



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 John 1:5-10

1 John 1

"Walking in the Light"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Mike, and good morning. We are continuing our study in 1 John, which we began last week. We covered the first four verses of the chapter. We'll cover verses 5-10 and finish the chapter this morning.

"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this Sunday morning, this opportunity that we have to be together with the saints, with Your people. What a blessing that is, to have fellowship with them, and true fellowship. Fellowship in them and fellowship with You, fellowship in Your word, listening to what You have to say to us. Help us, Lord, to listen carefully, to put the cares of life out of our minds for just a little while and focus on Your word and what You have to say to us.

We pray to that end, that the Spirit of God will minister to us. What a blessing we have when we think about it. We have the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The moment of faith we're sealed with the Spirit. We are secure because of Him. He keeps us until the day of redemption and in the meantime he guides us through life and teaches us Your word. He's the ultimate teacher. We recognize that, Lord. It's important for us who stand at a pulpit to make preparation and do the best we can, to make things clear.

But ultimately everything's a fog if He doesn't clear it, if He doesn't illuminate the page of Scripture and illuminate our minds, and help us to understand things. And I pray that that will be the result of our time together this morning, that He will teach us, that He will open this word up, help us to have an understanding of what John wrote. And beyond that, that He would apply it to our lives.

We are all at different places in life. We have different experiences, different needs, and concerns. He knows all of that and He knows how to apply the word to each and every various issue of life. I pray that that will be the result of our time together and You'll build us up in the faith and prepare us for the work ahead.

And help us to have a greater picture of You and a greater appreciation of who You are and what You're doing for us, the security that we have in You, and the way we're to live our lives in light of all that we have in Jesus Christ.

Lord, we commit this to You and pray Your blessing's upon us. And bless us, we pray not only spiritually, but physically, materially. You've made us material, physical beings. We have needs of a material nature and we're reminded of that with certain prayer requests that have been listed in our bulletin. We pray that You would bless those who are in physical need - they're sick, they're recovering from surgery, they're going through procedures of various kinds.

Some are without work. In Your providence, open a door of work. That's something very easy to do. You're the God of providence and You can do that. We pray for that, but we do pray that it happen

in Your time, and You are perfect in Your timing. Providence always works well for Your people. We go through dark valleys sometimes, but it's not dark to You and You know where You're leading us. And I pray that those who are without work, or those who are sick or discouraged because of the circumstances of life, that You would encourage them with that fact, that Your hand is upon them. You are in front of them, beside them, behind them. You are guiding them. They're never outside of Your care.

Help us all to remember that. Some of us, Lord, are not struggling with issues of that kind. We're employed or we're healthy, or we're surrounded with family and friends. But Lord, most every Sunday that's reason for thanksgiving and that's what we ought to be doing, giving thanksgiving to You for all the good things You give us, and You give us an abundance beyond all that we ask or think. We thank You for that, so Lord, bless in these ways.

And then, Lord, we pray, again, for the ministry, that You'd bless it this week, as a new series begins. We pray that You would bless Mike as he teaches, and all of those who will follow. May it be an enjoyable and helpful and very instructive series that we have this summer. Bless it, and we pray You'd bless the ministry of this past week, Vacation Bible School. Thank You for all the labor that went into it, for the individuals who planned and carried things out, for the young people that helped, and the teachers that taught, and all of that, Lord. Thank You and we pray that fruit will come from it, that the seeds that were sewn will germinate and sprout into eternal life for so many of these children that were there.

We look to You to do that. That's Your work, and it's Your work to teach us this morning. It's Your work to bless us in so many ways. So, Lord, bless us now as we sing our next hymn. Prepare our hearts for time of study and worship together. We pray in Christ name.
Amen.

[Message] One of the great statements in the Old Testament is an obscure statement, but impressive to me. In Genesis 5:24, we read

Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him. He walked with God for 300 years. It was a long walk in an evil age, the age before the flood, which meant Enoch stood out. He was different from all of his contemporaries. He must have taken abuse from the men of his day because he was so different and because he did walk with God.

