

**1 John 1:5-2:3**  
**(Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-20; Matthew 5:14-20)**  
**“God Is Light and in Him Is No Darkness at All”**

## **Introduction**

John opened this letter by writing of the living Word who has entered human history from the eternal Father’s presence. He has come to restore us to fellowship with God and with one another, so that our joy might be complete. But what message has this living Word brought us? What is the message that is able to restore us to fellowship with God and with one another? It is a message about God and about us. It tells us who God is and describes the transformation he works in those who are his.

The greatest theologian of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, opened his greatest work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with the words, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” This summarizes well what the apostle John aims to do in the verses before us this morning. The ancient Greek maxim, “Know yourself,” is insufficient. If we are made in God’s image and if our suffering and brokenness come from our rebellion against him, then true wisdom would have to consist in knowing who God is in order to understand who we were meant to be.

## **Body**

### **1. The character of God: Light (1:5).**

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Light is used in the Bible to describe three aspects of God:

God as the source of life (as in “Let there be light.”)

God as the source of truth (as in “a light for revelation to the gentiles”)

God as the source of holiness (as here: “in him is no darkness at all”)

Clearly this final sense of God being holy in the sense of moral purity, separation from all that is wicked, is the meaning of verse five, as becomes clear in the verses that follow. The central idea is that sin can no more exist in the presence of God than darkness can exist in the presence of the sun.

John has already written that the living Word is to restore us to fellowship with God. Clearly, if “God is light and in him is no darkness at all,” this is going to have a profound affect on the requirements of our having fellowship with him. But this brings us to the heart of the problem: we are conceived in darkness, born in darkness and live our lives in the darkness of our rebellion

against God. We seek God when it pleases us to do so, but turn away from him when it seems to suit our purposes. How can we possibly come into the light?

John faces the problem directly, first describing three deceptions that mark those who may think that they know God, but who, according to John, are deceiving themselves and are still lost in the darkness of this world. He follows each description with a prescription for life, a description of the way of life. We will split these three couplets and first look at the three self-deceptions, returning then to take up the three prescriptions for those who would know and enjoy fellowship with God.

## **2. Three self-deceptions of those who do not know God: (1:6,8,10):**

Each of these deceptions begins with the words, “If we say,” and ends with a warning that we are tragically deceiving ourselves:

*The first deception:* “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1:6). In other words, if we say that it doesn’t matter whether or not we live in sin and claim that a pattern of sinful behavior has no affect on our fellowship with God, we are lying to ourselves, and preachers who say this are lying to their listeners. Sadly, this is a line frequently heard in so-called “grace” gatherings today. Yet it is nothing but the ancient, ever-recurring false teaching of antinomianism, or lawlessness. The apostle Paul eloquently addresses this deception in Romans six. If grace has set us free from sin’s power, why would we go on living in it?

*The second deception:* “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1:8). In other words, if we admit that we were once sinners, but now claim that we have eradicated all sin from our lives and never yield to it, we are self-deceived and resisting the truth. This has been a sad tendency in various holiness movements, and even the great John Wesley fell into this and taught it for a time. The problem was that he defined sin superficially, not as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). And we can all fall into this way of thinking when we no longer examine ourselves to recognize the myriad ways that we rebel against God, even perhaps in our finest moments when we, however subtly, turn a lovely, gracious, self-sacrificial act into a source of spiritual pride and think, “Thank God I am not like other people.” In doing so we are blind to our brokenness.

*The third deception:* “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1:10). In other words, if we admit that sin exists and, perhaps, other people are sinners, but claim that *we* are not sinners and never have been, we basically call God a liar, for his Word says that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. Such people may see themselves as deeply spiritual and on a path of self-salvation, needing no one to save them.

### **3. Three practices of those who know God: (1:7,9,2:3).**

Each of the three previous descriptions of deception is followed by a prescription for those who would know God and enjoy fellowship with him.

*The first prescription:* “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” (1:7). The prescription for no longer walking in darkness is to walk in the light. Sin breaks fellowship with God and with one another. Joyful obedience to God’s Word brings intimacy with the Lord and with each other. Even among unbelievers, those who are violent, immoral, dishonest liars are despised and distrusted by others. And they are just living out loud what all of us, apart from grace, live in the secret, silent places of our hearts. Sin breaks fellowship, and it is the reason we live in a broken world. For those who would live the new life, there is the cleansing sacrifice of Jesus, who paid the penalty of our sins and set us free.

*The second prescription:* “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). Here is the daily, even hourly, prescription for a clean conscience: When we confess, we recognize the reality of our sin and its devastating consequences. When we appeal to the blood of Christ, we remember what it cost the Lord to redeem us. We realize afresh the heinous nature of our rebellion against him and the awful folly of our choosing the ways of death over the ways of life. When we claim the forgiveness he has promised to those who truly confess and trust in the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice, then we know the relief and joy of freedom from guilt and shame and bondage. We live in this repentance and forgiveness.

*The third prescription:* “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (2:3). This is a recurring theme in this letter. The one who has been ransomed from bondage to sin is increasingly eager to obey God’s commandments because we know that it is the way of life and joy and peace. It is, as John will later write, the supreme mark of love for God.

### **Conclusion**

We have in these verses the waypoints for two completely different paths: one leads to death, the other to life. Which path are you on today? Walk in the light and enjoy fellowship with God and with one another. Don’t hide in the darkness any more. Confess, repent, and follow Jesus. It is the only way of life and joy and peace.