

Walking in the Light to See God

The New Testament talks a lot about light. Most often, when it speaks about light, it speaks about God's revelation – God showing us the truth about Himself, the world and ourselves. Just like physical light reveals our surroundings, so spiritual light is God showing us what is really around us – what the nature of reality is.

So the Bible teaches the need for illumination – another light metaphor. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and lights things up. He enables us to understand the truth about God, about ourselves and about the world.

In some ways, that is the basis for everything else. It is the basis for right doctrine. It is the basis for right practice. It is the basis for right feeling and affection towards God. When we start to see God for who He is, we will worship like we should. When we start to see ourselves as we are, we will humble ourselves as we should. When we start to see sin for what it is, we will flee from it. When we start to see others for what they are, we will have mercy and compassion on fellow sinners.

Illumination is to the Christian life what literacy is to books. If you cannot read, books are useless to you. If you do not experience illumination, Christianity will be like a book you cannot read. It won't make sense. It will bore you. It will seem hollow, phony.

So, if there is a root cause in us which leads to us not seeing the light of God in the Word, I would say it is of primary importance.

There is something we do, though, that cuts off the illuminating work of the Spirit. There is an attitude of heart and life which is, to God's illuminating, what wooden shutters are to a sun-lit room. This attitude has the same effect on our heart, which a power-cut has on our home at night.

We find the answer in **1 John 1-**

^{v5} 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. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life⁸ 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.

John begins by saying that God is light. There is no darkness in Him at all. This does not only mean that God is morally pure. Here light and darkness have more to do with *revealing* versus *hiding*. He is saying – God is light, in Him there is no place to hide. If we walk in darkness, John says, we are lying when we say we have fellowship with Him, because in Him there is no darkness. What does that mean?

Verses 6, 8 and 10 describe what this walk in darkness looks like: it is refusing to deal truthfully with God. Saying we have no sin, saying we have not sinned.

Verses 7 and 9 describe the opposite. Walking in the light – that is in Him – His light, is to deal truthfully with God.

This is the point: God cannot reveal the truth to you, *if you continue to live in lies*. You cannot see more light if you are shutting your eyes to it. You cannot see the truth, if you prefer to believe the lies you tell yourself.

Many of us want illumination, but we do not realise the extent to which we walk in darkness. We do not realise the many ways we close the shutters, put on dark glasses, switch off the light and close our eyes tightly.

Dealing with Him in sincerity is almost the starting point of humility. God can save you from your lies, but He cannot save you *while* you are lying. He can save you from self-deception, but He cannot save you while you choose to keep deceiving yourself.

Darkness is simply the absence of light. To choose lies over truth is to block out the light, and make our own darkness. You can do whatever else you want to do once you have blocked out the light – but the one thing you cannot do is continue to see the light.

So, in our lives – we can do many things when we walk in darkness, but the one thing we cannot experience is illumination. You cannot face north and south at the same time. You cannot avoid the light and see it simultaneously.

Let us examine three major ways we do this.

1. When we Lie about our Sin and Hide from God (John 3:19-21; I John 1:8, 10)

In I John 1, verses 8 and 10 are parallel:

Verse 8 – *if we say we have no sin;*

Verse 10 – *if we say that we have not sinned.*

Verse 8 – *we deceive ourselves;*

Verse 1 – *we make Him a liar.*

Verse 8 – *and the truth is not in us;*

Verse 1 – *and His Word is not in us.*

According to John, if we deny our sin – past and present, we do two things – we say He is a liar, and we deceive ourselves. We tell a lie *about God*, and we tell a lie *to ourselves*.

Think about this - God, who cannot lie; God, who knows all things; God who is the Truth, makes a judgement about our words, thoughts and deeds. He says, "That is a sin. That is displeasing to Me. That does not glorify Me. I did not create you to behave like that."

This may come in the form of your conscience, with the Spirit of the Lord judging you to be in sin. Or it comes when the Word of God is preached, or when you read it, and it says – 'That particular act or word or thought in your life was, or is, sin.'

And, when we walk in darkness we say, 'No it isn't' or 'I didn't do that' or 'It wasn't my fault' or 'Everyone's doing it, it can't be wrong' or 'It's not a sin to me' or 'I was forced to do it, so I'm not responsible' or 'I meant well by it, I had good motives'. All of those excuses say one thing – 'I did not sin. I have not sinned.' In turn, we are saying, 'God, you are wrong, and I am right.'

To say that is to say – 'God, you have lied about me.' Then, we turn to ourselves and say, 'Don't worry, you are quite right in what you are doing, you are justified. Forget about what God says.'

The Lord's Supper is supposed to be a time of allowing the light of God's Word to search us. If we remain in rebellion and partake, we are turning from the light. Don't partake if you are playing games. God is not mocked. The light of God's face may start to recede.

