

(1 John #6) Walking in the Light - Part II

by J. Glyn Owen

Walking in the light means living in fellowship with God, who is light, and being aware of our sinfulness in our natures, and the key to this is confession and forgiveness.

Duration: 45:19

Scripture: 1 John 1:6

Topics: "Following Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher explores the nature of God as described by John in the Bible. According to John, God is light, love, and life. The preacher emphasizes that when we claim fellowship with God, we come into His light and are exposed to His judgment. This exposure reveals the sin in our hearts and minds, prompting us to recognize our need for forgiveness. The preacher highlights the importance of confessing our sins to God, as He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Transcript

Last Lord's Day morning we were saying how beginning with verse 6 in chapter 1 of this first epistle of John and proceeding over to verse 2 of chapter 2, the apostle is dealing with a certain behaviour, a kind of behaviour, and then with certain beliefs that are quite incompatible with our walking in the light and in fellowship with God. We were concentrating last Lord's Day morning on verses 6 and 7 and we were envisaging the incongruity of walking habitually in a moral climate that is here spoken of as darkness when we say with our lips that we have fellowship with God who is light. Now that simply makes no sense.

If we say that we have fellowship with God who is light whilst we habitually walk in darkness, not simply make an occasional excursion into sin, but walk in darkness, then John tells us categorically we're simple liars, simply liars. We are not speaking the truth. It is not so.

It cannot be so. But then he goes on to give us a word of comfort. There is an answer to our need.

We may have been guilty of walking in darkness while making such a profession. Well, says John, here is the answer. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, come right out into the light of God's holiness and judgment, we shall find that we shall have fellowship with him and fellowship with one another.

And what is more, the basis of its beginning and its continuance is this. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, will keep on cleansing us from all sin. Now, today we come to the first of two beliefs that are incompatible with walking in the light.

We cannot have fellowship with God, who is light, if we hold one or other of the two beliefs that are enunciated in verses eight, nine and ten. We shall take one this morning and we shall return to the second at some other time. But before we come specifically to this, can I just note the principle here? We note that our actions and our ideas are important in the sight of God.

Not only what we do, but what we think. Indeed, Scripture says, as our man sinketh in his heart, so he is. God puts tremendous premium on the kind of thoughts we entertain, on the beliefs that harness our energies and mold our behavior.

We live in a world which tends simply to place emphasis upon the way we behave. I'm sure you've met this many times. Someone has done something morally outrageous, and then someone chirps up, oh, but he's a good person at heart.

He's a very good neighbor. He's very kind to the poor, and these are great virtues. But the suggestion is, you see, because a man is a good neighbor, it doesn't really matter about his morals and his beliefs and his principles.

Now, I am not for one moment wanting to be understood as minimizing the importance of good living, moral living, care of the poor, and so forth. That's not the point. The point is that in the sight of God, behavior is important and belief is important.

It is not a question of either or, it is a question of both and. And this morning, we are coming to consider a particular denial which is in the realm of the mind, in the realm of thought, a denial of certain things. And let's look at it then.

You have it in verse eight, the denial that speaks of deception, or that spells deception. Here it is. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If your view of yourself at any given point in time is such that you claim concerning yourself that you have no sin in you, the apostle is being terribly blunt with you and with me this morning and he's saying to us straight in the eye, you're deceiving yourself. And what is more, you're not only guilty of self-deception, but the truth of the gospel, the word of God, is not in you. You may have a certain knowledge of its doctrines, but the word which is saving and sanctifying has never really got down into the depths of your soul.

Now, let's examine this. Two things I want to say concerning the denial that spells deception before we move on to the rest of the text in the next verse. I want us to look first of all at the claim that is envisaged and then at the conclusion that is reached.

Here is the claim. If we say we have no sin. Now, this kind of claim could conceivably be made as implying one or other of many things.

It could have been made as a denial of the presence of sin in our natures. As such, it could either be a denial of the fact that we have ever had sin in our natures or, whereas we may at some time or other have had sin in our natures, we haven't got it there anymore. You know that there are certain schools of theology, or of sanctification to be more precise, that claim that the roots of sin have been taken out of our

natures.

