

## **GOD IS LIGHT: LIVE IN FELLOWSHIP**

It was a cold dark evening (don't all great stories begin with such an introduction??), and I was fortunate enough to be spending it outside. I was on my initial officer's training course for the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and we were conducting some training 'out on exercise' as they call it. This was the 'militarized' term for running around in the bush with weapons, getting tired, dirty and sleep deprived. I loved it! At least for the first few days. This particular evening, I had made my little half shelter to protect me from the rain, and was lying underneath it in my sleeping bag thinking:

"I am just soooo cool right now. I'm such a 'gung-ho' military man, roughing it in the wild!" Have you seen the TV program 'Man verse Wild?' Watch out Bear Grylles, here comes Sam Schuurman!!

I couldn't miss this opportunity to take a photo with my little disposable camera which happened to have a flash on it. I'm sure you can see where this is heading. After priming the flash and positioning myself, face in front of the camera with a thumb raised, I snapped the picture. What followed was probably not the best display of military manhood. In the almost absolute dark of the night, the light struck my retinas like headlights to a possum. At that moment, I empathized in a new way with the blind man healed by Jesus, only before his healing occurred.

The *light* was Intense!

Much like God, who is *described* as light.

Who IS light.

Over the next couple of months that I am with you, we are going to make our way through the book of first John. This will equate to 11 sermons. Today we are starting with one of the biggest sections we are going to tackle, from chapter 1, verse 1, to chapter 2 verse 6.

I may have bitten off a little more than I can chew in taking on 1 John, as it's not the easiest of epistles to get your head and heart around. There is plenty of difference in opinion surrounding most aspects of the book, including its author. We are going to join the majority opinion, and believe John, son of Zebedee, the Apostle, to be the author.

There is also much debate surrounding the division of the text, and the main themes running through it, and all give valid argument. However after my own personal reading and devotion with the book, I have decided to pick up on what I believe are three major character traits of God, revealed in this epistle:

God is Light. This will be the first four sermons.

God is Love, constituting the next four, and;

God is Life. The final three.

So today we begin with 1 John 1:1 to 2:6, focusing primarily on 1:5 to 7. Unfortunately I've had to reduce the length of today's sermon as a result of sharing my testimony, so I'm not going to cover the text in great depth. I want to pick up on what I see as one of the essential points John makes in these verses.

Let's start with the beginning four verses, reading from the NIV:

*"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. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 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 the Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete."*

John breaks from the traditional letter writing format of the time, by failing to mention himself as the author. Not only that but he ceases with the common opening greeting, and doesn't specifically state his intended audience, this is why this letter is typically called a general, or Catholic epistle. Catholic is the universal church sense of the word, not the Roman Catholic church. He does however state one of his purposes for writing the letter:

*"We write this to make our joy complete."*

But before that, bearing much similarity with the opening of John's gospel, he paints a wonderful picture of Jesus. Jesus is the word of Life. This theme of life we will come back later in this series, but for now I want to move onto the rest of this morning's text: verse 5 through to chapter 2:6, where John discusses what it is to 'Walk in the light:'

*"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 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."*

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."*

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

*We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in*

*him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."*

Verse 5: GOD IS LIGHT! In Him there is no darkness at all. GOD IS LIGHT! What does this mean? God is light? Is God some type of wave-particle duality, whose wavelength is between 380 & 780 nanometers, with a frequency range of 405 to 790 Terra Hertz, moving at a speed of 300 million metres per second? Surely that's what John meant right? Wrong! Light in this context was understood to mean two things:

1. Revelation and salvation (which is sort of two things itself), or
2. Holiness.

So God, in nature being light, is our revelation and salvation, and He is also completely and perfectly Holy. This makes sense. But John doesn't just end with this abstract idea, he shows the intended application of it. We are to WALK IN THE LIGHT. Verse 7. We are to live in the light. God is light: Live in Him! But what does it mean to walk in the light? I want to suggest one important way we walk in the light: By Living in Fellowship. It is clearly stated in verse 7 that to walk in the light is to have fellowship with one another: *"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."* So fellowship is part of 'walking in the light.' Turn again to 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."* John mentions two types of fellowship here: A horizontal, and a vertical. Fellowship with others, and fellowship with God the Father, and Jesus His Son. Let's think for a moment about this Horizontal component.

One of the most difficult years of my life to date was while I was in Canada for most of 2005 completing my Navigator training for the Air Force. While the training itself was not too bad, I had been separated from my family, my church and had to make new friends. I knew it was important to get integrated into a church, so I started attending a fairly large sized church in the City. The preacher was outstanding! I think if Sad am Hussein was present, he just might have responded to the alter calls. The worship team were incredible, especially the lead female vocalist. She would have given Edith Piaf a run for her money. All the same, my faith struggled. Other than a friendly hand-shake at the door, I did not really get to know anyone.

I was not at all integrated. I was merely attending a service. I was missing true horizontal fellowship, though I desperately needed it! We must do more than give out friendly handshakes at the door. We must love each other sacrificially. We must respect our differences, and focus on our similarities. We must understand our unity in Christ. We must journey through the good and the bad together. We must live life together in true fellowship. To walk in the light, we must walk together as God's body! God is light: live in Horizontal fellowship! Live also in vertical fellowship! *"Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son."* How do we experience this fellowship with the Father and the Son? How can we possibly know a God so great and powerful? The short answer: Only through the person of Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit. John experienced Jesus Christ. This was his proclamation in the opening of the letter.

*“That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched. . .we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”*

John experienced Jesus after he rose from the dead. He states again and again that he had “*seen, heard, and touched*” Jesus! That Jesus was not just some fictional character made up by a body of deceives known as ‘the apostles.’ That Jesus was not some deity, so far removed from humanity that he didn’t understand our suffering, or the challenges and frailties of life. John knew Jesus the Man. Jesus the Son of God. Jesus, as God! “Incredible! I wish I could have been John, and had the wonderful opportunity to experience Jesus.”

Church, the reality is that we can and do experience Jesus today as well! We experience him because he continues to live! He rose to life, on the third day! He continues to live through his body, the church; Through his word, the Bible; We experience Him through prayer and through creation. We experience him through others. We just have to seek Him! We are reminded of this in James 4:8: *“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

To live in God who is light, we must live in Fellowship. We must literally live in fellowship with God himself, vertical fellowship, and in horizontal fellowship with others. Fellowship that is real; authentic; sacrificial; loving; patient; caring; Jesus centered; and God honoring.

This is the Kingdom on earth. Do we desire it church? Are we willing to be part of it, whatever the cost? In walking in the light of fellowship with God, and fellowship with each other as brothers and sister in Christ, we become a light to those in darkness around us. Oh, that they would experience the same light we have. The same joy. That their joy would be complete also.

God is light: we must live in fellowship with him, and in fellowship with each other!

**God is light: Live in Fellowship!**