In Psalm 51, David said that the confession of his sin was in effect, justifying God. It was saying, God, you are right, I am wrong. Confession is to say what God says; to say the same thing about your sin. Denial is to block out the light and hide from it.

Did you ever think what a silly thing it was for Adam and Eve to hide amongst the trees of the Garden? It was irrational. They knew that God could see everything. They knew that God was everywhere. Yet they hid. It was, in a way, their first lie. They were acting as if they could avoid the presence of God.

When you try to shut out thoughts about God, when you try to ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit, when you run from going before God and confessing your sin, you are acting just like Adam. When you try to avoid seeing certain Christians whose lives are godly and without reproach, when you skip church, because you decide you have had enough conviction for one day – that is a form of hiding.

Sometimes people believe they will be insincere if they come to church when they have sinned. But this is a mixing up of truths. You don't preserve sincerity by avoiding the light. You certainly are insincere if you go through the motions with no thought to your condition. But to avoid the things you need to change is not being sincere. It is being, in an odd way – insincere.

Anytime we are convicted about something, and instead of approaching God for help in dealing with it, we cover it, hide it, excuse it, we are retreating into a world of lies.

John 3:19-21 *"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. ²⁰ "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

People hide from God when they have sinned. They also hide from God when they are *about to sin*. Jesus says that the reason people do not come to the light is because the light exposes them. They do not want to be exposed, so they prefer the darkness. They prefer their own take on life, their own way, their own authority.

So they avoid God, they avoid hearing about Him; they avoid listening to the Gospel. They hide from God. But when people in darkness avoid the light, they are lying. They know the light exists, but they do not want that light to reprove them. So they act as if they haven't seen it.

It is not only unbelievers who do this. Whenever we sin willfully, we walk in darkness. If you know pornography is evil, and you look at it, you are walking in darkness, you are lying to yourself and to God. If your wife, or your mother, or some other Christian, walked into the room, you would be terribly embarrassed. You wouldn't do it in front of them. But when you sin openly, it is like saying, 'God doesn't see this.' It is telling a lie to yourself until you are happy and comfortable enough to go ahead with the sin. You shut your eyes to truth, so you can go ahead with sin.

When you know you should go into the Word of God, but you deliberately procrastinate until there is no time left, that is retreating from the light, so you can pursue your own course of action.

Do we really think that when we just keep busy and avoid prayer that we are avoiding God? Do we really think that by skipping appointments with His people that we get away from His presence? Do we really think that by shutting Him out of our thoughts, He does not still see them? It is a form of lying. It is walking in darkness.

Anytime you find yourself avoiding God, you should ask why. Usually there is something we do not want the light to expose.

This is doing what Adam did. It is hiding. And it is lying – because everyone knows you cannot hide from God. It is a form of lying.

A man who hides from the light is not going to see it. For as long as you shut your eyes to the light, you will not see it. If you are not enjoying truth being illuminated, check to see if you are not dealing untruthfully with God when it comes to sin.

Psalm 36:9 *For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.*

2) When we treat the Word of Truth as if it is not True (James 1:22-24)

John told us that to deny our sin is to deceive ourselves. James picks up this theme and says the same thing, this time, with a slightly different point:

James 1:22-25 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

Here, the focus shifts from denying your sin, to treating the Word of God deceitfully. The man who looks in a mirror, but does not make any changes, is deceiving himself. He is playing a game. He pretends to believe that the mirror shows him a true reflection of himself. But he doesn't actually believe it does. How do we know that? We know it because he doesn't make any changes.

In the same way, the person who treats the Bible this way pretends to believe it is the truth for the duration of the sermon, or for their daily Bible reading. But he doesn't actually believe it is the truth. How do we know that? We know it because he doesn't make any changes.

If you believe something is true, you act upon it. If I came to you and said, your car parked outside is on fire, how would you respond? If you believed it was true, you would go out and try to put the fire out. If you didn't really believe it was true, you might smile at me and say, 'Thank you, that's very interesting.'

There are many who are playing this game with the Bible. They listen to Bible teaching, and they reason, 'That's all very well if you live in Narnia or Never-Never land like David. But in the real world, this doesn't work.' What are they saying? It really isn't true. But instead of saying so, they play a game of make-believe, whereby listening to sermons and taking notes and reading the Bible is like saying 'I really believe. If I look in the mirror, I show that I believe it is a mirror. If I listen to the Word, it shows I believe it is the Word of God.'

But this is lying to ourselves.

