



Sermon Transcript August 1, 2021

Our Life Together Fellowship with God and One Another 1 John 1:5-10

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 1, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Daniel Warriner. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Introduction:

I don't know if I have come across any verses that have been as profoundly troubling to me as 1 John 1:5-10. And yet, I don't know if I have come across any verses that have been as profoundly comforting to me as 1 John 1:5-10. I do not know if I have ever studied any other passage as deeply as I have studied this one. I want you to know that what I'm sharing with you this morning, I'm preaching to myself just as much as I'm preaching to you. I need these verses. I think you need these verses, too.

1 John 1:5-10 *Walking in the Light*

- 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,
 that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
- 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we 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 his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- 8 If we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar,
 and his word is not in us.

Background:

John wrote the books of Second and Third John. But the Letter of First John is not written by a "John Doe." I would say it's very clear that it's the same "John" that was sitting at the last Supper and wrote the Gospel of John. It's the same author of the Apocalypse of John (what we call the Book of Revelation). Across all of these books, John repeats similar ideas and phrases especially in regards to talking about God as light in contrast to our sin and darkness and how that impacts our relationships.

God is Light: Why Would This Be Troubling?

Let's get into the verses and then I'll explain they would be troubling to me. Verse 5 says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." It's actually a double negative in Greek. I don't know what happens in English with double negatives, but I know what happens in Greek with a double negative and it makes it a stronger negative. It adds a punch, an emphasis to the negative. So this verse could be translated, "God is Light and in him there is not even a teeny tiny bit of darkness." You could even throw a few exclamation points in there as well for a stronger emphasis: "God is Light and in him there is not even a teeny tiny bit of darkness!!!"

John continues, "If we ever claim to have unbroken fellowship with God but our pattern of life (literally: the way we walk around) reflects darkness, then we lie and do not practice the truth." He also adds, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." I think these are hard verses. How do you react to the mere suggestion from John to walk in the light?

It makes me wonder what John is saying here about God being light. I mentioned how he authored five books of the New Testament, so what he means when he says "light" is probably complex. I wanted to share with you three ways to understand what John is saying when he says, "God is light."

The Theme of Light in the Bible: The first thought I wanted to share is that all throughout Scripture, there is a connection and contrast between light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error, life and death. So John is picking up on the biblical metaphor for the goodness of the God of light and the forces of evil and darkness that wage war against it.

With just a little bit of self-reflection, I would feel exposed by this line of thought. When it comes to looking at my life in the light, I feel convicted by my selfish choices, my sin, my self-deception, my laziness to do what is right, and my gluttony to do wrong. God is light and I often feel like I spend most of my time living in darkness. This is something that feels pretty common. There is darkness and evil in this world. Bad things happen. I think this is part of what John had in mind, but I think there is more here if we keep digging.

The Person of Light in the Bible: My second thought is that I think John is directing us towards another question. I think he wants us to ask, "Who is Light?" In the first

six verses of First John, he has already mentioned more than once how closely they lived with Jesus in flesh and blood. “We saw him, we touched him with our hands, God’s light made (physically) manifest to us!” Remember how John began this section in verse 5 where he says, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 1:9). Throughout his writings, John brings around that point. He refers to Jesus as being full of light with no darkness in him. John is making a direct connection to Jesus as the light - God’s light manifest to us. Jesus is the key for understanding these verses.

But why would I find these verses profoundly troubling? John says there is no darkness in God at all. None. I say I have fellowship with him. I’m constantly reflecting on my actions and observing the little ways my darkness is present. What’s troubling about these verses is that I have sin; I have darkness! I’m prone to live in the shadows. I’m not prone to expose my heart to light. I deny my sin. I deny my darkness. Which just makes me feel my darkness become even darker. I want to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light. But it’s easy to wonder: Does my darkness negate my fellowship with Jesus? Does my darkness negate my fellowship with others? John tells me I have sin. And not only do I have it, but I am prone to cover it up. But when I do that, I lose something between myself and God. And when I do that, I lose something between myself and others. Are these verses convicting to you, as well?

The Invitation of Light in the Bible: Thirdly, I used to really struggle with what it meant for us to live in the light. The same actions for one person can come from a totally different place and motivation in the heart for another person. So what does living in the light of Christ mean? I don’t think it prescribes precise behaviors or checking off a certain Christian list of “Dos and Don’ts.” I don’t think that’s the message here. Look back at verse 7, John says: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Walking in the light of Jesus is not a place of perfect obedience or behavior, is it? Walking in the light of Jesus is the place of personal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. It’s the place of exposure of your darkness. It’s the location of cleansing. It’s the place of forgiveness. The darkness isn’t really the place of my deepest sins, my deepest guilt. Rather, it’s where I think it’s safe to conceal myself from revealing those things to God and to others. Darkness is the place I run to hide my sin. It’s the place where you dump the broken pieces rather than admit you broke the lamp.

