



Sunday School Lesson for December 17, 2006
Released on December 13, 2006

"Light That Conquers"

Printed Text: 1 John 1:1 - 2:

Background Scripture: 1 John 1:1 - 2:6

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

1 John 1:1-10

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

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

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

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

1 John 2:1-6

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Quote 1 John 1:8, 9 from memory.
2. Discuss the personal implications of what it means to walk as Jesus did.
3. Describe one way that he or she will walk as Jesus did.

Introduction- Unresolved Guilt

She sat on the tailgate of a pickup in the parking lot, her body shuddering with silent sobs. In the nearby park the rest of the church was enjoying the annual picnic, but she didn't participate. She just sat there, hugging herself tightly, staring into nothing.

The preacher sat down next to her and asked, "What's wrong, dear? Can I help?" She gained control for a minute and blurted, "I take shower after shower, but I still feel dirty." Her problem? She had recently committed adultery with her best friend's husband. Her sin made her feel guilty and unclean, and she felt there was no way to get over it.

Counseling professionals say that unresolved guilt is one of the great problems facing troubled adults. The church knows the cause of unresolved guilt: sin. Some secular counseling theories deal with sin problems by saying, "That's who you are. Just accept yourself and be happy." They believe that clients want a therapist who will say that their sin is OK. Actually, no one needs to spend money to hear this. All you have to do is find a bunch of drinking buddies to party with, and they will tell you this for nothing!

God, who made us, knows that sin cannot be ignored or explained away. It must be confronted and overcome. Ignoring sin is a sin itself and is ultimately destructive. The apostle John has a strategy for dealing with sin that we will see today. This week's lesson uses bold symbolic language to guide us into a fellowship with God. This fellowship moves beyond paralyzing guilt to a joyous walk with the Lord.

Lesson Background

The apostle John was one of Jesus' closest associates. Jesus trusted him enough to task him with the care of His own mother, Mary, at the cross (see John 19:26, 27). Church tradition says that John later moved to the great city of Ephesus, taking Mary with him. There he ministered for many years, dying sometime between a.d. 95 and 100. His exile to Patmos is also well known (Revelation 1:9).

There are five books in the Bible written by the apostle John: the Gospel of John; 1, 2, 3 John; and Revelation. We are not sure who the intended audience was for 1 John, but apparently they were confronted with many threats to their faith. Some may have been Jewish believers who had denied Jesus in order to return to the synagogue (see 1 John 2:22). Others may have been former pagans who were being lured back into the worship of idols (see 1 John 5:21).

Still others were being tempted by an early form of the attractive heresy we call gnosticism (see discussion of this in the first lesson of this quarter). For this reason John emphasized his personal contact with the human Jesus, including seeing and touching (1 John 1:1).

First John deals with both extremes on the issue of sin: legalism and license. On the one hand, John confronts a legalism that refuses to recognize the sufficiency of Jesus to deal with sin. On the other hand, John will not stand for those who think that they have a license to sin because they believe that personal righteousness and lifestyle are unimportant (compare Romans 6:1, 2).

John's solution to both extremes is to combine forgiveness with godly living. If we try to live righteously but do not feel forgiven for those times we have failed, we will be miserable. If we glory in our forgiveness but disdain God's standards of personal purity and integrity, then we have given up the possibility of a close relationship with God. We too will ultimately be miserable. These issues of John's day are amazingly current for us today. The message of 1 John still has a place in the church and should be heard.

The Manifestation of the Word (1 John 1:1-4)

1. Why did the Apostle John emphasize the humanity of Jesus (v. 1-2)?

False teaching was infecting the church when John was writing the letter. In the second century, Gnosticism became prominent, teaching that matter was inherently evil and only that which was spiritual was good. This led to the conclusion that a divine being could never take on human flesh. Thus this led to the conclusion that Jesus could not have become incarnate. The Gnostics made a distinction between the human Jesus and the spiritual Christ, who came upon Him at His baptism. John was hearing the beginnings of this heretical teaching.

