

Sermon 6, No Fellowship for the Sin-Hider, 1 John 1:5-6

Proposition: Because God is light, you cannot share Christ with Him as long as you keep hiding your sin!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we begin this evening to look at the beautiful and profound (and profoundly relevant) application of the central truth that God is light. John applies this truth with a series of six "hypothetical" statements. They are all paired off, two by two, with each other, each formal hypothetical met with another formal hypothetical. The first element in each pair refers to speech: "If we say," or "If we boast." The second pair refers to actions — walking in the light, confessing our sin, having an advocate with the Father. John has a message for you and me: it's that living in the light requires action. Talk is cheap, and we are more than capable of lying about whether we are actually walking with Christ in light. But we can know that we know Him if we actually do the things He tells us.

So the statements are hypothetical in form — but all too real and close to home in content. We will spend the next month or so looking at them; indeed, today I want to focus only on v. 6, with its insistence that there is no fellowship for the sin-hider. Because God is light, you cannot share Christ with Him as long as you keep hiding your sin!

I. Begin with God's Character as Absolute Light, v. 5

John, as you recall from last week, begins with the solemn announcement that the message he heard from Christ was that God is light. We talked about how that is probably not how you or I

would summarize the message that Jesus brought. But if not, brothers and sisters, it would simply seem that we don't know Jesus as well as John knew Him! Having leaned on His bosom, having gotten the title "the disciple whom Jesus loved," John was undoubtedly the one closest to Christ in His earthly life. (Sorry, Mary.) And John summarizes the message Jesus brought as "God is light." If we don't begin there, with the truth about the character of God, we will end up in the wrong place. If we begin from our felt needs, or from a human definition of what fellowship looks like, or from our relationship with our earthly fathers, we will go wrong. We have to begin with the truth that God is light, that He is morally perfect and that His moral perfection exposes and shows up your and my moral imperfection.

II. Recognize that God's Light Requires You to Walk in the Light, vv. 6-7

In other words, as John essentially says here, God's perfect light requires you to walk in the light. After all, we know that it's our call with walk with God. That means that it's our call to walk in light. We are supposed to. You must walk in the light; come out of the darkness! Stop hiding, Christian. Stop seeking to hole up in a place where your sins and imperfections can't be seen. For one thing, it doesn't work. You can't hide from the light of God; all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. But for another thing, even if it did work, its result would only be to cut you off from God. If you're hiding in the dark you're not walking in the light. If you're concealing something, then you aren't sharing Christ with the Father.

III. It's impossible to share Christ with the Father if you're hiding sin, v. 6

That, my friends, is the point of v. 6. It's impossible to share Christ with the Father if you're hiding sin. It's not merely difficult; it's impossible. Light and darkness are mutually exclusive. His light excludes and destroys your darkness, and so if you insist on having darkness you can't have Christ too! We'll look at that in more detail in just a second, but let me make myself clear. This means that if you insist that some sin in your life is okay and none of my business, then you are picking the darkness. This means that if you will not admit that something you did long ago and are really ashamed of now is an actual sin, you are choosing the darkness. This means that if you want to hide from your church, your spouse, your children, your boss something you are doing because your conscience is telling you that the thing you're doing is not kosher, you are choosing the darkness. And therefore you are rejecting Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we live in the era of the both-and. This phone gets data on 5G *and* 4G! This tire is good for summer *and* winter! This gadget is wonderful for the kitchen *and* the bedroom! (Okay, maybe not so much that. I hope.) But brothers and sisters, though the both-and has replaced the either-or in the popular imagination, such that we believe that we can have it all and that we can have it both ways and that we can have our cake and eat it too, at least in this instance, we can't. Megyn Kelly exhorted readers to *Settle for More* in the title of her autobiography. But John is adamant on this point: either Christ or the darkness. *You can't have both!* So stop trying to have both. You will never succeed. One eliminates the other from your life. One drives out the other. Christ annihilates darkness, while darkness willfully chosen and

lived in excludes Christ. So embrace the either-or; pursue Christ, and let Him blast the darkness with great turbolaser bolts of unquenchable light.

