

God is Light

The Problem of Sin Part 1

1 John 1:5-7

Summary: God is like light in that He is the source of all truth and exposes truth. He cannot be mixed with darkness, which means fellowship with Him do not walk in the darkness (that is, live in a manner that is inconsistent with the truth about themselves and about God). Walkers in the light do that (step into darkness), but they do not walk in the darkness because they return to the light (repentance). Return by seeking restored intimacy with God. You know it is time to stop grieving and return to rejoicing when you feel the joy, peace, etc. of His presence.

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," and 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 have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

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Introduction: The problem of Christian sin

When you read through the New Testament you read a lot about our new heart and new nature, and that Christians are holy and righteous and pure, and yet our own personal experience is the experience of failure after failure and sin after sin. There are so many passages in Scripture about the righteousness of the believer, and not so many about the problem of sin in the life of the believer. There are not a lot of

them, but there are some, and today's passage is one of them. Starting here in 1:5 all the way through 2:2, John addresses the problem of sin in the life of the Christian.

And he has a very gripping way of introducing this section.

Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you

John says, I walked and talked with Jesus during His earthly ministry, and let me tell you what Jesus told me. That is about as compelling an introduction as a person could possibly have – “Let me give you the message that God in human flesh told me to deliver to you.”

Premise 1: God is light

Preaching about God's nature

Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light

That is what Jesus told John to tell us. If you boil it all down to one statement, it is a statement that begins with the words “God is.” I regret the fact that more of the sermons that I have preached in my lifetime do not have “God is...” as the first two words in the title. I think a lot of failure in the Church and in individual Christians' lives is due to the fact that we tend to want to skip directly to “how to” without starting with “God is.” There is no great advantage to increasing in godliness if you do it in a way that brings glory to you rather than to God, so God made it so we will not have success unless we do it by delighting in God and experiencing His attributes.

God is like light (it is a metaphor)

Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light

What does that mean? When John says, “God is light,” obviously that is a metaphor. God is not photons. When you send a beam of light through a prism you did not just bend God. He is not literally light any more than Jesus is literally a sheep gate or a loaf of bread. When John says, “God is light,” it means that God is like light.

So then the question is, in what way does John mean to compare God to light? What are the points of similarity that John has in mind and that he expects the readers to focus on? He is not like light in very way. He does not travel at the speed of light (in fact He does not travel at all). He is not affected by gravity, or dependent on a source like light is. There are a number of ways God is unlike light. So in what ways are we to think of Him as being similar to light?

The metaphor of light in Scripture

Scripture makes frequent use of the metaphor of spiritual light to describe a number of things.

Sometimes it refers to goodness and righteousness as opposed to evil. (Isa.5:20)

Sometimes light refers to joy as opposed to sorrow and gloom. (Ps.97:11, Micah 7:8-9)

Sometimes light is used to describe beauty and glory. (Isa.60:1, Lk.2:32)

Sometimes it is used as a metaphor for spiritual life. (Ps.36:9, Jn.1:4))

And sometimes light is a metaphor for salvation and all that goes with it. (Isa.58:8, Ps.27:1, Ps.36:9)

And very often – probably most often – light is a metaphor for truth or that which exposes the truth.

John's use – Truth or that which exposes truth

And that is the way John uses the metaphor throughout his writings. Light is one of John's favorite words. He uses it 66 times in his writings. And when John talks about light some of those other ideas are probably also included, but the main emphasis is always on light as truth or that which exposes the truth.

So the statement "God is light" means He generates nothing but truth. His representation of Himself and of everything else is completely accurate and without any deception. No wrong thoughts or ideas ever come from Him. He does not lack knowledge in any area, and if anything in Him is hidden it is because of our blindness – not because of darkness in Him. So far all of John's opponents no doubt agree. In fact, judging from the writings of that time there is probably no statement that would be more agreeable to the false teachers John was writing against than the statement that God is light. At this point there is nothing but a big chorus of amens from everybody.

Premise 2: There is no darkness in Him

But then John takes them on a little journey through logic. If God is light, then in Him there is absolutely no darkness at all. The structure John uses here is very, very strong – not one bit of darkness. Pretty hard to argue against that. If you mix white paint and black paint you get grey. If you mix light and darkness you just get light, and no darkness. It is impossible for there to be darkness in light. So they cannot argue with John's first premise. If there is light, darkness is not there. And if there is darkness, light is not there. They cannot coexist. So there can be no union between God and darkness.

Conclusion: Fellowshippers with light cannot walk in darkness

At this point John's opponents are probably still on board. But then he takes the next logical step.

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

This is where all the amens die out. Having fellowship with God, according to John's logic here, has something to do with walking. Walking just refers to moving through life. Every moment you live you take another step down whatever path you are on. So walking is the day to day, moment by moment activity of living life. This is where John confronts their error head on. From what we can gather, it seems that these people thought fellowship with God was something that really had nothing to do with day to day life. It is religion. It is something that takes place during times of prayer or meditation or worship. It is what you do at church.

