

Sunday, September 25, 2022

Walking in the Light

(Series: Life, Light and Love; a series on 1 John)

(Message Three)

(1 John 2:3-17)

Scripture:

³We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.
⁴Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.
⁷Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.
⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.
¹²I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.
¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.
¹⁴I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:3-17)

Message:

It was the headline: A 124-year-old woman finally fulfills her long-held dream! (Yes, that's correct – 124!) Maria do Carmo Jeronimo, **(pic)** a former slave, walked down Rio's Copacabana Beach and caught her first glimpse of the ocean: "It's pretty big. Look how it goes up and down," she exclaimed to reporters.

Jeronimo, who lives in the coffee-growing state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, was invited to Rio by the city's mayor after he read a newspaper article in which she said she had never seen the ocean. Delighted by her first visit to Rio, she said her only remaining goal was to meet God. She had to wait five more years (5 March 1871 – 15 June 2000).

I'm impressed by the simplicity of Maria's dream. Nothing along the hedonistic "Mecca" of Copacabana Beach interested her—only the creation of her Maker. Having seen that, her only remaining interest was to see the Creator himself.

Maria could see beyond the sandcastles, beyond the steel high rise *castles* lining the beach, and beyond the *castles* often substitute for an eternal *mansion*.

Last week we talked about "walking in the Light;" now John tells us the only way to "walk in the Light" is to "walk in love." John says, "*If anyone obeys His Word (i.e., if anyone is walking in the Light) God's love is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him (i.e., walking in the light) whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*" (2:5-6) Life, Light, Love.

When Christians **love**, watch out. The early church exploded throughout the Roman world. As one Roman writer noted, "Behold, how they love one another." They turned the world right-side up.

When Christians **fail to love** – and it happens far too frequently - watch out. There is nothing as hard to watch as a bitter religious fight. Christians can back-stab, manipulate, gossip, bend the truth, lie, and betray - all in the name of Jesus! Ammianus Blaiklock (4th century) wrote, "*The enmity of the Christians toward each other surpassed the fury of the savage beasts toward men.*" Dale Cooper said, "*When it comes to the lessons of 1 John, Christians belong in 'summer school.' They don't seem to learn; they don't even want to.*"

So, let's talk about how we can walk in the Light, how we can walk in love.

CONNECTIONS (2:3-11)

Note, first, the connection between the Old Commandment and the New Commandment (2:7-8a).

John is actually talking about the same commandment: "*A new commandment*

I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another.”
(John 13:34) This commandment is old in the sense that it has been around since the **beginning** when God said, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”
(Leviticus 19:18)

This commandment is new in the sense that Jesus is raising the standard by having shown us his love. That is, no one really knew what love was until they saw it in Jesus Christ.

It is new in its **expansion** (Jesus even loved sinners), in its **extent** (he promised to love us forever) and in its **essence** (God’s grace is always new and fresh).

The second law of thermodynamics says, “*All systems, if left to themselves, tend to become **degraded** or **disoriented**.*” It is also true with spiritual dynamics. Religious conviction tends, over time, without outside intervention, to lose its luster and focus.

In Revelation, John says the church of Ephesus lost their first love; Sardis was just going through the motions; Laodicea became lukewarm. Sadly, we’re soon just going through the motions; we realize we have lost some of our passion, so we try to fake it (like a fireplace video – looks like a fire; but it provides no warmth).

We all know people who go to church, carry a Bible, pray at meals, know their theology, but they attract no one – there is no fire or warmth in their heart. The only way to **warm** a **cold** heart is to reconnect with the **source** of warmth. We need to connect to the one who loves us so we can love one another.

Second, note the connection between **knowledge and **obedience** (2:3-4).**

The Gnostic heresy of John’s day emphasized knowledge. They said, “*knowledge equals godliness.*” So if you know (about) God, it doesn’t really matter what you do as long as you know.

John says (and this is in the original Greek), “*That’s nuts!*” John says, “*Knowledge is **useless** unless it results in **obedience** to the God of the universe.*”

The Gnostics said, “*God, I have all of this knowledge and the good news is, I’m yours.*” God says, “*Not so fast. Out of your knowledge must come obedience.*”
Out of the Light must come your love.

We teach God’s Word here. We know the Truth about Christ’s birth, death, resurrection. We know about loving God and our neighbor, about the body of Christ, about being a good spouse/parent/child, about standing up for justice, about witnessing the Gospel. We know.

Jill Briscoe pushed her husband Stuart to go witness at their neighborhood coffee house. He had plenty of excuses, but he eventually relented. A man said, “*You don’t really believe this stuff, do you?*” “*I sure do!*” he replied. “*No, if you really believed it, you would have been here long before now.*”

We know what we're supposed to do; we just don't do it. John is saying, "*You don't really know or believe anything until you **do** it.*" The things we really believe become the reason we do what we do (or don't do).

Third, note the connection between Obedience and Love (2:5)

Consider this principle: Obedience to someone who **knows** more than you and **loves** more than you will eventually turn your **obedience** into **love**.

