

# Walking in the Light: Turning Away From Sin



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 3:19, 8:12, Rom. 3:10–20, 1 Tim. 1:15, 1 John 1:5–2:2.*

**Memory Text:** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NASB).

In 1982 an unusual work of modern art went on display. It was a shotgun affixed to a chair. The artwork could be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel. The problem was that the gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. Amazingly enough, people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path, although they knew that the gun could go off at any moment.

Talk about tempting fate!

Unfortunately, people do the same thing with sin, thinking that they can stare it in the face and still get away unharmed. Unlike the gun, however, sin—unless dealt with—definitely will kill them.

This week John looks at the problem of sin and its solution in Jesus Christ.

**The Week at a Glance:** What does the Bible mean when it calls God “light”? What kind of errors regarding the reality of sin did John seek to deal with in these early verses? What promises does John present to us as the remedy for the sin in our lives? Why do we need those promises?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.*

## The Light *(1 John 1:5)*

**Read** 1 John 1:5. What does John mean that “God is light”? After all, light is merely a physical phenomenon, a form of energy made up of photons. What point is John making? See Pss. 27:1, 36:9, Matt. 4:16, John 3:19, 8:12, 12:46, 1 Tim. 6:16.

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Light is used in reference to both Jesus and the Father. Light is God’s glory, and it points to Him as the One who brings salvation. The image also emphasizes the concept of truth and revelation. And, especially in our immediate context, it stresses His moral qualities of righteousness, holiness, and perfection (*see also 1 John 2:9*).

**Why** is John not content to say that God is “light” but adds that “in him there is no darkness at all”?

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By adding this phrase, the apostle underlines in strongest possible terms God’s perfection and His separation from sin. He is not comparable to the Greek or Roman gods, in whom one supposedly would find virtues and vices combined. God is pure holiness, pure goodness, pure righteousness. He is, in a sense, as opposite to sin as darkness is to light.

John’s mention of darkness, meanwhile, introduces a new element, one that sets the stage for what follows. As fallen beings, steeped in sin, humans belong by nature to the sphere of darkness rather than to the realm of light. If God is light and we are in darkness, the contrast between us and God, especially in terms of holiness and righteousness, couldn’t be greater.

**Think about darkness. What kind of emotions, images, and thoughts does it evoke in you? Write down what you come up with about darkness, about what it represents, and about how it makes you feel. Why is it such an appropriate image for sin and unholy? Bring your responses to class.**

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 John 1:8–10*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Accept that Jesus is the only solution for sin.

**Feel:** Experience thankfulness for forgiveness freely given.

**Do:** Respond by confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness.

► **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Know: Jesus Is the Only Solution to Sin

**A** According to John, what is the ultimate self-deception? (*1 John 1:8*).

**B** In 1 John 2, *parakletos* is translated “advocate.” Define the role of an advocate. What impact does knowing that Jesus is our Advocate have on our lives?

**C** What happens when we confess our sins?

### II. Feel: The Key to Freedom

**A** Imagine that you are locked in a dark room, when unexpectedly the door opens and light streams in. How would you feel? Think of some other analogies that describe how you feel when you have experienced forgiveness.

**B** How can we foster a spirit of thankfulness and not take forgiveness for granted?

### III. Do: Living in the Light

**A** How, when, and where should we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness?

**B** What prevents us from seeing the enormity of our sin? What steps can we take to open our eyes?

**C** What can we do to cultivate a proper attitude to our struggles with sin?

► **Summary:** There is only one solution for the sin problem, and that is Jesus. He is able and willing to forgive us if we are willing to confess our sins.

## The Sin Problem *(1 John 1:6, 8, 10)*

First John 1:6–10 forms a unit. After his principal statement about God’s character, John deals with some beliefs apparently circulating among the believers. It is these beliefs that he criticizes.

All five verses begin more or less in the same way, namely, with the phrase “If we.” However, we notice a marked difference among them.

**What** are some of the claims that John, in verses 6, 8, and 10, is dealing with? What false statements are being made, and what do they have in common?

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The first statement discusses fellowship with God. People claim to have fellowship with God, but in reality they walk in darkness, which means that they really aren’t walking with God.

In contrast (*vs.* 7), walking in the light results in true fellowship. Those who do that are cleansed from their sins. Therefore, to walk in darkness has to do with living in sin. Living in sin and claiming to have fellowship with God is, according to John, a lie.

The next two claims, in verses 8 and 10, are linked with sin. Though John speaks against the practice of sin, he’s very clear about the reality of it in our lives. In verse 8 he seems to be dealing with the belief that humans are not sinful, a teaching that goes against the most basic Christian doctrine.

**Why** is John’s declaration in verse 10 so important? What are the implications of the idea that “we have not sinned”?

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Notice the progression in these verses. In verse 6, the folk are lying. In verse 8, they deceive themselves. In verse 10, they make God a liar. Obviously, John understands the reality and seriousness of the sin problem for humanity.

**How open and honest are you with yourself regarding the reality of sin in your own life? Do you tend to ignore it, justify it, or berate yourself over it? What should be your attitude toward your own struggles with sin, and what can you do in order to cultivate the right attitude? What is the right attitude?**

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Walking in light demands that our lives reflect, in some small way, the life of Jesus, who is the Light.

**Just for Teachers:** One cannot rise above the god one worships. For example, when a person worships a god who is dualistic—both good and evil—can that person be morally upright, following good and shunning evil? This week’s lesson deals with God as light. Christians who worship such a God cannot walk in darkness, but walk in light.

**Discover:** Look up Genesis 1:3; Psalm 119:105, 130; Isaiah 5:20; John 1:5, 7; John 3:19–21; Ephesians 5:8; Revelation 21:23 and see how the word *light* is used in the Bible.

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**Discuss:** What did the exercise teach you about light? How do the various meanings of *light*, when taken together, give you a more fully developed sense of who God is?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus as God in flesh brought a basic message to this world. That message unveils God’s character and what He demands of us (*1 John 1:5–10; 2:1, 2*). Both are important in order to experience what God has done to us through Christ. Make that point come through in today’s discussion.

## Bible Commentary

Upon what is the Christian understanding of God based? Not reason. Not logic. Not nature. Not philosophy. But “the message which we have heard from Him” (*1 John 1:5, NKJV*)—from Jesus Christ. The message is simple: God is light, and He expects us to walk in the Light.

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## Responses to the Sin Problem *(1 John 1:7, 9; 2:2)*

It's clear that in these verses John is dealing with the seriousness of sin. How does he understand sin? In 1 John 3:4 he equates sin with lawlessness. According to 1 John 5:17, sin is wrongdoing or unrighteousness. It is a departure from the will of God as revealed to us in Scripture. Sin also is opposed to truth. It alienates from God the person who commits sin, and this alienation leads to spiritual death. *Sin*, in the singular, may point to the separation of the sinner from God; in the plural, *sins*, it may point to sinful acts. However we view it, one thing is certain: Sin is real, and unless dealt with, it will destroy us.

**First** John 1:7 and 9 contain divine promises regarding the solution to the sin problem. What are those promises, and how can we make them real in our own lives? How can we experience for ourselves what God is promising us here?

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Forgiveness of sins has become possible because of Christ's death on the cross, the shedding of His blood as the sacrifice. Because we have transgressed the law and therefore deserve death, He died in our place and has set us free from the eternal condemnation that our transgression otherwise will bring us. More so, His blood purifies us from every sin.

However, from our side, confession of sins is necessary. The term *to confess* in 1 John 1:9 also can mean "to admit," "to acknowledge." The text does not mention to whom sins have to be confessed. God is certainly implied, because in the next part of the verse we hear that if sins are confessed, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins. It may be that confession of sins includes also public confession before those who were hurt through our sins; even so, the forgiveness of sin comes only from God.

First John 1:9 also has the force of a command. We should lay our sins before God, and He will forgive us and purify us. Sinning makes us guilty; we need forgiveness. Sin makes us unclean; we need purification. Through Jesus, God has made a way for us to have both.

**What areas of your life might you need to change in order to better avail yourself of these wonderful promises? What holds you back from choosing to surrender all your sinful ways to God?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**I. God Is Light** (Review 1 John 1:5, 6 with the class.)

To say “God is light” (vs. 5) is to say that God is essentially pure, absolutely holy, uncompromisingly righteous, fully transparent, and self-revealing. Our knowledge of Him rests not upon our innate ability but on His revelation through Jesus Christ (*John 14:9–12*).

As light, God provides our way out of chaos and darkness, not only in the cosmos (*Gen. 1:1–4*) but also in human life: He “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (*2 Cor. 4:6, NKJV*). Hence the assurance of the believer: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (*Ps. 27:1, NKJV*).

There is something absolute about God being light: “In Him is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5, NKJV*). Some philosophers teach that good and evil necessarily coexist and that both spring from the same source. The apostle denounces such false teaching. God is light, and light’s innate nature is to dispel darkness. It is God’s absolute holiness and moral purity that make Him the only Source of truth and salvation.

**Think on This:** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (*John 8:12, NKJV*). How does God, as light, not only save us from darkness but empower us to walk in the light? (Compare *Eph. 5:8–14*.)

**II. Walking in the Light** (Review 1 John 1:7–2:2 with the class.)

God is light. We as sinners are in darkness—moral and spiritual darkness (*Isa. 1:5, 6; Rom. 3:23*). But the “message” we have received from Jesus is that through Him we can move from darkness to light and have fellowship with God. That fellowship makes our joy complete (*1 John 1:3, 4*) and permits us to walk in the Light. Walking in the Light demands that we be aware of three dangers and three assurances. The apostle introduces each of these dangers and assurances by the phrase “if we” and paints a picture of contrast between error and truth.

**First, the danger of inconsistent conduct.** “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie” (vs. 6, *NKJV*). The gospel demands a consistency between talk and walk, profession and conduct, worship and fellowship. We cannot say we have fellowship with God but lead a life that is contrary to God’s will (*see also 2 Cor. 6:14*). Such an inconsistent life makes us liars, and we are judged to be children of

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## The Christian's Goal *(1 John 2:1)*

**In 1 John 2:1** John calls us not to sin. How should we understand this admonition?

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The context of the call here not to sin comes in the context of walking in the light, which was introduced with the statement that God is light. If we want to live in fellowship with Him and His children, we must walk in the light, and to walk in the light means to renounce sin *(1 John 2:1)*.

John addresses the believers in a caring and intimate way, calling them “little children” and telling them one reason for writing his letter: They must renounce sin completely. By doing this, he is not suggesting that a completely sinless existence is possible, but he is pleading that Christians stay away from any definite act of sin.

**Why** does John balance his admonition not to sin with the phrase “and if anyone sins” *(NKJV)*? See also *1 Kings 8:46, Rom. 3:10–20, 1 Tim. 1:15*.

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The discussion of sin here could have been misunderstood in the sense that someone might think that sin does not matter: “Do not claim to be without sin; you are a sinner anyway. Therefore, just live your life and do not worry about sin.”

John therefore has to balance his statements about sin, and he does this with 1 John 2:1. The goal of a disciple of Christ is not to sin. Christians must admit that they are sinners; yet, they must seek to live without sin.

At the same time, John doesn't want to give the idea that we can be perfectly sinless. Therefore, along with his admonition against sinning, he says: “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate . . .” *(NKJV)*. This is a clear acknowledgment of the reality of sin in the lives of Christians. Even consecrated and sincere Christians may commit sins. Unfortunately, sinning is always a real possibility for church members. Therefore they need help. They need someone to help them resist temptation, but they also need someone who intervenes for them after they have sinned.

**How can we learn to live with the tension of being sinners and yet being admonished—very strongly in the Bible—not to sin?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

darkness. On the other hand, “if we walk in the light” and maintain our “fellowship with one another,” we bear testimony that our sins have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (*vs. 7, NKJV*), and we remain in light.

**Second, the danger of denying the fact of sin.** “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). Some in the world refute the existence of sin. They see moral lapses, relational defects, or breaches of civil law, but these are all imperfections of conduct against a code devised by society. While such conduct may have its consequences (a fine or a jail sentence), it has nothing to do with sin as a rebellion against God. Denial of sin perpetuates moral and spiritual darkness. But confession of sin leads to a life of light and forgiveness.

**Third, the danger of claiming sinlessness.** “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (*vs. 10, NKJV*). To say that we have not sinned or to say that we have reached perfection so that we cannot sin is to make God a liar, for His Word plainly declares that all are sinners (*Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23*). Perfection on this side of heaven makes the mediatorial ministry of Jesus unnecessary. Of course, John desires that those who are saved “may not sin.” But the apostle is pragmatic and offers the assurance, “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (*1 John 2:1, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Review the three contrasting statements given above. Recall a personal experience during which you faced one of the three dangers John warns against, and God’s promise came to your rescue. How did the promise help deliver you?

### ► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** What is the first thing you do when you hear a piece of good news? Grab a phone and tell a friend, right? Yet, what have you done with the most wonderful good news that this world has ever known: that Jesus saves us from sin and makes us children of light? Consider the following:

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see

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## The Christian's Comfort *(1 John 2:1, 2)*

First John 2:1, 2 contain wonderful statements that comfort repentant sinners and fill them with hope and courage. In spite of sin and guilt and horrible consequences that often arise from our sins, there is a solution. John already has mentioned forgiveness, or purification, of sins. Now he comes back to this topic again, saying that this forgiveness has become possible through Jesus.

How? First, He is our Advocate, and He intervenes in our behalf. This Advocate is identified as the Messiah (“Christ”), and it is said that He is righteous. Righteousness was attributed to God the Father in 1 John 1:9. It is attributed to the Son in 1 John 2:1, and it’s because of His righteous character that He can intercede for us.

Second, our forgiveness is secured because, through His sacrificial death, Jesus brought about propitiation, or atonement; this means that He paid the penalty for our sins. The debt that we owed, which we could never pay, Jesus paid for us.

John therefore portrays Jesus as Sacrifice and Intercessor. In the context of the New Testament witness, this implies that Jesus lived a sinless life among us, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, where He intercedes in our behalf.

The term *paraklētos*, translated “advocate” in 1 John 2, has been translated differently; for example, “comforter,” “helper,” “advocate,” “mediator,” or “intercessor” (*see John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1*). It is a person who is called to the side of someone else and who stands up for someone else. A *paraklētos* can be a person who helps a friend. In the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is the helper. In the first Epistle of John, Jesus is the Helper and Intercessor (*1 John 2:1*).

When we talk about Jesus as our Advocate and take great comfort in the fact that He is instrumental in providing forgiveness for our sins, we must be careful not to give the impression that the Father is mean and harsh and must be persuaded by a go-between to forgive us. Such a picture of God is unwarranted. He is the One who sent Jesus in our behalf (*John 3:16*). Also, a few verses earlier we were told that He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (*1 John 1:9*). Jesus does not have to pacify the Father. On the contrary, the Father is the One who has revealed, through Jesus, His desire for our salvation.

**Based on what we have just read, how do you understand the wonderful promises given us in 1 John 2:1, 2? What do they mean in terms of our daily walk with the Lord? How can you make those promises more real in your own life? What changes should those promises bring to our experience?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'” (*Matt. 5:16, NKJV*). How is being a light linked to obedience and good works?

2 First John 1:6, 7 presents an important gospel principle: fellowship with God, fellowship with one another, and walking in the light are all inseparable parts of the Christian calling. Why must we as Christians have all three?

**Application Questions:**

1 How do you answer the Christian calling in (a) your community, (b) your church, and (c) your family? What are some difficulties you may face in trying to do this? How do you meet the challenges?

2 Isaiah said, “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you” (*Isa. 60:1, NKJV*). One quality of light is to shine and dispel darkness. How can we shine radiantly for Christ?

► **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your class to engage in the following creative expressions and activities this coming week as a way to live and experience the truth of the lesson more fully: **Jesus as our Light.**

1 Music is a mnemonic device. Just ask anyone to recite the alphabet. Chances are one of them will start singing the letters. That’s because setting something to music makes it easier to remember. Try memorizing 1 John 1:9. Then, if you are musically inclined, try setting this, and other verses studied this week from the lesson, to music. Or try learning verses that already have been put to song as a defense against the three temptations John warns against in his first epistle.

2 Do a word study of the ways that light is used in the three epistles of John, contrasting them against the use of darkness. What does this comparison teach you about the power of light against darkness and the danger of darkness?

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Confession,” pp. 37–41, in *Steps to Christ*.

“ ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ The conditions of obtaining mercy from God are simple and reasonable. The Lord does not require us to do some grievous thing in order to gain forgiveness. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to commend our souls to the God of heaven or to expiate our transgression. He that ‘confesseth and forsaketh’ his sin ‘shall have mercy.’ Proverbs 28:13. In the courts above, Christ is pleading for His church—pleading for those for whom He has paid the redemption price of His blood. Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 552, 553.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, read what you wrote about the thoughts and emotions and images that the idea of “darkness” brought to you. How does that help you better understand not only what it means to be unrighteous and in sin but also what it means to walk in the light of God?
- 2** How could you help those who are so burdened with their sins and guilt that they are ready to give up on God completely? What promises and encouragement can you offer them? What examples from the Bible can you find of God forgiving some very heinous sin?
- 3** Some people believe that we have to be utterly free of all sin before we can be saved. How do you deal with this belief without, at the same time, giving the impression that sin doesn’t matter?
- 4** Someone killed most of a family of people who were not Christians and who never professed faith in Jesus. Years later, on his deathbed, the murderer confessed his deeds and accepted Christ as His Savior. How would you respond to this comment by a surviving member of the family: “So, according to you Christians, my whole family is destined for final punishment, while the person who murdered them now has the promise of heaven? Is that what your religion teaches?”