Now, John will have no truck with that. If we say we have no sin, either that we've never had sin in our natures or that we have had it at one time, but we've no longer got it, says John, as a conclusion which is rather shattering, that's a matter of self-deception. Now, there are many who claim something of this order.

There are schools of psychology, for example, which deny the objective basis of guilt. Freud took this point of view. There is no objective basis of guilt.

There is no such a thing as sin in and of itself in your nature or in any other way or in any other sense. On the other hand, it is right for us to say that there are some modern psychologists and psychiatrists who are coming back to the biblical point of view as far as this is concerned. I'm thinking, for example, of Meninger, the founder of the famed Meninger clinic in the United States of America, who in his fairly recent book, *Whatever Became of Sin*, is coming back very clearly to John's position and the biblical position about this.

Sin is something that has affected man in the depths of his being and his whole psychology and his whole approach is based upon this. If the words before us are a denial that even though we may have had sin in our natures at some previous point, but that we have it no longer, this denial might not simply have come from the kind of people that we have referred, who claim that the roots have been brought out by Jesus Christ or by the Holy Spirit, but the Gnostics claim the same thing. And you remember all the time John is thinking of certain heretics here and of their claims.

The Gnostics claim that. Some of them claim that they had this higher knowledge, whatever it was, in virtue of which they were now liberated completely from any tendency to evil. And then some of them put it in a slightly different way.

They said, in any case, sin is lodged in the body, in material things, not in the mind, not in the spirit, not in the nature. And so they excused themselves. Now that is the claim that we envisage here then.

Whether it be on the grounds of a psychological theory or a physiological, or whether it be on the grounds of an experience which we allege that we have had, whatever the grounds, whatever the reason for it, the claim is this. My nature now is free from the taint of pollution. My mind has no sin in it.

My imagination has no sin in it. My inner life, my emotions, my heart as the Bible speaks of it, is a heart that is free from sin. Perhaps I ought to say in passing on that at least two other expositors of note understand this passage differently.

They understand it to refer to the guilt of sin only. But most people will say, as I think we ought to say this morning, that if you can't thus interpret the passage, you can't thus interpret the words, they refer to sin, not sins, and sin not over against us, not a guilt that is standing over us or before us, but right inside, in us. Now the conclusion that John reaches.

If we say that we have no sin, what? That is the height of spirituality. John doesn't say that. If we say that we have no sin, says John, without any qualification whatsoever, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Says John, it is impossible to make a claim like that without being deceived. And not only that, without having to come to the conclusion ultimately that the truth of God has never really got deep down in the

depths and done its sanctifying and its illuminating work, because we don't know ourselves. Now we can only fully appreciate the significance of the charge of self-deception if we bear in mind the two foci in John's thinking here.

The first is this, the objective nature of God as light. And the second is the subjective ministry of the word in the soul of a believer. Now if you want to understand why John is so radical here and so ruthless, it's because of this.

He relates our condition to God who is light on the one hand, the objective nature of a holy God out there above me, and then secondly to the ministry of the word of God in the soul of a believer. Let's look briefly at the first. Who is God? What is God? Well, God is light, says John.

He will go on to say that God is love. He will go on to say that God is life. But here in this context, dominating the whole question of our fellowship with God and with one another, fundamentally, says John, God is light.

Now that means this, the moment you claim fellowship with God, the moment you claim to be an active Christian, a real Christian, that moment you come into the light. You come near to God. You are reconciled to Him.

You bring your life to Him and the light of God's eye and the light of God's judgment falls upon you. Now, says John, it is impossible for a man to be living in that light and not know that there is sin in his heart, in his mind, in his imagination, in the depths of his being. The very nature of God will bring up to the open the scum of the soul.

My dear friends, isn't this what you find? Isn't this what you find in experience, that when you come into the presence of the Holy One, you feel more of a sinner than when you live with a worldling? You can mix with people of the world and you don't feel morally uncomfortable or inferior, but when you come into the presence of God and you read the Word of God and you turn the whole shaft of divine light in upon your soul, how do you feel? Don't you feel like a worm? The light of God penetrating the soul of man means that I discover myself and I get to know myself as I really am. I cannot, therefore, be in fellowship with a God who is light and claim at the same time, there is no sin lodging in my nature, says John. Significantly, however, John does not leave the issue on that level.

