

# 3: In the Dark

Today, many Christians are making claims they can't substantiate. They self-identify as Christians, but their lives reflect a different reality. Instead of putting off their former conduct (Ephesians 4:22), they are donning lifestyles that contradict biblical truths.

Like Christians today, those in John's day made claims that were inconsistent with their profession. They claimed to have an intimate relationship with God while they *"walk in darkness"* (1 John 1:6), minimized the seriousness of sin, and "repeatedly, continually, habitually"<sup>i</sup> engaged in behaviors, attitudes, and desires that marked their life before Christ.

Understanding the implications of their self-deception, the Apostle John asserted that one could not walk in darkness *and* be in fellowship with God; one could not practice the truth *while* he *"walked according to the course of this world"* (Ephesians 2:2), and *"conducted [himself] in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind"* (2:3). He understood that if they refused to cast off their carnal ways, they would become slaves to the one they chose to obey (Romans 6:16).

*"Let no one deceive you"* (Ephesians 5:6). *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness"* (5:11), for *"what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness"* (2 Corinthians 6:14). ***"Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'"*** (1 Peter 1:14-16, NLT, emphasis mine).

*"Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Galatians 5:24). Therefore, *"Come out from among them and be separate', says the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 6:17). *And the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, [will] cleanse [you] from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

## Consequences

After he affirmed Jesus' deity (1 John 1:1-3), the Apostle John turned his attention to the claims made by those who desired "to both be right with God and have life, but also have this life on their own terms—to have life by taking the broad, easy way (Matthew 7:13-14)."<sup>ii</sup>

Read 1 John 1:5-6. What did some individuals believe to be true about their relationship with God? How does one arrive at such a conclusion? \_\_\_\_\_

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What must they believe about God to substantiate their claim?<sup>iii</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

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What is light and what is its purpose?<sup>iv</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe darkness. What does it represent? \_\_\_\_\_

Why are light and darkness incompatible? Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. \_\_\_\_\_

If “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all,*” why might some Christians believe that their actions have no bearing on their relationship with Him? \_\_\_\_\_

In John’s day, teachers of Gnosticism asserted that one’s spiritual life existed independently of one’s material life. They claimed, “Since the body is inherently evil and the spirit is inherently good and you cannot change the nature of either one, then it doesn’t matter what you do in your body.” Further, “they claimed that [they] were not responsible for what they did... Thus, they could act in any way they pleased without fear of [God’s] discipline.”<sup>vi</sup>

While this belief seems extreme and is likely to be refuted by most professing Christians, at its core is the belief that one can separate his spiritual life from his everyday life without consequence. In short, the substance of his daily choices, actions, and attitudes will not affect his relationship with God.

How is this belief displayed in the lives of many professing Christians? \_\_\_\_\_

Consider the fallacy of this belief: Adam and Eve communed with God. What broke the fellowship between them? How did this change their relationship? (Genesis 3:1-13, 22-24)

David Guzik writes, “It is possible for some to claim a relationship with God they do not have. [Likewise], it is possible for someone to think they have a relationship with God that they do not have.” Explain his statement. \_\_\_\_\_

In 1 John 1:6, believers claimed to be in fellowship (*koinonia*—an intimate sharing relationship) with God while *walking* in darkness. Walking in darkness refers to a behavior or a manner of living—a practice, pattern, or habit in which one is engaged that opposes God’s Spirit and His Word.

*Walking in darkness* includes continuing in or returning to behaviors, attitudes or desires that marked your life before Christ. What might these include? Consider Galatians 5:16-26 and Colossians 3:5-10. \_\_\_\_\_

Quietly think on your present conduct and manner of life. Is there a fleshly behavior you refuse to mortify or a past sin to which you have returned? How or why did this occur? Do you believe your actions have consequently affected your relationship with Christ? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read Romans 6:1-2, 12-23. What is the result of "continuing in" (v.1) or "presenting oneself"<sup>vii</sup> (v.13) to sin? (vv.16, 19) \_\_\_\_\_

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What indicates whether God or sin is reigning in your life? (vv.12-14; Also read Romans 8:1, 5-8.) \_\_\_\_\_

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How does Matthew 6:24 apply? \_\_\_\_\_

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Return to Romans 8, verses 12-13. What action must be taken by those who desire to walk in the light? What consequence will befall those who live according to the flesh? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Self-Deceived

In 1 John 1:6b, what term is used to describe the claim of the one who says he is in fellowship with God while he walks in darkness? \_\_\_\_\_

Turn to John 3 and read verses 16-21.

Why do we often refuse to come into the light? (vv.19-20) \_\_\_\_\_

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What does this prove about our affections? \_\_\_\_\_

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In what ways do we lie to ourselves about the effect of sin in our lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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In John 8:12 and 12:46, what is said about those who truly desire to follow Christ and those who do not? \_\_\_\_\_

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In Genesis 3, Eve had to entertain the lie before she partook of its fruit. Similarly, to conclude that participating in sin will not affect our relationship with God, we must justify our decision (lie to ourselves) to engage in that which God has prohibited.

Return to Genesis 3 and answer the following questions while considering how we self-deceive.

