

# Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk

## 1 John 1:5-7

December 8 & 9, 2012  
Steve DeWitt

Let's say that you were talking with someone at work or school. Tell me if you can relate to this. They happen to say in passing that they are a Christian or that they go to such and such a church. In that moment, you're not sure if you are going to faint or vomit.

Why? Because you have come to know them quite well and you never would have suspected that they were a Christian. What does your heart intuitively wonder? How can they say they are a Christian and yet their life seems to be in such contradiction to that claim?

You may be squirming right now for a few reasons. One is that you may be the person in your workplace causing the shock. Or you may be thinking, *I don't like where this sermon is going because who are we to judge?* Or maybe you are thinking, *Nobody is perfect and we all need God's grace so it doesn't matter so much what our lives are like.*

How do we know if someone is a Christian or not? How do we discern if we are a Christian or not? Is it what you say that decides it? Is it the talk that matters most? Or does my life have something to say about that? Does my walk matter?

This is what John addresses in 1 John 1:5-7. His letter is for a church where a number of these Christian-in-name-only types had left their fellowship following leaders who taught them something different than the Apostle John.

*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. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. (1 John 1:5-7)*

What do you notice repeated here? Verses that begin with "if." You can look ahead and see that verses 8, 9 & 10 each begin with "if" and two of them with "if we say." When we study the Bible, these repetitions are obvious clues as to the organization of the text.

Is John pulling these phrases out of thin air? No. These were teaching points that the secessionist group and their false teachers held to. People were following them, leaving the leadership even of the Apostle John. Think of that. If your pastor is the Apostle John, how do you leave the church to go with these other guys? Who would rather have as your pastor? Some yahoo false teacher or the guy who put his head on Jesus' bosom and who Jesus asked to care for his mother Mary? Why would anyone leave his church? We get a glimpse into the appeal of a slightly distorted biblical truth that lets false converts *talk the talk without walking the walk.*

He introduces this with, *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you. From him?* Who is that? While he doesn't give his name, coming off of verses 1-4 which speak of Jesus, the "him" in verse 4 must be Jesus.

## **The Character of God – Light/No Darkness (Verse 5)**

*...that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

John begins where all theology begins, with the nature and character of God. He describes God as *light*. Get used to this as light is a common Johannine theme—light, and its opposite, darkness. Where light is, darkness isn't. Where there is darkness, light isn't. They are mutually exclusive in a way that anyone who has tried to find their way through the living room at night knows. I once heard a description of the human shin as *a device used for finding furniture in the dark*. Kids know this difference between light and darkness from a very early age. Lots of kids are scared of the dark. I've never heard one say, "I'm scared of the light." Light and darkness. Two complete opposites.

In what way is John saying that God is light? Light is a prevalent theme in the Bible and is used in a few ways:

- **Physical light** – “*Let there be light.*” (Genesis 1:3)
- **Metaphor for life or salvation** – *The LORD is my light and salvation.* (Psalm 27:1)
- **Spiritual life sourced in Jesus** – “*I am the light of the world.*” (John 8:12)
- **Ethical and moral purity** – *God is light.* (1 John 1:5)

It is this fourth use that John has here. *God is light* describes his absolute moral and ethical purity, his righteousness, and goodness. He is utterly and wholly good. The Psalms celebrate “the splendor of his holiness.” (Psalm 96:9) The glory light of God, the Shekinah glory, emanates from the being of God in such intensity that those who have seen it, fall down before it. That glory-light is a visible expression of his intrinsic moral and spiritual goodness and worth.

*In him is no darkness at all* - He is so utterly and wholly good that in him there is no crevice or shadow of darkness. God has nothing to hide. He has no secret closet. He is whole, honest, and sincere, without darkness, sin, or temptation. He is holy, holy, holy. Or as John says, *[He] is light and in him is no darkness at all.*

John begins with what Jesus told him about what God is like. Absolute moral purity. Why is this important? Because if God is intrinsic, infinite holiness, then this means he can have no fellowship or connection to anything that is less than pure.

