1 John 1:5-10 – Walking in the Light

1. Introduction

a. Today's message is based on just three words. We sometimes need to focus on the basics and the simple things that we find in the word of God. Three words that are found in the first chapter of 1 John: God is light. We must not let their simplicity lose their impact.

b. Stop for a moment and think through what this statement means, and what is its implication for us. In the prayer room we often pray for God to send his light or shine his light in a particular situation, but do we know what we are asking for? Have we encountered God's light in our own lives?

1 John 1:5-10 *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. [6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [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. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

c. In verse 5 John gives us the foundation for what he wants us to get hold of, in verses 6-7 he gives us a negative and a positive response to that foundation. In verses 8-10 he gives us a clarification make sure we don't get hold of the wrong idea.

2. God is light

a. What do you think of when you see this statement God is light, what does that mean?

1 Timothy 6:15-16 *…he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, [16] who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.*

b. First we must understand what the bible means by light. Our natural understanding of light is what we see with our eyes. It's a very narrow band on the electromagnetic spectrum that stimulates the light receptors in our eyes and sends a message to the brain that interprets that message as vision.

c. But the electromagnetic spectrum is much bigger than just the little part of it that we understand as light. If you decrease the wavelength, you come to infra-red; next are the microwaves; and ultimately there are the radio. Then if you go the other way and increase the wavelength you first come to ultra-violet; next are the x-rays; and finally there are Gamma-rays.

d. From a scientific perspective we have learned a great deal about light, a lot more than was known fifty or a hundred years ago.

   i But have we learned anything new and really important about it? The main functions of light have been known ever since the beginning of history. In the earliest dawn of humanity men experienced what light could do as equally and fully as we do today.

e. Another thing we have to consider, what was the first thing that God? It was light, which is what he created on the first day. There's something quite profound about the creation of light that is easy to miss.

Genesis 1:1-4 *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. [3] And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. [4] And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.*

i God didn't create the sun until the fourth day, so the light that was created on the first day must have been of a different order than the light that comes from the sun. Then God separated the light from the darkness. We think of darkness as being the absence of light, but here the implication is that both light and darkness can exist independently of each other.

f. When we consider God is light, we must understand that the light that John is talking about is not the same as the visible light that we experience in our day-to-day lives. However, it does bear some of the same characteristics, and there are important lessons we can learn from our understanding of it.

g. First, the most characteristic thing about it is that light **reveals**. I can see you because there is light in this room. If there were no light I might be able to hear you, but I wouldn't be able to see you. So darkness conceals, but light reveals.

i That is the first function of light, it enables us to see things that have been there all the time, but which we couldn't see until the light shines. And that is one of the things that this God who is light does. God, through His Word and through His Spirit opens the eyes of the heart and life comes into focus, we see it clearly without distortion. What was before veiled by darkness now becomes a living reality. Sometimes it's a gradual process, at other times it is a sudden realisation, but it is God who is doing the revealing.

h. Secondly, light **measures**. Light always travels in straight lines, it never deviates. And this property can be used to make measurements. One of the most obvious ways we can see this is with the use of lasers. Light's property of travelling in straight lines can be harnessed to create a visible light source that can be confined to a specific width that never grows any wider.

i One of the common uses of lasers today is in spirit levels – the ones that builders use to check if what they are constructing is level. They are also used in hospitals.

ii Another way that light can be used is to measure distances. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second in a vacuum so we can use it to measure distances in space.

iii God also measures:

Amos 7:8 *And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them;*

iv A plumb-line with which God was going to measure Israel in terms of judgment for their unrighteousness. God himself is a measuring-stick, he is a point of reference. He measures

according to his standards and his righteousness. God sees man according to the truth, according to the light, and that's what he measures us by. And he has given us his Word by which we are able to measure ourselves.

i. Thirdly, light **energises**. It activates, it quickens, it imparts life. Without light nothing grows and nothing lives. Think how much better you feel on a sunny day compared to when it's cloudy. If you're a gardener, you will know that many plants' life cycle is governed by day length. Most plants are photosynthetic: they convert light into energy and growth.

   i As light stimulates in this manner, the God who is light intensifies, fulfils and glorifies our humanity. He takes us and leads us on in an ever-increasing experience of life and vitality and productivity.