Suppose a friend came to you and said his New Year's resolution was to improve his friendship with you. So he asks you, 'What can I do differently, that would improve our relationship?' You know that what annoys you is when he visits you, he cracks his knuckles. So you say, 'I think we can start with you not cracking your knuckles.' A week later, he is back. He starts out by cracking his knuckles and then shaking your hand. Without missing a beat, he says, 'How can I continue to improve our relationship?' You remind him of your original request, thinking he might have forgotten. But the next week he is back, asking the same question, and still cracking his knuckles. Very soon, you will know your friend is lying to himself when he asks, 'How can I improve our relationship?', because he has no intention of doing anything to improve the relationship. He is lying to himself ('I'm a really good friend') and to you ('I plan to change').

So the person who attends service after service, takes notes, participates in discipleship groups, but has no intention of doing anything differently is telling a lie to himself ('I believe the Bible') and to

God ('I want to know the truth about myself').

Even today, there will be those who read this and continue the game. There will be those who read and respond to the light.

What does the Bible call itself? 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' To keep coming to the Bible with no intention of obeying it is like collecting light bulbs. Your cupboard can be bursting with light bulbs still in the package, while your house sits dark at night.

But here is the problem – if you have been exposed to light from the Word, you are morally responsible for it. It would be more helpful to your Christian life, if you just said, 'I don't believe the Bible.' In that case, though, you might want to examine if you are a Christian. But to pretend you believe, when you really don't, is walking in darkness.

It is turning your face away from the light. That's why illumination is so scarce, if you treat the light you do have as no light at all.

Luke 8:18 *Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.*

Psalm 36:9 *For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.*

To cover our sins is obviously avoiding the light. A little more subtle is treating His Word like it is not true. And more subtle than that is the third way we walk in darkness.

3) When we worship Him with insincerity

One of the worst things you can do to the light of God's Spirit, is to pretend when you are dealing with Him directly. We all know what it is like to be at the receiving end of someone who is being false, pretentious. You feel that you are being lied to, in a way. Well, when we approach God and speak to Him or about Him with anything but utter sincerity, we do that to God.

Let me mention three aspects – prayer, praise and preaching.

Matthew 6:7-8 *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*

Prayer is talking to God. To talk to God with anything but total sincerity harms us spiritually. If you speak to God so as to impress others, you are not dealing with God, you are trying to please man.

If you speak to God using all kinds of clichés, which Jesus called 'vain repetitions', you are not dealing with Him truthfully. You are acting or you are repeating, but you are not communicating.

If you speak to Him, not from your heart, but as you think you should speak to Him, you are being less than truthful. For doesn't He know what is really in your heart? To say anything to Him except what is really in your heart is hiding.

Praying with anything but complete sincerity is trying to impress others, trying to impress oneself, or even trying to impress God. In all cases, it is not walking in the light – coming before God just as you are, being wholly transparent and open and exposed before Him.

Praise – if we praise God insincerely, a veil will settle over our hearts.

Certainly, insincere praise is when we sing something we do not believe or mean in our hearts. To sing 'I surrender all' when you don't, or don't even aspire to, is to sing a lie.

But another way we praise insincerely is when we do not really know what it is we are saying to God, but we say it to Him anyway, because it is a song we have heard sung. We sing 'Heaven came down and glory filled my soul', although we do not really know what that means. Who does? It is a meaningless cliché. We sing 'Echoes of mercy and whispers of love', although we aren't really sure what it means. No one is, because it doesn't mean anything – it is a cliché meant to substitute a fuzzy feeling without any thinking.

Imagine doing that to someone close to you. You say to him, 'You bring me joy bells & make my pathway glow'; and he says, 'What do you mean by that?' And you say, 'I don't know. I'm just being nice.' That person would not appreciate that, because you aren't really dealing with him as a person. You aren't interested in the meaning of your words, so why should he be? The praise is insincere. Saying vague things to God does not open us up to more light from God, because we are almost saying to God, we don't care who you are, what you are – we are going to say and sing these things to you regardless. Whether they apply to you or not doesn't matter to us, we're just being nice. That has a disturbing effect on your soul. You start to believe God is satisfied with vague, clichéd praise. To be prepared to say things to God you don't understand or mean does not smack of being truthful with Him. It doesn't sound like walking in the light.

Preaching – what about teaching others things we do not believe or practise? This does not only apply to the preacher, it applies to small-group discussions, one-on-one conversations. How easy it is to become doctrinal, knowledgeable-sounding. One way to cut off light from God is to stand up as an authority, and preach about things you have had no experience of, but making out like you have.

Sometimes, people join in just because the group is doing it. Don't be like the people in the 'Emperor's New Clothes'. To be praising or agreeing with others over something when in reality you feel nothing and see nothing. Far better to confess to one of your spiritual betters – I am dry as a bone. I feel nothing. What am I doing wrong?

God will not give you more light about Himself, if you will not be serious about the light you already have. That doesn't mean the light will shut off. It means – until you leave your cave, take off the sunglasses, open the shades, open your eyes, and deal with God truthfully, things will remain as they are right now as far as illumination goes. You need to look at it. Focus on it. See Him for who he is. Speak to Him as He is. Praise Him as He is.

Why is it important?

Is it really that important? Yes it is. The bottom line of humility is to accept God's estimate of yourself. It is to deal truthfully with God. God does not give more light to the one persisting in darkness.

God will save you if you have been a liar. God will not save you while you lie. God will save you out of darkness and bring you into the light. He will not save you while you are fleeing from the light. You will not experience illumination if you persist in dealing untruthfully with God.

Choosing darkness eventually makes our blindness worse. Like an actor who is so used to playing other people, he loses a sense of who he is. The one who keeps being insincere with God starts to treat his game as the real thing. We treat our made-up God as if that is who He is, which means we substitute an idol for God.

At some point, you believe your excuses for your sins, and your conscience begins to tolerate them. There is more and more corruption in your life, but you notice it less and less. The darkness gets darker.

Your routine of looking in the mirror and doing nothing bothers you less and less. The longer the routine of hearing the Word and being unmoved goes on, the more natural it seems. The darkness gets darker.

Matthew 6:22-23 *The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

If only we would know how fragile and tender our consciences are. To keep avoiding or ignoring the light wounds the conscience, weakens the conscience, and eventually, sears the conscience.

To keep doing this to yourself is like pressing your hands over your eyes to block out the light, and doing so with such frequency, and such pressure that you eventually damage your eyes and their ability to see the light. Keep ignoring the light, and illumination becomes harder and harder for you.

Whether it is denying our sins and hiding from God, treating the Word like it is not the Truth, or worshipping God insincerely – it comes down to rejecting the light.

John 12:35-36 *Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."*

How do we learn to be truthful with God?

By now you will already have identified problem areas as far as walking in darkness goes. Let me just list out ways we can deal truthfully with God.

1) Never Run from Conviction or Hide from God's Presence.

This is the point of Psalm 139. David seems to say very different things. He has one section dealing with God's omnipresence. He has another section dealing with how God fashioned him and made him. He has another section on God knowing his thoughts and words.

But David is actually saying the same thing in the Psalm. 'God – you have known me like no one else has – so how can I hide from you? You know my thoughts, my words, my actions. You know me inside out – you actually knitted me in the womb – you are everywhere I go. I cannot hide my thoughts from you. I cannot hide my body from you. I cannot find a place to hide from you.' So instead of hiding, David says – 'Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' David realised he needed to walk in the light.

The One you are running from loves you very much. There is no sense in running from one who has paid for your sins Himself. There is no sense in running from One who prays for you. There is no sense running from One whom you can never outrun.

Learn to respond to the Spirit's promptings. Keep short accounts with God. Confess your sins as they are revealed to you, or when you are reminded of them. Forsake them. Eventually, you will gain a like, not a dislike for God's searching light. You will not fear the light exposing you; you will want Him to so you can know Him.

2) Learn to be completely frank with God in prayer, praise and with others.

Learn the frankness of the psalmists and the prophets. 'A great Christian of the past broke out all at once into a place of such radiance and victory as to excite wonder among his friends. Someone asked him what had happened to him. He replied simply that his new life of power began one day when he entered the presence of God and took a solemn vow never again to say anything to God in prayer that he did not mean. His transformation began with that vow and continued as he kept it.' - A.W. Tozer - *God Tells the Man Who Cares*

Do not offer praise that is flattery or meaningless. You do not have to fully identify with everything a good hymn says. You can aspire to those affections, even if you don't have them. Learn to not be satisfied until you are speaking to God with truth in the inward parts. Dump all the stock phrases and clichés you have picked up. Don't use spiritual words and phrases loosely and lightly if you don't mean them. 'I'm praying for you', 'God bless you', 'Praise the Lord', 'God knows', 'Lord-willing'.

Don't sing anything which will debase your view of Him. Don't utter praise which is empty, trite, or meaningless. Learn to speak candidly and with gentle honesty to other people. Wearing facades before others only increases the sense of unreality with God.

Never speak about Him as if you know Him better than you do. Teach others what you know from the Scriptures and from experience.

3) Treat an encounter with Scripture as an encounter with God's authority.

If you don't mean to come under it, then don't pretend as if you will. Don't fool yourself with pretend interest, or pretend hearing. Open it with a view to changing. Come to hear it with a view to changing.

One of the things about our physical eyes is that they adjust. If you go from the bright midday into a cave, you cannot see for a moment. Then your eyes adjust. If you stay in the cave for a while, and then walk out into the light, you are blinded for a while, till your eyes adjust.

Our consciences are like that. Keep rejecting the light, and you get used to it. It becomes as much light as you want or need. It might be, if you choose to take this path of utter sincerity before God, that it will seem blinding and overwhelming. But I challenge you to pursue it. Your soul will awaken to a whole new understanding of God, yourself, the world.

In thy light, we shall see light.