repeat our questions now that we've got a little bit more biblical data on the table. How are you doing at this matter of walking in the light? If that's the continuum, 1 John 1 kind of person or a Genesis 3 kind of person, where are you on that continuum?

What would happen if we brought the people who know you the best into this discussion? What would happen if you asked your spouse this afternoon, "Honey, do you see me as a person who walks in the light? Do I have an open attitude toward admitting my own sinfulness?" If you brought some friends in, if we brought other family members in and you asked them sincerely to help evaluate you on that issue, how well are you doing at this matter of walking in the light?

We All Sin, but What is Your Attitude Toward Sin?

Now here's a critical point: the question isn't the fact whether or not you and I sin. The question is your attitude toward the fact, right? I mean, John made that clear twice in this text. Verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." Verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar." The question isn't did you sin last week. The question is did you walk in the light by having an **open attitude toward admitting your side of the problem quickly?**

King David: A Man after God's Own Heart

Interesting biblical aside by the way, is in 2 Samuel 16. This is from the life of King David who is a fascinating character in the Bible. He had some real failures, no question about that, yet the New Testament remembers him as a man after God's own heart. How could that be? This example, I think, helps us understand it. It's in 2 Samuel 16 and David is with his mighty band of men. You've got to love those guys. And they are fleeing from David's rebellious son, Absalom, because David doesn't want to kill his own son. So David is on the run from his rebellious son Absalom. Think about how painful that would be as a king. 2 Samuel 16 tells us as they are going through this pass, there's this guy up on a cliff name Shimei.

Story of Shimei

Do you remember what Shimei did? Shimei is cussing the king. Shimei is throwing rocks and dust down on the king. Shimei is pronouncing judgment on the king. Well, there's a third guy in the story. It's one of David's mighty men of men. His name was Abishai, kind of David's right-hand man. Do you remember what Abishai said about Shimei, the guy who is cussing the king? Here's exactly what he said, he said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Abishai son of Zeruah demanded. Let me go over and cut off his head!" What would you have done if you were David? This guy is cussing the fire out of you and your best friend offers to go and take off his head? "Go for it Deacon So-and-so. I'll pray for you." It's amazing what David said. He said basically "No. Leave him alone." "No! If the Lord has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him?" That's walking in the light. That's having an open attitude toward admitting my sin. He had already had to learn the negative lesson of hiding his sin. By this time his sins with Bathsheba had been long exposed, and God had taught him what it meant to be "walking in the light."

Koinonia with Others

Now, another interesting part of this discussion is that following this principle will have a tremendous impact not just on your koinonia with God but also your koinonia with other people. You see, what do you do when you have a problem with another person? By the way, it's not like you're going to have to work hard to think about the last time that happened. For some of you, that happened on the way over to church today.

We have your car bugged. For some of you, it hasn't been that long ago so don't give me the innocent, "That never happens," look. Come on, you're in the church house. So what happens when you have a problem with another person? And here's the question: **what do you choose to focus on, your sin or the sins of others?** Jesus said it this way, "When you're having a problem with another person, before you try to get the speck out of somebody else's eye, first get the log out of your own."

Matthew 7:3-5, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Does that come naturally for you? It doesn't come natural for any of us! No.

Walking in the Light Does Not Come Naturally

So many times in marriage the argument comes because I refuse to focus on my own sin. If there is a scheduling conflict, I must be right and my wife wrong. If there is a problem with something I promised but didn't follow through on, it's that she didn't communicate clearly enough. I've learned that marriage and any relationship in the body of Christ is so much happier when I begin with me.

Once when we were first married, when cell phones were billed by the minute, **my wife announced to me that the bill was higher than normal.** Of course what was my first reaction? I became defensive, and I focused on her. I accused, "*Jill, why are you talking on the phone so long when I'm at work?*" Actually, after further investigation, I found out that Jill almost never used the cell phone since back then we had this antiquated thing called a "land line." She used the land line. I was making a lot of calls to pastors trying to raise support for Spain.

