

Sunday, September 18, 2022

If We Confess...

(Series: Life, Light and Love; a series on 1 John)
(Message Two)
(1 John 1:5 - 2:2)

Scripture:

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

⁷But 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.

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

² My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Message:

The ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes is often pictured as an old man carrying a lantern through the world looking for an honest person. Apparently, Diogenes spent his whole life searching without success. People generally consider themselves honest (but our definition of *honest* varies). Truth is, searching for an honest person is an impossible quest.

Then comes John Ben-Zebedee. He's not carrying a lamp but a megaphone. He tells everyone who'll listen that Truth has (finally) been found. John is not a searcher but an eyewitness; he is not a philosopher, but a proclaimer. And John proclaims, "*God alone is Light.*" And, not just "a" light, but "the" Light." (John quotes Jesus - "*I am the Light of the world.*" **John 8:12**)

John says if we pretend our moral worth, personal intelligence or personal upbringing has made us more knowledgeable and privileged than others, we deceive ourselves.

In fact, the true mark of a saint is they feel totally unworthy of God's love and grace. Adam, ashamed of his sin, ran to hide in the bushes; Moses stopped dead in his tracks when God said, "take off your shoes." When exposed to the Light, Isaiah lamented, "Woe is me for I am undone..." When confronted on the road to Damascus, the Light exposed Paul for what he was—a sinner.

John urgently and passionately calls people into the Light so they can honestly see themselves, be confronted by the Truth, confess their sins and walk with God.

John knows no one embraces the experience of being forgiven unless one knows and confesses they have done wrong...so John confronts those who think they have it all together: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie!" Translated, "knowing" about the Light is not the same as "walking in the Light." Only if we walk in the light will we experience God's fellowship and forgiveness.

First, note the Revelation of the Light. (1:5)

In 1 John 1:5, John makes his second major declaration concerning the Word of Life. (The first was when John declared Jesus became flesh to re-establish our fellowship with God and others in 1:1-4).

Now John proclaims, "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" – again, not "a" light, but "the" light. God's essence is light; all light finds its source in Him.

This "Light" is a central theme of John. In his Gospel, he notes Jesus talking about light twenty-three times; in this letter, he talks about it five more times.

When John talks about *light*, he is talking about purity, holiness, integrity, righteousness, truth, and justice. He's talking about God's character; there are no imperfections, blemishes or sin.

The primary benefit of light is that it reveals truth.

Children hear noises in the middle of the night and think there is a monster under the bed or hiding in the closet; trying to convince them otherwise is a real challenge.

Judith Viorst, in "My Mama Says There Aren't any Zombies, Ghosts, Vampires, Creatures, Demons, Monsters, Fiends, Goblins, or Things" writes "My mama says there isn't any mean-eyed monster with long slimy hair and pointy claws going scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch-scratch outside my window. But yesterday my mama said I couldn't have cheese on my sandwich, because, she said, there wasn't any more. And then I found the cheese under the lettuce in back of the Jell-O. My mama says that a vampire isn't hiding in my closet with his red and black vampire cape and his vampire f-f-f-fangs. But how could I believe her when

she said my wiggly tooth would fall out Thursday and then it stayed till Sunday after lunch?"

The only way to call out monsters and comfort children is to turn on the light. Light reveals the truth! Light puts things in perspective. Light lets us see things as they are!

Light also **measures**. Want a **straight** line? Use light, a laser, to hang your picture. Want to know the **distance** a star is from the earth? It is measured in "light" years. God uses His Word – *a lamp to our feet* - to measure our purity, holiness, and integrity.

Light also **energizes**. Light offers both **physiological** and **emotional** benefits. Sunlight produces vitamin D to keep us healthy. Sunlight is important emotionally; without it, people often suffer from SAD (seasonal affective disorder) and depression. John tells us that it is the *Light* (and only the Light) that leads to Joy.

Do you want to know what the world is like? Go to the Light! Do you want to know what God requires of you? Go to the Light. Do you want to live your life forgiven of sin and free from guilt? Go to the Light. Do you want an intimate marriage, a happy family, good friends? Go to the Light! Do you want a more just world, a healthy society, an effective government? Go to the Light! Do you want to have your joy **complete**? Go to the **Light!**

Second, note the Requirement of the Light. (1:6-7)

In these verses, John implies a significant "therefore." Because God is Light, because we claim to have fellowship, because we don't always live by the Truth, we "therefore" need to **walk** (live) as *children of light*.

Notice the preposition "if" - it occurs a number of times. Our *walking in the light* has a basic condition. In order to have fellowship with God - to walk with him - we need to **believe** right and **behave** right. (I.e., we can't have fellowship with God and believe and act however we want.)

Jesus uses the word walk in these verses to indicate an ongoing journey/life together. Walking (together) with God suggests agreement, friendship, and an intimacy.

