

# First John(3) - Correcting Serious Mistakes

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want to continue with our studies of 1st John. Tonight we're looking at verses 5 to 7. 1st John, the first chapter, and at verse 5.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Well, I've looked in a couple of studies at the first four verses. We come now to this point in the letter where John is beginning to apply the teaching that he gave in the beginning, in the introduction there, in the first four verses.

That dealt with the word of life, the word that was personified in Jesus, the word that was proclaimed in the message of the gospel. And what he's doing now is saying this message, this message about Jesus, about the eternal life that came in him, that is in him.

[ 1 : 19 ] This message he is saying, this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you. And then he comes to an affirmation in verse 5.

A great statement of truth or an affirmation of truth. And that is that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. And that affirmation is something that really sets as a kind of framework everything that follows on from that, at least for the next few verses into chapter 2.

And if you look at the section from verse 5 here, down as far as the second verse of chapter 2, what you have there are three units of teaching, you might say, three units in the apostles' teaching, where he deals with certain matters in relation to God being light and the implications of that for our lives as Christians, for our lives as human beings.

I just quickly run over that structure because it's always helpful to know the structure of a passage. You come then to look at something of its detail.

And the structure, as we say, is that there are these three units made up of two verses each. And what you find is that he takes, first of all, if we say.

[ 2 : 42 ] Notice the if we say at the beginning of verse 6. The first unit begins there. And it goes on to verse 7. Then verse 8, if we say. All right, and that's the second unit beginning there.

And on to verse 9. And then verse 10, you have the third unit. If we say we have not sinned. And then it goes on to chapter 2. Because the chapter structure sometimes interferes a little bit with the order of the whole text as you find it.

So all the way through that you've got these three units of two verses each. And in each of these units, John is actually taking an error or some aspect of false teaching.

And I think most commentators agree that he's actually taking something he knows is being taught by the false teachers that the letter goes on to speak about in some detail. And that he's taking these points as points of their teaching.

And the danger in that teaching. And what he's doing is taking the error first of all. And then he takes the outcome of it. And then he thirdly gives a correction to it.

[ 3 : 51 ] Let me just follow that through in the verses we have tonight. After verse 5. Here's the first of the units. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness.

That's the error. That we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness. Still following the ways of sin. And the outcome of that, he says, the result is that we lie and do not practice the truth.

That's the outcome. Here's the error. There's the practical outcome of it. But then he comes around to the correction of it. And the correction is in, but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

And the blood of Jesus' son cleanses us from all sin. And if you follow the other two units yourselves, you can see that's the same pattern that he's got there. If we say, then something follows, and then there's the correction.

And in each of these corrections that you find, verse 7, verse 9, and verses 1 to 2 of the next chapter, you find that the correction consists largely of core doctrine, important biblical teaching to offset or to show up the false teaching and overcome it by the truth itself.

[ 5 : 10 ] So that's really the outline of it. And we'll follow through tonight to the end of verse 7, taking the first of these units, because we first have to take the affirmation in verse 5, then the first of the units, and God willing, next time we'll come back at units 2 and 3 as they fit together in this block of teaching.

First of all, he comes then to this affirmation. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If you know anything of John's writings, as you do, you'll know that he uses light and darkness very frequently as symbols of things which are important to him.

Here it's God, but it can also refer to the truth, it can refer to the Christian life, and it can refer to the opposite of that, somebody in the ways of sin. And the way in which John uses light and darkness is very instructive.

Because when he says light, he means two aspects of light that follow on into what it represents as well as light itself.

[ 6 : 19 ] First of all, light stands for or represents moral purity. Moral purity or holiness, if you like. It stands for moral purity.

That's why John's use of the word darkness is always to do with evil, with sin set against light as moral purity.

If you cast your mind just briefly back to John's gospel, you'll find much of the same imagery used there, but just let me read through chapter 3, verses 19 to 21 there.

This is about God coming in the person of Jesus into the world. Well, he says, this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

There's light and darkness contrasted. Then he says, for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

[ 7 : 22 ] But whoever does what is true or does truth comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God. And that's an important passage and has a bearing on what we're looking at in this passage in 1 John as well.

So there's the contrast between light as moral purity or representing moral purity and darkness representing sin or evil or wickedness.

The other aspect of light that's important to John as representing something is the way in which light comes to be something that communicates its properties.

In other words, it stands for revealed truth. It stands for revealed truth from God who is light in the sense that what God is like has been revealed to us, especially in the person of his Son.