But what a privilege to do that. What a privilege to walk with God and walk with God for 300 years. The picture it gives is that of a child walking with his or her father and getting wise counsel, or a young man walking and talking with an older mentor, and learning about business and the art of the deal.

Philippe Godet, the son of the Swiss New Testament commentator Frederic Godet, wrote that he liked to rise early in the morning. It was a habit he learned from his father. He always got up early and Philippe would often go out and walk with him, a son with his father. He wrote, "I can see him going slowly to and fro in the road. He has his Greek testament in his hands and he meditates and ponders." I imagine Enoch like that. He walked with God. He had fellowship with the Lord. He communed with the Lord in prayer. He meditated on God's truth. He followed the Lord's ways. He was obedient to the Lord's instruction and his behavior.

That is walking with the Lord. It characterized Enoch's life and it should characterize ours. We should be men and women who are seen as walking with the Lord, living in fellowship with Him, especially in these dark days. That's what John writes about in the second half of chapter 1 of his epistle. The reason he did was there was a man. There was a teacher. Evidently a very charismatic character in the church, a church that John knew well - maybe even the church at Ephesus - a man who claimed he walked with God. In fact, he made some bold, even brazen, claims. He said he walked in the light and he had no sin. He was so spiritual that he could do no wrong. And a number of people were very impressed with him. They followed him. So John felt compelled to write this letter and tell the church who really walks

with God and how we walk with God, how we have fellowship with Him.

He does that by first giving the standard for real fellowship and he does that with theology. You can't really understand the word of God without understanding some theology. You can't avoid doctrine if you want to know God's word and want to live life in this world and live it for the Lord. He begins with theology. He begins with a very simple statement, but one that is rich in meaning.

John writes, "God is love." That's the message, John says, that they heard from Him, from the Lord Jesus Christ. He had declared that in John 9:12. He said that "He is the light of the world." He is Light because God is Light, and He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is God's eternal Son. He is Light. All through the Old Testament God is associated with light. His first command in Genesis 1:3, after the universe had been created and it was formless in void and darkness was over the surface of the deep, there was no light. God says, "Let there be light," and there was light. And throughout the Old Testament He appears like that. He appears in fire and light. Psalm 104 describes God as covering Himself with light as with a cloak.

John says God is light. That is His nature and it expresses a number of His attributes. Two of them associated with light are illumination and holiness, or truth and purity. Those are certainly two aspects of God's nature that John emphasizes in this chapter. But life is also part of that. Light is life giving. So before God created life, he called forth light, and spiritually it is that way as well. Spiritual light precedes and causes spiritual life.

So we have the two, I think, together in this. David combines these in a great statement he makes in Psalm 36:9, where he says, "With You," speaking to the Lord God - "With You is the fountain of life/In Your light we see light." God is the source of illumination. He's the source of revelation. He's the source of truth and He's the source of all life. Life comes from Him - physical life, spiritual life. He's the fountain of it.

And knowledge is from Him. Man is in darkness unless God gives revelation. Man is in darkness unless God gives understanding, unless He gives knowledge. We all see things naturally. We see lots of things. We see reality; we see facts about the world and about life. Everyone does, but not everyone sees it the same way. And so to see things correctly we must have the light of God. We'll never see those things, anything, correctly without seeing them through the window of God's word. That translates everything. That interprets everything for us. That gives us perspective. That's who God is. God gives that. God is the source of light and life.

And in this one simple statement "God is light," John is emphasizing all of that. God's nature is characterized by light. It's characterized by life. It's characterized by truth and by purity - moral purity. John emphasizes that by ending, "And in Him there is no darkness at all." No darkness at all. God's not a mix or a confusion of good and evil, of truth and error. He's light. There's nothing unholy about Him. There is no evil in Him. There is nothing false about the Lord God. And as you reflect upon that, you must see that that is a great blessing. We can pass over that. God is light. Nice statement, great verse, and move on.

