

Confess or Cover?

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ 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. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Some of you may have had the unpleasant experience of discovering a skin melanoma in your body. Once you discover something like that, you can do one of two things with it. The first option is to take it to a doctor, so that it can be cut or burnt out. The other is to ignore it, and if it is visible to others – hide it, with clothes or some kind of make-up. Most of us would say it would be silly to hide or ignore a melanoma, since if it is found to be malignant; it could cost you your life.

But when it comes to our life in the truest sense – there is one thing which kills. The Bible says – the wages of sin is death. If you are spiritually alive, then you will want to get rid of the cancer of sin. What you do with sin is a key sign for whether or not you have eternal life within.

This book is all about describing eternal life. Eternal Life is the life of Jesus Christ Himself – the person of Jesus Christ dwelling in you by the Holy Spirit. If you have the Son, you have life. If you do not have the Son, you do not have life.

Last week, we saw that John is giving an eyewitness account of this Word of Life, who was with the Father. He is telling us about Jesus Christ. And he does so, in order that we might have fellowship with God Himself. John wants us to know God personally, and to have the fullness of joy that comes from being in fellowship with God. Don't draw some kind of distinction between fellowship and relationship. In John's epistle, to be in fellowship with God is to be saved. To be out of fellowship with God is to be in darkness and to be unsaved.

In this first section, John begins by stating a fundamental truth about being in fellowship with God, about having the life of Christ dwell in you. This is the first sign of life that he wants you to check. If you do an elementary first aid course, you learn to check for the vitals: is there a pulse, is the patient breathing? So here the Bible is going to give you the very first sign of the life of Christ within.

And to do so, the Bible uses a word picture. The Bible says in verse 5 that God is light. Verse 7 is going to repeat that, God is in the light. By contrast, we are also told in Him there is no darkness at all. In the original language, it is a double negative: there is not darkness, none! So here is this image of light and darkness, and it is the key to unlocking this passage. What does the Bible mean when it says that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all? Well, we know it doesn't mean that God is the same thing as light, as if He is an impersonal force of nature. In the Bible, and particularly in John's writings, light refers to two things.

1) Light refers to truth.

Light refers to the intellectual aspect of knowledge about what is:

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in

Me.'

Just think about it. Light reveals what is. When you can't see in a dark room, you turn on the light, and the light reveals all that is in the room.

Ephesians 5:13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

So, in the same way, light is a picture of truth, because truth tells you what really is. Truth tells you about reality. So when the Bible says God is light, in this sense, it means He is completely truthful, and in Him there is no deceit. To walk in the light is going to mean something to do with truthfulness and shunning lies.

2) *Light refers to holiness.*

Light is pure and revealing and beautiful, and the things which are holy are pure and beautiful and fit to be done in broad daylight. The things which are shameful and sinful are the kinds of things that want to be hidden.

Ephesians 5:11-12 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

Romans 13:12-13 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

So when the Bible says God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, it means, God is pure and holy and in Him is no sin. To walk in the light is going to have something to do with holiness.

So light = truth and holiness.

Now John moves to applying this truth to us. It is very simple. **Verse 6.** If we say we have fellowship with Him, if we say His life dwells within us, that we are truly Christians, and yet we walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the truth. If God is light – truthful and holy, and we walk – that is, we live habitually as people who lie about our sin and commit it without remorse; we are lying when we say we have fellowship with Him.

If God is summer, we are lying if we say He is in us and we in Him but yet we live in winter.

If God is the noonday sun, we cannot say we live in Him we are living in a dark dungeon somewhere. To claim to be a Christian and to live opposite to the nature of God is to fail to practice the truth. You are a living lie. In verse 6, **we lie**, in verse 8, we **lie to ourselves** and in verse 10, we call **God a liar**. It's a life of lies, as opposed to the light of truth.