In other words, where light represents revealed truth from God, darkness represents ignorance or error. The opposite of truth, revealed truth.

[ 8 : 27 ] So bear in mind these two aspects of light as light represents. On the one hand, moral purity. On the other hand, revealed truth.

And apply that to God as it represents what God is and who God is. This is the message that we proclaim to you and heard from him. You see, John's not making this up. John's not saying this is something that we actually put together as apostles.

We thought this would be good teaching. We thought this would be a good program for discipleship. We came up with these ideas ourselves. But we think it's really well worth following. No, he says this is what we have heard from him.

He got his message from God. God revealed this to him. And now he says we proclaim it to you that God is light. In other words, God as light is morally perfect.

Spiritually pure life. That's why he adds there is no darkness in him at all. And he's also light in the sense of revealed truth.

[ 9 : 34 ] He's revealed to us what he himself is like. Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. And Jesus is the light of the world. The light that came from God to show us what God is like.

The moral purity of God. Now we'll see in a minute how that has a bearing on the false teaching and the correction that John is giving alongside of it or after it.

But just think for a moment of how awesome God is. This is not a God that's drawn after the imagination of human beings.

We're sometimes confronted with the idea that the God we worship of the Bible, the God the Bible speaks about, it's really just a product of human imagination.

It's just simply like any other sort of human production in terms of morality or spirituality or whatever else. That's what we're accused of following, a God that we have invented ourselves over centuries.

[10:35] And it came really to its apex, if you like, in the teaching of the Bible. God is not an invention. God is not something human beings decided would be good to put before themselves for whatever reason.

God is God, uncreated, pure being, holy beyond anything we can imagine. That's why you cannot bring sin into the presence of God.

That's why you cannot bring sin into relation with God and not find sin highlighted as an evil.

Because the light exposes the darkness. And indeed the light comes, as we'll see in our salvation, to scatter the darkness.

These verses, from here on down through, into the next chapter, and indeed all the way through 1 John, have a lot to say about sin. Have a lot to say about what sin is.

And the destructive effects of sin. And how God regards sin. You see why this is so relevant to the age in which you and I are set? Because out there, there's hardly any knowledge or conception of sin.

[11:45] Sin is not something that's accepted as a reality. It's something that comes from the Bible, but that's outdated. And when you put the law of God aside, as is often the case, and is now so much the case, then sin loses its meaning.

You cannot have a meaning to the word sin except as it is directly related to the law of God, to the being of God, to the demands of God.

What you do can only be sin if it is a relation to the Creator God who has given us a law to live by.

And the moment you fail to meet the demands, the standard of that law, or else, put it in the way of the catechism, transgress that law, you have sinned.

And when you have sinned, you have done something that offends God. That's why these verses are so crucial for our understanding of the Gospel, for our understanding of why sin must be frequently, repeatedly mentioned in the preaching of the Gospel, in the experience, indeed, of God's own people, why sin features there to the extent that it does, because it is the reality the Bible says it is.

That's why it's represented by darkness. It's the opposite of what God is. It's in conflict with who God is.

[13:15] And that's why you have such a wonderful correction on the part of the Apostle in all of these units of teaching. You have the blood of Christ.

You have Christ as a propitiation. You have Christ as an advocate with the Father if anyone sins.

You see, there is John's solution to the human dilemma of our sinfulness, of what we are by nature.

He doesn't do it by lessening sin. He doesn't treat it, he doesn't do it, he doesn't approach the problem by redefining sin, by making it less serious than it really is.

Oh, he says, make it as serious as you like. Make it as serious as God actually says it is. But bring it to the cross and you'll find something bigger, something better, something that overcomes it, something that actually deals with it destructively.

That's why it's important to see these verses and understand something of them for ourselves. So, there is the affirmation that God is light and you see, he's not just saying that God is light, he's saying, in Him is no darkness at all.

[14:29] There are no shady areas in God. The being of God contains no shadows. There are no dark corners. There's no inconsistency.

There's nothing inconsistent with holiness and perfect, pure, moral life. Nothing in God at all about the way God does things.

Nothing in God Himself or in God's works has any area of shadow or anything to do with darkness. And that too is seen so much, so brilliantly, in the person of Jesus, His Son.

Again, when you go to John's Gospel and some of the other passages that deal with the person of Jesus and who He is and who He claimed Himself to be, John 12, for example, this is the end of, this is the very end of Christ's public ministry and John's record of it.