Do some sober reflection here. Is there a place of sin you have been concealing in darkness? Drew Hunter says, “Walking in the light...isn't about being perfect; it's about admitting we're not.”¹ Acknowledging your sin means coming into the light.

Acknowledging your broken pieces means walking in the light. Perhaps it's time to take steps to let in some light so you can fight the darkness that lurks inside. Does walking in the light mean we are perfect people and no longer need to confess? No, I think it's just the opposite! We can become keenly and sometimes painfully aware of our sin and dark places because of the light. If anything, being exposed to the light gives us a heightened awareness of the dark nooks and crannies of our heart and mind. Acknowledge and confess your brokenness and dark places. We should be asking, “Jesus, where do we need your light today?”

These verses can be uncomfortable because they force me to think about parts of me that don't cut the mustard. It reminds me of parts of me I would want to change. It reminds me of parts of me that I have tried to change and failed. The temptations, struggles, failures. Seeing my vulnerability before Jesus can be quite disconcerting, especially as I feel my need for change. I continually wrestle with hiding my same old sinful habits or behaviors.

God is Just and Faithful: Why Would This Be Comforting?

Now that we've addressed the troubling part of these verses, let's be encouraged and find out why these verses are so profoundly comforting. Check out verse 9, “If we are confessing our sins he is faithful and just in order that he should forgive us our sins and should cleanse us from everything unrighteous.”

It's not exactly clear in English the verbs that are used in verse 9. The verb tenses are different. Without boring you with the minutiae of Greek grammar, it's the Present Active Subjunctive tense. It's like John is saying, “If we might be confessing today” or you could say “Should we be confessing today.” And by the end of the verse there is a change in tense for “Forgive” and “Cleanse.” John shifts from the probable to the finished and completed past action. We are cleansed and forgiven in past tense. So it's a completed action. And if you're scratching your head- that's ok. John is just describing how God's plan for forgiveness takes place.

When we are sinning in our present lives, and we will, we should be confessing it. We should shine the light on that stuff as soon as we are able. It's something we have to do

and continually do! But in confessing our sins we look back to a completed action - we look back to the cross for our forgiveness before God today. When we invite the light of God into our hearts and ask for forgiveness, we point backwards in time to the past event of the cross. That's the only currency that can purchase our forgiveness before God, and it's available to us today, as we bring our sin into the light.

And notice God's motivations here in dealing with our sins. God is first faithful and then second he is just. God is faithful to us to love us and draw us back in. God's faithfulness means God is working for our good. It means God desires to win your heart and bring you into real relationship. But that true life and love cannot happen without satisfying God's justice. So God met this need in space and time. At the appointed time, Jesus lived and died on a Roman cross and he rose from the dead. Jesus satisfies God's justice on our behalf.

I work in a hospital. As 2020 wore on, I spent time with a lot of sick people. As I talked with families of the sick, they wanted nothing more than an antidote for Covid19. People wanted immunity from this fatal sickness that threatened and in some cases still threatens to destroy our bodies. Sickness is a terrible evil. And there is also a sickness of sin in our life that lurks in the darkness to destroy us. That darkness of the soul that we've been talking about this morning has a ready antidote. It's ready and free to anyone who would desire it. Jesus offers immunity to the sickness of sin, darkness, and death that looms over us. His sacrifice gave a remedy for the real evil and malice that infects the world. This is comforting to me and I hope it's comforting to you. God holds the antidote to our darkness in his hands. It was made available on the cross and still remains available for you today. And we all need it.

God is faithful to you, to love you. But you have sin, and sin needs to be dealt with. God is just because he has provided passage through death in a way that can satisfy his own justice. Jesus takes your sin and you get Jesus' righteousness. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, both when we first accept his gift of salvation and daily as we confess our dark sins to him.

What about "One Another"?

For this sermon series entitled "Our Life Together," we've been looking at several of the "One Another" Bible verses. Up to this point today we've been focusing mainly on our individual relationship to God: our individual darkness contrasted to God's light and how he makes a way for our relationship to him. However, there is an important "One

Another” component in this passage and can be summarized like this: *God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.*

Once we have recognized the darkness in ourselves and accepted that it’s only God who brings light into our lives, the necessary next step is to look around and see this same truth applies to everyone. This is where that fellowship with “One Another” can become richer, deeper, and more of what God intended because we can see each other through this lens. And that lens is graceful. We know the darkness of our own souls so maybe that gives us more empathy when we start to see slices of darkness in others - whoever we are in relationship with. They’ve got darkness, you’ve got darkness, I’ve got darkness. We’re all a mess. But God is at work, making good out of our relationships.

Our ability to reveal our darkness to God, accept our forgiveness from the cross, and live in that Light transforms our fellowship with one another. Exposure to the light of God made manifest in Jesus Christ changes how we act towards each other. The Gospel should always orient us to love God and to love others. If your faith does not lead you to care for others in some meaningful ways, you need to take an honest and hard look at how well you understand your faith.

