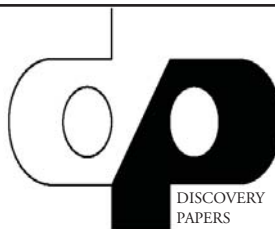


WALKING IN THE LIGHT

SERIES: IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL



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1 John 5-2:2
2nd message
Steve Zeisler
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Jesus said this of the devil: “He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth. He is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) The arsenal of the evil one contains such weapons as deprivation, persecution, and blasphemy, but in our setting he most often attacks Christian faith with lies. Bernie Madoff seduced people into foolish investments with false promises. Similarly, the father of lies attempts to seduce us with false promises about the way to intimacy with God.

This is the second message in our study of First John. In the previous message (DP #090222), we met the apostle John, an old man with an extraordinary message: in the person of Jesus Christ, life itself has appeared to rescue us from death and to create a community of men and women who are at home in the company of God. He is writing this letter to correct and encourage dear friends who are being deceived by false teaching and drifting from truth.

The text we are going to consider now repeats the phrase “If we claim.” Three times John presents a false claim, refutes it, and offers a true alternative. Each false claim is a misrepresentation of what it means to know Christ and to walk with him, so we will examine each in turn and then focus on John’s alternatives.

1 John 1:5-2:2:

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

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 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.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and

not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Light is a term that has been used in religions both ancient and modern, a familiar metaphor for spiritual things. John’s flock would be familiar with other gods, such as the Roman god Apollo, who rode the sun like a chariot across the sky each day; such a god could be called a companion or representative of the light. But only the Lord God, made known to us in Scripture, can claim to *be* the light. Prior to sun, moon, or stars, prior to any created thing, he is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The ancient gods were very dark beings, well acquainted with moral decay. But the Living God has absolute integrity. He is righteous without exception; not a single accusation could be laid against him that he has failed at any point in holiness or moral purity. Certainly no other god could make such a claim.

But if there is no darkness in him, how can people like us be welcome in his presence?

If We Walk in the Darkness...

We find the first false claim in verse 6: “If we *claim* to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by 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, purifies us from all sin.”

Before we consider what it means to walk in the darkness, let me clarify what it does *not* mean. First of all, it has nothing to do with shallow issues of personal taste or appearance. God is not ultimately concerned with our haircuts or style of dress or speech habits. Walking in the darkness is a matter of sinful lifestyle. It is about the profound things that make us really human or not, like God or not.

John is also not talking about the struggles and failures of life. People who acknowledge their brokenness, who agree with God that sin is sin and repent of it when they fail, are *not* walking in the darkness. What John means by walking in the darkness is claiming the right to act in complete defiance of God

We live in a small neighborhood that contains just about every ethnicity, religion, age group, and family configuration you can think of, and it can be an interesting place to observe prejudice in action. Perhaps you were raised to hate anyone who is “different,” or perhaps you learned

such hatred later in life.

Jesus' command to love our neighbors does not admit any exceptions, but it is hard not to act on long-standing prejudices. If you realize your sin and ask the Lord for help, if you fail sometimes but genuinely want the Lord to change your heart, you are not walking in the darkness. However, if you reserve the right to hate those whom God has told you to love, if you assert that he has no right to change you, then you most certainly are walking in darkness. If we claim to be in fellowship but reserve the right to rebel, we are lying and are not, in fact, in fellowship with him.

Perhaps you want to experience the love of Christ but you are unwilling to let him change you in any way. Or perhaps you attend church every week, like the music, are glad to make business contacts—but secretly you ridicule those who actually believe the teaching of the Bible. You justify cheating in your business or on your taxes because, after all, everybody does it. But John says that combining God-awareness with a hard heart is a lie, and lies will take you further into the darkness on a path to ruin.

What is the alternative? Verse 7: "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, purifies us from all sin." Don't walk in the darkness and claim nearness to God; instead, agree with Him, and walk in the light. When we are purified by Jesus' blood, we don't have to pretend to be welcome in God's presence; we *are* welcome, because God sees us as he sees his own son.

And we will have fellowship with one another. Most of us succumb to hypocrisy because we worry about what people think of us. But the promise here is that we will actually grow in honest relationship with each other when we face the truth and ask for help and trust God to change us. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and Jesus' blood cleanses and purifies us.

If We Claim to Be Without Sin...

The second false claim is in verse 8: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Here we can clearly hear the voice of false teachers. Gnostic teachings of that time would have sounded something like this: Other people may be sinners, but not you. Your behaviors and attitudes don't represent the real you, and, by applying our secret insights you can leave the world of obedience and accountability behind. There are modern voices who justify unrighteousness by application of religious mysteries as well.

Another contemporary deceit might sound like this: You aren't really responsible for your sin. It's not your fault. Things might be different if you had different parents or a different spouse or had a better education, but you just can't help being lazy or resentful or self indulgent. John

says we *are* responsible for the choices we make. There may be extenuating circumstances, but in the long run, we answer to God for who we are and what we do. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. But 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...

The third false claim, and probably the worst of all, is in verse 10. "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." Essentially this says that you have never sinned, and to say you have never sinned is to claim to be God. You decide what is true or false, worthy or unworthy. The God of the Bible can have his opinion; you have yours, and if there is disagreement, it is a disagreement among equals. And to say such a thing is to call God a liar.

John doesn't even go on to the positive alternative in this case. He moves straight into a summary and application of the insights in the previous six verses. Chapter 2, verses 1-2:

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

It is a wonderful balance that is presented to us in verse 1. I write so you won't sin. But, if you do, there is a remedy. John knows we will fall back into old habits. He writes for our freedom from sin, and he writes for our forgiveness when we fail. This is what makes life in Christ real. We confess our sins to God and expect forgiveness and cleansing. We admit our struggles to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are changed in the process. And when we stumble, we have an advocate to lift us up.

John reminds us that Jesus died in our place. He was the atoning sacrifice that satisfied the law's demands and paid the debt for our sins. Moreover, he is not only the payment, he is our defense attorney. On our behalf, he speaks against the accuser in the presence of the Father, and when we struggle, he is our hope.

If We Confess, He Is Faithful

Have you bought into any of these false claims? Has the Lord made you aware of some way in which you are being prevented from experiencing full fellowship with him? Have you felt like you are on the

outside looking in, and are you willing to give your life to the Living God? There is no better moment than now to speak to the Lord about important things, to confess your sins and receive his cleansing and forgiveness, for if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Let's pray. Lord, we want to respond to your voice. If your Spirit is speaking, Lord, don't let us turn from it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