And John just blasts away with both barrels at that kind of thinking and his logic is impeccable. If God is light, then there can be no trace of darkness in Him. So someone whose day to day actions in his life are darkness is not in Him. And if he claims to have fellowship with God he is a liar. He is a liar with his mouth and a liar with his life. It is not just that he fails to tell the truth – John says he does not *do* the truth. The truth is something that must be believed, told, and carried out. People who claim to know God but who walk in the darkness are liars inside and out. John uses strong words. It is not just that they are mistaken – they are liars.

Does that mean they always know they are in error and they are intentionally lying? I don't think so. I don't think John's point is that they are intentionally lying. Rather it is that their teaching and their claims and the way they live their lives deceives people. And that is the issue. That is what John is upset about. These false teachers are leading people in the church astray. Their false doctrines are ruining people's lives, and some people are ending up in eternal hell forever because of it. If something you are doing or saying is leading people astray, your life is a horrible lie because it deceives. Doing it

on purpose is worse than doing it ignorantly, but either way deceiving people into hell is a despicable, wicked thing to do. And that is what you do when you claim to know God and walk in the darkness.

Walking in darkness means behaving as though truth isn't true

So what does it mean to walk in the darkness? Walking in darkness is the way you live when you have no knowledge of the truth. It is the way you live when you are detached from reality in the spiritual realm.

When you go for a walk in a pitch dark forest – why do you stumble? You stumble because the reality is that there is a log in the path, but you don't know that because you can't see. If there is light we can look and see the log and behave accordingly (by avoiding it). But when you cannot see you behave as though there were no log. You just keep walking and then fall on your face. Walking in the darkness means living a life that does not comport with or agree with or correspond to spiritual truth.

- In the real world sin is deadly, and is never worth it.
- In the real world the things of God are more wonderful than anything else.
- In the real world Jesus Christ is the only way to God.
- In the real world eternity matters far more than this short life.
- In the real world the Bible offers you a steak dinner and television offers you pond scum.
- In the real world God's Word is reliable and our own wisdom is not reliable.
- And in the real world, the real truth is that my life is shot through with sin and all kinds of evil.

That is reality. That is what you can see when you walk in the light. Walking in the darkness means living in a way that does not match up with that. It is when you live as though sin is sometimes worth it - and some pleasures are more wonderful than nearness to God - and this life matters more than eternity - and sometimes you should go with your own wisdom over what God says - and you are really not such a bad person. That is the darkness.

Walking in the Light

Living according to Truth about God and Self

About self- sinner

There are two parts to walking in the light. Walking in the light means walking in a way that is consistent with the truth about God and walking in a way consistent with the truth about yourself. The truth about yourself is that you are a finite, created being who has rebelled against your Creator and is deserving of eternal punishment in hell, and you have zero power to remedy that situation.

About God- Must have fellowship with the Apostles (forced to choose)

That is the truth about self. The truth about God can be summarized in one word – Jesus. The truth about God is whatever Jesus revealed about God as reported by the Apostles. If you disagree with anything John wrote or any of Paul's doctrine, or Peter's or James' or any other Apostle - you are not in the light.

It was very easy for John's readers when he said, "God is light." That was easy to agree with.

But when that requires that you agree with John and the Apostles (which is what he has been saying right from verse one), that puts them on the spot.

Now they have to choose – either follow John and the Apostles or follow the false teachers.

2 John 1:11 for the one who says, "Welcome," to him shares (koinonia) in his evil works.

You can either have *koinonia* (fellowship) with those teachers (which means you have *koinonia* (participation) in their wicked work, or you can have *koinonia* (fellowship) with John and the Apostles and in so doing have fellowship with God. John forces them to choose – they cannot have both.

There is an important lesson in that. It is not enough to just accept the truth; you must also reject error. It always amazes me when people tell me they love some radio preacher who is really sound, and in the same breath they tell me their other favorite teacher is some guy who is way out in left field doctrinally. And it is amazing to me how often that happens. I used to think everyone who loved the truth would automatically reject error - if they love some really good teacher, they would not like the bad teachers. But that is not always the case. Some people have appetites like a goat – they love a good, juicy, tender cut of prime rib and they love a nice tin can. They like both garbage and food, and cannot seem to tell the difference. Part of becoming a mature Christian is learning to both accept the truth and reject error.

Walkers in the light sin

And then John says not even that is enough. It is not enough to just accept truth and reject error in your mind. John requires that we live in a way that matches the truth. And if you live in a way that is not consistent with the truth, any claim you make to fellowship with God is a lie. You do not know God at all.