A really smart one there. And before you throw a rotten tomato at me, let me tell you one more thing: I realized I used the cell phone a whole lot more freely than my wife! **Why would my wife announce that problem that I not immediately focus on myself?** Why didn't I walk in the light? Why didn't I say, "*Well, that's my fault. Baby, I need to be more careful about using the cell phone. Maybe put a timer on it that blows my ear off when I talk too long!*" You see, it doesn't come natural. What we're talking about this morning doesn't come natural.

Alternatives to Walking in the Light

Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. Walking in the light means I have an open attitude toward admitting my sin. Now, let's push the pause button on that for a minute and think about this important question: if it's true that we all sin and at that very moment we have a choice to either walk in the light or do something else. What falls under the possible heading of the something else? Let me give you some options.

ANGER

One is just to **ignore what you did and act like it wasn't that big of a deal.** That especially happens when someone struggles with **explosive anger**. Am I talking to anybody here this morning like that? Where you pitch a fit, you have your meltdown and then for you it's over because all the energy has been expended. Well, the problem is that you've said all sorts of hurtful words, you've done all sorts of hurtful things but now you're ready to move on. You feel a whole lot better. You got it off your chest even if in the process you've used all sorts of sinful means in order to get it off your chest. But now you want to ignore the whole thing. You want to go from your sinful explosion to restored fellowship without what? Without walking in the light and without dealing with your sin. Wanting to enjoy fellowship without working at it.

DEFENSIVENESS

Here's another alternative to walking in the light, it's **becoming defensive** to **minimize your sin**, to make excuses for what you said or didn't say or what you did or didn't do. Some of us are incredibly creative at finding ways to **make ourselves look as good as possible** and every time we move down that road, we're putting another layer of shellac on our fellowship with God, another layer of shellac on our fellowship with other people.

No Credible Defense for Your Sin

Maybe this will help this morning: friends, **there is no credible defense to excuse your sin.** If you tend to be defensive, there is no credible defense to excuse your sin. Your **past** didn't make you do it even though you may have had a very difficult past. Your **circumstances** didn't make you do it even though your circumstances may be trying. **Your body** didn't make you do it although you may be struggling physically in some way. There is **no credible defense** to excuse your sin.

Walking in the Light Helps Restoration

Here's another way of thinking about this: walking in the light, it helps you move toward **restoration**. It helps you move toward fellowship. It helps you move toward reconciliation. Failing to walk in the light takes you on the opposite path and when you ignore your sin, when you become defensive, you're going further and further and further and you continue to tell yourself that narrative, you continue to focus on the sins of the other person and here's the problem: for some, by the time you actually turn around and are willing to walk in the light, you have separated yourself an incredible distance from the other person. You have been going the opposite way of what God designed. **Defensiveness** can kill a relationship stone cold dead. So you can ignore what you did or you can become defensive.

ATTACKING THE OTHER PERSON

Here's another one: you can go on the attack. **Attack the other person**. I can choose to walk in the light or go on the attack. I can either pause, take a deep breath, ask, "Did I sin in any way to create this problem?" or I can focus forcefully and exclusively on what I believe the other person did. I'll tell you, I've been in this counseling world a long time and **some people are like a dog with a sweat sock in its mouth on this point**. They are absolutely going to grab onto their narrative, they are absolutely going to attack everybody else in their life. They're absolutely going to refuse to admit what they did was wrong and just like a dog with a sweat sock. **Do you understand what I'm talking about?** And you could lift that dog right off the ground. It will not let go of that sweat sock. Some folks, that's the way they are with their narrative. They are going to continue to attack the other person. They're going to continue to focus exclusively and forcefully on what the other person did an absolutely refuse to walk in the light.