2. What did John offer as proof for his teaching that Jesus was truly God in the flesh (v. 2-3)?

John stated that the eternal Word of life had come directly from the Father and was manifested among them ("we" and "us" probably refer to the apostles). They, in turn, declared exactly what they had witnessed, and there was no doubt in their minds that He was the eternal Son of God manifested in human flesh. John was well qualified to teach about him, for he had been one of those eyewitnesses to everything Jesus did throughout His ministry. John's readers had not seen Jesus personally, but they could rely on the apostle's testimony.

3. What important result did John say would come from a correct understanding of who Jesus was (v.3)?

It is important that all believers understand and accept the true humanity as well as the deity of Christ. These things mark Jesus' identity. Jesus, the God-Man, provided salvation through His death and resurrection. To believe anything less would render the whole truth of salvation uncertain. John wrote so that the believers would understand all about Jesus, and for them to know that they were sharing personal witness with the apostles in the truth. Since the apostles were in fellowship with God the Father and His Son, those believers would then also be in fellowship with both.

True joy comes from understanding Jesus' identity. Regarding verse 4, the Hollman New Testament Commentary states, "The prologue concludes by linking John's own joy with the spiritual welfare of his readers. He reaffirmed these truths so that their joy could be made complete. John was so concerned about their welfare that he could not experience complete joy himself as long as they were struggling with doubt created by these false teachers" (Anders. Ed., Broadman & Holman).

The Practice of Walking in the Light (1 John 1:5-10)

4. What specific message did John say the Son had given him and the other apostles (v.5-6)?

John tells his readers in verse 5 that God is light. He states that he and the other apostles had heard Christ. Now he specified what the message was that came from Him. It was simply that God is light; there is no darkness in Him. Light and darkness are two separate extremes. Light stands for what is good, pure, holy, and righteous. Darkness stands for what is sinful, evil, and false. Light shines and reveals what darkness hides and covers. In His very nature, God is completely light. Darkness cannot touch Him.

5. What does it mean to say that God is light?

The statement about God is light is not a metaphor. That means that God is not a light or like light. God is light, meaning pure, glorious truth—holiness in His very nature. Darkness, the opposite of light, will never be a part of God. Because God is light, He exposes all that is sinful and evil. Sin cannot hide in His presence. Those of us who are in God's family, then, walk in the presence of light.

6. What did John say about those who claim to know Christ but do not live according to His Word (v. 6)?

John answers this question quite bluntly in verse 6 by stating that people who profess to know Christ and live in darkness (i.e. not according to His Word) are lying and do not know the truth. Walking in darkness shows that there is a continual presence of sin our lives. We who are God's children must recognize that we cannot enjoy fellowship with God in the way He intends as long as we allow sin in our lives.

7. What does walking in light or walking in darkness mean (v. 7)?

John wrote about what happens when we walk in the light, that is, when we live consistently obedient, pure lives before God. When we live that way, we are living the way God's Son, Jesus Christ, is living! Since Jesus is truly God, it is just as true of Him as it is of the Father that there is no darkness in Him. He is entirely pure and holy and cannot be morally affected by sin and evil. When we walk in the light, we are compared to Jesus, who is in the light constantly.

In contrast, walking in darkness means that we are living lives that contract God's Word. Walking in darkness means that we are following Satan instead of Christ.

Nominal Christians are a tragedy. Their claims and the realities of their lives are inconsistent. Total obedience to God should not be an option we entertain but the choice we make because we love Him. We do need to recognize that because we are human, we cannot be perfect. To claim sinless perfection would be to live a lie. The cleansing blood of Christ, however, is available to cover every sin we confess to Him.

8. By what means can believers be clean even though sinful (v. 9)?

John wanted his readers to believe that even though people sin and cannot help doing so because of their humanity, God has provided a means by which they can be in fellowship with Him. It requires confession, which means that one must

acknowledge or assent to something. God wants to forgive us our sins; that is why He sent His only Son to die for us. By nature, we are sinners, and when we commit sin, He wants us to agree with Him that what we have done is wrong. We know this by conviction of the Holy Spirit.

