

The Walk of a Christian

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Date: 02 January 2021

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[0 : 00] It was the week before Christmas, 10 o'clock at night, very dark, and I had to take my garbage bins out. Of course, my garbage bins needed to be empty for all of the empty boxes and wrapping that comes from Christmas. And I was walking my bins out down my driveway and something tickled my face. And I did what every sane person would do in that situation. I leapt back and did one of these dances. I did a spider dance, we may call it. But I had to get those bins out. So I moved back, and I wish I had Coe's torch. That would have been much more helpful. I grabbed my phone out, and I swiped up and got my torch on, and there was a stick nearby. So I grabbed the stick and my torch, and I went spider hunting. And I went out, and I thankfully wiped off all the spider web at this point. And I went out to the driveway, and I was looking around, and I looked up, and there was a big fat orb spider, I think it was. You know, my wife is shivering right now. She hates spiders.

And it was, you know, the ones with the really big abdomens? And it was making the biggest web it could. And I thought, all right, what I'm going to do is I'm going to whack it on the ground, and I'm going to stamp on it, and I'm going to deal with this problem. So I whacked it. But I whacked it too hard, and it disappeared. Anyway, I got my bins out. It all was well. Now, I'm sure you've been in a situation like this before. Maybe you've had a physical reaction to my horror story this morning. But there's something terrifying about the unknown dark. What is out there? What's going to crawl on my face? What's going to crawl up my leg? What piece of Lego will I step on? What furniture will I walk into with my little toe? Now, in so many ways, we as people have fought back the dark and the fears that come with it. We have streetlights, and, you know, they reduce, you know, fear of criminals and reduce crime. We have headlights to reduce car accidents. But we are also contradictory people, because we avoid the dark and there's the fears associated with it, but we can also do the opposite, and we can also love to embrace the dark. One of my kids recently over this Christmas period has been stealing lollies. I won't tell you which of my children it is. They can put their hand up and say who it was. And so what they've been doing is they've been stealing lollies and going off and hiding in a dark spot to eat them. And then they come out later and tell you, I've been eating lollies that I stole. So, you know, but we can see that the dark is also a place of protection when I am in the wrong. When I want to do the wrong thing, I want to hide because I still want to do it, but I don't want the guilt and shame that's associated with it. We can embrace the dark too, just like one of my kids. I might want to embrace the dark to do what I want, to do what I want and not have the consequences.

I might hide things from family members. I might hide problems at work out of fear of punishment and retribution. So we can live this double life. We fear the dark and we want to be in the light, but we also can embrace the dark so we can get things that we want. And so instead of walking in the light, we do this staggered walk where we're sometimes in the light and sometimes in the dark. Today, we are starting in this short book that John wrote, a letter, the first of his three letters, and he was writing to a church who were being deceived. People had come into this church and were trying to get them to follow a different path, to follow a different version of Jesus. And they were taking them down a different path, a path that was not following God, but a path that would take them into the dark. The challenge for us today will be to check where we are walking.

[4 : 23] We've just started a new year. It's 2021 now. We can't make any of those Vision 2020 jokes about our eyesight. But right now, it is a good time to be checking what path we are going down. Are we having a staggered walk where we follow God, where we do the right thing? You know, we come to church.

We want to spend time with God and we want to love Him and get to know Him, but we are also embracing our sin and hiding away things from the people that we love and hiding things from God.

There is a God who loves us, who wants us to follow Him, who wants us to walk following Him wholeheartedly. And so are we following Him? Or are we embracing darkness out of fear and desires to get what we want?

And so today, as we look at this piece from 1 John, we'll see the God who is revealed. And we'll see that God is light and that He is the God that we should walk with.

So let me pray for us as we spend time in God's Word. Heavenly Father, as we look at Your Word this morning, we ask that You would help us. God, reveal Yourself to us and give us eyes to see, to see who we are and what we are like, and how amazing You are that Your Son has died for us so that we can walk in the light following You. Amen.

[5 : 54] So first of all, this morning and today, we will see the God who has been revealed. You can be following along in the app. I'd also want to encourage you to have your Bibles open in 1 John today.

Now, it appears that John is writing to a group of people who had had others come in to try and deceive them. He is trying to encourage this church to continue down the right path.

And he brings up a number of claims that these people have brought in, and he refutes them. They claimed to be sinless. They denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

They denied that Jesus' blood brought forgiveness. They didn't show love to each other. And they continued to choose sin without care at all of the consequences.

Now, over the next couple of weeks of January, as we look at this book, we'll look at a number of these claims. But it starts with the Apostles' resume, in one sense.

