

## Light and Darkness

1 John 2:1-14

August 29, 2010

This morning's text comes right after a couple of very important declarations by John at which we looked last week. Let's go back and look at the last two verses of chapter one to help us put the beginning of chapter two in context. *"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."* (1 John 1:9,10) We must understand this is the fundamental division into which all people are grouped. Everyone has either confessed their sin, agreeing about it and it's consequences, to God, or they have not. We either acknowledge our sin and fall on our faces before God seeking His mercy and forgiveness, or we deny that we are guilty because of our sin. Seeking God's forgiveness is in keeping with the word He has given us. To deny that we are guilty and deserving of damnation because of our sin is to deny what God has said and declares Him to be a liar.

John began the next paragraph with a word of endearment for his readers. He also gives us his reason for writing the letter. *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin."* (v.1) This is pretty direct. John calls the readers his children mostly because they are much younger than he was. John wrote this letter late in his life. He was the only apostle to live to be an old man. With his hair gray and the other effects of old age having their impact on him, he was writing to the second and third generations of Christians to strengthen and encourage them in their faith as they faced the coming increase in opposition and oppression that had so affected his life. He

also called them children because he had known Jesus for so much longer than they had. His faith was deeper and more mature than anybody else's. He called them, "dear," because that's what they were to him. He loved them deeply and cared about their lives in this world and the next.

Because John cared, he wrote this letter so they wouldn't sin. The goal of Christian **teaching** is to provide the information people need to make changes in their attitudes that the Holy Spirit can use to change their behavior. We can only have a limited impact on our own behavior. That is why the self-help industry makes millions of dollars each year. We are creatures of habit, obsessions, and addictions. We cannot control ourselves. Books and programs to help us get ourselves under control may help, but they cannot bring us where we need to be so we keep going back to buy more books and programs. Deep and lasting change can only come through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

What we find much easier to control is the attitudes which we take toward things. The Bible tells us to control how we think about things, and then to control our behavior. This is one of the reasons that love of God is so closely connected to obedience to His commands. John wrote this letter to remind us of our love for God and to grow that love and obedience in us so that we might not sin.

John's purpose didn't stop there, however. Verse 1 continues, *"But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."* God's grace is such that, when we do sin, Jesus, the Righteous and Sinless One, stands before the Father in our defense. The word John uses here for Jesus

is, “paraclete.” It goes back to the last supper as Jesus was teaching the apostles about the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”* (John 14:15-17) Jesus called the Holy Spirit “another Counselor.” The Spirit was coming to teach and intercede for us, just as Jesus taught and would intercede for us. He stands on our behalf in the heavenly court and pleads our case, arguing our innocence before the Father. He can do this because, if we are in Him, then His righteousness was applied to us when He took our sin on Himself. He is righteous, and so, those who are covered by the sacrifice of His blood are seen to be righteous as well.

John makes this point when he reminds us that Jesus is the atoning **sacrifice** for our sins. It is His death that makes us right with God so that we will not have to die. It is His blood that is shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus not only speaks to the Father in our defense, He also paid the penalty for our offense.

John adds that it is not only our sin Jesus died for, but the sins of the whole world. We must be careful here. John is not a universalist. This sentence does not mean that everybody is going to be saved. The Bible clearly denies that. What John does mean is that Jesus’ death was not only for the Jews, or for the first century Mediterranean peoples. Jesus’ death has the power to save all who believe and call on Him, wherever and whenever they live.

Continuing with his remembrance of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper, John says, *“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.”* (v.3) John connects knowledge of God, light, love, and obedience very closely in this passage. For him they are all different

aspects of the same truth—life in Christ. Jesus closely connected love for Him with obedience to His commands. John makes a similar connection here among obedience to Jesus, knowledge of God, and walking in the light. Indeed, this is the focus of the rest of the passage. Now that John had established the basis for the forgiveness of our sins, he continued by talking about how that ought to affect the rest of our lives.

John set a very high bar in this passage. Knowing God and obeying Him are two sides of the same coin. John is not talking about the occasional sin here. That is why he reminded us that Jesus intercedes for us when we do sin. John’s concern is with attitude and lifestyle. If our attitude is that we can do whatever we want now that we have been forgiven by God, or if our lifestyle is one of disregard for the things God has said, then we do not know God. It is a matter of the attitudes of our hearts and the habits of our lives.

It is not that we are saved because we have changed our behavior. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is true that when we are saved our **behavior** will change. Our changed behavior is the result and evidence of the changed heart God has placed within us. If there is no change to our behavior because we know God, then we don’t actually know Him. As John wrote, *“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”* (v.6)

John moved on to talk about the command he was giving. First, he said that it is not a new command. By the time John wrote this letter the church was decades old. As we’ve already noted, this was written to the second and third generations of Christians. John is repeating the commands Jesus gave and under which the church had

been living for many years. In this sense it is not a new command.