Steps to Walking in the Light

Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. People who have done that are skilled at taking at least four steps whenever a problem arises. The first is to carefully **ask**: *what is a sovereign God trying to reveal about my heart?* Secondly, to **faithfully pray**, admitting to the Lord, "I don't like to walk in the light. I need your help to handle this situation well." Then thirdly, to **refuse to even consider how the other person may have failed** until you first get the log out of your eye. In fact, if I had the ability to do this, I'd do it for every one of us: on the way out I would just close down the valve of you focusing on the failures of others and open wide you focusing first on the way you sinned in a situation. I understand at some point there has to be a balance. There is a place for you to deal with the sin of others but for some of us, that valve is all the way open and focusing on the ways we need to change is absolutely closed. Fourth, sincerely ask the other person if you sinned against them in some way. Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. **Walking in the light means that I have an open attitude toward admitting my own sin.**

III. A true Christian lives in God's light by constant repentance and confession of sin (1:9-10).

Well, wouldn't it be great if there were some kind of test? If I told you right now that there is a test that you could take to determine how well you're doing in the matter of walking in the light. Would you want to take that test? I know you would.

Here is walking in the light in action. This is the best-known verse in the text, "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1:9). You see, the answer to the question is: how can I know if

I'm walking in the light is, a person who is walking in the light is **regularly and specifically confessing sin to God and regularly and specifically asking forgiveness of others**. That's what confession means, *homologeō*, to **say the same thing about my sin that God does**.

By the way, if you say you have no struggle with sin, then 1 John 1:10 is for you, "If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts" (1:10).

Can I now ask you the same questions I posed several times? **Have you been walking in the light**? When is the last time you confessed anything specifically to God or specifically to others? I'm amazed in counseling how many spouses say to me, "I have never heard my spouse admit he's wrong. I don't ever remember my husband asking my forgiveness or anybody else's ever." I've had teenagers say that to me, "I've never heard my parents ever ask forgiveness. I don't know anything about that." What does that tell you? Either we're dealing with a home filled with perfect people who never have to ask forgiveness or we're dealing with a whole bunch of people who are **not walking in the light**. Listen, can we just be honest? It's the Lord's day in the Lord's house. None of us do this as often as we should. None of us do this as comprehensively as we should. Is that right?

IV. A true Christian lives in God's light because of the work of Christ (2:1-2).

2:1-2, "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate** who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world."

Well, John concludes with the truth that makes it easier for us. This is a very unfortunate chapter division. You understand the chapter divisions were added later. H

Here is deep encouragement. You are able to walk in the light because of the ongoing intercession of Christ. John tells us about **the person and work of Christ** in verses 1 and 2. It says that Jesus Christ is our **Advocate**! What does that mean? That means **he's our lawyer**. He is the one who argues our case. The Bible says, the devil is accusing us before the throne of God day and night.

Revelation 12:10, "The accuser of our brethren is cast down who accused them before the throne of God day and night." I don't know about you, but for me, he doesn't necessarily have to lie. I give him plenty of fodder for him to make the case against me every day. The Bible says that Jesus pleads my case. He argues on my behalf but not on the basis of my own merit. Jesus could never say, "Heavenly Father, Matt is not that bad or other people are worse or look at all the good he has done." No!

Do you understand that **Jesus could not be our advocate unless he was also our propitiation**. What does that mean? He's the **satisfaction**. And the picture

is in heaven of the devil accusing me before the throne of God, he is making some excellent points against me, and how I deserve hell.

My Attorney Pleads My Case

Then my attorney, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands up and he shows the wounds in his side and the prints in his hands and he says, "That sin has been paid for once and for all." "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). Friends, it's at that point that the heavenly Judge wraps the gavel and he says, "Case dismissed."

We Need to Benefit Fully from Christ's Work

I'm suggesting to you that when we fail to walk in the light, we're also failing to benefit fully from his propitiatory work, the blood of Christ on the cross.

If you want fellowship with God, you have to walk in the light. If you want to walk in the light, you have to have an open attitude toward admitting your sin. If you want to know if you have that attitude, ask yourself how often you're confessing your sin both to God and to others and when you struggle with that, remember that he is your advocate and he's your propitiation.

Conclusion

A Christian lives a life of constant repentance. Repentance means a worldview change, to see your sin and yourself as God sees you.

This takes place by walking in the light. As God speaks to us about our sin through the Word and the Spirit and the church, we confess our sins. A Christian with God dwelling in them cannot live comfortably in sin.