Now my guess is that nobody in this room who is paying attention is comfortable right now. Because if walking in the darkness means living in opposition to the truth, then we are all guilty. We all do that. We are all guilty of behaving as though God were not the greatest treasure – we do it many times every day. As James 3:2 says – we all stumble in many ways. If you just read through verse six it sounds like John is saying that unless you are sinlessly perfect you are in the darkness and have no fellowship with God. John is going to say a lot of things in this book that sound like that.

1 John 3:9 Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.

That really sounds like perfectionism, doesn't it? What are we to make of this? If we just deal as honestly as possible with the text, and let John say what he is saying without fudging his words to fit our theology or experience, don't we have to conclude that a true believer is sinless? That is what those who teach perfectionism say.

But let's see what John himself says. In verse seven he gives us the alternative to walking in the darkness – walking in the light. Let's see what walking in the light looks like. See if this sounds to you like sinlessness:

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.

So is John saying, "If you are sinless then He will purify you from all your sin"? That would be nonsense. If you are sinless what do you need purification for – there is no impurity there. Someone might say, "Maybe he means that if you attain sinlessness, then God will cleanse you from all past sin." But that is not what he is saying, because the word "cleanses" is in the present tense. That tense points to ongoing, linear action. All the verbs in this verse are present tense. If you are currently walking in the light then you are currently being cleansed from all your sin. So these are not sins of your past. These are sins you are currently committing. So if you walk in the light as He is in the light, Jesus' blood will purify you from all the sins you are currently committing.

Future sin not yet forgiven

By the way – not only does that rule out the idea that the sins are only in the past, it also rules out another idea that is very popular in our day – the idea that the moment you become a Christian God forgives all your sins, past, present, *and future*. The “and future” part does not come from the Bible. That is a product of human reasoning, and it is incorrect human reasoning. This verse is very clear that for the Christian, being forgiven is a current, ongoing reality. The sins you are committing now are being forgiven now.

Walking in Darkness means never coming into the light

So John’s own words prevent us from interpreting anything he says in this book to mean that the Christian does not sin. And in case verse seven slips past you, he gives us verses eight, nine and ten.

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 have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

So now we know that walking in the darkness is not just another way of saying “sin.” The people who are walking in the light and the people who are walking in the darkness are both sinning. So what is the difference? What is the difference between a person who sins regularly but who walks in the light and someone who walks in the darkness? If darkness is living in a way that does not align with the truth, then every time we sin we step into the darkness, right? So evidently there is a difference between that and actually *walking* in the darkness. What is the difference?

Not a matter of being “characterized”

Some people say the difference is a matter of magnitude or frequency of sin. They say that if your life is *characterized* by sin, then you are in the darkness. But if sin is the exception to the rule in your life, then you are in the light. I do not buy that answer. I do not think that is the right answer, and I am glad it is not the right answer. Because that would be about as unhelpful as I can imagine an answer being. How many times do you have to sin before you are characterized by sin? The truth is, if I am honest - I am characterized by sin. I fall short of the glory of God in my actions and thoughts and motives and inclinations and affections and attitudes every minute of the day. Since I have been a Christian I have committed thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of sins. Big ones, little ones, minor ones, major ones, socially acceptable ones, scandalous ones. I have sinned knowingly. I have sinned repeatedly. I have sinned defiantly.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.

That’s me. I want to be righteous, and I want to eliminate sin from my life altogether, but I fail to do what I want.

James 3:2 We all stumble in many ways.

That’s me. Galatians 5:17 and James 3:2 are true of me every day of my life. And do not get too down on me because it is true of you every day too. Anybody ever had a day when you were so spiritual and so holy that you opened your Bible and Gal.5:17 wasn’t there that day? James 3:2 was blank? How about...

Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sin

Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?

1 Kings 8:46 there is no one who does not sin

We all sin throughout the day every day. If the standard were that you cannot be characterized by sin we would all be in trouble because if doing something all day every day because you freely choose to is not being characterized by something then I don't know what characterized means.

So back to our question. We are all characterized in a huge way by sin. We all take countless steps into the darkness every day. So what is the difference between that and someone who actually walks in the darkness?

Never comes into the light

The answer is this – the one who walks in the darkness is someone who *never* comes into the light. Those who walk in the light and step into the darkness, grieve over that decision, and quickly step back into the light. But when those who walk in the darkness see the light, they avoid it.

John 3:19-20 This, then, is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.

When those who walk in the light stumble into the darkness, they retreat back into the light. Those who walk in the darkness do all they can to dodge the light, because they would rather remain in the darkness than be exposed for what they really are. If you want to see the difference between one who walks in the darkness and one who walks in the light just look at David and Saul. Both men committed terrible sins. Both men many times behaved in ways that were not consistent with the truth. But when Saul did that he would respond by remaining in the darkness. He would rationalize his sin, justify himself, adjust God's Word, shift blame to others – whatever it took to avoid being exposed and avoid having to give up being the captain of his own soul. But David would step back into the light. He would return to God in repentance. That is the difference. The person who walks in the darkness is one who will admit to sin, he will say he is sorry, he will even shed tears; but he will not step into the light. He will not let go of his treasured idols. He will not give up the things or people he thinks he needs to be happy. He will not allow the light of the truth to shine on his life and expose all the wickedness. He may admit a few things, but only carefully selected things. Mostly he dodges the light.