So, how do we love others when our darkness does not naturally incline us to love those who are also in the same boat? I think we start with prayer for ourselves. It doesn’t have to be complicated, but our prayer can be as simple as “God help me to understand the darkness inside my own heart. Make me aware of the darkness in others so that I may love them gently and wisely.”

Then we step into our relationships. Maybe this leads us to reclaim the gift of confessing our sins regularly to one another. Admitting with heartfelt honesty our shortcomings with another person in one way to practice walking in the light. Find someone to confess your faults to so that they can proclaim Christ’s forgiveness to you. And if you are in the position of hearing someone confess sin they struggle with, listen well and listen deeply to what the other person is sharing. Pray. And when the moment is right, you can remind them of God’s truth and that they are free from their past sins because of the completed work of Christ on their behalf. God is faithful and he is just to forgive sins.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book, The Cost of Discipleship, he connects the verses of First John that we’ve been looking at with Ephesians 4:32 which says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Our

forgiveness ought to result in our compassion as we engage in community. I can engage in relationships with people that have rough edges. I can do this because of what God has done in me. He has exposed our darkness and brought us into the light of Christ's full and advancing forgiveness. Bonhoeffer also adds that Christian community is not a community of sinless and perfect people who don't need to repent anymore. I trust that isn't a surprise for you. But instead, Christian community is a community which proclaims sincere forgiveness and constantly encounters grace with God and with one another.²

As I was thinking about these verses, I also happened to be reading With Open Hands by Henri Nouwen.³ There was one section in particular which gave me reason to pause and alerted me of a dark corner of my own heart. In many of my relationships, both personal and professional, it's easy to say "I'll pray for you" when someone is hurting or struggling. Nouwen put this common "encouragement" in a new light for me. He says "Praying can never be antisocial or asocial. Whenever you pray and leave out your fellowman, your prayer is no longer real prayer." He later adds, "'I'll pray for you,' is more often seen as a meaningless remark than as a sign of genuine concern." It still shocks me when I read that quote. I don't want that to be true of me, but I had to spend some time thinking about it.

"I'll pray for you" are easy words to throw around to each other, but if they are just words without any actual prayers behind them - they are meaningless. Of course our prayers are important, but perhaps praying for the person you are with on the spot is a more loving way to be in fellowship with one another. As you pray, make specific mention of the areas you thought needed prayer. To do this well, you'll need to be listening to each other.

Another way to practice being social in prayer is with this experiment. Shift the order of operations. The next time you're about to say to someone, "I'll pray for you" stop yourself! Don't say it. By all means you should still pray for them - there is power in praying for people. So make yourself a note and remember to do it. But instead of using that phrase as the expression of love you leave with someone, think about the conversations and what that person might be going through and what they may need in light of what they shared. Then once you have considered their unique situation, go and do something kind, tenderhearted, and loving for that person. Do something good for them: a kind word, a handwritten note, a gentle touch, a warm hug, a helpful deed or errand, a generous gift, a loving surprise, or a truthful conversation. Then tell them "I have been praying for you." Reverse the order and see if God is at work in this little

experiment. Maybe there is an invitation here for deeper relationships with God and with others in your life.

Conclusion: What Are You Going To Do About It?

We all have darkness and need God's light and forgiveness through Jesus. One of the most prominent points that emerges for me is that God's antidote to our darkness is found in him alone, where we are called to be in fellowship with him and with one another.

Let exposure to the light of Christ humble you and soften you to the lives of others. You are released from your sin through the cross of Christ. Your forgiveness frees you to love your neighbor for the sake of Jesus. You can love those around you because you are broken too. You are a work in progress so be mindful of that as you love your neighbor.

The Gospel message is the antidote to sin, darkness, and separation from God. The Gospel message is also the antidote to sin and isolation from others. Walk in the light of Christ and you will have fellowship with one another. Study these verses and let them trouble you and then let them comfort you. Let them sink into your bones and warm your heart. Let them motivate you to step out in faith to trust God who brings light into our lives and enlivens us to bring light to our neighbor. We need these verses from John to point us to Jesus. May they help us so that we may better love one another.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Drew Hunter. *Made for Friendship: The Relationship That Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joys*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018. Page 86.
- ² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Revised And Unabridged Edition. New York: The MacMillian Company, 1966. Page 323-324.
- ³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985. Page 53.
This name may sound familiar if you have ever taken the Stephen Ministry training. His more prominent book about suffering and caregiving is called, *The Wounded Healer*, and is worth reading.
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Further Reading Suggestions:

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. New York, New York: HarperOne, 2009.

Hunter, Drew. *Made for Friendship: The Relationship That Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joys*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018.

Sauls, Scott. *Befriend: Create Belonging in an Age of Judgment, Isolation, and Fear*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016.

Welch, Edward T. *Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018.