So that leads us then to an explanation of what that looks like. What does it look like to walk in darkness, which means we don't know God and don't have eternal life? What does it mean to walk in the light, wherein we do know God and possess eternal life?

Well, we're going to see four *if* statements. Verses 8 and 10 give us the explanation of what it looks like to walk in darkness. Verses 7 and 9 give us the explanation of what it looks like to walk in the light. So, that gives us two very simple main points: unbelievers sin and cover it up, believers sin and confess it up.

I. Unbelievers Sin and Cover It Up: Walking in Darkness

Look at verse 8 and compare it to verse 10. You can see they are parallel in meaning.

No sin – not sinned – deceive ourselves – make Him a liar – the truth is not in us – his Word is not in us. What John is doing is explaining what it looks like to walk in darkness. Since light is both the truth that reveals, and the moral purity, to walk in darkness is to sin, and then to hide it. So you do the opposite of moral light by sinning, and then you do the opposite of intellectual light by covering it up.

Look closely at the characteristics of this. In verse 8, John says if we say we have no sin. Here sin is in the singular, and the verb is present tense. In other words, if we deny the existence of sin generally in our lives, we're walking in darkness. If we say we do not have a sin nature, if we say we are not sinners, if we deny that we are fallen, helpless, rebellious creatures, we are still in darkness. We're lying to ourselves about ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Have you ever met someone who denied he was a sinner? Occasionally you meet someone who says something to you like, "Well, I know I have made mistakes, after all, we're only human. But I don't think of myself as a sinner." Such a person, according to John has lied to themselves until they have believed it, and now there is no truth in them. They have walked away from the light of their own conscience. Now they're bumping around in the dark, sinning even more, and covering it up with excuses about personality, human nature, weakness,

When in the dark, people keep sinning and keep covering it up. Look at verse 10. Now sins are in the plural, and the verb is in the perfect tense. The idea is, if we say we have not committed sins. In other words, if we deny the fact that we commit acts of sin, and have done so in the past up to the present time, then we are lying, and walking away from the light of His truth. In fact, the Bible here tells us that if we say such things, we are actually calling God a liar. Why is that so? Because God said that you have sinned.

*Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Ecclesiastes 7:20 ¶ For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.*

If we claim we don't have a sin nature, if we claim that we have not really sinned, then the truth is not in us. God's Word is not in us; we're lying to ourselves, and calling God a liar. This is not a sign of eternal life; it is a sign of death. It is a sign that you are a guilty, condemned human being, because you deliberately avoid the light of God's truth. In fact, that's exactly what Jesus said in John 3

John 3:17-21 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. "For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Jesus says that our condemnation is our own actions. Light has come into the world, and instead of rushing to Jesus Christ to find life and forgiveness, they avoid him. They hate how he exposes them as sinful. So they avoid the light, like a vain woman avoids social company because of a blemish on her face. Those in darkness want to stay in darkness so their evil does not get exposed, which only condemns them more, because in so doing they admit that what they are doing is shameful and humiliating. So they know it is evil. And instead of coming to the light to have it cleansed, they want to stay in darkness to keep it covered.

Our race has a long history with covering our sin up. Think back to Adam and Eve. Once they had

sinned, and their sin turned to shame, what did they do? They firstly sewed fig leaves together. They tried to cover their own shame, with their own works. Secondly, when they heard God walking, what did they do? They hid away. They ran away from the light. Thirdly, when God questioned them, they kept trying to cover their sin by blaming others. Adam said, "I sinned because of the woman that You gave me".

Eve said, "I sinned because the snake told me to". In other words, it's not my fault. You cannot say I have sin or did sin.

Throughout the Bible we have examples of people hiding from God, or trying to cover up their sin, or making excuses for it:

Cain covers up his murder by pretending he doesn't know where Abel is and saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Abram makes excuses for lying about Sarai by saying, "I was scared you would kill me for my wife."

Isaac does the same thing.

