

Light and Truth

1 John 1:1-10

August 22, 2010

This morning we are starting a short series on the letters of the Apostle John. Many of the themes of John's Gospel are reflected in the letters he wrote to the churches under his care. This is no more true than at the beginning of his first letter which is our text for the morning.

John's Gospel begins with a series of declarations about creation, the nature and incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the reason for His coming. John's first letter also begins at the beginning, though at the beginning of the creation of the church instead of the beginning of the universe. It also deals with the incarnation of Christ as John is very clear in unmistakable language that Jesus was physically present on earth.

Jesus' physical presence, His incarnation, was very important to John. One of the prevailing worldviews of the day was put forth by a group that we call the neo-platonists. These people were followers of Plato's view that the things in the world are but poor shadows of ideal things in heaven. The neo-platonists took this view to the conclusion that all matter was evil and everything spiritual was good. In the centuries after the founding of the church this idea got caught up into Christianity and a heresy called Gnosticism was formed. John was writing before Gnosticism existed as an organized position, but he was already dealing with, and rejecting, the seeds of thought that would later develop into it.

This common, but wrong, view that believed all matter was evil led John to emphasize the fact that Jesus inhabited a real, flesh and blood body, just like ours. It is why it was so important for John to say that he was talking about someone he not only saw with his eyes, but touched with his hands.

It also emphasizes that we are dealing with an eyewitness account. This letter is was written by someone who knew Jesus on earth. This is a man who walked with Him, ate with Him, watched Him perform miracles, and watched Him die on the cross. Of course, John includes himself in the first person plural. He's not the only eyewitness. There were many others, especially the other apostles.

So, John was one of the eyewitnesses to Jesus, who he calls the "Word of life." You will remember that at the beginning of his Gospel, John simply called Jesus the "Word." Words symbolize things. They have power because they have meaning. When we use words they mean something and once they are spoken they are out in the world and cannot be taken back. We can apologize for saying things that are hurtful, but those things cannot be unsaid. Words also have power for good. They can help heal broken hearts. They can lift up hurting spirits. They can build and strengthen relationships. In calling Jesus the Word of life, John declared Jesus to be the agent through which the Father brings life into the world. Jesus is the author of life and the only One in whom true life can be found.

John reinforced this in the next sentence. He wrote "*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.” (v.2) This is a remarkable declaration of the nature of the relationship God wants to have with us. Make no mistake, God stands outside the universe. He is the transcendent Creator of all that is. But this powerful Creator who made all that is also wants to be an immanent **friend**. He wants to rescue us from the power of sin and the death that it brings. He wants to spend time with us. He wants to be involved in our lives. He loves those He calls. Jesus left the Father’s side and came so that we might be saved from our sin and know God as the One who walks with us.

John wrote, *“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.”* (v.3) This idea of Christian fellowship is an interesting one. As I have said before, it is not just sitting around a lunch table talking about the weather or last night’s game. Fellowship is about sharing our lives and ourselves with each other. It is a risky thing as we open ourselves and expose our hurts and fears, our failings and disappointments, and also our joys and triumphs. We are not meant to live our lives isolated and **alone**, and we are certainly not meant to live the Christian life without each others’ support and guidance.

At the heart of all this fellowship is God. True fellowship springs out of Him. John invited his readers into fellowship with him, and declared he had fellowship “with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” Through the witness of the Apostles, the early church, and the church over the last two-thousand years, but

more importantly through the continued fellowship over that time, we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. We do not just share our lives with each other, we share them with, and in, God. This is not some sort of mystical statement that has no effect on our lives. It is a powerful statement of the relationship God seeks to grow with us. We are intimately known by Him. He knows every little detail of our lives and of the thoughts of our minds and hearts. Yet He wants to be in a relationship with us anyway. He wants us to respond to His voice. He wants us to hear His whisper. He invites us to know Him even as we are known by Him.

John then said that he wrote this letter to make his joy complete. The idea was to bring his readers into the same relationship with God that he had enjoyed for decades. If those who read his letter (us) would be found in fellowship with God, then John would consider his job finished. As we share in the eternal life in Jesus, John would consider his task accomplished.