## **Fake Faith – Talk, but no Walk (Verse 6)**

*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

John introduces a second metaphor, walk. *Walk* is not literal walking as in putting one foot in front of another. Walk is a description of life or the manner of life; lifestyle. It's the moral and spiritual character of my life.

Here he says, “Walk in darkness.” What does it mean to walk in darkness? If the light of God is ethical purity, then darkness is the absence of it. This is moral and ethical darkness; the opposite of God. John speaks of this elsewhere:

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But*

*whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:19-21)*

Sinful men love darkness rather than light. Why? What does the light of God’s moral beauty reveal about man?

Have you ever been out somewhere, in a field or on a hike and you come across a large flat stone? If you are a boy, you look at the stone, and if it’s too big to throw, what do you want to do? Turn it over. When you lift that large stone up, what do you see? There all these little critters under there. Worms, maggots, and creepy things. In the light of the sun, what are those little critters doing? Trying to hide. Scurrying down into their holes. They’ve been exposed to the light of day and they search for darkness in which to hide.

Sinners are the same way. The first thing Adam and Eve did after sinning in the garden was to hide themselves. To hide is to find a shadow, a dark place, where our true nature is hidden and we are not exposed for who we truly are by the light.

John points out the immoral disparity of someone who claims to have fellowship with God but who themselves walk in darkness. There is illogical contradiction between their words and the actual ethical character of their life; between their walk and their talk.

Apparently, these false teachers were saying you could be a Christian without change in your life. *“Come. Believe. Have fellowship with God and don’t listen to John and all that repentance and obedience stuff. Be a Christian and enjoy the wonderful city of Ephesus!”*

We know a lot about Ephesus where this was written. The city was famous for its idol worship of Diana. It was like so many other ancient cities dominated by sin, especially sexual sin. I have toured the old city of Ephesus and I remember walking the main street. Archaeologists have uncovered much of the city including the ancient road through town. Right there in the stones you can basically see advertisement for a brothel and prostitution.

This wasn’t Mayberry; this was Las Vegas. We asked the question earlier, who would ever leave a church pastored by the Apostle John? How about people who lived in an immoral city and wanted a salvation without repentance and fellowship with God without any need to change? They had the talk but their lives showed they were *walking in darkness*.

John doesn’t mince words. What does he call them? *Liars*. In spite of what they said, their lives showed they were not “practicing the truth.” They were false converts. False Christians. Christians in name only. They talked the talk, but they didn’t walk the walk.

Was this a problem only in the first century? How many Americans would identify themselves as Christians? The Pew Report says that in the US, 78.4% of all Americans identify themselves as Christians; almost 80%.

*“Are you a Christian?”*

*“Absolutely, I am a Christian!”*

*“Is obeying God a priority in your life?”*

*“Huh?” We live in a nation that talks the talk, but do we walk the walk?*

Let me say it clearly, the people John is describing are not genuine Christians. Talk is cheap and is no evidence of genuine salvation. Well then, what is?

## **Genuine Saving Faith – Talk and Walk (Verse 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.*

Before some of you get queasy here thinking that John is saying the moral nature of our life saves us. John wants us to avoid two damning errors. One is to say your conduct after you're saved doesn't matter, and the other is to say your conduct must be perfect. He navigates this by saying there are three fruits of genuine Christian experience. Notice that they are fruits; they are not salvation itself. Chapter 2:1ff. will explain the necessity of atonement through Christ. We are not saved by walking in the light; we walk in the light because Jesus has changed our lives. Three fruits:

### ***Walk in the light – A habitual life oriented toward God and his will***

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light...*

What does it mean to walk in the light? The direction of my life is a general orientation toward God and the habitual desire to please him. The light is God's moral beauty. I walk in that light when I live consistent with it. I think we all know what this means. It prioritizes obedience. It is doing what I do, to and for God's glory. The Bible balances that with the fact that we still are sinners and indwelling sin is with us till we die. So there is no perfection here as verse 8 will make clear. However, in Christ we are new creations; the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the walk of the genuine Christian will increasingly reflect that. Our lives change. Our desires change. God is in us, and rather than walking toward darkness, we walk toward and in the light.