[6 : 55] John's going to refute these claims, but before he gets to it, he sets out his resume. Have a look with me, 1 John 1, 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. And in these first three verses, John repeats himself three times to emphasize his point. The promised Christ, well, we have seen him, we have heard him, and we have touched him.

We celebrated this, how long ago was Christmas? Was it a week or two ago? I can't remember.

That whole period blows into just a day or two. But we celebrated this at Christmas, that God himself came and could be touched and could be seen and could be heard. That the mighty, all-powerful creator of the universe became someone that we could touch and see and know.

God revealed himself. He's come out into the light, so to speak, and made himself knowable. And it is this which unites us in verse 3.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And so John is saying at this point, don't be deceived by the people coming in and saying that Jesus didn't come in the flesh. Don't be deceived, people saying that Jesus really wasn't God. We saw him. We saw him when he was alive, and then we saw him dead on the cross, and then we saw him raised to life again. And he is the only reason that this church stays together.

[8 : 47] If we take away these things, if we take away Jesus' divinity, and that he was really flesh, if he was fully human and fully God, if we take those away, the church just falls apart. This is the only reason that the church stays together. So we walk together as a church, as a body of believers following this God. Christianity is not an individual sport.

I was watching some dragon boat racing videos the other day. I don't know why that came up, but I was watching them. And it reminded me that in dragon boat racing, correct me if I'm wrong, but there's one person that lays down the beat on the drums. Thank you, John, nodding for me.

And everyone else rows in time. And the more in time you row to the beat of the drum, the faster you go. And then they cut through the water like a knife. It's amazing. In so many New Testament letters, including this one, the author calls the church back from where they've been going. You have been rowing to your own beat of your drum. Row in time to the beat of God, because it matters for the whole church. If one of us goes off, there is a consequence for the whole church. Our faith is not individual.

We are all connected and we all impact each other positively and negatively. And so John starts by reminding them of who sets the beat. For this church, it was John. For us, our church is built on the Bible. And so we don't just go out of God's word and set our own agenda. But everything we do as a church is built on God as he has been revealed to us in his word. So God has been revealed to us.

We have the apostles who have seen him. They have written it down. And that is how God has been revealed to us. We don't go away from that. But that is what unites us as a church. God revealed Jesus Christ in his word. And now John explains more about who this God is, that this God is light.

[10:58] He says this in verse 3. And it's a picture of God and his character. At the very start of the Bible, when God was making the world, the very first thing he made, the first thing he said was, let there be light. It's an expression of who he is. He makes light. He pushes back darkness. He reveals things. And it's from the light that everything else grows. Plants grow, animals, humans, everything needs light. All creation owes its existence and its sustenance to the God who is light and Jesus who is the light of the world. C.S. Lewis said that we believe that the sun has risen, not because we see the sun, but because we see everything else by it. Where the sun is, there is no darkness. Where God is, there can only be truth and there is no error. Where God is, there can only be good. There is no place for evil.

And we get to be in close relationship to this God. I know what it's like when I try and stare at the sun for too long. You know, you get that image burnt into your eyes and you can't see very well. Can you imagine being right next to the sun? It wouldn't last very long. But the great God of the universe, who there can be no evil, who is only truth and is only goodness, we get to be with. John paints a wonderful picture of what walking with this God is in verse 6. He paints a positive picture and a negative picture. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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. Some have been claiming to have fellowship with God, but they're in the darkness. They're lying. Some claim to have no sin, but they've been deceived and effectively they're calling God a liar. A Christian is instead someone who has had their sin brought into the light and exposed. And that can be a painful thing to have our darkest moments, our deepest fears, our darkest shames brought into the light.

But instead of being pushed away, being expelled from God's presence, all our sin is dealt with and purified by the blood of Jesus. We can only walk in God's light by his grace, that God would choose to deal with us by the blood of Jesus so that we're not left in the dark without him.

I really love this picture on the screen. Kev, if you can put that so that everybody can see that on the stream as well. I love this picture. I think it's a really wonderful image of the walk of a Christian. God has lit our path following him, and yet we are surrounded on all sides by darkness.

[14:30] On the one hand, we can walk in the darkness thinking that everything is fine with our life. You know, I'm going okay without God. I don't need to obey him. I don't need to follow him.

I can figure out things on my own. I can do things on my own. But the reality is if we are walking in that part of the forest without God, without the path, we're going to stumble. We're going to fall. We're going to hurt ourselves, and we're going to be left in the darkness. But we can also be tempted to think that there is no problem, that we're fine. Well, I'm not really that bad. It's not really that dark. I can kind of see. I've got my iPhone torch out. I'm a good person. You know, God loves me the way I am. I can choose to go on my own path.