Children are not born loving their parents; their love develops as they are nurtured by loving parents. We grow to love our teachers, coaches, mentors because we do what they say and in doing so, we grow to love them. The song summarizes it: "The longer I serve Him, the sweeter he grows."

We, as sinners, don't instantly have a love relationship with our Creator, but our **obedience** draws us into a **love** relationship. (He knows us and loves us more than we do and turns our obedience into love.)

Like the chicken and egg debate, we wonder what comes first. Does love or obedience come first? Yes! It is not either or. Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will keep my commands.*" (**John 14:15**). And if we obey him, our love will grow.

Ever wonder if God gets tired of hearing us tell him how much we love him while, at the same time, we constantly ignore his commands?

Fourth, note the connection between Love and Imitation (2:6)

When we love someone very much, we start spending quality time with them and then – we start looking like them. The principle here is, we become like those we **love**.

As we grow to be like those we love, we begin to reflect their character, their wisdom, and their love. John is saying, if we "*walk with Jesus*" (**2:6**) we'll not only learn to love him more and "look like him more and more," we'll start to love like him more and more.

Fifth, note the connection between Imitation and Specifics (2:8-10)

Those who walk in the light provide a **clear** path for **others** to Jesus; those who live in darkness are like the blind leading the blind.

God did not create his church so we could gather in our clusters and do religious things. He did not call us *his body* so we could follow a prescribed and proper liturgy. He formed his church because he knows life is hard, he knows his mission is demanding, and the pushback we'll receive from the world of darkness is often painful. He formed his church because he knows we can't face it alone, because he knows our conviction often fades, and because he wants his presence to encourage us to persevere.

God calls his church (us) to reflect Christ - to be caring, supportive, forgiving, celebrative; to be known for our love and grace. If we're known to be critical, judgmental, hypocritical (as the world often accuses us of being), we violate

the essence of Church and we compromise our (his) witness to the world.

Life is **hard**. That is why God called us to **live** in His **love** together – as his family.

CHILDREN (2:12-14)

Beginning here at verse fourteen, John inserts what appears to be a poem. John wants to remind his readers what it means to be a believer (because we often tend to forget).

At this time, John is an old man in his 90's. He has loved on his readers for a long time. He has baptized many of them; married some of them; done their parent's funeral; he has cried with them and rejoiced with them. He has walked with them.

John knows that time plus integrity builds trust. John has earned the right to say what he now writes. He calls them "dear children." He addresses the "fathers." He uses these terms of endearment to speak less about chronological age and more to our spiritual maturing. John acknowledges our spiritual growth is a process and we shouldn't expect the completion of the process while we are in the middle of it. That is, we shouldn't expect followers of Jesus to be instantly mature. It takes time. It is the slow work of God in his kingdom.

But John's greatest concern is that we, as believers, grow into the **culture** more than we grow into **Christ**. His concern has real validity.

The Greek for "children" (*teknia*) in 2:12 references a young child (in age) who has little to commend themselves; that is, they are small, untrained, and uneducated. John says, "*Children, the first thing you need to understand is that your sins have been forgiven [you] on account of his name.*" Your slate is **clean**.

It is imperative to get this foundational truth right because everything in our whole life depends on it.

The priest listened to the confession of a woman who said she'd had a conversation with Jesus. Suspecting she was a few tacos short of a platter, he said, "If you ever have another such conversation, ask Him about the sins of the bishop." (A little dirt on your supervisor never hurts!) She returned the following week and reported on another talk with Jesus. Had she asked about the bishop and his sins? "Yes." "Well, what did he say?" "He said He couldn't remember."

Do you **really** believe you've been forgiven? Then why do you still feel so guilty? Why do you have such a poor self-image? You're a child of God! Before you do anything, take hold of his forgiveness. You can't grow spiritually without embracing it.

The Greek in 2:14 for “children” is a different word (*paidia*); this word underscores a child who lacks experience/seasoning, i.e., a child in need of training and discipline.

The second step, after knowing we’re forgiven, is to get to know the **Father**.

A young man intent on climbing the corporate ladder asked, “What do you need to be successful in this company?” Boss: “You need to do three things. First, you need to get a good education. Second, you need to work hard. Third, you have to marry the boss’ daughter.” (Actually, if you marry the boss’ daughter, you can skip step 1 and 2).

God wants us to live in an intimate relationship with him. He wants us to be part of the family. After forgiveness, the next most important thing to remember is, it is about the relationship! It continues to amaze me that the God of the universe loves me, that the God who created all things wants to have a relationship with me, and that the God who can have and do anything he wants, wants to spend time with me!

In **Luke 10**, Martha complains to Jesus that her sister, Mary, is just sitting listening to Jesus and not doing her share of the work in the kitchen. (Most pastors would love a church full of Marthas.) Jesus responded, “*Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better...*” (**10:41**)

What is our primary business? What is the most important thing on our to-do list? It is to know the Father intimately. We need to be in his Word, in prayer.