Jacob's sons massacre a whole town of men, after having deceived them, and then they turn around and say, "They deserved it; they defiled our sister."

Aaron says of his sin of idolatry, "I just put the gold in the fire, and out came this calf. I couldn't help it. It just happened."

Saul commits the sin of not waiting for Samuel, and performing a priestly offering. When convicted, he says, "You were late, *so I forced myself* and did this thing."

Later, he disobeys by keeping the spoils of an attack on the Amalekites, when he was supposed to destroy it all. He says, "I was going to sacrifice these to the Lord! I meant to do good with my disobedience!"

We have people who tried to cover up their sin. David tried to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba by getting rid of her husband and marrying her. Achan hid his spoils in his tent. Ananias and Sapphira tried to hide their hypocrisy. All of this is walking in darkness. Certainly, believers can retreat to the darkness. But the one who walks here, the one who lives in denial and cover-ups, is not in fellowship with God.

You see, God is light. If you are in the light, you know it is pointless, utterly pointless to try to cover up your sin. He knows it, and can expose it. When the light is shining and bright, you know your deeds can be seen, so you do not try to hide them. If we see someone doing something evil in broad daylight and pretending that we can't see them, we think they are foolish. So it is when sinners sin, and then lie about their sin.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

It is not only futile to cover your sins since God knows them, but if you cover your sins now, there is coming a day when God will uncover in front of us all.

Luke 12:2 "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known."

On that day, Revelation 20 tells us, the books will be opened. And there God will bring out all that you thought you were hiding, but had actually been recorded.

Think about your own habits of life. Do you see sin in your life and admit it is sin? Do you tell God it is sin? Or do you minimise your sin? Are you offended at being called a sinner? Do you deny that you fit into the category of sinner? Do you rationalise all your actions? Is there something about

Jesus that you find repulsive? If so, examine yourself, if you really are a Christian. The one with God's life in him lives in the broad daylight of God's truth and holiness. As such, he or she does not make a practice of covering up sin and hiding it.

In fact, the very first act of leaving the darkness and coming into the light is the day of our new birth, the day we are saved. Because on that day, you finally come to God and make no more excuses. You plead guilty before God. You admit you are lost, sinful, and deserving of His judgement. You say – You are right, I am wrong. You come empty handed, pleading guilty and relying only on mercy in Jesus Christ. That is the very first step of leaving the darkness and coming into the light.

That leads us to the second main point of this section in 1 John.

II. Believers Sin and Confess It Up: Walking in the Light

Now the alternative is to be a believer. Look in verse 7. If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. Is that 'one another' referring to fellow Christians? No, the context is fellowship with God – v 6. We have this fellowship with God, this eternal life dwelling in us, if we walk in the light as He is in the light.

So what does that mean? Just like verses 8 and 10 are parallel, verses 7 and 9 are parallel. Both speak of God's work of forgiveness and cleansing in a believer. That leads me to believe that walking in the light is parallel to confessing our sins.

You see, Christians, as they journey on to heaven, still sin. But the key difference between believers and unbelievers is that believers don't make a practice of sin, and when they do sin, they bring their sin out into the open before God, and confess it as sin. Believers do not hide, cover or excuse their sin. Believers confess it.

What does that mean? Our English word *confess* is actually a rather weak word to translate this Greek word *homologomen*. That word is a compound word which means "to say the same thing". In other words whatever God says about your sin, you agree with Him, and say the same thing about it. If He says it is wicked, you call it wicked. If He says it deserves death. You say it deserves death. If it repulses God, you agree that you should feel repulsion. Look in Psalm 51 for some examples of what confession looks like:

Confession is realising sin is evil and deserves judgement, and requires mercy to be forgiven (v1)

Confession is realising sin is dirty and defiling and calls for cleansing (v2)

Confession is claiming responsibility for your sin. (v3)

Confession is calling God true and just and condemning yourself. It is taking God's side against yourself. (v4)

Confession involves a brokenness and humble repentance (v17)

Think back to the story of the prodigal son. When he finally came to his senses, what did he plan to say to his father?