The one who walks in the light is different. When he steps into the darkness he sees the light and longs to return to it. And so he steps back into it – sin and all – he braces himself for the excruciating pain of all his wickedness being exposed. And as soon as he steps back into the light, to his amazement and delight, all his wickedness vanishes. The ugly, black blemishes disappear, and he is totally cleansed and fit to have fellowship with a God who is pure light.

Don't walk in the darkness!

Satan will tell you to wait to step back into the light

I want to urge everyone this morning – do not walk in the darkness. When you sin the enemy will try to use your guilt to destroy you. He will do everything he can to keep you in the darkness as long as he possibly can. He will tell you that because of your sin you are now unfit to enjoy closeness with God, and it is not appropriate for you to seek the presence of God just yet. He will tell you that you need to do some penance – or something to make up for what you did. Or he will tell you to just lay low

for a while until God's anger blows over. Satan will tell you whatever he has to tell you to keep you from seeking hard after nearness to God.

David's return to the light

That psalm describes what it was like for David when he stepped into the darkness for a time. During the time when he was in the darkness – not confessing his sin...

Psalm 32:3-4 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

That is what it is like for the Christian while he remains in the darkness. You cover up your sin, lie about it, pretend it is not so bad, make excuses for it, blame someone else, pretend you are something you are not - all the time you continue to refuse to face the truth about your sin because you cannot face the humiliation of exposure, you start to rot away from the inside out. People who walk in the darkness just stay in that condition indefinitely. But believers cannot stay in that condition, because God's chastising hand is heavy on them, and it is so miserable they finally decide they will do anything to be back in the light.

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

He came into the light, sin and all, and the moment he did so he experienced exactly what John described – the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed him from every sin. He experienced the blessedness that comes only when you step out of the darkness back into the light. That is why he starts the psalm by saying,

1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

The deceit is the darkness. It is the denial of the truth. We do that when we are not really ready to give up the sin. We make excuses and justify what we are doing and we live in a lie, because we are not really repentant. We might feel bad for our sin, and we might even admit to committing sin, but we are still living in some kind of lie that makes it so we do not have to take the hard, painful, excruciating steps of cutting off our access to that sin.

But when you let go of all that and confess the truth about yourself and about God and about reality, and you seek to be restored to nearness to Him, your sin is wiped away.

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found

(That phrase “while you may be found” is a warning. The chance to step back into the light is not available forever.) But if you take it, and you step back into the light, then when the mighty waters of God's judgment rise they will not reach you. God will be your hiding place that preserves you from His wrath.

Not easy in instant

Now, I don't want to oversimplify this process. When I say, “Step back into the light” that sounds like something that is very easy to do. It is usually not. The reason we step into the darkness in the first place is because something deep within us loves the darkness and prefers it to the light. And so in order to step back into the light something has to be done about that part of us that loves the darkness. It has

to be overcome with a greater love for the light – love for God. That is why the most important thing you could be doing every single day is cultivating a deeper love for God, and a greater appreciation of and experience of His attributes. That is why I am working on a devotional – “100 Attributes of God.” I do not know if the book will end up helping anyone else; I am mainly writing it for me – so that I start out each day thinking deeply about some wonderful attribute of God, and I spend that day seeking to experience that attribute so I will love Him more because the more I love the light the more I will prefer it over the darkness.

You will not be able to turn your back on the darkness and step back into the light out of mere resolve. That will work temporarily, but ultimately you will pursue what you love. The only way to really genuinely return to the light is to change your affections so you love the light more.

And even then – even when your heart is transformed and you begin to crave the light and prefer it over the darkness, even then the restoration is not always immediate. When Micah stepped into the darkness, and then repented and turned back to God, God’s anger at Micah lingered for a time. Restoration into the light did not happen instantaneously.

Micah 7:8-9 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

This is such a beautiful picture of what it looks like to return to the light when you have sinned and God is angry with you. Even though He is angry and you are feeling the sting of His rod, the only place of refuge is His arms of love. That is the only place in this universe where you can flee from His anger. So Micah says, “I am going to just seek restored intimacy with Him, and wait until it happens.” So often our temptation is to seek it halfheartedly, and if we don’t find it within a couple minutes, instead of waiting on God we just revert to some substitute to make us feel better. The warmth and joy of restoration that comes from nearness to Him does not come instantly or easily, so we say, “I’ll just find something that will deaden the pain here in the darkness.” And so we open the refrigerator, or click on the TV, or log on to the Internet, or whatever. Anything that is easier than seeking hard after God.