What did the adversary first call into question? (v.1) \_\_\_\_\_

What restrictions did he draw attention to? (v.1, 5) \_\_\_\_\_

How does the serpent negate the penalty? (v.4) \_\_\_\_\_

In the same way that the adversary sought to convince Eve that she could “eat of the fruit” without consequence, we often convince ourselves that we can do the same. How do we minimize the personal, social, and spiritual effects of participating in sin? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Eve allow her feelings and desires to supersede truth? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Adam participate? (v.6) What role do others play in causing you to concede to the desires of your flesh? \_\_\_\_\_

Justifying sin begins with questioning God's Word and continues with questioning His motives and intents. In an effort to make sin more palatable, we then redefine God's terms and minimize the consequences of sin. Further, we will seek those who condone our desires and will participate in our acts, thus deceiving ourselves (James 1:6).

List the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin according to verses 7, 8, 10, 23. \_\_\_\_\_

Also read James 1:13-16 and add to the above list of consequences.

### Walking in the Light

Return to 1 John 1 and reread verses 5-6, continuing through verse 7.

What does fellowship with God require? \_\_\_\_\_

*Walking in the light* as Christ did (v.7) does not require sinless perfection, but rather it “entails believers acknowledging whatever the light reveals is wrong in their lives.”<sup>viii</sup> As John 3:21 revealed it is an openness and responsiveness to the truth about ourselves as revealed by God's Spirit and through His Word.

Which of the following aspects of walking in the light do you find to be the most challenging? Acknowledging fault, openness to God and others, responsiveness (obedience), transparency, or accountability. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Per verse 7 of 1 John 1, what will occur as we walk in the light?<sup>ix</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

Walking in the light first requires us to acknowledge the impact of sin in our lives. Second, it requires us to put off the behaviors, attitudes, and desires that marked our lives before Christ. Then, to seek to "*understand what the will of the Lord is*" (Ephesians 5:10, 17), and put on Christlikeness (5:1).

Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Continue in Ephesians 4 and read verses 17- 5:21.

What temptation faces all believers as they walk with Christ? (2:3, 4:17, 22, 5:7, 11; Romans 12:2, Galatians 5:17) \_\_\_\_\_

What will occur if you fail to listen to and heed Christ's instruction (Ephesians 4:21), putting off your former conduct (v.22)? Explain.

v.22b \_\_\_\_\_

v.27 \_\_\_\_\_

v.30 \_\_\_\_\_

According to Ephesians 5:13, what will be made manifest? \_\_\_\_\_

What behaviors are you to "*put away*", thus denying the "opportunity, the room or space for the adversary to function and perform?"<sup>x</sup> (Ephesians 4:25-26, 28a, 29a, 31, 5:3-5, 18) \_\_\_\_\_

Walking was previously defined as "a behavior or a manner of living—a practice, pattern, or habit." If you are to "*walk as [a child] of light*" (5:8), what behaviors and attitudes are you to practice instead? \_\_\_\_\_

"Two things are true of believers who walk in the light: (a) they are in fellowship with God and (b) they are being cleansed from every sin. So long as there is true openness to the light of divine truth, Christians' failures are under the cleansing power of the shed blood of Christ. Indeed, only in virtue of the Savior's work on the cross can there be any fellowship between imperfect creatures and the infinitely perfect God."<sup>xi</sup>

In closing, Romans 13:12 says, *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the... light.”*

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<sup>i</sup> Zodhiates, Spiros. 2000. In *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Pak, Joseph. 2018. *Themelios, Self-Deception in Theology*. 43.3. p409. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/self-deception-in-theology>

<sup>iii</sup> False teachers had propagated a Jesus that was like them, asserting that as a human it was impossible for Jesus to be without sin, and therefore, unfeasible to expect His human followers to “walk in the light.”

<sup>iv</sup> God is its source (Genesis 1:3, Revelation 21:23, 22:5); where He is there is light (1 Timothy 6:16); without Him there is no light. God’s light gives life (Genesis 1:17, John 1:4, Ephesians 5:14). It makes vision possible (Psalm 36:9, Matthew 11:5). It illuminates—man’s heart (John 3:20, 8:12, 1 Corinthians 4:5), the Word (Proverbs 6:23), and the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). It discloses (Psalm 139:11-12, Luke 15:8-10), cleanses, and heals (Isaiah 30:26, Malachi 4:2), guides and protects (Nehemiah 9:19, Psalm 119:105, Luke 1:79). Light symbolizes liberty (Isaiah 42:6-7), knowledge and understanding (Psalm 119:18, 130, Ephesians 1:18), our witness (Matthew 5:14-16), purity, moral goodness, openness, honesty, and God’s glory and holiness.

<sup>v</sup> Darkness is defined as the absence of light. It covers, conceals, hides. Figuratively it represents ignorance of God and His ways, sin, its consequences, and death. Darkness symbolizes the ways of the world, the works of the flesh, the carnal mind, blindness, hopelessness, etc. Darkness is the antithesis of God.

<sup>vi</sup> Songer, Harold S., and E. Ray Clendenen. 2003. *“Gnosticism.”* In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, and Trent C. Butler, 657. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>vii</sup> Presenting yourself to sin is “to offer [yourself]; make [yourself] available or accessible.” It is permitting (failing to guard against) or pursuing carnal activities and behaviors “in which you once walked according to the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2); the act of “reaching out [your] hands to iniquity” (Psalm 125:3).

<sup>viii</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary. 1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>ix</sup> The phrase, “*We have fellowship with one another*” (1 John 1:7), refers not to the believer’s relationship with other Christians, but to the mutual fellowship between the believer and God.

<sup>x</sup> Logos. Bible Sense Lexicon. Ephesians 4:27.

<sup>xi</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary. 1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.