The passage before us today, he stresses the fact that to deny the presence of sin in our natures means that God's truth is not in us. The Word of God has not gone deep down into the depths of our beings. Do you remember the psalmist saying, Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee? Do you remember the apostle Paul praying for the Colossians, that the Word of God may dwell in you richly? Now that means this, the Word of God coming into the mind, the Word of God penetrating into the soul.

My friends, do we know anything of this? Do you allow the Word of God to saturate your spirit, to go down into the depths of the soul and search? Do you remember what Jesus said in the parable of the seed and the sower? There are occasions when the soil is so hard that the seed falls as it were upon a rock. It does not penetrate. But that man is not a Christian.

That man is not a Christian. If the seed is only coming on the intellect, on the surface of the consciousness and we just toy with it in the mind and then decide this, that or the other on a purely intellectual plane, says John, that's not what it means to be a Christian. What it means to be a Christian is for the Word of God to

get into the soul and bring forth life.

Now if the Word of God is in me, what will it do? Well, the first thing it will do is this. It will reveal to me my own evil and sin and pollution and I shall become aware of myself as I never was before. The Word of God is the greatest diagnostician in this universe.

Men and women who allow it to penetrate become conscious of the fact that they are sinners. There is sin not only superficially in their lives but deep in the depths of their nature. Now if the Word of God is not doing that for us, then my friends, we need to take ourselves very seriously in hand.

I suggest to you, this is why so many professing Christians are slack about the means of grace. Be it public worship like this or be it the private discipline of reading the Word and of prayer. It is because we really do not allow the Word of God to get deep into the soul and to show us ourselves.

But the saints of the ages have been wont to do that. I was thinking this week as I was meditating upon this very challenging theme of the words of the saintly Murray MacChain. If ever there was a saint and a godly man, surely it was he.

I remembered a statement of his which goes like this, The seeds of all my sins are in my heart, and perhaps the more dangerous that I do not see them. He knew that there was sin in his nature. And because he knew that, he countered it.

He did battle against it. He sought the grace of God and found it. When at last, of course, we shall see our Lord and we shall receive a new body like unto his glorious body, we shall no longer know the passions and the lusts of this fallen body of ours, the scene of so much humiliation.

Then shall we not only be like him in one sense but in every sense. Whilst we are in the body, there will be sin in our natures. The denial that spells deception.

Now come with me to the confession that spells discovery. If I had to finish there this morning, it would be a very dismal ending, wouldn't it? And I wouldn't blame any of you if you went home and said, Well now, I really don't like to hear that kind of thing. And I don't know that I'll come back again.

But you know the word of God never ends there. John links another thought with this. He doesn't want us to stay there.

He wants us to get right on into the joy of the experience of God that he's been holding forth in the previous verses and will continue to do so later on. What do we do then? We've made this awful discovery about ourselves. There is sin in us.

When asked this, John, here it is. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now, before we come to it in detail, mark the two levels there.

What are we going to confess? John says, if we confess our sins, individual acts of sin, what will God do? Well, God will deal with the individual acts of sin. He will forgive them. But he'll do more than that.

He will cleanse us not only from those sins, but from the underlying corruption of our nature that affects us. And the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all the taint and the pollution of our fallen natures that we carry about with us. Now let's get down to it in a little more detail.

We have marked the change of fronts then. From one who is denying the presence of sin to the person who recognizes the realities of the situation brought to light by the indwelling truth and by the outshining of God's holiness. The person now envisaged has God's truth within him and he's living in the awareness of the fact that he is a sinner of heart in his nature.

Now, what is he going to do? Two things concerning this again. First of all, we're going to look at the condition presupposed and then the conclusion assured. Says John, the thing that we need to do, the key to the situation as far as practical life is concerned, is this.

