

1John 1:5-9 Confession

A good study is predominated by questions, not monologues, but it's important for you to have a thorough understanding of the passage and point of the study. Please read and understand this essay for your own knowledge, and then lead the study by asking the questions which follow. Keep it lively, interactive and feel free to customize to suit your audience

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. For instance, I 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 “Be good,” or “Follow Jesus,” or “Do 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.

Walking in the light is not a metaphor for being good. It’s a call to live exposed to God’s holy knowledge – to leave the shadows and bring our 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 I John 1. The ideas and clauses in verses 6-7 match up, or parallel, those in verses 8-9:

6. If we claim to have fellowship with Him, yet walk the darkness, we lie and do not live by 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, purifies us from all sin.

8. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

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

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.

Print these question, cut them out and stick in your Bible as a discrete guide for the discussion.

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 our 1 John 1:9 across the sheet and tear it up, symbolizing God's forgiving of all these sins.

Here are the answers, nice and simple. But be sure to read and understand the opening essay designed to give you background knowledge to lead well.

1. Light enables us to see. It reveals and exposes things.
2. Light represents God's holiness or righteousness.
3. He is holy and all-seeing.
4. Because there is no darkness any- where near Him, He is all light. It's impossible to be in an intimate relationship with an omniscient God and have unrevealed secrets.
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.
7. The parallel to "walk in the light" is "confess your sins."
8. Unconfessed sin can cause disruption in our Christian fellowship, if for no other reason than we may be experiencing conviction or guilt.
9. We are agreeing with God that we have sinned, that it is forgiven because of the cross, and that we must turn away from it.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
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.
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.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. We should confess our sin as often as we are aware of sin in our lives.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. This can be a powerful exercise, especially for those who have never really considered that God would completely erase their sins.