The prophet asks, "*Can two walk together unless they are agreed?*" (**Amos 3:3**) The preacher says, "*Two are better than one...if one falls down, his friend can help him up.*" (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**). When we are in harmony with God, we are walking with Him in the Light.

Third, note the Rejection of the Light.

But there is the problem. We are not holy and righteous. No one is. When we step from a dimly lit room into the bright sunshine, it hurts our eyes. We like the light – on a limited basis. In fact, we kind of like the darkness – at least the semi-darkness. (We like our comforts, control, opinions, ignorance – don't confuse me with the facts!) We want our ticket to heaven (and eternal life) punched but we don't really like having any “restrictions” on what we can do in our daily lives.

(First) A part of us simply likes to ignore the light. The Scripture brings light - but only when opened, read, and applied to our daily living. Prayer brings light - but only if we pray seeking God's face and listening for his voice. But statistics indicate the average believer prays less than five minutes a day and spends even less time in the Scripture. We stay in darkness because we kind of like it.

Second, we deny our need for light. While most people admit they mess up, we're hesitant to admit we “sin” and we especially avoid being specific about our sin. And we (I) sin less than most; God obviously grades on a curve, so we're (I'm) good. Right?! John says we delude ourselves and we walk in darkness; but sadly, we seem to like it.

Third, we rename sin. We call it weakness, error, mistake; we're pro-choice, pro-freedom - doesn't sound as bad.

Fourth, we justify our sin: Everyone does it; I couldn't help it; God told me to do it; God wouldn't want me to be alone. They have prejudices; I have convictions. They're conceited; I'm self-respecting. They've got a temper; I have righteous anger.

Fifth, we excuse our sin: I was too tired; I'm too busy; under a lot of pressure; dealing with special circumstances; I really had no choice (so it can't be considered sin).

Our rationalizations seem to allow us to sleep at night; but poison in another bottle is still poison.

A bright light in your face can hurt – as do reminders of things we don't want or like to hear or know. The Light reminds us there is a God and we are not him. We don't make up the rules; we just get to obey (or disobey them). The light reminds us that we have imperfections we're trying to hide, that we live in community and that our behavior positively or negatively affects those around us.

What difference does living in semi-darkness really make? Answer: Since God is a faithful and righteous God, sin destroys any possibility of having an intimate relationship with Him. There can be no fellowship with God if his

righteousness is not satisfied. So *the blood of Jesus, his Son* was required to *purify us from all sin.*" (1:7)

But there is a **condition** (an "if") for his loving acceptance: That we **confess** our sins.

Fourth, note the **Redemption of the Light. (1:8)**

When we lift our **darkness** before his Light, we understand our darkness is **dark**. The Light is bright and reveals things we've never seen before: our sin, our guilt, our misery, our alienation from God. We see God is holy and realize we are not! And then we become aware of our inability to do anything about our situation.

So how can we **walk in the Light**? How can we have **fellowship with God**? John says (1:7b), "*It has been made possible by the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son [who] purifies us from every sin.*"

One of the heresies John confronts is that Christ (the Son's divine nature) left Jesus (the Son's human nature) before he was crucified so the divine nature (Christ) didn't actually suffer and die—only the human (Jesus) died. John says it is only by the death of Jesus Christ that our forgiveness and walk with God are possible.

So we learn to *walk in the light* by...

First, by realizing it's **dark** and someday we all must stand before the **Light**; if we have never stood there before, we will be in big trouble because we can't handle it alone.

Second, we need to fix our eyes on the **cross** as we walk toward the light. God put our sins on his Son and had His Son die in our place. God said, "*For me to declare you holy, for us to walk together, for me to bring you into fellowship with other believers, you have to believe he died for you!*"

Third, as you walk into the light, you need to hear his **invitation** – "Do you want to experience the joy your Creator intended for you to have?" – and accept it!

Don't let the simplicity fool you. It is not easy to walk in the light. We need God's help.

Fifth, note the **Rhythm of walking in the Light. (1 John 1:9)**

The **first** move belongs to **God**. He initiates the process with his call to **confession**.

The fact that God takes the initiative says three things about our God:

First, it says God takes our **sin** seriously. He keeps an accounting. It is on our record.

Second, God takes His **love** seriously. He wants us to be forgiven/restored and have a relationship with him so he provides a way his justice can be satisfied, and he can forgive us. Forgiveness is his business. His only Son paid the price.

Third, God takes His **promises** seriously: “*If we confess...he will forgive.*” You can stake your life on it. And if we sin again, confess it again, he’ll forgive it again.

The next move, second move, is **ours**: to respond to God, to admit we are sinners and to genuinely **confess** our sins. Confession means admitting we’re a mess, we’re sorry we’ve offended him/others, we’re committed to making amends, and refrain from repeating it in the future. Confession is seldom easy: but without confession there is no forgiveness of sins.