How to know when to stop grieving and start rejoicing

In the Agape 101 class last week the question came up, “How do you know how long you should grieve over your sin?” On the one hand we know God does not want us to beat ourselves up over our sin forever, right? He wants us to know the joy David talked about in Ps.32 – the joy of forgiveness and cleansing. He does not want us to mope around in self-loathing even after He has forgiven us and restored us. But on the other hand God does not want us to take our sin lightly either. Part of true repentance is a broken, contrite heart. When we sin against God in some egregious way, and our whole repentance process of confessing our sin and returning to God lasts all of 30 seconds, that does not match the Biblical pictures we have of proper sorrow over sin in repentance.

So how do you know the balance? How do you know when you have grieved enough and it is time to return to rejoicing in the Lord and in His forgiveness? I think a good answer to that question is right there in Micah seven. That whole passage is looking forward to something, isn’t it?

Micah 7:8-9 ...Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

He is grieving and sorrowing under the chastisement of God – and he is looking forward to the time when that will be over. How will he know when it is over? When he is back in the light and sees (experiences) God’s light and restoration.

The most bitter and painful form of chastisement from God is when He withdraws His presence from you. Any suffering in life can be endured with joy as long as you have the nearness of God's presence. But when He withdraws His presence not even the greatest joys of life can bring joy and satisfaction to your soul.

So you know the time of grieving is over when God grants you access once again to the nearness of His presence. Scripture says in His presence is joy and life and peace. So you sin, you repent, you are grieving and sorrowing in anguish of soul, and that pain and anguish drives you to seek hard after renewed nearness to God, and you keep doing that and keep doing that – even though He seems so distant and there is no joy, you keep seeking with all your heart until finally there is a glimmer of joy in your heart - joy that comes not from some earthly thing, but joy that is a direct result of fellowship with Him. He opens your eyes to understand and appreciate some wonderful thing in His Word. Or He allows your heart to be delighted in the experience of some attribute. Or He drains away your anxiety and gives you a taste of peace as you seek after Him. Those kinds of experiences are God saying, “Okay, the time in the woodshed is over. It is time for me to gather you into my arms and comfort you. It is time for restoration of the closeness and intimacy of our Father-son or Father-daughter relationship. The discipline is over.”

How long does that take? It is totally up to God. Sometimes it takes a long time. God wants us to understand the seriousness of departing from nearness to Him. Sometimes, even though we have repented and are seeking hard after Him, He waits a long time to grant the joy and peace that come from His presence. That is when the psalmists start crying out, “How long Oh Lord?”

Psalm 13:1-3 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? ... ³ Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death

Sometimes God will withhold the nearness of His presence so long it feels like if He waits any longer you will die. Times like that reveal what is really in our hearts. When God does that will we give up? Or will we be like David and just keep pressing after Him because the only alternative is death? Will we seek some substitute, or will we be like Peter and say, “Where else will we go – You alone have eternal life?”

God does that because he wants us to seek wholeheartedly after Him. God does not want you to respond to your sin by beating yourself up in some kind of effort to pay for your own sin. Self-inflicted punishment is not the solution. If you need to be beaten up or punished, let God's chastisement beat you up. Let yourself feel the acute pain of being banished from nearness to Him for a time – let that be the consequence for sin that causes the greatest pain.

And let God be the one who is in charge of when that consequence is lifted. Sometimes you will commit some horrible sin against God and come to Him in repentance, and seek nearness to Him, and right away – immediately – you open up your Bible and seek hard after Him, and you find joy and peace and sweet fellowship with Him come right away! Accept that! Don't say, “No, I have to be punished first!” If God decides to bypass the woodshed, that is His perfect wisdom – don't argue! Just enjoy closeness with Him, and let yourself be deeply and profoundly moved over the fact that God showed up in the woodshed with gifts and open arms instead of the rod in this particular instance.

And if you do not know for sure if what you are experiencing is really nearness to Him or some imagined restoration that is not reality- just remember this: you can never go wrong with seeking hard after God. If the restoration has happened or it has not yet happened the main thing you need to do is the same – seek hard after nearness to Him. And if you are not sure if you have attained it, seek even harder after it. To whatever degree you have joy in His presence rejoice over that and to whatever degree you do not, grieve over that and seek harder after Him.

But always remember – the goal of repentance is not to punish yourself to make up for your sin. The main goal is not to alleviate your conscience and it is not to make you feel better about yourself. It is to be restored to intimacy with God – period.

Sometimes we sin and we are not even upset about loss of intimacy with God. We are upset because we failed. We are mad at ourselves because we proved ourselves to be weak or evil. We are upset because we have to deal with a guilty conscience or some painful earthly consequences. We are bothered because of the embarrassment.