"Luke 15:18-19 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you," 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."'

Think of the repentant tax collector in Jesus' parable of the two men at the Temple. What did he simply say, "God be merciful to me a sinner". Or perhaps think of the silent confession of the sinful

woman who simply washed Jesus' feet with tears.

We don't need a formula. Confession is the act of children coming to their heavenly Father and taking His side. It is calling sin - sin, calling it evil, desiring to be separated from it. Confession is admitting that it is me who had interrupted the intimacy with my Father, and acting maturely enough to admit and turn from my sin.

If you profess to be saved, do you confess your sins to Him? Not "Lord, if I happened to sin today, please forgive me" No, it is living and walking with God, so that when you break His commands, you notice it, and you confess and repent of doing that. Or perhaps the Lord reminds you of it, and you bring it out into the light in prayer and confess it.

There is a further way in which we show that we are walking in the light. It is the fact that we present ourselves before God. We go to Him in private prayer and spend time in His presence. We allow Him to search us. We open His Word in private worship, and let the Word of God purify and refine us. We present ourselves for corporate worship, because there we know we will again be exposed to light. The light of God's Word will search us in the preaching. The sharpening influence of seeing one another will shine light on us as well.

Sometimes, you find people who do the very opposite. When they are guilty, they hide. They avoid prayer, the Word or even fellowship. They often say things like, "I don't want to be a hypocrite and come and sing these songs when I am in sin." Now that sounds good, and there might be some sincerity in there, but what good will it do you to avoid the light, when you have sinned? When you have sinned, you need more light, not less. And if there is a pattern in someone's life of perpetually, continually avoiding the light of God in prayer, the Word and fellowship, you have to begin to ask, is he or she walking in the light? Because it looks very much like he or she doesn't want any light.

Part of walking in the light is feeling that rather uncomfortable burn of seeing our sin, and then bringing it to God. But the discomfort lasts only as long as you keep justifying it. Once you confess it, what are the promises of verses 7 and 9? Cleansing! Forgiveness.

If we are believers then something remarkable is true of us: the blood of Jesus Christ keeps cleansing us from sin. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross keeps cleansing us, on an ongoing basis – sins of ignorance, sins of omission, sins of commission, sins of tongue, and word and thought and deed, sins of failure, sins of weakness.

Now that is a whole topic on its own: how confession is related to cleansing, and why we confess our sins. We'll deal with that next week. But for now, the promise of God is this: if you are in the light, if you are one of His, He keeps on cleansing you, just as you keep on bringing to Him the sin you identify. You keep agreeing with Him. If you have the life of Jesus within you, then it is the death of Jesus that keeps cleansing you, enabling you to stay in the light. You don't hide, precisely because of how assured you are that Jesus Christ keeps cleansing His own, no matter what. He knows all your sins, has paid for them all. You live in the light of that truth, and in the light of his holiness. So you keep striving to please Him, and when you do sin and become aware of it, you admit it. You confess it. You repent of it.

This is the sign of a truthful heart. It is the sign of a heart which knows it is living under the spotlight of a loving Father's omniscience, and that hiding from Him is foolish and futile. You see, it's not just a matter of behaviour; it's a matter of nature. Some animals are nocturnal. The hunt and eat and are active only at night. They are made for the darkness, and try to escape the light of day.

Other creatures are daytime creatures, and simply sleep when it gets dark. Unbelievers are still made for the darkness, so that's where they live, in a place of continual sin, and an ever-growing web of lies and excuses for their sin. Believers are made for the light, so that's where they live, with sin on the decrease, and every recognised sin brought out into the light under the cleansing power of Jesus Christ.

So in the end it comes down to this: The one who covers his sin in this life is going to have it uncovered in the next, and whoever exposes it to God in this life shall never have it exposed again in the life to come.