A. Fellowship

John uses three phrases here whose meaning we need to unpack. One of them is a common vocabulary item in Christianese. This word, of course, is fellowship. We say, John says, that we have fellowship. This is the art of having a fellow. I mean that in all seriousness!

1. A relationship built on having something in common

A different way to say it is that fellowship is a relationship built on having something in common. We've talked about this before: If I say "My fellow Americans," or "My fellow airline pilots," or "my fellow automobile owners," or "my fellow citizens of Campbell County, Wyoming," I'm using "fellow" in its normal sense, as an adjective that means "You and I share the designation I'm about to use. You are every bit as much an American, an airline pilot, a car owner, or whatever, as I am." Fellow-ship is the relationship between two people who are fellow somethings — fellow-travelers, fellow Marvel fans, fellow Gillette residents, or something else. Now, obviously, the fellowship is tighter or looser depending on how much you having common. If all you have in common with someone is that both of you live in the USA, that may not feel like much — until, perhaps, you meet a Mongolian and see how little you have in common with him! I still remember the day I spent hanging out in the departures lounge at Tokyo international airport. I had been in Japan for 10 days on a construction missions trip, and my fellow Americans had departed to other gates and other concourses for their flights back. So when I saw a heavysset gentleman wearing a belt buckle, cowboy boots, and a huge black Stetson, I approached him and said "You're not from around here." Brothers and sisters, I had spotted a fellow American, and it felt good. Anyway, though, if you're talking with a fellow professor who's spent 40 years with you teaching at the same college, that's a lot in common. If you're talking with a fellow human being, that may not be much in common, but it's a lot more than you have in common with a glowworm. Anyway, though, the bottom line is that fellowship is the relationship of having a fellow. The specifically Christian fellowship that John is talking about is, of course, the relationship of having a fellow Christian.

2. We have Christ in common with the Father and each other

And what makes you a Christian, or a fellow Christian? It is a particular relationship to Jesus Christ. I've said it before and I'll say it again: Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. To be united to Jesus Christ by faith such that you have Him in common with the Father and with your fellow Christians is the essence of what Christianity is all about. To say in particular that we have fellowship with Him, with Jesus, is to say that Jesus has something in common with us. That would be the same Father and the same brothers and sisters in the family of God that we call the church. Jesus is my fellow sibling, my fellow child of God! I have something in common with Him, something that makes Him as close as my own brother.

So that's what the claim that John cites actually means. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him," we are saying "Jesus and I have something in common. He is my fellow

son of God.” Do you actually think in those terms? That your relationship with Jesus is built on Him being your fellow child of God, such that you have fellowship with Him because you have something in common? That’s literally what John is saying. If you say you have fellowship with Him, you are saying that you have something in common with Him. That something is the Father. You have God the Father in common with Jesus Christ. His Father is your Father; His people are your people. That is a mighty claim; and for the true Christian, that is a fabulous reality.

B. Walking in Darkness

But John doesn’t just say “We have fellowship with Him.” Instead, he talks about the opposite of fellowship. This is an action that contradicts being a fellow son of God along with Jesus and your brothers and sisters in the church. This action, this action that is incompatible with being a fellow child of God, is to walk in darkness. Now, we already talked briefly about what this means. Basically it means doing anything, thinking anything, loving anything that you’d rather people didn’t see or know about.

1. Root Meaning: Happy Subjection to Satan’s Kingdom of Darkness

The root meaning of this phrase “walking in darkness,” however, is not a reference to sin in particular so much as a reference to life in Satan’s Kingdom in general. We know that the domain over which the Devil rules is called the Kingdom of Darkness. We know that its opposite is the Kingdom of Light or Kingdom of God. To walk in the darkness, in the first and primary place, is to be a subject of Satan’s Kingdom, to feel like you fit in there, to have no sense that you don’t belong or something’s not right about the place where you live. To walk in darkness is to live as an unbeliever, of your father the Devil, as Jesus tells the Pharisees in the Gospel of John. The flip side, of course, means that to walk in the light is to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, which is the Kingdom of Light!

If you fit in with Satan’s Kingdom — which, by the way, is the default setting for everyone born on planet Earth — if you fit in with the default, if you think there’s nothing basically wrong with the way the world in general is going on, then you are walking in darkness in its primal sense.

