

ILLUMINATE

WEEK 2 | No More Darkness

1 JOHN 1:5-2:2

WEEK 2 | DAY 1

Light and Darkness

Pastor Shea Fitzgibbons

The world began in darkness. "And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light." (Gen. 1:3) It is remarkable that God's first creative act in the history of the earth was to create light in the midst of darkness. The Greek word for "light" is *phos*, a word so important to John (author of the Gospel of John, 1-3 John, and Revelation) that he is credited for one-third of all its occurrences in the New Testament. For John to state, "God is light" is significant because it addresses God's nature. As a metaphor light denotes that God is absolute truth and spiritual purity.

Think about some of the brightest lights you have ever experienced. A bright sunny day at the beach, bright white lights at the height of a music concert, an eye doctor examining your pupils. God is light in ways comparable to these examples above: intense, pure, brilliant, and radiant.

In the Old Testament, Moses had a front seat audience with God. Exodus 34 records the story of what his face-to-face with the Lord was like:

29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai.

33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Week 2 | Day 1 (Continued)

Have you ever experienced a sunburn? It seems every summer I forget to apply sunscreen on that first very hot, sunny day. By nightfall, my face, neck and arms are glowing! I wonder if that was what Moses looked like. Only for him, it wasn't the power of the sun; it was the brilliance of being in the presence of Almighty God! Scripture says that Moses didn't realize his face was radiant, but everyone else saw it. Being in God's presence literally changes a person. You might not immediately be aware of this change in you, but others do take notice.

John described Jesus in the first chapter of his Gospel by saying, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. That light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) The radiance of God is reflected in his son, Jesus. That same radiance reflected by Jesus is meant to illumine our lives, serving as a beacon in the darkness. John wrote about God, "in him there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5), and the Apostle Paul declared that God "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col.1:13). In this world, there is darkness. But those who trust in Jesus have hope. We've been changed. Others can see it. We've been rescued from darkness and been brought into the light!

- How does the truth impact you that "in him there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5)?
- In your closest moments spent with God, how do you feel he has changed you?
- Ask someone close to you (spouse, parent, friend) how they experience God through you. How did they respond?

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

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WEEK 2 | DAY 2

Living a Lie

Pastor Shea Fitzgibbons

Have you ever lived a lie? I have. I recall in high school throwing a party at my house with friends while my parents were out of town. I thought I did a good job cleaning up, but somehow my father still found remnants of party wares days later. When confronted plainly about whether I'd had a party or not, I flat out lied and claimed to have come by the empty bottle somewhere else. I'm not sure they believed me, but they didn't challenge me. Ironically, the reality of "getting away with it" was harder on me mentally, emotionally, and spiritually than it would have been to get caught lying. I had broken honest fellowship with my parents, and I had to live with it.

The Apostle John framed a similar dilemma for believers in the first century church who were apparently being led astray by false prophets in their faith community (see 1 Jn. 2:26). In both the Old and New Testaments, the verb "walk" is frequently used to mean "live" (see Psalm 1). Hence, how one walks is essentially how they live - the values, attitudes and actions that are clear in their everyday interactions with others. It's probably where the notion of "watching one's step" comes from. Being careful to live according to God's righteous standards is the business of every believer. Therefore, to believe in any anti-biblical teaching is considered walking in wickedness or darkness. "If we claim to have fellowship with [God] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6). Did you catch that? Those who walk in darkness are living a lie, just as I was with my parents.

It's one thing to sin, acknowledge your shortcomings, and correct course; but it's quite another thing to sin and continue covering it up. It is the latter of these that John is warning his readers about. A lifestyle of sin consciously and willfully breaks fellowship with God. John is essentially telling these early Christians, "If you're living a lifestyle contrary to Scripture... and you know it... and you're running around claiming to have a close relationship with God... you're lying." Perhaps worst of all, you're lying to yourself. You're stuck living a lie.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8). John rolls that statement out to the early church as truthfully and as pointedly as he can and it's there for our benefit too. If there is any area of your life where you're living contrary to Scripture, do away with self-deception; name and confess your sin before God. It will begin the process of freeing you from living a lie.

- What are you struggling the most in life with now?
- How have you dealt with that struggle?
- Write out a prayer that acknowledges the power this struggle has over you and what help you desire from God?

LIVING A LIE

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WEEK 2 | DAY 3

Cleansed by the Blood

Pastor Shea Fitzgibbons

Beside words like “saved”, “redeemed”, and “born again” perhaps the most peculiar phrase Christians may have employed to talk about what Jesus has done is this: “I have been cleansed by his blood.”

Well for a watching world, as Ricky Ricardo always said to Lucy, “You’ve got some ‘splainin to do!” The very best explanation for what the blood of Jesus means is found in Hebrews chapter 9 where the reader gets an education as to why the blood of sacrifices under the Old Covenant were temporary and outward, while the very blood Jesus shed served as a “once and for all” sacrifice which is eternal and inward:

12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

I have a feeling that when most of us say we’ve been “cleansed by his blood” that what we mean is, “Jesus has saved me,” or “Jesus has forgiven my sins.” While it is true that Jesus’ blood secures our “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12), it doesn’t end there. The fuller implication is that “the blood of Christ...cleanse[s] our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb. 9:14) We’ve been redeemed by his blood and are continually cleansed in our consciences by his blood.

This was doctrine taught by the apostles in the first century, and among those apostles was John who reiterated it in his own words this way: “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” (1 John 1:7). Walking in the light and having fellowship with other believers is part of our service to the living God. It’s the lifestyle Christians are called to live – a continual journey with Jesus, lived out in the context of a faith community (i.e. it’s not just ‘Me and Jesus’ – see more on Day 4), with continual cleansing of sin. It’s not merely assenting to beliefs about Jesus and his sacrifice, as much as it is living by those beliefs with the daily blessing of being cleansed once and for all by his blood.

- Would you say you’ve been cleansed by the blood of Jesus? Are you being cleansed by the blood of Jesus?
- Who are the “one anothers” you have fellowship with who can help you on your faith journey?
- In prayer, identify one thing you are thankful for about your cleansing, and one thing you still need cleansing from.

CLEANSSED BY THE BLOOD

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WEEK 2 | DAY 4

Vertical and Horizontal Fellowship

Pastor Shea Fitzgibbons

In yesterday's devotional I mentioned the spiritual necessity of a faith community (i.e. church). Encouragingly, attendees from all three of Bethany's campuses who participated in a church wide survey in October 2022 reported a high priority of personal engagement with a local body of believers (see Figure 1.).

Having recently completed the church wide small group experience ROOTED, it is certain that the percentage of those engaged in a small group at Bethany Church will see a dramatic increase. That's great news! This means we are staying true to our mission of disciples making disciples. We are in fellowship with God and with one another.

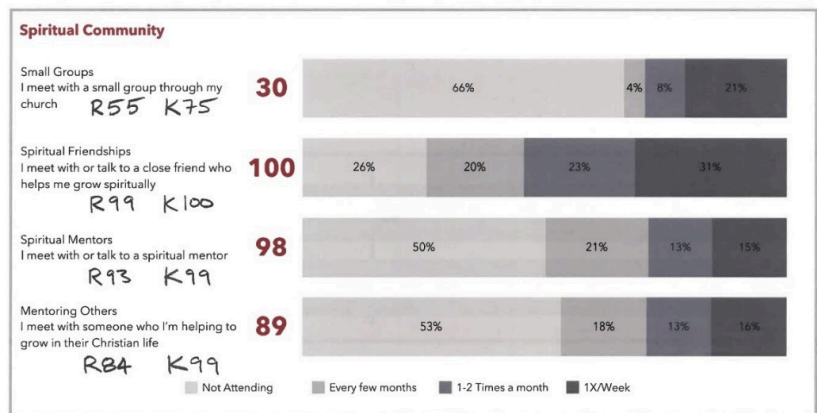
In other words, our relationships are both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with one another). John will explain in this epistle that these two relationships are interdependent. Jesus said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Mat. 22:40)... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mat. 22:37, 39). Vertical and horizontal fellowship. Now that's life!

- If you're not in a small group with fellow believers, what's stopping you?
- Who regularly speaks into your life? Whose life do you speak into regularly?
- How is relationship with God a priority in your life? How would a stranger know?

Church Activities: Spiritual Community

Spiritual community shows up as a growth catalyst across the Spiritual Continuum, though the specific form of community shifts as people grow in their faith from more casual friendships to mentoring relationships.

The red numbers below show your church's percentile rank for participation in each type of spiritual community. The bar chart provides more detail on the frequency of participation at your church.



VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL FELLOWSHIP

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WEEK 2 | DAY 5

Sin and Forgiveness

Pastor Shea Fitzgibbons

Clearly, sin is one of the greatest concerns to John in 1 John 1:5-2:2. He states his case for why these early Christians cannot habitually live in sin. Even the claim to be without sin (vv. 8, 10) is, itself, sin. John's goal here is one part reminder and one part exhortation. New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee summed it up well, saying "God's true children do not continue to live in sin, but neither are they sinlessly perfect." [1] John's readers are children of God who need reminding that they are sinful and have a process for dealing with sin. These same readers also need exhorting to make use of that process so that they won't continue to live in sin.

In 1 John 2:2 Jesus is described as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins." The phrase atoning sacrifice is actually one Greek word *hilasmos*, appearing only here and in one other place in the New Testament, 1 John 4:10. The word indicates that Jesus' death is the means of appeasement or propitiation for the sins of humanity. Vine's Expository Dictionary explains it this way: "Hilasmos signifies an expiation, a means whereby sin is covered and remitted... signifying that He Himself, through the expiatory sacrifice of His Death, is the Personal means by whom God shows mercy to the sinner who believes on Christ as the One thus provided."

This section of John's epistle contains one of the most frequently quoted scriptures among Christians regarding confession:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Confession of sin is a spiritual discipline that leads to freedom - forgiveness of sins and purification from sinful thoughts and actions. We would do well to make a daily habit of confessing our sins to the Lord. He knows them already, but it is clear from scriptures such as the one above that we are meant to confess them to God in the context of a relationship with him. Jesus is our "advocate" (1 John 2:1). He is our *hilasmos*, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And just to be sure we understand him correctly, John proclaims that Jesus isn't just a way to forgiveness of sins, he's the only way; because he is the *hilasmos* "for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

It is through Jesus that we have true fellowship with one another and with God. It is to Jesus that we confess our sins. It is Jesus who forgives us and purifies us from our sins. Through. To. Who. It's all about Jesus!

- What is the last thing you confessed to the Lord? When was it?
- Perhaps you were brought up with "going to confession" (i.e. through a priest or religious leader). What difference have these passages and this devotional made on your understanding of confession?
- Listen to the hymn "Jesus Paid it All" as you reflect on today's reading.

SIN AND FORGIVENESS

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WORKS CITED

Week 2 | Shea Fitzgibbons | Light

Figure 1. REVEAL Assessment Report - January 2023 - Bethany Church

[1] Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2014). How to read the Bible book by book: A guided tour. Zondervan.