Yet, John also says it is a new command, the truth of which is seen in Jesus and in the church. We know that it is a new command because there is still darkness. The darkness is passing and the light is growing, but the darkness persists and so the command is not yet complete.

The light is closely related to our love for one another. Jesus said that the world around us will know we are His disciples if we love one another. This is the old command that is continually made new as we live it out. We are called to **love** those who are in Christ and by doing so, we walk in the light. If we hate a brother, then we are still walking in the darkness—we are still under the influence of the world and not of the Holy Spirit. Whoever loves his brother—whoever places his brother's needs before his own, whoever is patient, kind, not envious, boastful, proud, rude, selfish, easily angered, does not keep score or delight in his brother's suffering, whoever rejoices in the truth, protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres—this is the one who lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

To not seek **knowledge** of God that we might know Him better, and to not allow that knowledge to change us so that we love God and each other more is to give ourselves over to the darkness—it is to allow the darkness to blind us so that we do not know where we are going. We are going to be filled with something. Even as followers of Christ, if we are not filled with the word of God we will be filled with the things of the world. I have heard it said many times recently, “The **Bible** will keep you away from sin, or sin will keep you away from the Bible.” For John, the measure of where we stand between the world and God

is in our love for each other. If we are not growing in the truth and thus in our love for each other, then we are blind and have no idea where we are going.

The Tuesday morning Bible Study saw this as we looked at Peter's second letter. We saw in chapter 1 that we cannot love one another by just trying really hard to love one another. It is not our effort that will get us there. Peter placed the ability to grow in love for one another in our knowledge of God and the scripture. Several times in that passage he talked about knowledge and how foundational it is to the Christian life. If we do not know the Bible we cannot come to know God through it. If we do not know God we cannot grow in Christ. If we are not growing in Christ we cannot develop brotherly love for one another. If we do not have brotherly love for one another we cannot love God and each other as God loves us. It all flows from knowing God by studying His word. This is one of the reasons Bible Study is so essential to the Christian life and why we must study it together.

As we come to the end of this morning's text John addressed three groups. It is a series of six parallel sentences. He addressed each group in turn, and then repeated his statements to them, with some modification. Again, as John wrote he was using a writing system that didn't have punctuation. In writing this way he placed a very strong emphasis on what he had to say. This is a “sit up and pay attention” moment.

The first group John addressed was the “dear children.” This is the third time John has used a term of endearment for his readers. We looked at the first one, of which this is a repeat. The second we skipped when we came to it. Back in verse seven John called his readers, “dear friends.” Perhaps a better translation is, “beloved.”

This is written to the church as a whole, people whom John loved and about whom he cared very much. John wrote, *“I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”* (v.12) The church, by definition, is the gathered community of people who have been forgiven on account of Jesus’ name.

In the second time through the triad John wrote, *“I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.”* (v.13) There is a strong connection between being forgiven by God and knowing the Father. They are the same thing. Since we know that we know the Father because of our obedience to Him, it follows that, if we are not living a life of obedience to God’s **commands**, our sins are not forgiven and we are not saved. We dare not presume, just because we have some affection for Jesus and we come to church that we are saved. The evidence is not found in our emotions or in our desire to escape Hell. The evidence for our salvation is found in the Holy Spirit’s witness to our spirits and in whether or not we walk in obedience to God’s word.

The second group John addressed was the older people in the church—the church’s mature disciples and leaders. John wrote, *“I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.”* (v.13) John repeats this exactly in his second time through in verse 14. John is not calling us to faith in some new God. We are called to worship and obey the God through Whom everything began. He is the Creator. As we come to know God, and as we look to the past, we see more and more clearly that God has always been there and we can trust Him to lead us going into the **future** just as He has led His people in the past.

The third group John addressed was the young people in the church. John wrote, *“I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.”* (v.13) John expanded on this in verse 14: *“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.”* As we know from the beginning, we have not overcome the evil one through our own strength, but through the strength of God. The young men are strong because the word of God lives in them. As the members of the church with the more mature faith lead the body in trusting God, the younger members, informed by the word, have the strength to live out that faith and, through the word of God and the Holy Spirit, overcome the evil one. The victory is **ours** through Jesus Christ our Lord, and only through Him. As we hold fast to Him, with Jesus through the Holy Spirit living in us, there is nothing that can defeat us, no evil that can overcome us, and nothing that can stand in our way as we do God’s will.