"God is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and truth; in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false...This being so, those whose 'fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' will in their lives reflect the character of God; they will 'walk as children of light'." (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, p.41)

### ***Fellowship with one another – Authenticity and openness with others***

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...*

This is a little surprising. We would expect it to say that if we walk in the light we have fellowship with God. While that is true, John goes horizontal. One result of exposing ourselves to the ethical light of God and being forgiven is that we don't feel the need to hide or pretend anymore.

A friend of mine who years ago suffered through adultery by his wife shared about this. He said pride is about pretending. Pride has to pretend and will try and hide imperfections at all costs. *I can't be real. I can't admit wrong. I can't let anyone know what a fraud I am.* Humility is a trust word. Humility means I trust you with my junk. I trust you to know my failures, and I trust you to accept me in spite of them.

When I walk in the light of full exposure, now I have fellowship with my fellow Christians because I don't have to hide, you don't have to hide, and we can be real with each other knowing God has accepted both of us. What a difference that makes in our relationships when we don't have to keep up pretenses.

I recently ended a two-year cohort with 10 other pastors of larger churches. We had four meetings over two years. You should have seen the first meeting. Everyone was cautious. Who are these other guys? How do I measure up? They say this is confidential, but can I trust them? By our last meeting, we were sharing gut level struggles. Why? Trust. Honesty. Fellowship.

Would our relationships deepen here if we gave up trying to impress each other and were open with failures God already knows and has forgiven in us? His final point is that pretending we don't have sin isn't how we walk in the light.

### **Ongoing cleansing from sin**

*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.*

The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. What a wonderful truth! How do we continue walking in the light over the course of our lives? By absolute moral perfection? There's no one like that. We stay in the light by the ongoing moral cleansing of our sin and guilt by the atoning merits of Christ on the cross.

The verb here for cleansing doesn't mean one time. It means continual cleansing. The blood of Jesus continues to morally scrub our hearts. He will describe this further in verse 9 with confession and forgiveness, but here's the reality. When we believe, we are saved and declared righteous, but our lives continue to struggle with sin. What keeps us from walking in darkness and keeps us in the light is God's work in us to continue to purify our hearts. Progressive sanctification. Ongoing repentance and cleansing. Salvation isn't a one-time cleansing; it is an ongoing cleansing which keeps us in the light and in fellowship with one another.

"Christianity is the only religion which, by emphasizing that God is light, first insists on taking sin seriously and then offers a satisfactory moral solution to the problem of sin. The way to have fellowship with a God who is light is not to deny the fact or effects of sin, but to confess our sins and thankfully appropriate God's provision for our cleansing." (John Stott, *The Message of John's Letters*, p. 79)

It is like taking care of a car. You wash it. Wax it. Looks great. What happens? It rains or snows. Imagine a guy taking his new car to the junkyard.

"Here you go, you can have it."

"Sir, that is a 2013 model, why are you junking it?"

"It got dirty."

"Sir, you have to continue to clean the car."

God has made provision for the ongoing cleansing from our ongoing struggle with sin. Verse 9 says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Hiding; walking toward darkness—that's what unbelievers do and what Christians in name only do. An evidence of God's true saving work in us is that we own up to our sin, seek his forgiveness and cleansing, and continue to walk in the light of God's holiness, love, and favor.

That is the week ahead. With each of these evidences in 1 John there is the implicit invitation for anyone whose honest assessment is that they are walking in darkness and not the light, to come to the light of God by faith in his Son, whose blood shed on the cross for us, can cleanse every sin.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2012 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) on the copied resource.