By confessing our sins, John states that God cleanses from all unrighteousness. He can do this because He is faithful to all the promises He has made about his willingness to do so (cf. Col. 2:13). Furthermore, all the promises are legitimate because He is a just God. God does everything in accordance with what is right, or righteous. The death of Jesus Christ has provided the moral grounds upon which God can forgive all who receive Him. He does not become unjust when He forgives us.

Even though we become new creatures when we receive salvation (2 Cor. 5:17) and possess a new nature, we still live in bodies of flesh. This is why we sometimes sin as Christians. By repeating the warning that we cannot claim to be without sin, John was reminding us of the presence of sin. To deny this is to call God a liar, for He has clearly told us we are simply sinners saved by His grace. Romans 7:14-25 provides an explanation of the continued presence of our sinful flesh.

The Test of Knowing The Christ (1 John 2:1-5)

9. What is the test that reveals whether someone truly knows God (v. 3)?

Verse 3 tells the audience that those who are saved will obey God's commandments. We should all have a desire to obey God and His Word. This is an easy test to take because we either have the desire to obey Him or we do not. There is no middle ground here. The person who claims to be a Christian but has no concern whatsoever about obeying God is lying, according to John. In fact, the truth is not in him at all. Major changes take place in the heart when a person accepts Jesus as personal Lord and Savior. His desires are no longer worldly.

The key word in this verse is "keep," and the Greek word means "to guard." The idea is that we observe something and then we guard it by holding fast in our memory. As a math teacher, I always instruct my students to remember concepts so that they can succeed not only on exams, but also on learning new concepts since each new concept builds upon the old. Likewise, in the Christian life, we must remember God's truths that He has revealed to us through pastors, teachers, and personal Bible Study. Each new truth that God shows us relates and builds upon other truths that we have learned. We must remember God's teachings and then live by them.

Verse 4 states the converse. Those who do not practice obeying God's words give evidence that they have never received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They are living according to Satan's desires. He has no truth in him and is nothing but a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). Do you really want to obey God? If you do, even though you often fail, you are His child. If you listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, and follow His leading, you can become a victorious Christian.

10. What should happen as we mature (v. 5)?

The ability to obey God comes as one loves God more deeply. Notice Jesus' words in a conversation with His disciples. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and

I will love him, and will manifest myself to him....If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John: 14:21, 23).

Our love should mature as we grow in our understanding of God and His ways, but as we have already seen in this passage, we will never reach sinless perfection as long as we live in our fleshly bodies. We should, however, find ourselves becoming more sensitive to God's will and more responsive to the need to confess our sins. Maturing in Christ will lead to that sensitivity and enable us to maintain a closer fellowship with God. As we live according to the spiritual light given to us, our joy in Him will increase.

Conclusion - What Would Jesus Do?

Over a century ago Charles Sheldon penned the classic Christian novel *In His Steps*. The main character, a minister named Henry Maxwell, is confronted by an angry poor man who asks, "But what would Jesus do? Is that what you mean by following His steps?"

This challenge sets off a series of events that transforms a town because the people begin to ask themselves, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" They allow the answer to determine their decisions.

The "What Would Jesus Do?" fad passed through many churches a few years ago, accompanied by WWJD? wristbands and other paraphernalia. The question WWJD? doesn't always work because Jesus did some miraculous things that we cannot; Jesus even died on a cross to pay sin's price—something we cannot and need not do. But by and large the WWJD? phenomenon was a good thing. Even if it is now out of fashion, the question still is worth asking.

Are you willing to do what Jesus would do, to live as Jesus lived, to walk as Jesus walked? Are you willing to act in a manner that acknowledges Christ's presence in your life and let Him be the controlling influence for your actions? This is the message of this lesson. When we do this, we are not automatically perfect. But we have yielded to God's conquering light in our lives, and we are truly walking with Him.

Prayer

Gracious and merciful God, thank You for loving us in spite of our sin. Thank You for being willing to allow us into Your close fellowship despite our weaknesses. And thank You for cleansing us despite our spiritual filthiness. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus, Your Son and our advocate in Heaven, amen.

Thought to Remember

Walking with Jesus means living with His presence in our lives.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Read John 1:1-18 as you anticipate a lesson on the incarnation of Christ.

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