That was the introduction. With verse 5, John moved on to the real content of the letter—the message he had to share. *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”* When all is said and done, there is no cosmic **balance**. It is not the case that good and evil are two sides of the same coin. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness. This is the same God who created everything, so darkness is part of His creation, but not part of Him. This means that darkness has no power over Him. Darkness may reign in our world for a time, we may suffer under the authority our sin gives to it, but

it is entirely under the dominion of God and it is God who has the last word concerning it.

At the same time, fellowship with God and with His people changes our hearts and, through that change, effects our behavior. If we do the deeds of darkness, if our hearts are filled with wrong attitudes instead of God's light, then we do not have fellowship with God. If we then say we do have fellowship with God, we are liars.

On Wednesday evenings we have been looking at the disobedience of the Israelites. We have seen that they left the path God put them on and decided to do things their own way. We have also looked at the same danger in the church. Too often churches follow the ways of the world instead of the ways of God. The result is that the light grows dim and we lose fellowship with God. Even congregations can walk in darkness instead of light and live by lies instead of the truth. When that happens the congregation finds that God is their enemy and they have no fellowship with Him, even though they claim to.

If, on the other hand, we walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light—that is, if we follow Jesus and build a relationship with the Father like the one He has—then we have true fellowship with one another. Fellowship is the result of walking in the **light**. It comes from dedication to the truth—the truth of God's word and the truth about ourselves. As we all acknowledge the truth we can be honest with each other about our struggles, fears, successes, and lives in general because we all know we are all nothing other or more than sinners in need of God's grace and the fellowship of His people.

This brings us to the other benefit of walking in the light. If we walk in the light then we know that, “. . . *the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, purifies us from all sin.*” (v.7) Just as walking in the darkness while claiming to have fellowship with God makes us liars, walking in the light is evidence that we have been **forgiven** by Him. God cannot have fellowship with darkness or sinners. We can only be in right relationship with Him after we have been cleansed from our sin and purified. If we have true fellowship with His people, then it follows that Jesus' blood has been applied to us and we are holy.

It is not walking in the light that saves us. We can only walk in the light because we have already been saved. It is the light that shines in and through our lives that is evidence of the salvation God is working in us. We can only be filled with light because the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, has already purified us from all sin.

At the same time, we are not without sin. All of us were at one time dead in our sins. It is only the grace of God that has brought any of us into the light. We are all sinners by nature and deserving of God's wrath. If we believe anything else, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

John reminds us of the cure, however. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* (v.9) If we answer the Holy Spirit's call and confess our sin, repenting of it, then we are assured of God's forgiveness.

Outside of the church the only place we hear about confession is in the courtroom. At the beginning of every trial the defendant is given an opportunity to enter a plea. A plea of “not guilty” almost always results in a trial during which the prosecution seeks to prove that the plea was a lie. A plea of “guilty” results in a sentencing hearing during which the penalty for the crime is set. God has all the evidence. He does not need witnesses to our guilt. He is the chief witness Himself. He knows our actions. He knows our thoughts. He knows our hearts. It is ridiculous to think that we could stand before Him and plea “not guilty.” Yet people do it every day.

If we confess and are in Christ, we have been cleansed of the stain and guilt of our sin. We still struggle with sin, however, and none of us are holy outside of the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf and the mercy and forgiveness of God that flow so freely to us through it. God’s forgiveness, and fellowship with Him, require that we confess our sins.

This is a very Old Testament concept that carries over into the new. In Proverbs we read, “*He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*” (Proverbs 28:13) God commanded sacrifices to be made for sin so that we might know how seriously He takes it, but mercy and forgiveness have always been found only in **confession** and repentance. Even as God gave the people the law through Moses, He made this point. As we saw in Hebrews, the only true sacrifice was the one Jesus made as He offered Himself. The only way to

have that sacrifice applied to our sin is through confession and repentance.

Finally, John wrote, “*If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*” (v.10) If we claim that we do not need to be forgiven, that there is no sin in us that needs the purifying power of the blood of Jesus, then we declare God to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives. Oh, what a fearful state to be in: to stand opposed to God and what He has said about us, to hear the truth and yet stand firm in the lie.

Do you do what God says or what you think is best? Do you follow the world’s suggestions or the Bible’s commands? Do you walk in darkness or in the light? Are you making God out to be a liar by saying you don’t need to be forgiven? Be honest because nothing less than eternal life hangs in the balance. Even if you follow your own way and have more love for the world than for Jesus and God’s word, then there is hope. God’s call to confess and be forgiven still stands. There is still room at the foot of the cross.