By the time we are an adult (i.e., what John refers to as a “father”), we understand life is a **spiritual battle.**

Sin, evil, temptation, and **Satan** are very real. The evidence in our world is pervasive. “*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities against powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.*” (**Ephesians 6:12**)

There is little in the Old Testament about Satan because, without Jesus and the Spirit, there isn’t much we can do. But since Jesus has come, the battle is on! If we are committed to walking with Jesus, with the Light, the battle with darkness will get intense. Satan will not let us go without a fight and we need to confront his darkness and evil.

If we’re going to be a witness for Jesus; proclaim the infallibility of Scripture, be consistently pro-life from conception to the grave, live counter-culturally by embracing the kingdom of God more than the kingdoms of this world, and promote justice, we need to make sure we’ve taken steps one and two. If we **love** Him, we need to **stand** up for him; it is not an option. When we stand up for him, there will be a **battle**. The battle is often intense; it always involves a

cost. But because if we know him and because we have an intimate relationship with him, he'll be standing by our **side**.

After you've embraced these steps you will catch a greater glimpse of the **wonder of God, his creation, and his redemption (2:13a; 2:14a).** The closer we get to God, the more awesome the reality of his sovereignty sets in; and the less rebellious we get. Having seen and walked in the light, we are overwhelmed by it. Having seen and walked in his love, we are amazed by it.

If you're in the first stage, move to the second. If you're at the second stage, move to the third because God has a wonderful surprise in store for you as we grow closer to him.

CASTLES (2:15-17)

John has been urging Christians – children, fathers, young men, all believers - to live lives of love, that is, to walk in love...with one significant exception.

John writes, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world."* (2:15) Don't mix love for this **world** and love for **God**. It is either/or. It can't be both. You have to choose one or the other. The choice is clear – you can invest in this world, like building sandcastles on the beach, or in following Jesus, and store up treasures in heaven. You can't do both.

John knows human nature. He knows this world and its things are enticing. It concerns him. He tries to warn his readers.

These verses have long been used to rant against such "worldly perversions" as lipstick, piercings, tats, movies, cards, dancing – but that's not what John is really talking about here.

John is saying there are two separate distinct kingdoms, and we need to choose one or the other. "The World" (*kosmos*) is used in the New Testament in at least three different ways: as God's **material** creation (3:17); as the **totality** of mankind (4:14 or *"For God so loved the world..."*, John 3:16); or as the world system of **entanglements** we're attracted to.

Using the latter understanding here, John is warning about being friendly with the things of this world; he says it is incompatible with *"walking in love and the light"* in life. To love the world means we cannot love the Father.

Notice evil's **trident**: *"the cravings of sinful man"* (i.e., the **lusts** of the flesh – sex, gluttony), *"the lust of the eyes"* (**coveting** what we see in this world) and *"boasting of what he has and does"* (the sin of **pride**, arrogance, selfishness, self-centeredness). John is talking about an egotism that says, "It is all about me." "The world revolves around me!" "I'm #1!" "It's all about me!"

John is talking about building our life around ourselves - around our own **desires**, passions and lusts. The world promises we can be autonomous, that we can be in charge and that we can build our castles anyway we want (even if

they are just made out of sand). But the world cannot deliver on its promises.

John recognizes it is tempting but it's foolish. It's just **sand**.

During the end of the civil war, three wagons pulled out of Richmond, Virginia full of Confederate money. All three were captured by Union troops. That night Union troops played poker around the fire with the money. Wagers often topped \$200,000. When morning came, Union troops were still cold, still hungry, still under supplied.

"Whoever dies with the most toys wins" is a (silly) game we play because *"He who dies with the most toys still dies."* It is better to be prepared than profitable. Humanity often appears as lemmings rushing to the sea. Sometimes you just want to stand up and scream: "Are you people crazy? You're all going to die! The tide will come in; all your sandcastles will disappear."

Given a choice between something that disappears when the tide comes in and something lasts forever-which would you chose? (1 John 2:17)

John reminds us our significance isn't determined by the **things** we have, our bank account, our Facebook friends, or the place where we live; our significance comes from knowing the **Father**.

Everything else is "sandcastles." They come; they go. They aren't worth that much. It is senseless to spend our life on things that don't last. It is senseless to spend our life trying to keep the waves off the beach. The tide is coming in; sandcastles may be pretty, but they don't last. Every humanly built castle will **disappear**.

Only "the [one] who does the will of God will live forever." (1 John 2:17).

Prayer:

Father, we long to live in the Light as you are in the light. Teach us to walk in Jesus' love so we might learn to love as he loves. Teach us to keep our eyes fixed on you, to grow daily in knowledge and obedience, to reflect your love in a love-deficient world, and to fight daily against its delusions and enticements.

May we again be known for our love for one another so the world will see how much we love you and you love us.

Father, give us the strength, courage and wisdom to face the daily challenges of life and remain faithful, preparing for our mansion in heaven with you rather than building castles on earth for us.

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