But reflect upon that for a moment. There's no darkness in God. God is absolutely reliable. There's nothing arbitrary about Him. He is the governor of all things. He created everything. He is the foundation of everything. He holds everything together. There's structure to this universe that is reliable - physical structure, moral structure. He is the one who governs our lives and He's firm ground. He's reliable. He's always trustworthy. This universe and our lives are not left to chance and uncertainty, or some blind mechanical determinism. We're not caught in the jaws of fate or some capricious deity who changes his mind. The Lord God Almighty, the triune God is unchangeable and good.

Later in 4:8, John give another definition of God when he writes God is love. God is light. God is love. So when we walk with Him, He

leads us in straight paths that are always right, that are always good. There's no darkness in Him. Things may seem dark to us and confusing to us as we go through the shadow of death, as we pass through difficulties in life. We may not understand them, but they aren't confusing to Him. He knows exactly where He's going. He knows exactly what He's doing. He knows where He's taking us. He is light. And since He is, those who walk with Him will reflect His light. That's inevitable. They will believe God's revelation, the light of His truth, and they will show His character in their thoughts and behavior, the moral light of His character.

Now that's the standard of test of whether or not a person is really walking with the Lord. And John uses it in the next verses as the standard and to refute the claims that this troublemaking teacher and his cult were making. There are three claims. The first is in verse 6. John states them in a kind of hypothetical way, "if we say." And what he means is "if we say what they say." What they say is we have fellowship with Him, with God. Well, if we say that, John is saying, and we don't behave correctly, that's not correct. So "if we say" means what they are saying, and the first thing they said is they had fellowship with God, and they may have described their fellowship as walking in the light. John does use that expression in verse 7. It may be that he's borrowing their expression to show how wrong they are.

But that's the first claim. The second claim is in verse 8, that they have no sin. And the third is in verse 10, that they have not sinned. So the second claim they make is that their character is not sinful, they don't have a sin nature. And the second is their behavior's not sinful, they don't commit sin. It all sounds similar to the old Gnostics who claim to be an elite class of people who possess mystical knowledge of the universe that made them super spiritual.

Now you wonder how anyone could make such statements as bold as that they are without sin and that people would believe them. Buy people make such claims today and people believe them. The cult of Christian Science, for example, denies both the reality of matter

and the existence of sin. Its founder Mary Baker Eddy wrote in her "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," "the only reality of sin, sickness, or death is the awful fact that unreality seem real to human-erring belief." In other words, the only reason these things seem real to people is they have this errant belief in them. Sin is not real. Sickness is not real. Death is not real. Matter is not real.

So the Gnostics are still with us. They represent a small minority though. What really is I think more to the point for us, even among people with a grasp on reality who believe that the material world is real, that evil exists, that people sin, they often deny the seriousness of sin, or that they personally do bad things. That's more the problem than the other. A woman once asked Charles Wesley to pray for her because, she said, "I'm a great sinner. I'm a Christian, but I sometimes fail so dreadfully. Please pray for me." And Wesley looked at her very sternly and he said, "Yes, ma'am, I will pray for you, for you are a great sinner." And she was offended by that and she answered, "What do you mean? I've never done anything very wrong." You see, that's the real problem, not the problem of the cults and perhaps what the problem was that John was dealing with, but that kind of problem that minimizes sin.

It's a common problem. People minimize the seriousness of sin, at least the seriousness of sin in their own lives. John corrects all of this in these last verses of chapter 1, answers the cult leader, or the leaders - it may have been more than one - by debunking their assertions and showing that what they are asserting to be true is really false. In fact, he uses strong language. He calls them lies.

First they claim that they walked with God, that they had fellowship with Him. But John says, "If we say that and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." After all, God is light and in Him there is no darkness. So if our behavior is darkness, if our behavior is disobedient and dishonest, then it follows that we're not walking in fellowship with God. We are not walking in His light.

These people claim to know God. They claimed to be close to Him, but their lives denied all of that. They didn't take sin seriously at all. It follows then that if a person's behavior is contrary to God's character and commands, that if his or her life is characterized by sin and error, that the life of that person is not a life that's lived in fellowship with God.

