

1 John 1:5-6 God is Light & Our Fellowship with Him

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

The Message

Its Source

John has already given us a testimony about the empirical evidence of Christ and specifically mentions having heard Jesus himself. This first hand witness carries a veracity of content as well as helping in the analysis of the message of Jesus as the four gospel accounts are evaluated.

Its Contents

The initial content of Christ's message is that God is light, pure, unhindered light. Subsequent statements from John 1:6-2:11 are going to be derivative of this propositional statement.

Its Messengers

John, and those who are joining him in testifying to Christ in this letter as well as the disciples as a whole were responsible for sharing this concept.

Light: an Attribute of God

John starts out 1st John much like he started out his testimony of the life of Christ in the gospel of John. He references the beginning, and he references the reality and presence of God, and then he touches upon the concept of light. Furthermore John references structure & principle elements that were present in the introduction to the first chapter of Genesis. Genesis tells us that God spoke light into existence in the creation, but John tell us that God is light. If God is light then there seems to be a very part of His radiant essence that He brought into the universe first (day 1 in the Genesis account).

John testified to something that the Jews would have already known from the Old Testament. This message was something that was important for purposes of communicating the continuity of the message of God (progressive revelation), validating the relationship of the Father & Son, and also to remind the believers of the familiar doctrines in an evangelistic context.

Old Testament Passages about God's Being Light

- Exodus 13:21 - The Pillar of Smoke & Fire was God's presence with His people
- Exodus 34:33-34 - Direct Interaction with God Yielded Radiance on Moses Face
- Psalm 43:3, 44:3, Psalm 90:8, Psalm 104:2 - God is light in various contexts before the psalmist.
- Isaiah 2:5 – the Lord is a light before the house of Jacob
- Isaiah 9:1-2 – God's light will come from Galilee
- Isaiah 60:19 – The Lord will be an eternal light
- Ezekiel 1:27-28 – God's appearance in Ezekiel's vision was that of fire and light

Matthew 17:2 – The Transfiguration [which John attended] showed that Christ's heavenly form radiated the light of God. When we evaluate the similarity of these passages we need to take into account that either we have disagreement between the authors or that John believes in a Triune God. This letter of John assumes that the reader knows that the Son and the Father are one (referenced in John 1:1-2). It is assumed in several aspects:

- 1) The Godhood of the Son along with the Father
- 2) God is light, but the gospel of John attributes the light to the Son

In Him There is No Darkness

Philosophically speaking if light is a part of God's being then the lack of light, darkness, is logically not present. John uses this as a pattern of repetition and emphasis. Theologically the darkness was used to show God's judgment on Egypt (Exodus 10:21). The Egyptians had attributed light to the false god Ra, and so God threw them into three days of darkness. Darkness is a sign of separation from God (1 Samuel 2:9, Job 34:22, Psalm 107:10-14). Secular ideas of deity almost universally included the idea that a god or semi-god was unreliable, selfish, and not purely good. Therefore, John's assertion (and the scriptures before him) point to the uniqueness of the God of the scriptures.

If We Say That We Have Fellowship with Him

John begins his expansion of the theology of God's light by referencing the concept of fellowship again. Previously in the letter he wants to have fellowship with the believers to whom he is writing, but in this example he presents a hypothetical scenario where a believer says he is in fellowship with God, but instead is lying and is not practicing the truth. John has started a series of propositional statements that point out a clarity of doctrine about the state of humans. These propositional statements are presented in a logical, consistent way that line up with the Semitic totality concept, but should not be construed to imply that the recipients of the letter were not believersⁱ.

Given a cultural bias that hated lying (recall that Jews despised lies, but that some gentile cultures seemed to esteem a good liar. See Colossians 3:9) John is emphasizing the truth-in-action mindset of his audience.

A Pauline Overlap

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” While Pauline and Johannine theology are consistent and agree, it is important to note that many of the illustrations and concepts are presented in different ways. Paul focused on revelation of the mysteries that God had given him to reveal, and John writes about the theological concepts that tie into many Old Testament doctrines that were known to primarily Jewish readers.

ⁱ This lesson’s purpose is not to pursue the topic of the audience of 1st John, but arguments against a non-believing audience include John’s use of the first person plural, His use of terms like my little children (which imply an elder/leadership relationship which would not have been biblical if the recipients were not believers), 2:12 says their sins have already been forgiven, the idea that the antichrists have gone out from among them means that they are the believers, etc.