If we confess our sins, confess the produce, the product of this underlying nature of ours which is evil. Confess the children that are born in the soul, the sins that emerge in our lives. Acknowledge them.

The discovery envisaged in this verse is imponderably precious. But it is morally conditioned. We shall discover that God has forgiven us for acts of sin and cleansing from the defilement of sin.

But it all has to start here, says John, if we confess. If we confess, we shall discover God's provision. Without the confession, we shall know little about it.

Now, what does it mean to confess our sins? I take it that perhaps someone might say that's a very rudimentary question and really shouldn't be asked in the presence of educated people. What does it mean to confess our sins? We all know that. I wonder whether we do.

I take it that the answer that someone thinking along those lines would say is that confession of sin is simply an acknowledgement of its presence. Now, that is basic to it, but confession of sin is something far, far bigger and greater and more significant than that. Biblically considered, confession of sin is something very big in a man's life.

It is something that he can't do thoughtlessly. It is not just when you're half falling into bed and you're half asleep and only a third awake. You may question the mathematics of that, but practically it's right.

Lord, forgive me my sins. I confess my sins. That's no confession of sin.

That's nothing at all. That's just playing with realities. There is nothing in the whole of a man's experience with God which is more realistic, in which he needs to be more alive and more alert than in this business of confessing his sins.

The word translated confess literally means saying the same as. Homo logeo. Saying the same as someone or something.

Now, what does that mean? What's the implication of that? Can I refer back to our two foci? When I bring my life into the light of God, who is light, God says something. He puts his finger on something. He points at something.

Or, God and his word are one. I'm not suggesting to you that they're divorced for one moment. God often brings the truth out by his word.

What happens when the word of God is allowed to lodge and remain in my mind, and I think about it, and I seriously consider its implication? What will happen is this. I'll feel awkward about something. I'll have a conviction of sin.

I'll know of certain areas in my life where things are not what they ought to be. Now, to confess my sin is to take the trouble to do this in relation to God, who is light, in relation to the word that searches. To read the word, to study the word, to apply the word, and to receive its judgments.

This is a discipline. But now you see, when I come to confess, what I do is, I say the same as. I say about myself what God says about myself.

I say about myself what the word says about myself. I hand over the judgment of my life to God. And I say, Lord, you say it.

I accept it. I know it's true. And now, out of a full contrite heart, I say the same as you do.

I take God's side over against myself. I take the word's viewpoint over against myself. This is what it is to confess our sins.

If we confess our sins, then what are we to confess? What do we need to confess? Living under the rule of the indwelling truth, living in the light of God, we shall become increasingly aware of both sins and of our sinfulness, if we are honest. Now, this may sound very strange to some young Christians if they're here this morning. And I'm sure there are.

But what I'm saying is this. As you grow in grace and in the disciplines of the Christian life, you will become more and more aware, one of the sins that you commit and of the sinfulness of your nature. Not less, but more.

You say, that doesn't make sense. Does this mean that I'm getting worse and worse rather than getting better and better? Not at all. What it means is this.

The nearer you come to God, who is light, and the more honest you are with the word of God as it speaks to you, the more sensitive you will become to the things that are wrong. A man who is growing in grace and in the knowledge of God is a man who is becoming increasingly sensitive to things that are wrong. When we are born again, we have the capacity for this sensitivity because we have the divine nature of the Holy Spirit given to us.

As we grow up, well, you know, the world will harden us and we'll argue against the word and we'll argue against the Spirit. But as we mature through this, as we overcome this, we'll become more and more sensitive. Now, let me give you a perfect illustration.

It's good to have a perfect illustration. We don't often have one. I've got a perfect one this morning.

It comes from the life of the Apostle Paul. Now, I don't think there would be anyone here this morning who would argue but that the Apostle Paul became one of the great saints of the New Testament. Mature in thought, in holiness, in service, in every respect.

His experience of God, if you lay emphasis upon experience, this man had great experiences of God. On every front, this man is a gigantic man. Intellectually, morally, in terms of activity and so forth, he's a gigantic man.

Now, one of the first epistles that Paul wrote, possibly the first one, was his letter to the Galatians. Now, I'm not criticizing him. Now, I'm stating a fact.

In his epistle to the Galatians, you will find that Paul is standing high on his two feet, asserting that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and that he is equal to any of the other apostles, wherever they are, whoever they are. I'm not criticizing him because the circumstances required that he do something of that kind. He says, they didn't do anything for me.

I received the gospel direct from God. I received everything directly. They are not responsible for making me the man I have become.

God has done everything, and I'm no whit less an apostle than they are. Now, towards the year 40... 40... no, it's more than that. It's about 53 A.D. The apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthians, perhaps 55.

He was writing his first letter to the Corinthians. In the course of writing to the Corinthians, this is how he speaks of himself. I am, he says, the least of the apostles.

Now, mark the change. I'm as good as any of them. None of them has done anything particular for me to make me the man I am.

God dealt with me personally and directly. Seven or eight years later, I am the least of the apostles. In another eight years or so, in the year approximately 63 A.D., he's writing to the Ephesians.

You know how he speaks of himself here. Unto me, he says, who am the least of all the saints. The least of all the saints.

Now, the apostleship is beyond the level of the ordinary Christian. There was authority given to the apostle. There was status given to the apostle.

He says, Paul, forget about that for a moment. I'm still an apostle. But he says, I am the least of the saints.

The least of all the saints. Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Turn another seven or eight years to the last writing that Paul wrote, his letters to Timothy.

You know how he speaks of himself, 1 Timothy 1.15, as the chiefest of sinners. The chiefest of sinners. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chiefest.

Now, notice, not of whom I was the chiefest. We'd all agree that perhaps because of his blasphemy and persecution, he was the chiefest. I don't know.

When I commune with my own heart, I might not be prepared to agree to that. But that Henry Paul doesn't say that. I was the chiefest of sinners, but I am the chiefest of sinners.

You say with bewilderment, what is it that makes this man take such a view of himself? I'll tell you. He's living in the light. And the truth of God, in its deep indwelling in his soul, is revealing to the man all the truth about himself.

And he's humbled. He's no less an apostle. He's no less a saint than he was at the beginning.

But you see, he's aware of his evil. He's aware of his sin. He's aware of himself.

What then are we to confess? Everything that God accuses us of, some of them are very private sins, secret sins as the psalmist speaks of them. Nobody knows about them, only you and God. Confess them

to God.

Accept his judgments upon them. There are sins that we have sinned against one another as a fellowship. Sins that we have sinned against men in the world.

Sins in business. Sins of all kinds. And sins against God.

If we confess our sin, the condition presupposed and lastly the conclusion assured. If we confess our sin, says John, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now, there's a discovery here, first of all, concerning the person of God and the provision of God.

We shall discover, says John, that he is faithful and just. Let's take the first of these. There will come first a discovery of God's faithfulness.

God's faithfulness. Now, what does this mean? Faithful to what? Faithful to whom? Can I spell this out very briefly? Basically, God is faithful to himself. If God were not fundamentally faithful to himself, then his faithfulness would vary because God is the only abiding and eternally abiding reality.

Everything else fluctuates. The standard of the world, the need of the saints, the well-being of the people of God, everything fluctuates. We're like a graph, we're up and down.

Everything of man is up and down. The one stable static is God himself. And the most precious thing about the faithfulness of God is this.

He cannot deny himself, as Paul puts it. He is faithful to himself. Let me put it like this.

God will never contradict himself. But now that means, to take it a step further, that means that God will be faithful to himself as he is revealed in the prophets, in the law, but supremely and superbly in his all-glorious Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So whatever God has said in his Son, he will be loyal to that.

He will be faithful to that. Has he promised us anything in his Son, he will be faithful to that. God will be faithful to himself as revealed in his Son.

Now that boils down to this, you see, that God will be faithful to what he has recorded in his Word. Practically speaking, this is what it comes to. Has God promised anything in his Son that we have in his Word? Have we a promise of God? We have a covenant of God promised to Jeremiah of old in chapter 31, beginning with verse 31.

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not according to the covenant that I made with them of old, but an entirely different one. And among the terms of the covenant is this. Among the promises, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

The faithfulness of God means this. What he has said, he will do. God is faithful to what he has promised.

He will keep. Now let me slip on to the next very hurriedly in closing. Not only shall we discover the faithfulness of God, but we shall discover the justice of God.

Faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God's faithfulness and justice are now discovered, will you notice, not to be against us, but to be for us. If we are not in Christ to the very faithfulness of God to himself, to his nature and to his words and revelation, God's faithfulness

and God's justice are against us.

Our sins will have to be reckoned with. And if we are outside of Christ, the very self-consistency of God and the justice of God will require that we shall be condemned. But when a man is in Christ, when a man has come to the Saviour, when a man has embraced God's deliverer, then all is so different.

The very faithfulness of God is now for us and the justice of God is for us. Now to me this is the most precious thing of all. How can God's justice be on my side? Everywhere in the Bible it seems to me, when I look at myself, the justice of God is against me.

The justice of God requires my condemnation because I have sinned and come short of his glory. I have transgressed his law. And the transgressors reward his death.

How can the justice of God be before me? It is always against me. Paul gives us the key, of course, in Romans chapter 3. He says the whole purpose of the death of Jesus Christ is this, that God should be just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. Because of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's justice can come over to my side and forgive my sin justly and save me from all its consequences on the basis of justice.

Can I put it to you like this? When I look at myself this morning and put myself outside of Jesus Christ purely in thought by his grace, purely for the sake of an illustration, as I think of myself, the justice of God can do nothing for me but condemn me, as it can do nothing for you but condemn you outside of Jesus Christ. But you see, Christ loved even me, says Paul, and gave himself for me. This is what every Christian acknowledges, that Christ came and died for him on the cross of Calvary.

If you believe that, then you are with me. Christ died in your place instead. He took your load of guilt and shame on Calvary's cross.

He died for the unjust to bring us to God. All right, now then, what happens is this. God will be just to his Son, who paid for my redemption, who has provided my forgiveness, who has shed his blood that I may be forgiven and cleansed and made fit for heaven.

And as I confess my sin, what I discover in reality is this, that God is not only faithful but on the basis of justice, not to me, but to his Son. For his Son deserves it. His Son has paid for it.

In the words of a very lovely hymn, payment God will not twice demand. Once at my blessed shorty's hand and then again at mine, God is no rascal. He struck the terms with his Son in the covenant of grace and having promised to save us and to endow us with all necessary for glory, he will not withhold the benefits of his grace when Christ has died for us and when Christ has put his arm around us.

God is faithful to his Son and faithful to himself and is just to his Son, and he will be merciful to us. Hallelujah. But, my friend, it all hinges upon this.

If we confess our sins, acknowledge that in you which stems from your fallen nature. Call a spade a spade. Call it what God calls it.

Acknowledge it openly and frankly and penitently. And what you will discover, says John, you can sense the thrill of it coming out. But we shall find that as we confess the truth against ourselves, we shall know divine remission of sin's penalty and the divine removal of sin's pollution.

Therefore we need not fear. We have fellowship one with another, fellowship with the Father, fellowship with the Son. The blood of Christ has cleansed us as well as pardoned us.

We may draw near with full assurance of faith. The veil is rent and God beckons us to himself. You know these lovely words of Francis Ridley Haverhill, I know the crimson stain of sin, defiling all without within.

But now rejoicingly I know that he has washed me white as snow. I praise him for the cleansing tide because for me my Savior died. Let us pray.

O Lord, our God and our Father, in humble acknowledgement of the light and the power and the authority of thy word, we bow before thee now. Forgive us that we have not lived more and more in its light and have deceived ourselves sometimes and deceived others too. Father, make us a people who are in tune with the word and in fellowship with thee.

And bring us, we pray thee, to this great discovery of finding that however corrupt our nature is, it cannot stand in the way of our fellowship with thee because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from unrighteousness. Take us now. Some of us bear wounds in our spirits this morning maybe because we've come near to thee.

We remember things that we have tried to forget but which were not forgiven. Enable us to confess every such sin that we may know in truth the removal of the penalty and of the pollution. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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