And significantly, as you read this passage, you can see how He, how He, how Jesus spoke about Himself as light. When you come to John 12, He says, the question was asked, well, who is this Son of Man?

[15:41] The Son of Man was mentioned and the crowd answered, we have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lived? Who is this Son of Man?

Jesus said to them, the light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. That's one of the greatest texts in the Bible, surely. While you have the light, believe in the light.

Why? So that you may become sons of light. There's the gospel appeal, the gospel message to every sinner, myself, yourself included. While you have the light, while the light is shining, and that means while your life exists in this world with the faculties you've got, while you know the light is there, while the light is offered to you and shines in the gospel, while you have the light, believe in the light, accept the light, take the light, trust in the light, so that you may become sons of light.

And then the next verse says, when Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. You see, his public ministry was coming to an end.

[17:01] This is how he ended, in John's record of it, his public ministry, by speaking of himself as the light and the need to urgently believe in the light because he was then going to disappear from public view.

And the rest of John's gospel, as you know, the following chapter deals with Christ's teaching of his disciples in the upper room, not to the world at large. He departed and hid himself from them.

That verse should terrify you. It should terrify me too. If Jesus were to say to you tonight, you've known the light all your life so far, you've persistently refused to believe in the light, so the light's going to go out.

I'm not going to speak to you anymore. I'm not going to show you anything more of myself. Just imagine, tonight if that were the case, how would you feel? What would you think?

What would that mean to you? Well, to everyone who really wants to be sons of light, children of light, children of God, Christians, followers of Jesus, the last thing they would want is that Jesus would disappear.

[18:13] We know that he never will for his people, but this is the urgency with which the gospel presses upon us to trust in Christ, give our lives to him. That's taken us away a little bit from 1 John.

Let's come back to 1 John. But this is what he's saying. There is no darkness at all in God. No darkness whatsoever. Because, you see, darkness actually doesn't have any properties.

You switched off all the lights in this building tonight, you would have darkness by and large. But total darkness, wherever you come across total darkness, darkness has no properties of its own.

You can't actually say, what is it that is proper to that darkness in terms of its own properties? What is it that characterizes it?

What is it that makes it up? It doesn't have any properties. Light does. Light shines. Light travels. Travels at great speed.

[19:19] Light shows up things that were previously darkness. darkness. But darkness has no properties. But it's the property of light to scatter darkness.

How do you get rid of darkness? By bringing light into it. It's the only way you can do it. Because there's no properties of its own. And what it says here about God and about salvation and about our darkness and so on, remember that the light that God is.

It's the light that through the gospel has come to shine into our darkness. The darkness of sin. The darkness of a world that's fallen. The darkness of a world that's in rebellion against God.

Where do you find the light? The light's in the gospel. The light is in Jesus. And it's the only hope for the darkness. The only thing that can dispel the darkness is that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

That's why you see he's going on now to test the claims that are made by the false teachers against the light. That's how you test every claim. That's how you test every claim that claims to be the

truth.

[ 20 : 38 ] That's how you do the same with false teaching today. You take it to the light. You take it to the light that God is shining through his word. The light of his truth.

His own light. The light that he is but the light of his truth as well. Remember light means revealed truth. You take every species of teaching including the teaching of this pulpit and you bring it to the light and you expose it to the light and you ask yourself is it true to the light?

Does it contradict the light? And if it does then it's false. Because they cannot mix. And so that's the affirmation that God is light.

But secondly he moves on now to the mistake and then the correction. The mistake is if we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth.

Remember we saw fellowship in the previous passage without repeating it too much. fellowship means sharing in something or sharing with others in something and there of course it's to do with salvation.

[ 21 : 45 ] Fellowship the fellowship that God's church is the fellowship that we are tonight as a people together under the gospel with sharers in the gospel. The fellowship that God saved people have is a sharing of the life that's in Christ among themselves.

they have that common sharing of the life that salvation is. And what is here is the claim by the false teachers they are saying they are claiming that they have fellowship with God.