John 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

   ii Jesus wants to lift us out of the boring, the mundane and the ordinary and fill us with spiritual energy to press in for all that he has for us. The disciples found that being with Jesus there was never a dull moment, it should be the same for us.

3. Our starting point: God

1 John 1:5 *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.*

a. John is saying in verse 5 "*We heard this straight from Jesus and we are saying the same thing to you.*" Not a discussion point, or a suggestion, or John's speculation as to what God may be like. It came from Jesus through the apostles to the readers. Fellowship with God must start with this revelation that God is light.

b. John begins with God and brings us face to face, not with God's love, but with His holiness. God is light means that God is the source and measure of all that is true, all that is holy, and nothing is truly understood until it is understood in the light of God.

c. I like what Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: *"We must always start with God. Our main problem is our self-centeredness, and so we come to the Christian faith looking to have our needs met. I'm not happy; can God make me happy? I'm looking for something that I don't have; can God give it to me? How can Christianity help me with my problems and needs? But to approach the Christian faith in that manner is to cater to our main problem, which is self! The first answer of the gospel can always, in effect, be put in this way: 'Forget yourself and contemplate God.'"*

d. If we want fellowship with God, it starts with God is light. And then John adds, "and in him is no darkness at all." When John says God is light, he's not saying that light is part of who God is, or that God is like the light. Light is the essence and substance of who God is, it is the very definition of his being. You cannot separate God and light, they are one and the same.

e. God being light is a difficult concept for us to comprehend. We can't fully understand what this order of light looks like. Being light means total purity, unaffected by anything, no external influence can impact upon it and nothing can detract from it.

i The best way that we can understand what it means is to think of it in terms of God's holiness. His burning, fiery, incandescent holiness – because that is who he is.

f. In the context of these opening verses of John's letter, the main idea that he wants us to grasp is that God is unutterably holy. That's why John adds that in him there is no darkness at all.

John 3:19 *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.*

g. Why does John start with God's holiness? If you start anywhere else, you will never understand God's plan of salvation through the cross. John has a lot of things to say about God's love in this letter, but if God was only love, you could argue that the cross is unnecessary and meaningless. It's because of God's holiness that the satisfaction of the cross is required.

i Starting with God's holiness exposes wrong thinking regarding the way to fellowship with him. True fellowship is with a holy God, and it prevents us from approaching God is a way that is too casual.

ii If we bring God down to the level of a "user-friendly" God, you can enjoy peace with God without dealing with your sin. But it's a false peace that will be exposed on the day of Judgment. Joy and peace come when we know we are reconciled to this holy God through the blood of Jesus.

4. Walk in the Light

1 John 1:6-7 *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. [7] But <u>if we walk in the light</u>, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

a. This is the practical application of what "God is light" means. John starts with the negative aspect of walking in darkness. Now he makes a subtle switch that we need to understand. Up to now the "we" in the text has been referring to the apostles. Now, he shifts the "we" from the apostles to a hypothetical group of people that includes his readers, but especially targets the false teachers.

b. John uses "walking" to describe the way we live our lives. Walking in darkness means living according to our own resources and knowledge, blocking out the light of God's holiness as revealed in his word; living as the world lives, making up your own ideas about right and wrong outside of God's standards. Some justify their behaviour by redefining sin or by blaming it on culture or circumstances, some do away entirely with the concept of sin.

i But many of these people continue with a claim to have fellowship with God while walking in this way. To have fellowship with God means that you see things the way he sees them and have the same desires he has.

c. The personal application of this verse is this: Am I allowing God's word to confront my sinful thoughts, attitudes, motives, words and deeds? If not, I am walking in darkness. Am I trying to dodge my sin by making excuses for it? If not, I am walking in darkness. We must do two things: We must recognise that he is absolutely holy, and we must not walk in darkness.

d. John goes on to explain the glorious positive consequences of walking in the light. It means assessing our lives and seeing reality for what it is, and being controlled by desires that accord with God's light. Walking in the light describes all true believers – it means we are allowing the light of God to guide us and direct us, so that our lives reflect the glory of the God of light.