2. Extended Meaning

But even if you’re pretty sure that you’re a believer, if you know that you don’t happily serve Satan or live in his kingdom, walking in darkness is a possibility for you. One 19th century pastor defined walking in darkness the way I have here: it is indulgence in anything that needs or courts the shade.

a) Indulgence in anything that needs or courts the shade

To need darkness in order to be palatable, or to want and seek darkness because that’s where you intuitively sense your activities belong, is the hallmark of an activity that the apostle would call “walking in darkness.” To do something that you would rather not have on the front page of the *New York Times* tomorrow morning is to walk in darkness. Of course, you can have such a hardened conscience that you don’t even think anymore about hiding your sin — but if that’s

you, then I can assure you that are a happy denizen of Satan's Kingdom of Darkness. You don't bother hiding your sin because in the place where you live, sin fits right in. But for those who have tasted the light, those who have enough of the radiance of Christ that they sense that their sin needs some concealment, you know exactly what walking in darkness is. You could tell me right now without a second's pondering what exactly is going on in your life that you don't want people to know about.

b) Doing anything you don't want people to see or know about

Works whose proper home is darkness, works you'd rather no one knew about: brothers and sisters, those are the opposite of fellowship with Christ.

C. Fellowship and Darkness are Mutually Exclusive!

And so, even though it doesn't really fit in the outline here logically, I've included it as a point because it is the point of what John is saying. You can't be a fellow child of God with Jesus and the saints and simultaneously be doing something that needs or courts darkness. Either you can fellowship with Him, or you can walk in darkness. You can't do both. I can't do both. No one can do both. They are mutually exclusive. This is a hard either-or, as hard as the distinction between triangularity and rectangularity, between right and wrong, between God and creation. You are either fellowshiping with Christ and the saints in light, or you are hiding something in the darkness. That means that you have got to get out of the darkness and let the light expose you!

D. Practicing the Truth

Thus, John rounds out his first "hypothetical" (remember, hypothetical in form, but only too real in content!) with the statement that those who claim fellowship while walking in darkness lie and do not practice the truth. This is an interesting statement, because we don't usually think of truth as something to be done but rather as something to be believed. How can one "do the truth?" We've talked before about how in the Bible in general, we are told not only to obey commands and believe statements but also to obey statements and believe commands. There is a holistic relationship here; you can't believe the truth without doing the truth.

1. Jesus and the Spirit Are the Truth

The reason for this ultimately lies in the statements of Jesus, who said "I am the truth," and John, who added "The Spirit is the truth." That is, truth is not just an idea, but a person — two persons! The Spirit bears witness, and He is truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

2. To Practice the Truth Requires Walking in Close Relationship with Them!

Thus, to "do the truth" like John talks about, you have to be in close relationship with Jesus and His Spirit. If you're not, then you're not doing the truth. You are unable to do what Christ would have you do; you are unable to fellowship with the Spirit. If you walk in darkness, you're not doing the truth, because doing the truth is another name for fellowship with the Son and Spirit and thus with the Father too.

Do you have fellowship with the Son and Spirit? Do you have a relationship with them based on something in common — a love for your Heavenly Father and a delight in His people?

Doing the truth, of course, means doing what God commands. It means doing what is right. Other Biblical names for this are “obedience” and “wisdom.” All of them simply emphasize different aspects of the Christian life, which is a life of obeying God lived in fellowship with His Son and Spirit, who are the truth. To lie is not simply to deny something about the world; ultimately, it is to offend against these two Persons of the Holy Trinity. A lie is not just formal, not just a transgression of the law: it’s personal.

That’s why John started by talking about Christ who was manifested as the Eternal Life who was with the Father. It’s why he tells us that we need to be in fellowship with the Father and His Son. This isn’t about rules; he doesn’t say “If we walk in darkness, we’re breaking the rules.” It’s about relationship — relationship to God as Father, Christ as brother, Spirit as indweller and paraclete. If you walk in darkness, you’re not doing the truth; you’re not living in a way compatible with knowing these persons of the Godhead.

So know them. Live in a way that glorifies them. Have real fellowship with them — and their light will destroy all the darkness in you. Amen.