

## **Week 2: John and Jude: God Is Light**

### **Hook**

# TRUE FAITH

**Main Point: Walking in the light means abiding in personal relationship with Christ.**

**Q: What would you do if you had five extra hours daily?**

Installing electric lights in communities and homes revolutionized the rhythms of daily life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ernest Freeberg, professor of humanities at the University of Tennessee, described the transition from lamps to electric lights in this way; the people understood “the light was creating them — changing their relationship to the natural world, shaping the rhythm of their days, and transforming their culture.”<sup>1</sup> Electric light ushered in a new world; folks could schedule events at night, immigration from rural areas to cities increased, and business no longer ceased with the sun’s setting. The light changed everything.

**Q: Imagine electric lights vanish; how would your life be impacted?**

**Q: In what ways does God act as a light in your life? How has walking with Him transformed your life?**

**Transition:** Today’s passage compares God to light and invites readers to walk in it.

**RECAP:** Last week, we talked about how the Gospel, at its heart, is about personal relationship, and how our relationship with God, which was broken in the fall, can be redeemed through Jesus. Our faith isn’t about following a set of rules or practicing a religion, it’s about having a personal relationship with Jesus. The Gospel is also passed from person to person in the context of relationships, and having a relationship with Jesus enables us to have holy relationships with each other. This week, we’ll look at the theological statement that “God is light” and what it tells us about God and our relationship with Him.

## **Week 2: John and Jude: God Is Light**

### **Book**

**Main Point: Walking in the light means abiding in personal relationship with Christ.**

**1 John 1:5–7 and John 3:19–21; 8:12 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Those who love God will walk in light, not darkness.

**Q: What does the phrase “God is light” tell us about God?**

**Q: What does it mean to walk in the darkness instead of the light?**

In the prologue, John told his readers he was proclaiming to them what he had seen and heard. Then he said, “This is the message” (1:5). This is the first “message” declared in 1 John; the second is in 3:11, that “we should love one another.” These two messages define the outline of the book (besides the prologue and conclusion):

- Part 1: The Message – God is light; in Him is no darkness at all (1:5–3:10).
- Part 2: The Message – We should love one another (3:11–5:12).

The book of 1 John has two main points: God is light, and God is love.<sup>2</sup> These two points define “the message” for John: 1) God is light, and 2) we should love one another.<sup>3</sup> These two statements aren’t what we might typically think of as Gospel, showing the way to salvation. But they are related to Jesus’ own words that the commands to love God and love others sum up all the Law (Matthew 22:36–40).

John described this first statement as the message “we have heard from him” (1:5) and the second as the message “you heard from the beginning” (3:11). The law of love has been true since the time of Adam and Eve (3:12). This statement that God is light has also always been true, but it is one that John said they heard from Jesus (1:5). It is not found anywhere in the recorded words of Jesus in the Gospels, but that doesn’t mean Jesus didn’t say it. John told his readers at the end of his Gospel that Jesus said and did many other things that were not written down (John 21:25).

For John, the theological idea that “God is light” is essential to the Gospel because it’s fundamental to the nature of who God is, but this letter was not focused on the message of salvation. He was writing to warn his readers about false teachers, so here he establishes a framework for how they could distinguish true followers of Jesus from those who just “say” they are (1:6). He used “light” as an image to help his readers better identify those who say they love God but really don’t (4:20).

The imagery of light and darkness creates a stark contrast between two completely opposed kingdoms (John 3:19–21; Ephesians 5:8–11; Colossians 1:13). This makes the theological truth clear – you can’t claim to have fellowship with God (meaning the

existence of a relationship with God and a closeness in that relationship) yet walk in darkness. Those in fellowship with God will walk in the light as Jesus did.

John often used the imagery of light to talk about God/Jesus. In the first verses of his Gospel, he told us that Jesus is life and life is the light of mankind (John 1:4). For John, light represented the source of life, as the sun brings life to the earth. But the true source of life isn't the sun, it's God, which John shows us in Revelation, when God's kingdom has no need of the sun because God Himself is their light (Revelation 21:23).

In John's presentation of the Gospel in his most quoted chapter (John 1), John tells us that the light (Jesus) entered our dark world, and even though He offered life, people rejected Him because they love the darkness (John 3:19). This passage also shows a stark contrast between light and darkness, saying that those who do wickedness hate the light (John 3:20). Jesus reiterated the contrast when He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The phrase "walk in" is very important to understanding what these passages mean. It describes a habitual lifestyle of darkness, not individual sins. Walking in darkness means living in darkness, having fellowship with the darkness.

These passages don't mean that those who follow Jesus will never do anything sinful; we all struggle with sin, which this passage speaks to in the very next sentence. We all sin, but if we walk in the light, His blood cleanses us from our sin. What does that mean?