They are saying we have a share in the things of God or we have a share in the salvation we have in common with you with you in the church we have this in common we share in this life and John is saying but they are walking in darkness they are following the ways of sin they are following that which contradicts the light which is opposed to the light and if we say that we have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness in other words while we follow the ways of sin while we persist in sin now this is different to somebody conscious that we sin from time to time that we need to come daily to God to ask for forgiveness we all need that it doesn't matter who we are in this world we need to come regularly to God to confess our sins and to seek His forgiveness and to seek His restoration whatever it may be that we require in relation to our sins but this is not that occasional that life that knows that sin is still there and you come to God this is persisting in sin this is persisting against your better judgment against the light of the truth against your conscience if we say that we have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness while we follow the ways of sin while we follow the ways of the world the ways of sin wherever they are displayed wherever they are able they are available to us to follow then we are we are living a lie and we are not doing the truth see somebody can claim to be a Christian but if they spend their whole life habitually following the ways of sin that claim because you are setting it against the light has to be seen as false it doesn't mean that Christians don't lapse that doesn't mean

Christians don't have problems that they need to face up to and get help with this is something different this is something other than that Spurgeon it's reported in some way that C.H. Spurgeon that great preacher of London that somebody came to him one day and said I saw one of your converts yesterday do you know where he was Spurgeon says no but you are going to tell me yes he said he was in the public house and he was drunk Spurgeon said I'm not surprised if he was one of my converts see that's the difference God's converts while they may sometimes struggle with moral issues like that nevertheless their desire is otherwise to follow the ways of God to seriously and honestly face life's problems and still truly walk not in the ways of darkness but in the ways of light that somebody who is as he says here saying one thing claiming one thing and yet very obviously acting out something else that person's living a lie and there's no way

John says of telling it otherwise you cannot have it both ways you cannot habitually willingly follow the ways of sin and think that you're walking in fellowship with God because God is light and light and darkness don't mix their opposites their contrasts they're incompatible you cannot have them in fellowship together that's what he's saying the false teachers are saying and this is what they're doing so this is the outcome we lie he says and do not the truth interestingly there just in passing notice the word truth there as it as it's used there sometimes we think perhaps that truth as against error is just opinion against another opinion as if there wasn't anything more to truth than that just like you might find somebody doing an arithmetic some of arithmetic or a mathematical question of some kind or maybe even

[ 26 : 50 ] English grammar or whatever and somebody says well that's actually not right that's wrong that's an error you've got to redo that so you get down to it and you fix it some people think

that truth and error spiritually or morally are just a little bit like that but truth truth in the way the Bible speaks about truth always has moral content truth is never neutral it always has a moral content and the moral content that truth has is opposite to the immoral content of error and sin in other words it's not enough for me tonight to know the truth in order to preach it I must do the truth in order to be a Christian in order to have fellowship with God every one of us here knows the truth outwardly but to know the truth and to do the truth are not the same and if we say that we have fellowship with God and do not do the truth which is really the same thing as saying walking in darkness we are lying and not practicing the truth now here's something for self-examination of course something that we just don't look at in passing and take for granted and move on where are we in relation to God what is my relationship with God tonight what's it based on what's my own opinion of it based on is it grounded in the truth of God do I come to the God that I claim to worship and follow with my sins and seek his forgiveness and his help daily am I seeking daily to walk in the ways of light and of truth or am I just making a claim but continuing to walk in the ways of darkness that's what you and I must each of us say to ourselves so then he corrected you see by saying there's the there's the affirmation from which everything else stems

God is light in him is no darkness at all there's the claim if we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we're lying and don't practice the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin as I look at the clock this is when you wish you had a bit more time because there's actually a lot in that part as well isn't there we're not going to go into it in too much depth but this is the correction if we walk in the light as he is in the light that is he God is in the light now what does he mean as God is in the light well he means if you think about God God is always consistent God always as light as we said represented by light he's absolutely sincere he never diverges from that he's never inconsistent with that and if you think about God being in the light in that sense always the same and true to himself and if we following that walking in the light if we walk in the light as he is in the light if we walk consistently and sincerely and genuinely then he says we have fellowship one with another and the blood of

Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin no you'd expect there wouldn't you you'd expect instead of we have fellowship one with another he's been talking about fellowship with God and how it's not true fellowship if we're walking in the ways of sin you would expect then if we walk in the light as he is in the light we might think that he would then say we have fellowship with God therefore he doesn't say that he says we have fellowship one with another why is that why is he changed from fellowship with God as he said out there to fellowship with one another here well because for one thing fellowship with one another genuine Christian fellowship is itself evidence that we are in fellowship with God because when you go on into the next chapter you can see something like that chapter 2 verse 9 whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness in other words when you don't have genuine fellowship with