Actually, I know there's a path that God has there for me, but I've got this other path that's down here, and I want to follow that instead. And God, well, he said he's love. You know, Coe said that for us this morning as well. So I'm just going to go down my own path.

Instead, chapter 2 tells us that we have Jesus. We have the advocate. In his death and resurrection, he takes our hand and he brings us into the light. The word advocate here is...

[15:48] Kev, you can take that picture down now, mate. The word advocate here is also the same word for lawyer. Usually, we would think about that as a really negative thing. You know, lawyers are terrible people. I know some that are great. But Jesus here is like the lawyer who stands next to us when we are condemned. He stands next to us, the guilty person in court. And Jesus pleads our case for us.

And he guides us. Come this way. Come into the light. Walk on this path following God. You're lost in the dark. You are not a good person. You cannot go that way. That way will lead to death and destruction. But I am with you to make you good, to help you so you can walk in this path.

Brothers and sisters, are we choosing to embrace the light following God? Or are we choosing to embrace the dark?

What secret sins are you hiding that draw you into the dark that you need to confess? We have Jesus the advocate with the Father. And I think this is a really wonderful thing that we have a

Christian faith where we don't need to have guilt. We don't need to be laid down by the burden of our sin.

We actually have an advocate who will guide us into the light. An advocate who will say, I know you have sinned, but I love you and you can find forgiveness in God.

[17 : 20] As we start off 2021, it is a good place to start by bringing our hidden sins into the light.

Bring them to Jesus, first of all, our advocate, who stands by our side as we confess. But also, bring your sins to a friend. Bring your sins to a Christian brother or sister, someone in a community group, someone that you're sitting with.

Bring your sins to a Christian brother or sister, you know, mate, I've been really struggling with this sin. God has convicted me about it. This is keeping me in the dark, not from following God.

And he wants me to change. I know I've been forgiven. Keep me accountable to this sin. Start your year off following and obeying God, not in the dark.

God is light and he calls us to walk in the light with him. It's our second point today that God is light. Thirdly, that this God is the God to walk with.

[18 : 26] John now illustrates what walking with God in the light looks like and how our God is the God. Chapter 2, verse 3, have a look with me. We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

We can actually check where we are on this path. You know, there's that golden path before us. We can check how we're going by whether we are keeping his commands.

Are we obeying him? That's what that golden path illuminated in the forest looks like. Walking, following God. That's what walking in the light looks like, obeying him.

Verse 5, if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Now, we could get a big list of all the commands in the Bible. We could go through the 10 commandments in the Old Testament. We could look at all the commands in the New Testament. But that really is the journey of a Christian.

[19 : 33] Reading God's word. Comparing our life to Jesus'. And seeing where we are at that point. And the reality is, for all of us, we walk not in a straight line, but at zigzag.

It really is zigzag. As we change, our sin changes too. I have different sins now as a father than I did before when I was not a father. I have different issues with patience than I did before I was a father.

And so as life changes, God is convicting me of different sins that I need to be aware of so I can be walking in the light. So we don't need to necessarily go through all these commands.

I want you to do that. Read your Bible. Ask God, God, how do I need to be following you and obeying you in this moment?

Where am I letting you down? How do I need to be made more like Jesus today? And the journey of a Christian is in the Bible. It is asking God.

[20 : 37] It is walking with brothers and sisters. It is doing it as a church. Asking that question, am I on the path when it comes to whatever it is?

Patience, loving you more than anything else, my own pride. God, how am I embracing the darkness of lying or lust and theft? And here for us, John illustrates one aspect of walking in the light and the dark.

It's all to do with our love and hate. Chapter 2, verse 9. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. John asked this church to test how their love of the church is going.

One test to see how you're going, walking in the dark or whether you're in the light, is to check your love for those who should be the easiest to love.

[21 : 43] The family that was created by Jesus' blood should be the easiest to love. If you don't love other Christians, people that God himself loves, are we really walking in the light?

God has united us in Jesus' blood. And so when we see other people in this church, it shouldn't just be, oh, there's that person I know, there's that person I don't know.

We are brothers and sisters. And the check here from John is, We live in an individualistic intellectual society.

We can check our Christianity by thinking, well, I'm a good Christian because I know a lot. I'm a good Christian because I'm really skilled. I serve in many ways. And there is a danger for all of us to forget to love. And instead, we focus on our own knowledge. We focus on our own self-centeredness. If we claim to be following Jesus, who have you loved recently?

[22 : 56] Not necessarily been nice to. Being nice is easy and fine. But who have you spent time with? Who have you sacrificed for? Who have you shared with?