Walking in the light is something that a Christian chooses to do. God wants us to pursue holiness. As we abide in Christ, He will reveal areas in which we are harboring sin. As He does, we repent of that sin, and He forgives and purifies us. We must continually confess sin, not to be saved (we are justified in Christ) but to maintain a healthy relationship (fellowship) with God and other Christians. Walking in the light isn't about doing everything perfectly all the time. It's about abiding in Jesus, the light and life, so when we do sin, we are forgiven and purified (1:9).

Growing in spiritual maturity is continually following Jesus to the end that you look more like Him. The perfect, sinless life is not achievable, but the pursuit of continual righteousness (right living) is our goal. The theological term for this is sanctification.

In the Old Testament, Moses told the original generation of Israelites who entered the Promised Land that he was presenting them with two choices, the way of life and the way of death (Deuteronomy 30:19). Jesus told Nicodemus that people who rejected Him were choosing darkness over light. It may be difficult for us to imagine anyone choosing death or darkness, yet it happens all the time because people love the things they think the world can offer, not realizing those things lead to death.

Jesus offers us a different path – to walk in light and abundant life (John 10:10). Abiding in Christ is like stepping out of a dark, scary world into the light. We can see where we’re going, so we won’t stumble and fall. Like feeling the light of the sun on our face, it brings us joy, peace and comfort. Walking in the light isn’t just about following a set of rules; it’s about living in abundant joy, the way God intended us to live. There is freedom in walking in the light.

**Q: Describe your life before Christ compared to now. In what ways is life with Christ like stepping out of darkness into light?**

**Q: In what ways have you experienced peace, joy and abundant life in Christ?**

**1 John 1:8–2:2; Romans 3:23–26; 1 Timothy 2:5–6 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** When we walk in the light, Jesus purifies our sins.

**Q: What did John and the other disciples do with what they had experienced?**

**Q: What is our mission as disciples? How is that accomplished?**

This section is a direct outflow of the previous section, like the continuation of an argument. God is light, so His people ought to walk in light instead of darkness. However, that doesn’t mean that followers of Jesus never commit any sins. Just the opposite. It means that because of their relationship with Jesus, when they do sin, as the light, He purifies their sins.

Most scholars believe John was responding to a specific false teaching here.<sup>4</sup> Those false teachers taught that fellowship with God required sinlessness, so they claimed to be without sin. But the true Gospel teaches that no human being is without sin, except for Jesus. This is the crux of the Gospel, the first point of the plan of salvation. This is where John’s message “God is light” moves into the salvation part of the message. The Gospel teaches that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that’s why we need Jesus (Romans 3:23).

Being a Christian doesn’t mean we are sinless; it means our sins are atoned or “covered” by Christ’s righteousness (*atone* means “to cover”). We are not without sin, but by virtue of our relationship with Jesus, His righteousness is given to us, and we are justified before the Father (Romans 3:22; 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:9). Though we are not sinless, we are sinless in God’s sight because when He looks on us, He sees the righteousness of Christ in our place.<sup>5</sup>

John used legal language to talk about Christ as our advocate before the Father. The Greek word, *parakletos*, is the word used for a defense attorney, one who pleads our case before the judge.<sup>6</sup> It can also be used more generally as a “helper,” which is the way Jesus used it when talking to His disciples about the Holy Spirit’s role in their lives

when He ascended to the Father (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). These are the only uses of this word in Scripture; it's used only by John.<sup>7</sup>

John continued, saying Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, the sacrifice that "appeased" or "satisfied" the wrath of God against our sin. Jesus' sacrifice was enough; it paid the full price (Galatians 3:13–15; 1 Peter 1:19).<sup>8</sup> Evangelical scholars agree that the phrase "the whole world" does not point to universalism. John is very specific in many other places that Jesus is the only way to the Father. It means that salvation is available to people of all nations, tribes and tongues who believe.<sup>9</sup>

John gets into some heavy theology at the opening of this letter to combat the false teachings that were going around the churches. We have some false teachings along the same lines today. Much of the world says mankind is inherently good; we're not sinners by nature, therefore we don't need a Savior. Some within the church teach that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough, that we also need works to be saved. Some theological terms such as *propitiation* or *atonement* can feel daunting, but it is crucial that we do our best to learn what Scripture really teaches so we aren't "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

**Q: What other theological terms do you find difficult to understand? How can you learn more about what the Bible really teaches about theology?**

**Q: Imagine you have a friend who believes mankind is inherently good. How would you talk to that person about the Gospel and the need for a Savior?**

**1 John 2:3–6; Matthew 11:28–30; John 14:15 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** When we walk in the light, we walk as Jesus did.