God's people when you don't really relish being in fellowship with them and being part of the fellowship that they are we're not engaging in truth we're actually committing a sin and he's saying here if we have fellowship one with another then that itself proves that we have fellowship with God that it's genuine the fact that we love God's people is itself part of the evidence not all of the evidence but part of the evidence and a very strong evidence that say later in the epistle because we know we've passed from death to life if we love the brethren if we love God's people so there is the correction walking in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and then he says and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin now you notice it's an ongoing cleansing it's not in the past tense the blood of

Jesus his son cleanses us what is mean by the blood it means in a word it means the death of Jesus it's not the life of Jesus it's the death especially of Jesus though you can't detach his life from it the death of Jesus is God's provision against our sin to deal with our sin the atoning blood of Jesus the blood that was shed and that our relationship with God could be mended and fixed and put right and he's saying here if we do walk in the light we do that consistently and sincerely and honestly as he is in the light then we have fellowship with one another and also can be persuaded the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin it's an ongoing work of sanctification see how important it is to belong to the fellowship because

[ 33 : 30 ] John is strongly suggesting by this that individual sanctification does not take place outside of the fellowship that God's people are you can't say that we are Christians and then say I

don't like being part of the fellowship I just don't really see that the church has any meaning for me at all and I don't see any need to meet together regularly with fellowship means the context in which we are sanctified and with God goes on making us holy as we find fellowship with one another and fellowship upwards with himself as we saw the beginning the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin sin still troubles the people of

God John Owen said this is indeed a mystery and a wonder that people who know that their sin is forgiven still come to God daily to ask for his forgiveness that's how it is our sin is forgiven judicially we're established in Christ judicially God accepts us there as if we'd never sinned but practically we still sin we still need to come to God for cleansing for the ongoing power of Christ's death and resurrection to operate in our lives and in the context of the fellowship that's what's happening so if you're disturbed tonight by the fact that you find sin in your life that you find repeated sin in your life that you find yourself committing the same sins in your life that you find yourself going back just like when you're picking up the weeds in the garden it's just you take just to take the top of it it'll soon grow again maybe it feels like that to you in your life that you're just going through a cycle of sin and forgiveness and sin and confession and so on that's what a

Christian life contains you're not going to be perfectly holy this side of death so don't be disturbed by that but what do you do with it you take it to the light you take it to the Lord you come to Jesus and you confess it and you have access to his blood and you are persuaded from that that this blood goes on cleansing you from all sin and if tonight you're still in the ways of darkness of sin you've not committed your life to Christ let me just remind you of these words of John while you have the light believe in the light that you may be a child of light before the light goes out before you lose your faculties before your life ends which it could tonight believe in the light accept

Christ as the light of your life that's why in John's gospel as we read chapter three and these verses we'll just read them to close with isn't it interesting that whoever does the truth you might think that person who knows the truth and knows that they're not holy and wants to be more holy you might think I would be scared to go to God who is light because that's going to show up the shabbiness of my life it's the other way about whoever does the truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be exposed whoever does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed but whoever does what is true comes to the light keeps on coming to the light so that may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in

God that he is indeed a child of the light let's pray lord our god we thank you for all that it means to your people that you are indeed pure light pure holiness without shadow without inconsistency there was no darkness at all and while lord we find that so intimidating in a certain way yet we know that it's also very comforting to your people for it is your light that shines into the corners of our life and shows us our sin the dustiness of our walk so that we may bring it to you and find the grace we need in our time of need we ask oh blessing to follow your word this evening we pray that each of us indeed will know more of that light of truth in our lives and our own concern and desire to follow it receive us now we pray in

[ 39 : 03 ] Jesus name amen we're going to conclude tonight by singing in Psalm 118 Psalm 118 verses 24 to 29 are singing to June Solly this is the day God made and it will joy triumphantly save now I pray thee Lord I pray send now prosperity that's on page 399 and it goes on to speak there about the light that God has made to arise the light of salvation the light of salvation in the one who came in Christ and so these verses 24 through to 29 to God's praise this is the day God made in it will joy triumphantly save now

I pray thee Lord I pray send thou prosperity blessed is he in God's great name that come about to save we from the heart which to the Lord hurt him you blessed thou God is the Lord who unto us has made life to arise bind ye unto thee the altar storms with courts the sacrifice thou art my God I'll thee exalt my God I will be great give thanks to God for he is good his mercy has always I'll go to the main door after the benediction now may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen