



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

WALKING IN THE LIGHT • Confession

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

1 John 1:5-9

In this passage, John teaches that the key to experiencing intimacy with God is “walking in the light.” This is a fundamental concept but it is often misunderstood. Let’s try to unlock the metaphors and learn how we can experience God’s love and forgiveness continually.

God is Light (Verse 5)

John uses a metaphor, namely “light,” to help us understand a particular thing that is true about God. Apparently, this truth about God has a special relevance to what John wants to teach us. So let’s see if we can figure out what it means.

In everyday life, light enables us to see. It exposes things and reveals what’s really there. In Scripture, light often represents holiness or righteousness.

1 Timothy 6:15,16 says, “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.”

Matthew 5:14-16 states, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Both concepts should inform our understanding of what John means when he says, “God is light.” He is drawing our attention to a perfect, holy God who sees and knows everything. He does so to make us aware of our sinfulness before this awesome God.

Walk in the Light (Verses 6 and 7)

Keeping in mind the metaphor of light, John then makes a logical argument; namely, that it is impossible to have intimacy with God and simultaneously walk in darkness.

Why can’t we? If God is light, and we claim to be next to Him in the dark, something is wrong. It is like claiming that we spent the weekend lounging in the shade of the Sahara desert. John is preparing to make the case that the only place to have intimacy with God and enjoy the other benefits He enumerates is to “walk in the light.”

What does it mean to walk in the light? The most common answer you should expect to this question is something along the lines of “being good,” or “following Jesus,” or “doing the right thing.” If that’s the answer you get – great! But it’s not the right answer. By asking the question and graciously pointing out that the answer is not what they likely thought it was, you create a teachable moment.

What’s the Big Idea?

God has provided a way to restore believers to Himself after they sin. By confessing to Him we experience His forgiveness, are purified from sin, and can enjoy fellowship with God. It also enables us to enjoy real fellowship with one another.

What’s the Problem?

Personal sin is an ongoing part of our live – even as believers. Unconfessed sin destroys our ability to have intimate fellowship with God and can lead to more sin.



Walking in the light isn't a metaphor for being good. It's a call to live exposed to God's holy knowledge – to leave the shadows and bring out sin into the light. We do this by confessing our sins.

Understanding the Parallelism (verses 6-7, 8-9)

One way to understand the concepts in vv. 6-7 more clearly is to also read vv. 8-9 and compare the two passages. Together, they form a parallelism. A parallelism is a literary structure in which one idea is expressed in two different ways. It's a device used for emphasis or clarity. The book of Proverbs is full of parallelisms. For example, Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." The two clauses are meant to communicate precisely the same thing.

If the people in your study understand parallelisms, it will help them unlock 1 John 1. The ideas and clauses in verses 6-7 match up, or parallel, those in verses 8-9:

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| <p>6. If we claim to have fellowship with Him,
yet walk the darkness,
we lie and do not live by the truth.</p> | <p>8. If we claim to be without sin,
we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us.</p> |
| <p>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,
purifies us from all sin.</p> | <p>9. If we confess our sins,
He is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins and
purify us from all unrighteousness.</p> |

Although it's more complicated than the Proverbs examples, and not all clauses have a direct parallel, the overall correspondence should be apparent, and may help your students to see that "walking in the light" is a figure John uses to mean "confession."

Confess Your Sins (verses 8-9)

The Greek word for "confession" literally means "to say the same thing" or "to agree." This sheds some interesting light on what is involved in confession.

We are agreeing with God that we have sinned. This stands in contrast to justifying (i.e., denying) that what we did was wrong. We are agreeing that what Christ has done paid for our sins. This stands in contrast to "beating ourselves up" for what we did wrong. We are agreeing to turn from our sinful course and turn back to God. This is repentance.

John also emphasizes that God is "faithful and just." The faithful part sounds nice, but what is justice doing here? At first glance we might be more comforted to hear John say, "God is faithful and *merciful* and will forgive us." But He doesn't. That's part of what makes the gospel so ridiculously sweet. When Jesus died, He paid for our sin – all of it. As such we don't have to beg for mercy, we can demand justice! I know that sounds like heresy, but it isn't. God has joyfully obligated Himself to wipe away the sins of those who are in Christ. By Christ's death, God is both just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). It is just for God to forgive you. Crazy.

The Summary (verses 5-9)

The fundamental idea that you must convey through this study is that God has provided a way for us to experience intimacy with Him, even after we have sinned. God's means are not difficult. He simply asks us to come to Him to confess our sins, and experience His forgiveness all over again. He who is holy and all-knowing loves us, and has seen all that we've done anyway. His commitment to us, and our security in Him are never at risk, but our ability to experience that fellowship with Him can be ruined by unconfessed sin. We can enjoy His presence unhindered in our lives by continuing to walk in the light, agreeing with Him that our sin is wrong, knowing He has justly forgiven it through the blood of Jesus, and turning from it with His help.

What's Our Response?

There are two very practical things you can do for application. First, you can ask people to keep a short accounting of sins they committed this week. When they become aware of sin, encourage them to go through the three steps of confession:

1. Agree [with God] that you've sinned.
2. Agree [with God] that the sin is forgiven because of Jesus' death..
3. Agree [with God] to turn your attitudes and actions toward Him and away from sin.

A second application with which you can end the study is to have everyone take a piece of paper and make a list of sins that God brings to mind. Then have them write out 1 John 1:9 across the list and rip up the list.

What Are the Questions?

1 John 1:5-9

LAUNCH

Describe a time when you seriously wronged a friend? What did it do to your friendship? How was it restored?

EXPLORE

1. John makes the statement that God is light. What do you think he means by this? What is the purpose of light in everyday life?
2. In Scripture, what does light represent?
3. As these two ideas combine, what do they tell us about God?
4. If God is light, why can't we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness?
5. In this context, what does it mean to walk in the darkness? What does it mean to walk in the light?
6. How are verses 6-7 related to verses 8-9?
7. What is the parallel to "walk in the light"?
8. John states that when we "walk in the light...we have fellowship with one another." How does unconfessed sin affect our fellowship with other Christians? Was there a time you experienced this?
9. The Greek word for confession meant literally "to say the same thing along with someone." What insight does this give to what is involved in confession and to whom we should confess?
10. In addressing the issue of confession, John underscores that God is "faithful and just." Would it be more comforting to you if he had said God is faithful and merciful? Why or why not?
11. Why do you think he chooses to draw attention to God's justice?
12. How are we forgiven for sins we commit of which we are not aware?
13. Using the language of this passage how would you summarize the good news of the gospel?

APPLY

14. Describe a time recently when God's forgiveness became real to you.
15. John does not comment on frequency. When and how often do you confess your sins during the day?
16. What do you think makes you want to come to God and confess your sins? What holds you back?
17. Take a minute to search your heart for any unconfessed sin. Jot it down on a piece of paper and confess them to God. Write out 1 John 1:9 across the sheet and tear it up, symbolizing God's forgiving of all these sins.

What Are the Answers?

1. Light enables us to see. It reveals and exposes things. because of the cross, and that we must turn away from it.
2. Light represents God's holiness or righteousness. 10. Allow the group to discuss.
3. He is holy and all-seeing. 11. It shows the rock solid basis for our forgiveness is not God's whims, but His declared and fulfilled purpose in sacrificing His Son for us.
4. Because there is no darkness anywhere near Him, He is all light. It's impossible to be in an intimate relationship with an omniscient God and have unrevealed secrets. 12. Our sin is forgiven because of Christ's death on the cross. As we confess any sin of which we are aware, the promise is that He forgives all of our sin and purifies us. Confession of the sins we are aware of enables us to maintain fellowship, and experience that forgiveness.
5. Walking in the darkness is hiding our sins. Walking in the light is bringing our secrets out into the open, where God can deal with them.
6. They are a parallelism. 13.-14. Allow the group to discuss.
7. The parallel to "walk in the light" is "confess your sins." 15. We should confess our sin as often as we are aware of sin in our lives.
8. Unconfessed sin can cause disruption in our Christian fellowship, if for no other reason than we may be experiencing conviction or guilt. 16. Allow the group to discuss.
9. We are agreeing with God that we have sinned, that it is forgiven 17. This can be a powerful exercise, especially for those who have never really considered that God would completely erase their sins.

Memorize

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9