

Stepping in the Light

Text:

I John 1:5-2:1

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But 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 cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

(but) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Introduction:

We came to the conclusion in our last study that John's primary purpose in writing was that we might be in fellowship with God, Jesus Christ, and one another, and that we might experience God's joy both in this life and in the life to come. Having stated his purpose in writing he now begins his explanation of the conditions of Christian discipleship which are the conditions of fellowship and joy.

The major portion of the book which will develop this theme of how to be in fellowship and experience God's joy may be divided into two major sections. There will be a great deal of repetition and development of parallel themes

between the two sections. John gives us the subject of the first section in verse 5, when he states: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” He gives us the theme of the second section at the beginning of chapter 3 when he states: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” We may then organize the contents of the book under the two headings: (1) God is light. We must walk in the light. (2) God is our Father. We must live as children of God. Furthermore we can organize the text of the two sections under the conditions for walking in the light, and conditions for living as children of God. There are four conditions for walking in the light:

1. We Must Renounce Sin (1:8 – 2:2)
2. We Must Obey God and Love (2:3 – 11)
3. We Must Reject the World (2:12 – 17)
4. We Must Keep the Faith (2:18 – 29)

Then there are five conditions for living as children of God:

1. We Must Renounce Sin (3:4 – 9)
2. We Must Obey God (3:10 – 24)
3. We Must Reject the World (4:1 – 6)
4. We Must Love (4:7 – 5:4)
5. We Must Keep the Faith (5:6 – 13)

Just looking at this outline helps us understand the repetition and development of basic themes in this book. John, most assuredly, believed the principle: “repetition is the best teacher.” We must add that he does more than repeat. When he comes back to subjects previously discussed, he does not simply rehash what he has said previously, but adds new insight in redeveloping the same theme. Otherwise stated, we would not do ourselves a favor by stopping at the end of chapter two.

The First Premise:

John’s first premise upon which he builds the first series of conditions for fellowship with God is the affirmation that “God is Light and in Him is no darkness

at all.” He says that this is the message that he and the other eyewitnesses have experienced in Jesus Christ that he is announcing to us in order that we might have fellowship. What John means by light is truth and righteousness. By stating that he “is light” as opposed to “the light” he is speaking of his essential character. In the same way as when he says “God is love”, and “God is Spirit”. His objective in making the statement, however, is more practical than theoretical. He is not speculating on the nature of God, but affirming the absolute absence of evil in God. Nothing of the darkness exists in him. This sets the stage for the discussion that is to follow, which summarized says that we cannot be in fellowship with God who is absolute light and still be pursuing the darkness.

He makes his argument with a series of three parallel statement organized around “If we say” (or claim”) balanced by a “but if we”. Behind all of these arguments is a single idea: “sin doesn’t matter. We could speculate on why some of these 1st century believers were making such claims, and we know from other sources that this was a problem in the early church. Our problem, however, was not what went on in the first century, but what is happening now. We may not deny sin and the seriousness of sin in the same way that these first century believers did, but however we deny it and minimize it, we do so, as they did, at our own peril.

The First False Claim:

The first false claim is found in verse 3: “If we claim to share fellowship with him, while living in darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth” (translation of Stephen S. Smalley in *Word Biblical Commentary*, (vol. 51, p. 21). The false claim is that our conduct has nothing to do with our fellowship or relationship with God. There is a technical detail here that is much clearer in the original text than any English translation can communicate. The walking in the darkness is habitual and deliberate. It is not a reference to a stumbling into the darkness inadvertently, but rather to a deliberate decision to walk in darkness, that is to persist in sinful patterns of behavior based on the false assumption that it has nothing to do with my relationship with God. The person doing this is saying to

himself: “God doesn’t really care about how I behave. I can live as I chose and still be in fellowship with God.”

John corrects each of the three false claims, and the correction is indicated by the “but if”. The correction to this first false assumption is found in verse 7 which says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Just as “walking in the darkness” implies a deliberate and habitual action, so “walking in the light” implies the same sort of action. What is described here is a person who has come to love the light and hate the darkness, who wants nothing to do with the darkness, who recognizes the destructive power of sin and wants nothing to do with it, who desires above all else to be in fellowship with God and with his fellow-believers. This does not mean that he is perfect, that he never sins, but it does mean that he has rejected the way of darkness and is making a deliberate effort to walk in the light. He has heeded Paul’s injunction in Ephesians 5:11 to “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

There are, John says, two consequences of this deliberate decision to walk in the light. First we have fellowship with one another. We saw last week that “walking in the light” is a synonym for being in fellowship with God, so it goes without saying that we are in fellowship with God and with Christ. In fact our fellowship with one another is a test of our fellowship with God. If we are at peace with God, then we will be at peace with his people. If we love the light, then we will love those, who like us, love the light.

The second consequence is that we will experience God’s forgiveness and cleansing. God has made provision for sin. It need not destroy us. Later John will discuss more fully the work of Christ on our behalf for sin. Here he simply says that “the blood of Jesus Christ is cleansing us from all sin.” By the blood of Christ he means Christ’s sacrificial death on our behalf. This is the way God deals with sin. This is the source of our victory over sin. The verb “to cleanse” is in the present tense. This is the reason I have translated it “is cleansing”. There is a sense in which we can speak of God’s forgiveness as past, finished once for all.

But here it is spoken of as present and ongoing. We never escape sin. We must deal with it on a daily basis. We have been forgiven. We are saved, but we need regular cleansing from the daily struggle with sin. The way we are to deal with sin as believers is not to deny it, or to deny its importance as some were doing when John wrote this letter, but to reject it and to flee from it.

Conclusion:

We live in a time where there is little consciousness of sin. We have all kinds of ways of excusing our bad behavior. What John says here, however, runs counter to much of what we have been led to believe. He says that the person who is walking in the darkness is not practicing the truth. Behind that statement stands the premise that the light has shined in Jesus Christ who is the way the truth and the life. Jesus by his coming into the world and living among us has shown us the light, the truth. He has shown us how we are to live. All behavior that does not conform to the pattern of the light revealed in him belongs to the darkness. We must not make excuses as these 1st century Christians did.

We must cease to make excuses because not only has Christ demonstrated the truth and given us the light in which we are to walk, but he has also shed his blood so that our sins might be cleansed and forgiven, and so that we might have power to overcome sin. To persist in walking in the darkness is to deny the light. This is the reason John uses the strong language he does when he says: "If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." We lie because we are denying everything Jesus came into the world to teach us and to accomplish for us.

The remedy for this, he says, is to walk in the light. Christ is the light. Where he goes we go. We can imagine this by thinking of walking down a dark path at night with a flashlight. As long as the light shines our path is illumined and we can see where to go, but we must follow the circle of light cast by the flashlight. The world is dark, but Christ is our light. He will never lead us astray. Our job is to stay within the circle of light that he casts on the worlds darkness. Constant

continual deliberate intentional fellowship with him is the only way through the maze of the world.