**Q: Why do those who love Jesus want to keep His commandments?**

**Q: Describe what it looks like to walk as Jesus walked.**

This is a conclusion statement for all that has come before it – if we are walking in the light, abiding in Jesus, we will walk in the same way He did. This isn't a rule, it's just logic. That's what it means to follow in someone's footsteps, to live as he or she did. This is how John's readers could tell whether these false teachers were really disciples of Jesus. Did their lives look like Jesus'? Did they love the way He loved? Did they spend their time and money the way He did? Did they include the people He included? Jesus came to this earth not only to die as a sacrifice for our sins, but to give us a model for how to live (John 13:15; Ephesians 5:1).

Again, it all comes back to relationship, to knowing Jesus. John used the word *know* 42 times in this letter. Scholars believe this focus on knowing was likely a response to Gnosticism, a false teaching that some people had special knowledge (*gnosis*) of God through mystical experiences.<sup>10</sup> John's response was that if you really know Jesus, you

will live the way He did. Our faith is an abiding relationship with a real person and has a practical effect on the way we live.

When we live in an abiding relationship with Jesus, His love is “perfected” or “made complete” in us. That doesn’t mean Christians always love others perfectly but that when we walk in His ways, God’s love has completed its purpose. This is the end goal of God’s love, not just to save us but to make us like Jesus. For John, this was a litmus test as to whether people who claim to follow Jesus were really His disciples – did they aim to walk in the way Jesus did, that classic “WWJD?” question. This is the way we can tell false prophets from true ones, but it’s also the way we can evaluate our own lives, just as David asked God to search his heart (Psalm 139:23).

**Q: How is the way Jesus walked different from the way most people live? Why is His yoke easy and His burden light?**

**Q: In what ways do you struggle to live as Jesus did? What kinds of people do you struggle to love the way Jesus loves them?**

**Q: How can you remind yourself to walk the way Jesus did in all things?**

## **Week 2: John and Jude: God Is Light**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Walking in the light means abiding in personal relationship with Christ.**

“Just as one candle lights another and can light thousands of other candles, so one heart illuminates another heart and can illuminate thousands of other hearts.” —Leo Tolstoy  
How can shining the “light” of Jesus within you spark others around you to shine their light, too?

**Q: Why is it useful to think of our hearts as candles that are capable of lighting others?**

**Q: What can you do to ensure that you are a strong fire capable of lighting others?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** How does thinking about following Jesus as “walking in the light” affect the way you understand this principle? On a physical level, how does walking in light compare to walking in darkness? How do those differences apply to walking in light on a spiritual level? Why is it preferable to walk in the light? What does this tell us about what it means to have a relationship with Jesus?

**PRAY** for God to reveal to you any way you aren’t walking the way Jesus would. Ask Him to search deep into your heart and show you things you may not easily see. Ask Him to shine His light on your life to reveal any dark places. Pray for the wisdom and strength to make changes to the way you are living.

**ACT: GO FOR A WALK.** Turn off all the lights in your house and close all the blinds, making it as dark as possible. Then close your eyes and/or blindfold yourself. Try to walk from one end of your house to the other without tripping or falling over anything. How did it feel? How quickly did you walk through? What happened? Now turn on all the lights and walk through your house. What was different that time? How quickly did you walk through? How did you feel? What happened? What does this tell you about walk it means to walk in the light with Jesus?

**NEXT TIME in 1–3 John and Jude:** Next week, we’ll look in more detail at what it looks like to walk in the light in this life – how we love others, how we overcome evil, and how we do not cling to the things of this world.

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- <sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-age-of-edison-electric-light-and-the-invention-of-modern-america-by-ernest-freeberg/2013/03/01/257a76c4-6f04-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-age-of-edison-electric-light-and-the-invention-of-modern-america-by-ernest-freeberg/2013/03/01/257a76c4-6f04-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html)
- <sup>2</sup> P. S. Berge, "The Word and Its Witness in John and 1 John" *Word and World, Supplement Series 3* (1997).
- <sup>3</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (B & H Publishing, 2001).
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "What the Atonement Means for You" Crossway, Aug 10, 2021 - [What the Atonement Means for You | Crossway Articles](#)
- <sup>6</sup> *Demosthenes*, p. 341; *Diogenes Laertius*, p. 50; *Dio Cassius*, p. 46.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, Christian Gottlob Wilke, *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* (Hendrickson, 1996).
- <sup>8</sup> SBC Staff, "24 Words Every Southern Baptist Should Know" *SBC Life*, Nov 1, 1995 - [24 Theological Words Every Southern Baptist Should Know | Baptist Press](#)
- <sup>9</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (B & H Publishing, 2001).
- <sup>10</sup> Gary W. Derickson, *1, 2, & 3 John, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Lexham Press, 2014).