1 Peter 1:14-16 *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

e. The second positive that comes from walking in the light is that we have fellowship with one another. Who does the "one another" refer to? Verse 6 implies that it is fellowship between the believer and God; verse 3 seems to indicate fellowship between believers. The text doesn't make it clear, but when you look at the context, both consequences will answer equally well.

   i The pursuit of holiness results in us walking in the light, which is the requirement for having fellowship with God. At the same time, it maintains the channels of horizontal relationship with one another, with fellow believers, encouraging us to walk together, to grow together, to learn together.

f. Walking in the light doesn't mean that we will never sin: we declare war on sin in our own lives, seeing it for what it really is and come into agreement with God so that it can be dealt with. Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin – that's present tense, it's ongoing and not just a one-off for all time.

g. There are two ways in which we can understand what being cleansed by Jesus' blood means:

   i As we walk in the light the blood of Jesus keeps us from sinning (sanctification)

   ii As we walk in the light the blood of Jesus covers and blots out our sin (justification)

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

h. Paul is saying that God has promised his ongoing work of sanctification in the life of every believer, and he is committed to finishing what he started. This points to the moral power of the blood of Jesus to help us conquer temptation so that we will ultimately stand pure and blameless before God. The blood of Jesus is the influence that keeps us from sinning.

   i But equally it refers to the justifying effect of Jesus' blood blotting out all of our sins as we confess them before God, giving us acquittal and eternal acceptance with God.

i. Both of these glorious outcomes sit side-by-side – the best way to understand them is to see them working in parallel with each other.

   i In this letter John tells us that Jesus came to cover sin and to conquer sin. To justify and to sanctify. To acquit and to reform. The ongoing effect of Jesus' blood is to cleanse our hearts in such a way that we cannot be content to go on sinning.

5. An error to avoid

a. John brings a clarification in the last three verses in case we get hold of the wrong idea.

1 John 1:8-10 *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

b. Some people say that Jesus' blood covers all of our sin for all time and so we don't need to come to God to confess our sin in an ongoing way. Once we've repented and accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf the debt is cleared once and for all time.

c. John rebuffs this argument head on. He says the claim to be without sin is self-deception. These people are so deceived because the truth is not in them. When a person is saved, the truth – or we could say the light of God – comes into their heart. John says it doesn't immediately drive out all falsehood and sin. That is a battle that lasts a lifetime.

   i When the truth enters in, its light reveals sin. The mark of the true saint is not sinlessness but sin-consciousness! The dawning of God's light in the heart exposes any remaining darkness.

d. If we confess our sin, two things happen. We are forgiven and we are cleansed. Forgiveness means that the guilt of sin is pardoned. It is a recognition of the internal consequence of sin and the affect it has on the soul. Cleansing refers to the defilement of sin being removed, it means the person who is cleansed need no longer fear God's judgment.

e. Forgiveness and cleansing are a part of our ongoing walking in the light, but how do we square this with scriptures that seem to say that we are forgiven totally at the point of salvation?

Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

   i Why do we need to be forgiven again when we sin after salvation? John answers this question in the text, but it is hidden in the construction of the Greek text.

f. Verse 9 says when we know we have sinned, we should confess that sin to God. Then God is "faithful and just to forgive." Faithful refers to God's promise to forgive all our sins through faith in Jesus, which happens at salvation (Hebrews 8:12). Just or justice, relates to God's demand that the penalty for sin must be paid – this penalty was paid by Jesus at the cross.

   i In the Greek, "confess" is in the present tense, it is an ongoing action. "Forgive" and "cleanse" are in the Greek aorist tense, we don't have a direct equivalent in the English language. The aorist tense means an action that is complete. The confession in verse 9 points to an ongoing action whereas forgiveness and cleansing point to actions that have been completed in the past.

   ii Walking in the light requires our continual confession of sins. At salvation we acknowledged our sin before God and we received forgiveness and cleansing. But as we become aware of sin in our lives, and we confess that sin we don't go back to square one to receive salvation all over again, but the effects and benefits of forgiveness and the cleansing of Jesus' blood are applied again to us afresh.

6. Conclusion

a. God is light: let us seek God for a greater revelation of what that means, leading us to a greater desire to be more like him. And so let us walk in the light as he is in the light.