When you repent of your sin, search your heart and ask yourself, “What is it that I am trying to achieve? Am I doing this just to get rid of the pain of failure, or guilt, or embarrassment, or earthly consequences?” None of those are real repentance. Even wicked people want to be rid of those things. True repentance is a heart that says, “God is light, and nearness to that light is better than life at its best. I have stepped into the darkness and I want more than anything else to be restored to nearness to the One who is the light of life.” When that is your attitude, rejoice, because the blood of His Son Jesus is purifying you from every sin!

Benediction: 1 Timothy 6:15-16 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Devotionals

God is Light

1 John 1:5-7 Day 1

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," and 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.

Psalm 27:1-3 Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Light is what opens the door to reality. When you are in the dark there might be wonderful things all around you - spectacular clouds, gorgeous flowers, fascinating information in a book; but without light you are not only unable to experience them, but you remain unaware that they are even there. When the lights come on, nothingness is instantly transformed into manifold fullness. The door to reality swings wide open, and, by means of the marvelous gift of perception, you can have interaction with reality.

The same holds true in the spiritual realm. We read in Scripture about invisible realities that do not seem real to us at all. We have heard that Satan is like a vicious, deadly, roaring lion, but he seems more like nothingness. We have heard that God's attributes are so delightful that they cause singing and dancing and shouts of joy, but so often they seem more like a mere list of facts. God's chastisement is rumored to be excruciating, but to us it seems worth risking it in order to have a few seconds of shallow pleasure. The law of sowing and reaping (Gal.6:7), the longness of eternity, the hotness of hell, the food-likeness of God – all of it, we have been told,

is real and is right here with us in this dark room, but in the darkness it seems like nothing but an ethereal, substanceless collection of thoughts and ideas and words.

But they are real, and to navigate successfully through life we must live as though they are real – which is impossible to do in the dark. When the lights come on, however, believing the truth about the unseen world is suddenly easy!

The lights do not all come on at once. One day your eyes are opened to what an amazing joy it is to experience God as your refuge, but when you think about his eternality or omnipotence your heart remains flat and unmoved. Each new world of wonder (attribute of God) we explore takes wholehearted, focused, intense, zealous seeking before the lights begin to come on. In this life we see “but a poor reflection in the mirror” (1 Cor.13:12). But oh, how much better even of reflected glimpse of His glory is than darkness!

Psalm 139:11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will crush me and the light become night around me,"¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

How strange and yet fitting it is that we would fear being crushed by darkness. We are such fragile, weak fearful creatures. All it takes to scare us is darkness, which is literally nothing. We require no hostile power to feel threatened. All that is needed to utterly destroy us is the lack of things we need. Nothingness would mean instant ruin, as we depend on so many things (air, water, light, warmth, food, love, joy, peace, awe...). We are so weak and so dependent that darkness, which is nothing, can have a crushing effect on us. Even if we are surrounded with all the 10,000 blessings we need to live, still we are gripped with terror unless we can see them. Their presence, abundance, sufficiency, and availability are not enough; we have to be able to see them. Without the hope that comes from perceiving the good things that we need we are crushed by hopelessness.

God is light. He enables us to see His marvelous, bountiful provision.

Experiencing this attribute:

If you had no sensory perception (could not see, hear, feel, taste, or smell) you could have no awareness or enjoyment of any of the things that are surrounding you in the room you are in right now. Light is the medium that carries the information about those things into your eyes. God is light. He is the medium of spiritual perception. Think about the spiritual realities that your soul does not seem to be fully convinced of (for example, the certainty of God’s provision, or the fact that fellowship with Him would be better than the pleasure of some sin). Cry out to God to open your eyes to see those realities.

Now think of some spiritual truths that your soul is fully convinced of – things that really do *seem* true to you. Those things seem true not because of the force of the evidence alone, but because you have experienced this attribute of God. The Light has shined in your eyes! Praise Him for being light to you.

The closer you are to God and the more you experience fellowship with Him the more the eyes of your heart will see. Draw near to Him and darkness will give way to light.

Each time you understand something in Scripture or gain insight about Scripture from a sermon or book, remind yourself that you are, at that moment, experiencing the light-likeness of God!

What are some areas that seem to remain dark for you (spiritual truths that do not seem true to you)? How could you experience the light-likeness of God in those areas?

God is Light

1 John 1:5-7 Day 2

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," and 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.

John 1:4,5,9 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Jesus is the Light of the world, who brings light to every man. Humanity, apart from Him, is in utter darkness. He is the only way we can know any truth or have any knowledge of God – the only knowledge and relationship that matters. But He is not just the light of the world; "He," says David, "is my light, and my salvation."

Psalm 139:11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will crush me and the light become night around me,"¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Experiencing this attribute:

The man with a blindfold may know a lot about the sun, but it is not a light *to him*.

Experiencing this attribute of God happens when God opens your eyes so that His great light is actually a light to you, in your life. It shines on your path, so you know where to walk as He guides you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. His light illumines your mind, so you can understand truth about Him. It lights up your heart, so you can accept and believe and embrace as wonderful the truth about Him. His light shines inside your heart and conscience, exposing your sin so you can see to repent. His light warms and softens your heart so that you are willing to repent. It turns your night to day so that what was a mere list of facts becomes a world of reality, and what you once merely acknowledged as true now actually *seems* true to your soul.

No wonder the psalmist thought of *light* as being a virtual synonym for *joy*.

Psalm 97:11 Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.

Micah 7:8-9 Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

The darkness is the place of gloom and sorrow. The light is the opposite of that.

Oh, glorious God in heaven, is not Your light my very life and joy? Your light brightens my life. Dear Lord God, please, open my eyes wider. By Your grace they are open, but are still so dim. Most days I drift back into dullness and spiritual sleep countless times during the day and become oblivious to the blazing sun right in front of my face. Oh, for the day when this flesh is redeemed and I will be eternally awake and alert to You! Lord, hasten that day. Let it begin today in some measure. Let me see and be warmed and brightened with joy today by Your light. When I drive my car, dear Father, remind me that You are the light unto my path, showing me where to go in life and leading me in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. As I listen to sermons or read books, remind me that You are the light that illumines my mind (so I can understand truth about You), my heart (so I can accept and believe and embrace as wonderful the truth about You), my conscience (exposing my sin so I can see to repent), my will (so that I am resolved to repent), and my affections (so I desire You more than sin). Each time something favorable happens, remind me that You are the light of joy that brightens life.

In your life right now which part of your is most in the dark – your mind, heart, conscience, will, or affections?

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The light-likeness of God

Promise to trust: He will enable me to see the truth about Him, about myself, and about the world, and allow me to interact with reality.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Insight, understanding, changed affections (delight in the good and distain for the bad), wisdom, repentance

God is Light

1 John 1:5-7 Day 3

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," and 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.

Good morning dear Lord, teach me how to stir up my soul to praise You. My soul is so prone to sluggishness, blindness, nearsightedness, and dullness and inattention to Your glory. Wake up, soul! Arise! Fall to the ground in awe! The King Himself is present!

Psalm 104:1-2 Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. ² He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Ps.103 is designed to stir our souls to praise Him for His benefits. Ps.104 is designed to stir our souls to praise Him for His glory reflected in the creation. It teaches us how to become skilled at seeing His glory reflected in the world He made.

And His glory is not hidden. God has clothed Himself in the very means by which perception takes place - light. If light itself is His garment, there is no excuse for not seeing Him. He has not hidden Himself from us. There is no excuse, then, for our dullness other than closed eyes. *Pry them open Lord. Make my heart interested enough to see Your glory that it will open the eyes of my sluggish soul – eager to see. It is an amazing thing, dear Father, that You have revealed Yourself to us! Let me have the drive and eagerness to see Your glory that I so often have for seeing impure things. Let the intensity of my desire to behold Your power and glory at least match the intensity of desire I have for the sins my flesh so craves. .*

Experiencing this attribute:

Whenever you turn on a light, so that you can see clearly what you could not see when it was dark, let that remind you to take a moment to delight in God's self-revealing nature. That which is hidden to us is hidden not because of deception or secrecy, but because of our own inability or unwillingness to gaze upon true brightness.

And whenever something about God or His Word becomes clear in your mind, so that you can see the meaning and significance and implications for life, and you are suddenly able to appreciate the sweetness of it – realize that is much, much more than a mere intellectual breakthrough. It is God turning on the lights. Each time you understand and delight in some truth about God You have just experienced this attribute of God!

Have you experienced this attribute of God in the past several minutes? If so, revel in the fact that He is right there in the room with you and has granted you access to His favorable presence. If not, keep seeking, harder and harder until you do experience His nearness.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The light-likeness of God

Promise to trust: He will enable me to see the truth about Him, about myself, and about the world, and allow me to interact with reality.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Insight, understanding, changed affections (delight in the good and distain for the bad), wisdom, repentance

God is Light

1 John 1:5-7 Day 4

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," and 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.

Psalm 96:6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 104:1 Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

Psalm 145:4-5 One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

Splendor (HADAR) – to be thought of and treated with distinction, honored, regarded as dignified, powerful, and impressive. Used often in lists with glory, strength, power, honor.

Majesty (HUD) – very similar to HADAR. Impressiveness, magnificence, awe-inspiring qualities

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Some things are big and powerful but not beautiful. Others have beauty but not power. The combination of those in God is an especially delightful thing. He awes and delights at the same time. His terrifying presence attracts us.

Experiencing this attribute:

Are God's splendor and majesty attributes that we must now know only in theory, and that can only be experienced someday in heaven when we see Him face to face? Or is it possible to experience them now? Ps.145 connects them with God's works and mighty acts. Each generation will experience them and tell about them to the next generation. It is possible to experience some of God's splendor and majesty when we observe His mighty works, if we have a conscious awareness of those mighty works as coming from the hand of a majestic, splendorous God.

It is difficult to have much of an experience of God's splendor merely by thinking about it in abstract terms. Sitting indoors and contemplating a high mountain or brilliant sunset does not have the same effect on the heart as standing outdoors and actually beholding them. Being outdoors has an effect on all the senses that have a cumulative effect in assisting the soul. The smell of pine trees, feel of the breeze on the skin, sounds of nature, all that is taken in by the eyes – it can all add together to bring the soul to a point of delight that is unmatched by simply thinking about such things. It is those kinds of experiences that we must use to give our souls a glimpse of the majesty and splendor of God. At a moment when the soul is staggered and awed, then is the time that the soul is especially disposed to be able to experience awe in the presence of God – realizing that He is far greater, far more beautiful, far bigger, far more threatening, far more lovely than what is currently creating feelings of awe.

Simply watching something awesome in nature and thinking that God is greater, however, is not necessarily an experience of the splendor and majesty of God. Experiencing God is more than having true thoughts about Him. It is never less than having true thoughts (don't ever bypass the mind or attempt nearness to God apart from truth!), but true thoughts alone are not themselves experiences of fellowship with God. One has experienced the presence of God when her soul is moved and awed and delighted by His presence.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The light-likeness of God

Promise to trust: He will enable me to see the truth about Him, about myself, and about the world, and allow me to interact with reality.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Insight, understanding, changed affections (delight in the good and distain for the bad), wisdom, repentance

God is Light

1 John 1:5-7 Day 5

The God whose discipline is only redemptive

Heb.12:9-11 We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! **10** Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

For the world, God metes out punishment for sin that is strictly punitive. It does not change them. In fact in some cases it drives them into even deeper rebellion against God. It is designed not to restore them but to destroy them. But for us, 100% of what God does in response to our sin is remedial (corrective). It is never mere punishment. It restores and corrects us. If you are a Christian, God has nothing for you but mercy and grace. NOTHING! There is no condemnation for us.

Ro.8:1 There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Even when He turns His face away from you it is 100% redemptive. In fact, the purpose of God's chastisement is precisely to protect you from His judgment.

1 Cor.11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

When God tries to produce a harvest of righteousness (Heb.12:11) in someone, does He succeed? Yes! God brings His discipline so that the person might share in the very holiness of God and produce a harvest of righteousness.

Experiencing this attribute:

When a person proves himself to be a horrible sinner our tendency is to just discard him as worthless. But God is the great recycler of ruined souls. He not only accepts them but in His accepting He renews them and takes what is worthless and makes it a work of eternal beauty.

There is a joy that continues even when we are crushed in sorrow over our sin, because His purposes in redemption are bigger even than our sin! Your fall is temporary. His promises are eternal. His eternal, perfect plan cannot be derailed even by our sin. And He has promised that He will restore us.

The rod is excruciating. It is not the suffering of the normal pains of daily life. It is acute pain that is so severe that it is to be more frightening to us than anything the world can do to us (and the world can inflict tremendous suffering). In fact, fear of chastisement is the motive that drives us to persuade people to become Christians, because our fear of discipline makes us realize how utterly fearsome hell is.

2 Cor.5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. **11** Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

Richard Baxter said it well: “If God’s threatenings be true why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them and put them into such freights without a cause?”¹ (The Reformed Pastor)

I bless Your holy name, dear God, for the blessed gift of chastisement. Thank You Lord, that I can trust You to give me exactly what I most need, perfectly tailored so that any part that is not absolutely necessary for my good is trimmed off. Thank You that in the moments of my most excruciating pain I can have 100% certainty that it is all for my good. Not even a little bit of it is sheer punishment with no redemptive, restoring effect. Thank You, dear God, that You restore me. You renew my soul and refresh me. When I rush headlong into death and destruction You bring new life and restore my soul. You heal me. It is painful to be under Your scalpel when deep surgery is needed, but I can delight in the knowledge that when I feel that pain it is always, always the Surgeon’s scalpel and never the mugger’s switchblade.

Micah 7:8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. ⁹ Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.

How seriously do you take God’s chastisement? Scripture says we should have great fear of incurring it (fear that keeps us from sin), and great joy when it does come knowing that it is only redemptive. When we take it lightly we have little or no fear of it, and when it does come we curse it.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The light-likeness of God
Promise to trust: He will enable me to see the truth about Him, about myself, and about the world, and allow me to interact with reality.
What will result if I experience this attribute today: Insight, understanding, changed affections (delight in the good and distain for the bad), wisdom, repentance

¹ *The Reformed Pastor*