

God is Light **1 John 1:1-2:2**

Introduction

Like much of the New Testament (e.g., Gal. 1:6-10; Col. 2:4,8,16), 1 John was written both to witness to the life, word, and Person of Jesus, and also to call believers back to the original gospel. Many false teachers sprouted up around the early church, and the apostles worked hard to set the record straight (see 2:24-26). The apostle John, presumed to be the author of 1 John, wrote to encourage and exhort Christians who were being told that Jesus was not the Messiah and not the Son of God (2:22), and that He did not in fact come in the flesh (4:3). These false teachings amount to a claim that Jesus is not Savior and is not Lord. If He is not the Messiah and did not come in the flesh, then He does not save us from sins. And if He does not save and is not the Son of God, then He is not Lord, and we have no obligation to obey or follow Him. This is, at least in part, what the apostle John is facing in this letter.

Summary of the Text

In 1:1-4, John emphatically claims to have authoritative testimony to the life, words, and person of Jesus Christ. He was made manifest, and John has declared what he saw and heard to his audience so that they might have fellowship with the apostles and with God and so that their joy would be full. In 1:5-10 (and 2:1-2), John declares the message given to him, “that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” John demonstrates that this truth dispels certain false claims being perpetrated among Christians and encourages Christians to walk in the light.

Savior and Lord

The first lie that John attacks is the claim “that we have fellowship with God and walk in darkness” (v. 6). Walking in darkness is walking in unbelief or living in sin. John could be referring to a particular set of false teaching (e.g., the Judaizers who wanted to return to the “shadows” of the old covenant – cf. Heb. 10:1, Col. 2:16-17), but there is also a general application (cf. Acts 26:17-18, 2 Cor. 6:14). To walk in sin and unbelief is fundamentally to refuse submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord. When we do this and at the same time claim fellowship with God, John says we lie and do not practice (or live out) the truth. It doesn’t matter how much you make it look like you have fellowship with God if you have your stash of little private sins reserved for you. God is light and so if you are in fellowship with Him, His light chases away the darkness. If you are holding on to your darkness, to your sin, you should ask if you really do have fellowship with God. If you do not have Christ, if you do not walk in the light, if you are walking in darkness, you are a liar if you claim fellowship with Him.

But, “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (v. 7). Here, John clearly identifies Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) *and* the Son of God (cf. 2:23). Jesus has in fact been seated, as the Son of God, at the right hand of the Father as King of kings (Heb. 1:1-3). If we deny that Jesus is the Messiah or the Son of God, then we deny that He is King. And if He is not King, we do not need to obey Him. However, it is His blood shed on the cross alone that can cleanse us from all sin. If we are walking in the light (i.e., believing the revelation of Jesus as Lord and Savior and living like it), John assures us of fellowship with one another,

with the apostles, and thus with God (1:3). Not only that, he also assures us of the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. We don't need anything else to clean us. And in fact, nothing else will.

Naming Sin

Jesus' blood is powerful to cleanse us from all sin, but this does not mean that we are sinless. Apparently, this was another claim made by John's opponents. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (v. 8). John says we lie to and about ourselves if we claim that we are sinless or that we have attained to a state of sinless perfection. Skipping to v. 10, John also says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." We all sinned in Adam (cf. Rom. 3:23, 5:12). We know that if God would mark iniquities, if He held our sins against us, none of us could stand before Him (Ps. 130:3). John shows that this is not just a doctrinal quibble or theological conversation. This is a matter of life and death. Do we agree with God about our sin and sinful nature? We blaspheme God by claiming a guiltless past (cf. Rom. 4:10ff). If we call God a liar, God's Word, the revealed eternal life (v. 2), is not in us. If the Word of life is not in you, you do not have life and no hope, since He alone gives eternal life.

John clearly assumes that we will have and commit sin. So, between the lies of v. 8 and v. 10, John says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive (or, "so that He forgives") us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Instead of deceiving ourselves about our sin (v. 8), we should confess our sins. Confession of sin at root identifies the sin as God does, calling it what God calls it, because God is light and in Him is no darkness. God is faithful and righteous, faithful to forgive those He purchased with Christ's blood and righteous (Gr., *dikaios*) to completely cleanse away unrighteousness (Gr., *adikia*). The righteousness of God (toward those in Christ) is infectious. His righteousness makes righteous (Rom. 3:26). His righteousness results in our righteousness. We *can* be free from sin, but not by claiming to have attained it ourselves. It is only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 6:11,14).

Conclusion

The Christian life is a life of trust and a life of war. We trust in our Savior, Jesus Christ, *because* He saved us. We trust His witnesses and His Word. It is on the foundation of Scripture, the Word of God, the revelation of Jesus Christ, that we stand (vs. 1-4). God is light, and we walk in the light (vs. 5-10).

Because of this, you, Christian, are in a war. If you are not fighting, you are losing. You cannot serve any other Lord in place of Jesus. You cannot cling to your sin. You cannot walk in darkness and have fellowship with God, because God is light. You cannot pretend that a particular sin in your life is harmless. But the grace of God is so incredible that the first step in fighting sin is not to grit your teeth and "do better." No, you fight by simply acknowledging the sin and calling it what God calls it. If you are not in Christ, if you are not in the light, there is nothing you can do to be cleansed from the guilt of your sin. But if you flee to Christ, if you confess with your mouth that He is Lord and you believe God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9). And then, if you confess your sins, His blood cleanses you completely. How is this possible? How can it really be that simple? Because Jesus Christ is your Advocate with the Father. "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

It is in this and this alone that we have hope. And glory be to God.