When we do that, we will be a community united by Jesus, walking in light. We will be attractive to our neighbors.

We will be building each other up in love. As we say goodbye to 2020 and journey to 2021, there has been much reflection about how bad 2020 was or how good it was for certain people.

But I've seen people also hoping for a much better 2021. And I can understand that. 2020 wasn't great for many people. But the hope for 2021, I've seen, has been focusing on personal freedoms. You know, I'll get that holiday that was denied to me by border closures. You know, when we get rid of that plague, I won't be full of fear and anxiety and the anxiety of constant restrictions coming on and lockdowns.

[24 : 03] 2021 is going to be the greatest year. And I feel the pull of that too. For me, I'm a cup is half full person. I love looking to the future and being excited about tomorrow.

But God has a much better 2021 for us than just those things. If we would walk with God in 2021, God has a better future for us.

Because it's not just about personal freedoms, but the freedom that comes from walking in the light with the one who made light itself. At 2021, that's not just about getting rid of fear and anxiety of lockdowns or catching COVID, but trusting in Jesus because he has defeated death and disease. I want a 2021 where I walk in the light closer with Jesus and walk out of the darkness controlled by my sinful desires. American pastor John Piper uses an illustration of a man sitting in a dark room all alone.

He feels around with his hands. And with one hand, he can feel something that is warm and soft and fluffy.

[25 : 20] And with the other hand, he feels something that is cold and hard and sharp. And so in the dark, he draws close to this warm, soft, fluffy thing, snuggling in close.

But when the light goes on, he sees that the warm, soft, fluffy thing is the underbelly of a horrid man-eating monster.

And the cold, hard, sharp edge that he felt is the sword of the majestic Jesus Christ. The reason he was controlled by his desire for that, for the man-eating monster in the dark, was because he was in the dark.

He couldn't see what was around him. Everyone who loves the world more than God is in the dark. When we walk in darkness, we are controlled by the desires for the soft, warm underbelly of sin, of filling our pride, of prestige amongst our friends and family, for chasing two-second pleasures that don't last.

But that is not following God in the light. Following God means seeing the world as he sees it and having the same desires as him.

[26 : 43] If we are controlled by desires for the world instead of desires for God, it doesn't matter whether we say we have fellowship with God, we don't have it. Instead, we are walking in the dark.

Brothers and sisters, we risk having a Christian faith where we are happy to stagger between walking with God and walking in the dark. Let's not have a half-hearted Christianity, a half-hearted Christian faith in 2020.

If you're in the dark about this God, if you don't know this God, let me encourage you to do two things. Grab a Bible and start reading Mark's Gospel. It's a good place to start.

And get to know this Jesus. And the second thing, talk to somebody else. If you're watching on the stream right now, send us an email, office at stpauls.org.au and ask some questions.

Ask about who this God is. If you want a closer walk with Jesus, there's a couple of things I want to encourage you to do. First of all, let me encourage you to be bringing your sins out into the light.

[27 : 51] As I said before, find somebody else. Walk with somebody else closely. Jesus himself walked with people.

Bring your sins out into the light. Confess them to God. Confess them to a brother or sister so they can hold you accountable. But also, start a new habit of walking with God today. Today's a good day.

It's not the first of January. That's okay. It's still early in January that we're thinking about New Year's resolutions. My New Year's resolutions always revolve around learning a certain language that I've been trying to learn for 45 years now and about health.

They're my two main resolutions and they always fail, give or take. Reading the Bible and prayer doesn't need to be a New Year's resolution that fails.

Let me encourage you today to plan to walk with God. Today is a good day to plan because it's still early in January so we can make plans.

[28 : 58] We're not at the end of January where we just give up on all our New Year's resolutions. But plan and start it tomorrow. Make your plan today and then start it first thing tomorrow.

Remember that great old saying, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. So today, figure out what part of the Bible are you going to read? What time of the day are you going to read it?

Are you going to pray before or after? What is prayer going to look like? Are you going to be reading through, say praying through the Lord's Prayer? Praying through the temple acts, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication?

Plan what it looks like for you to be walking with God. Do that today so that we can have a wholehearted Christian faith following God in 2021.

Let me pray for us now. Heavenly Father, I thank you for all of your goodness to us that you have not left us in the dark, stumbling, hurting ourselves, hurting each other, and left for destruction.

[30 : 12] But Lord, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in Jesus so that we can walk in the light following you. Heavenly Father, help us to do that.

Lord, help us to bring out our sins before you because, Lord, you know all of them. Help us to walk with you this year, walk closer to you, loving you more than we did last year so that you would have all the glory.

And we ask this in your son's name. Amen.