The third and final step is again **God’s** – he **forgives** us (just like he promised).

Simon Wiesenthal was a Jewish prisoner in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Poland in the early 1940’s. One day he was assigned to clean out a barn the Germans were using as a hospital for wounded soldiers. Toward evening, a nurse took Wiesenthal by the hand and led him to the bedside of a young Nazi soldier, maybe twenty-one years old. His face was wrapped in bandages; his eyes looked desperate behind the white gauze. “He’s not expected to live,” she explained. He said he could not die before he had confessed the brutal sins he had committed against helpless Jews. He had to be forgiven by a Jew before he died. The soldier clutched at Wiesenthal’s hand.

He told how his battalion set fire to a house where Jews were hiding; when they ran from the building, he gunned them down - parents and children. His guilt hurt more than his injuries. Would Wiesenthal, a Jew, please forgive him for his awful crime? Tears appeared in the sockets of the bandages around his face. Wiesenthal listened to the whole story. He listened to the dying man’s urgent request. Then he pulled his hand away and walked out of the barn. He could not forgive. The crime was too great.

Our God is not Simon Wiesenthal; he does not walk away because our sin is great or brutal. No matter how ugly your record may be, and how unforgiving others may be against you—if you confess, God will forgive. Completely! He promised!

This is the message of the Gospel! God guarantees our forgiveness because of Jesus.

Sixth, note the Reinforcement of Light. (1 John 1:9; 2:1)

One of the most dangerous things you can believe is that once you're a Christian, the **past** is settled, but you still need to work on your **future**. To believe "*I'm forgiven by grace and now I just need to put in a little elbow grease...*" is not Good News. It's actually bad news. Thankfully, it is not true.

1 John 1:9 and **1 John 2:1** is not for unbelievers. It is for followers of Jesus.

One day John D. Rockefeller Sr. went to the Willard Hotel in Washington D.C. and asked for the cheapest room: "I don't even need a private bath." The clerk was dumbfounded: "Mr. Rockefeller, when your son comes, he asks for the finest suite of rooms." "My son" said Rockefeller, Sr. sternly; "My son has a rich father. I'm not so fortunate."

If you love Jesus, you're a **child** of God. You have a rich, **loving, gracious** Father. When you sin, you move into the darkness; when you confess, you move back into the light...and your Father is extremely patient.

Abraham Lincoln, when asked what he would do with the South after the Civil War, said, "*It will be as if they never left.*" God says, "*It will be as if you never sinned.*"

Seventh, note the Ramifications of Light. (1 John 1:8; 10; 2:2)

What Jesus did has significant implications. Let me mention three.

First: Now that you know I'm a sinner (and I know you're a sinner), we don't have to **pretend** anymore. We can be **honest** and **transparent**.

We worry about our reputation. But we all have the same reputation: we're all sinners; if we believe in Jesus, we're saved by grace. That's who we are. We don't need to pretend. So we can stop hiding. We can be real with each other.

Second: If we walk in the **Light**, we get addicted to the Light. We begin to **grow**.

When you ask someone to give their testimony, and they say, "Twenty-five years ago..." that's not good. Nothing has happened in the last 25 years.

The longer we walk in the light, the more we desire to stay there and grow. We must be able to articulate our experience in the Light - today, yesterday, last week.

This could be a dangerous teaching: We like to sin. God likes to forgive. It is a perfect relationship! Except that if you have really experienced the Light, you want to stay in the Light and please God with your whole heart.

Third: John is saying that you and I are basically no different than anyone else. So be **gentle** (2:2) with people who do bad things, they only know darkness; they haven't yet seen the light. In Reformed Theology we'd say, "*The blood of Christ is sufficient for the sins of the entire world and efficient for the sins of the elect.*"

Understand, the difference between them and us is we have seen the light, experienced his **grace**, and been called by God to witness to the world, "Come over here, come over here. This is where the Light is."

We've been saying it over and over, "Believer, you're a child of the King!"

Don't waste your time **protecting** your reputation. You don't need one.

Don't go around **pretending** you're good. You're not. But you are forgiven!

And don't ever forget to whom you belong. You're a child of the King. That means we're **family**. And it is **forever**.

Prayer:

Father, we, like everyone, are on a quest for hope, for meaning, for joy.

Deep down we know something is missing; deep down we know we are a mess; deep down we know that even when we try to be good, we're not.

Father, we need Jesus. We need the Light. We are so thankful for your grace and goodness. Thank you for sending the Light into our darkness; for sending Jesus to the cross to bear our sins, for your atoning sacrifice, for being our advocate. So we confess...

And, Father, we hold you to your promise to forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness. Thank you for allowing us to walk with you and in the Light.

In Jesus' name – our life, light, and love – we pray. Amen.