John's description of them as walking in darkness is a present tense, and I think the grammar here is important. I'll come back to that again later in the text. But it describes the bent of their life. It describes the course of their life. It's a disobedient life continually. That's what characterizes them. He's not saying that genuine believers don't fall into sin or that we live sinless lives. In a moment he will state very clearly that we do sin. In fact, recognizing this, recognizing that we're sinners, recognizing our sins, is evidence of life, of spiritual life.

These are people who are unbelievers, the people that John is warning of here, the people that he is exposing here, this teacher, those who followed this teacher. They're unbelievers. They believed a false gospel with a false Christ. They deny that Jesus is the God-man. They denied His work on the cross. They believed in a gospel that offered a bloodless salvation, a gospel of knowledge and of works, not of grace and redemption.

But their lives, their works, showed that their claims were false. They were heretics. Still having said all that, this is also a warning that does make a claim on those of us who believe the gospel. F.F. Bruce, in his commentary, makes that point, makes it quite well. He states that it's equally necessary for those who adhere to the apostolic teaching and fellowship with the apostles and the Lord and God's people to be reminded that orthodoxy of doctrine is no substitute for righteousness of life. It's not enough to simply know these things, to understand these things. We must live these things. "Truth in the inward being," he writes, "is what God desires in His people. And where that is present, it will manifest itself in all the ways of life."

Well, we can add to that, where it is not present that too will manifest itself. Judas was a follower of Christ. He was disciple. He was one of the 12. But one evening he left the table where he sat next to the Lord. He left the room where he ate the Passover, and went to betray Jesus. John wrote, "He went out immediately and it was night." And in that John signified that night was in his heart. Night was in his soul. Night was his spiritual environment. Judas walked in darkness.

John doesn't teach salvation by works, but he teach a salvation that works, a salvation that changes a person from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. And our conduct demonstrates that. Our conduct doesn't earn us salvation, but it does express our salvation. It does evidence our salvation. John affirms that in verse 7, where he shows what happens if we do walk in the light.

He says as we do that continually, as we do that habitually, we have fellowship with one another. Now that's not quite what we would have expected to read, is it? Since walking in darkness prevents fellowship with God, we expect John to say walking in light gives fellowship with God. But instead he says we have fellowship with one another. Both are true. Fellowship with God is the basis for fellowship with believers. But our fellowship with one another demonstrates our fellowship with God and helps in our fellowship with Him.

It is an essential part of that fellowship with the Lord, our fellowship with one another, because our walk in the light and fellowship with the Lord separates us from the world, separates us from its ways and from its affection - our affection for it, and the world's affection for us. We're different, and that can lead to a solitary walk.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "Most of the world's great souls have been lonely. Loneliness seems to be one price the saint must pay for his saintliness. Enoch walked with God. The impression you get from that is that it was a solitary walk. He wasn't walking with companions, only with the Lord. He walked apart, on a different path from his

contemporaries. And that is the way it is so often with God's people, and yet we're not alone.

Those who walk in the light walk together. The world doesn't walk with us, but fellow believers do. Those who come to the Lord leave the world for a new society. They leave the world for a new group of friends, for a new family, and that's important. It's important to recognize that. It's important to live in that. Companionship is important. Companionship is essential. We get strength and encouragement from our fellowship. We read through the New Testament and we have all these analogies of the church that indicate the interconnectedness that we have with one another and that we must have with one another. We are a body, Paul tells the Corinthians. He wrote to the Ephesians and described the church as a building, a temple that's fitted together, like stones joined together. Peter does the same thing. We are united together. That's the way God designed it. That's the way we must function - in harmony and union with one another, in fellowship with one another. We get friends to help and bear our burdens, and we bear their burdens. This is what Paul said in Galatians 6:2. He commands us, instructs us. Bear one another's burdens. We need to do that. God gives us all of this in the church.

He gives us this fellowship, so that those who walk in the light have fellowship with one another and cleansing. We have cleansing. John says the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. So again, walking in the light doesn't mean being without sin. In fact, as we walk in the light of God's holiness and truth and in fellowship with other believers, we become more aware of our sin. The light shines on us. We see what perhaps we hadn't seen before or in fellowship with believers. They admonish us and they point out a failure that is true of us. So as we walk in the light these things become evident.

But John says God has made a provision for that. He's made a provision for that sin, to cleanse us from whatever sin would interrupt our relationship with Him and with one another. He cleanses us from it, John says. Now that's again a present tense. This is a progressive

work that John is describing here. This is what we would call progressive sanctification, the removal of the stain and the pollution of sin that we have, but also the victory that is given to us over the power of sin in our daily life. The one-for-all forgiveness of justification is applied by the Holy Spirit to the confessing believer in a daily washing from all sin.

And what that tells us is there's no sin in our life. We all commit sin. We fail continually, but there is no sin in our life that is beyond the cleansing power of Christ's blood. And so as we walk in the light, as we live in the realm of God's truth, in communion with Him, the righteousness of Christ is produced in us and we enjoy personal moral purity, not perfection, but an increase, a development in personal moral purity.

But the idea of Christ's blood was distasteful to the false teachers and they thought completely unnecessary. They didn't need any provision of cleansing for their sin. They had no sin. That's what they said and that's the second false claim that John denies. He writes in verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Again, it's hard for us to imagine anyone making so brazen a statement and such a claim as to say, "I have no sin," or, "I do not commit sin." But this is evidently the dogma of this incipient, Gnostic cult, this initial Gnostic movement as it was beginning in the late 1st century. And we do hear things like that from cults today, from fringe groups.

More often though, as I said earlier, people simply play down or explain sin away as a psychological issue. Years go - I think it was 1985 - Christianity Today ran some articles on the psychologist Carl Rogers, who was a secular psychologist who was having an influence on Christian churches and Christian counseling. So they gave an extended article on him, and in it they described his approach to counseling as non-judgmental. He didn't believe in judging people. He didn't in telling a person that he or she was wrong.

And that, it seems to me, is typical of our society. We've come a long way since then. It's probably even more so true now than then. It seems to me that we have become so tolerant a society that we are reticent about judging any behavior and rarely speak of evil or sin. Sin's a word that's pretty much dropped out of our secular vocabulary. An incident has to be a school shooting to rise to the level of being considered evil.

Otherwise, people remain non-judgmental. People have lost a sense of the gravity of sin, and that can even happen within the church. John says if you deny it, if you say that you don't have sin, or if you redefine sin as something trivial, or excuse and dismiss it in some way, you're deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you. A Christian attitude is to live under the revelation and guidance of the word of God and not deny sin, but recognize sin when we see it, and confess it.

That's what John says in verse 9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse is interpreted in one of two ways: either as being about justification or sanctification, about the eternal forgiveness of salvation or the repeated forgiveness of daily communion. It makes good sense as a gospel text.

It's those who confess that they are sinners and look to the Lord for forgiveness who receive it. Those who do, it's true, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins. I think, though, that John's describing the saved life. He's not describing unbelievers here when he says that. He's describing believers. He's describing life habitually lived in the light, and explaining that such people, those who walk with God, those who walk in the light, are confessing people. They're people who confess their sins. Again, the statement is a present tense, with the sense "if we are confessing our sins, God forgives." It's not a single moment of confession that his or her condition is sinful and he or she needs a Savior, as one might confess when one is coming to the Lord in response to the gospel. This is continual confession of sins,

sins which are plural. It indicates daily confession of individual sins, which God answers with forgiveness.

The Bible teaches that. It teaches the necessity of confession in our relationship with God - Christian sin. John says that. God has fellowship with what the reformers called righteous sinners. We are justified at the moment of faith. We're forgiven fully and forever. He treats us as righteous. He considers us legally righteous. We are legally righteous in His sight, and yet we still fail. We're still sinners. And when we do that, when we fail, when we sin, we should admit it. That's an essential part of fellowship. We are grieved by our sin until we confess it, until we confess it to the Lord.

David wrote of that all through the Psalms. He wrote in Psalm 32 of how when he kept silent about his sin, his body wasted away and he groaned all day long. So I said, "I acknowledge my sin to You." He acknowledged his sin to the Lord God. That's what we do. In Psalm 51, he prays for pardon. He confesses that his sin is against the Lord and he asked Him to cleanse him from it, to restore his joy and to sustain him with a willing spirit.

Paul did this at the end of Romans 7, where he confesses that he's a sinner. "Wretched man that I am," he said. Sin grieves the saint so that he or she must confess it, must go to the Lord with this confession of sin, and it's what the Lord instructs us to do. In Matthew 6:12, in his lesson on prayer, he says we are to pray, "Forgive us our debts." That's what we do in confession. When we confess our sins to the Lord, what we're doing is we're asking for God's forgiveness. It's what Dr. Johnson called family forgiveness, temporal forgiveness. It's asking for the removal of a barrier in our fellowship with Him, and that's what sin creates - a barrier in that fellowship. And so when we confess it and God responds to that, that's removed.

Now that's what happens in any healthy relationship. There is openness and honesty. And walking in the light involves openness and honesty. It involves sincerity and truth, which makes confession to the Lord necessary. Mr. Spurgeon said, "Only on the footing of sin daily

confessed and pardoned can there be any fellowship between us and the eternal God this side of heaven." And the assurance is the Lord always responds to that with blessing. He is faithful to bless in two ways: He forgives the offense and He cleanses us of what hinders fellowship.

God never rejects the repentant sinner. He saves and receives him into His family. And He restores the confessing Christian in fellowship, always - always. Those who walk in the light confess sin. Those who do not walk in the light, who walk in darkness, disregard sin. They don't see it. They don't confess it, because they denied that they're sinful. They denied that they commit sin.

That contradicts the clear witness of God's revelation. That contradicts human experience. John says they make God a liar. They of course are the liars. Later John will call them anti-Christ, which gives us a pretty clear picture of the character, the nature of these people, against whom John is writing. They are not believers. They're anti-Christ. They're liars. They're without God's light and life.

Those who recognize their sin and have sought forgiveness in the Lord are in the light. They walk in the light. They have fellowship with the Lord. And what a privilege that is, again, just to consider that. We need to understand that. We need to understand that it's a great privilege. And we need to nurture and develop that privilege, that relationship with the Lord so that it will grow and it will become a deeper, profounder relationship. How do we do that? Well, we do that by drawing near to the Lord in prayer and study, by seeking His light, seeking to conform to His life and truth and holiness. It's having an open relationship with Him, telling Him our failures and our needs, and seeking to know Him, to know who He is and what His will is.

That is walking with the Lord, as Enoch did. That's what the Lord desires. That's what He wants from us. He enjoys fellowship with His children, just as you enjoy fellowship with your children, or your grandchildren, or your brothers and sisters. You enjoy that. Fellowship is a rich experience. It's something we need. It's something

the Lord enjoys. And when we fail in that relationship, we have a loving Lord that receives us, that deals with us - not in a harsh way. He's gentle, He's loving, He's kind, He's giving. He says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." He heals us. He makes us strong. He makes us wise as we walk with Him.

Are you doing that? Are you walking in the light? Or are you walking in darkness? Those who are walking in unbelief and all the darkness implies - walking in death. You don't need to. Come out, enter the light. Come to Christ if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ. Recognize that you're a sinner in need of a Savior. He paid for the sins of all who do trust in Him. He receives all who come to Him and He casts none out. He will receive you. Come to Him and then know we have a Savior we can walk with and who deals with us gently daily, strengthening us. May God help you to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we give You thanks for the cleansing we have in Christ. We thank You for the salvation that's in Him, and for the future that's ours, and for the present, because you're guiding us and cleansing us and caring for us all along the way. We thank You for that walk in the light that we have with You. Bless us in it. Give us a hunger for it. Thank You again or the Lord Jesus Christ, His death for us. It's in His name we pray. Amen.