

Onward To The Light

1 John 1:5-10

5 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. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

(1 John 1:5-10 (ESV))

How often, when frustrated, have we found ourselves saying words like, “Today was one of those ‘one step forward and two steps back’ kind of days”? As I read these words in today’s passage, that seems to be the kind of battle that God is warning us about as we struggle to move out away from our old life of “darkness” into the “light of God”, a struggle that is often so intense, we sometimes even question if we are saved at all.

Because of that, may we pause for a moment and remind ourselves about how we arrived at where we are today in our salvation, and especially about the part we personally played within it all, and especially in those very first moments when the blood of Christ was first applied to wash away our sins. The truth is, our part in that first transaction was really a relatively easy one.

The real work of our initial salvation is done for us, by God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and by the blessed Lord Jesus. God the Father “draws” us to the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, convincing us that we need a Savior. And then the Lord Jesus, having shed His blood and died on the cross, applies His blood as payment for our debt of sin, and we are saved. We ourselves having done very little. Our part in that whole process is simply to “surrender” ourselves over to the faith God has put within us, and to believe.

And that’s where my thoughts often take me when I listen to a “new believer” giving their testimony about their experience of salvation, as they joyously describe how the Lord Jesus has brought them out of the “darkness” of their sin into the “glorious light” of God.

And I have rejoiced with those dear ones in their experience. But I have also come to know and to accept that their journey of salvation is not, by any means, yet over. “Their part” in that transition out from darkness into the “light of God” has really just begun.

Yes, true and real and lasting salvation has taken place in their heart, because salvation does take place in only “one moment”. But the scriptures are clear that there are also other elements of salvation, ongoing elements, that must also take place all throughout the remaining days of a person’s life, with final salvation taking place only as they enter glory. It is a long and joyous, but also oftentimes difficult journey that each of us must take.

One of my favorite bible teachers, R. C. Sproul, describes the journey of salvation in this way. He tells us that, “We never get past the gospel. What saved us in the past, when we were still in our sins was the grace of God in the gospel. And nowhere is that put more succinctly put than in Ephesians 2:8-9 where we are told

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians. 2:8–9)

Sproul goes on to say, “But the New Testament can also speak about our salvation in the present and ongoing tense—we are “being saved”. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, we’re told,

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

And then in Romans 5:9, God speaks of our salvation as being in the future tense—we “shall ... be saved”. Listen!

9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Romans 5:9)

Sproul goes on to say, “There is only one salvation and only one way of salvation. What occurred in our past, works itself out in the present, and comes to fulfillment in the future. It is all part of one work. Justification leading all the way to glorification. Romans 8,

30 . . . those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.” (Romans 8:30),

Folks, these words are precious assurance that the salvation Christ first wrought within us will continue to be worked out all throughout the remaining days of our lives.

Regardless of the struggles in-between, God will complete the “good work” He has begun in us.

Unfortunately though, that “work” does often turn out to have some very difficult trials within it.

Here, in our scripture text, we get a sense of that special struggle. You can hear that, “one step forward, two steps back”, kind of “tug-of-war” taking place within the souls of people who are in that transition, out from the darkness into God’s light.

May I read these words for us again and please listen carefully for that special struggle!

5 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. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

(1 John 1:5-10 (ESV))

Did you take notice of how God has framed these words for us? The desire of God for each of us is that we would come out from the “darkness” that we have lived within for so long, and “join with Him”, becoming “partakers” of the purity and holiness of His “Divine Light”. And He expresses that desire in verses 5, 7 and 9. Listen!

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7 . . . 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.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5, 7, 9 (ESV))

But then, sandwiched in between these words, and then at the end, there are verses that warn us about contrasting sinful behaviors on our part. Listen to verses 6, 8 and 10.

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

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

10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6, 8, 10 (ESV))

I'm not sure of all that God is conveying to us in these words, but they do give us a picture of the struggle that often takes place daily within the hearts and minds of most every Christian believer. Yes, in our testimonies, we often give the best-case-scenarios of our daily Christian lives. But hidden within all of our glowing testimonies are evidences of real lingering struggles with the "darkness".

As we've been saying in recent messages, this "darkness" spoken about here is very, very real. And up until that moment when we finally surrendered our heart to Christ, that darkness had a very strong hold upon our heart and mind, an actual legitimate claim to the territory of our soul.

And that darkness is never simply a static, inactive condition. Just as God's "light" has His "Divine Nature" within it, so also does the "darkness" have an evil nature within it. And the "darkness" is not about to give up its evil ownership over a person's soul without a fight.

Remember what we have said in earlier messages, that with sin as its foundation, this "darkness" has a "predatory" nature, a nature that pursues after us and is ever-reaching into, and invading and dominating and controlling everything that takes place within every heart and every soul that resides within that "darkness", the way people think, the things they say and the things they do.

And this "darkness" not only attaches itself to the things and the conditions and the people around us, it also attaches itself to the remaining remnants of our old sin nature. Yes, in our salvation, our sin nature did lose its control over us, but that does not keep our old nature from trying to exert its old claims over our habits and behaviors.

And that is one of the most vulnerable areas within our armor. Many of our old habits and behaviors were pleasing and comfortable to us. That "broad path" had convenient answers to the world's questions and demands.

Thankfully, God's Holy Spirit is ever-present to warn us away from those temptations, and to guide us back to the "narrow path".

But therein is often the rub. The “darkness” that fills that “broad path” continually tries to cover over our eyes, blinding us to the righteousness that God’s Spirit desires us to follow. And as we stumble and fall back into some of our old ways, we not only have those sins to corrupt us, according to these words, one more sin gets added.

One of our first responses to failure is to try to cover up and protect ourselves. And one of the handiest defenses is to quickly tell some sort of a “lie”, adding sin upon sin. Those words again in verses 6, 8 and 10.

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

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

10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6, 8, 10 (ESV))

The warning here in verse 10 is critical. Because when we tell a lie, we are not just lying to a person, to our neighbor or to a family member. We might think that we are, but that is not so. We are actually lying to God. In Psalm 51, we read.

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.
(Psalm 51:4 (NASB))

I’m also reminded of the charge that the Apostle Peter made against Ananias and Sapphira when they held back money dedicated to the Lord. Peter said to Ananias,

3 "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?
(Acts 5:3 (NASB))

Ultimately, every sin that we commit and every lie we tell is against God. He is the “lawgiver”, therefore He is the one whom we sin against.

And again, telling a lie is most often the compounding of other sins already committed. We do corrupt and sinful things, then we lie to cover it all up. It is a common behavior of a person who is not willing to come all the way out from that “darkness”. They seem to keep one foot in that “darkness” and one foot in the “light”. And then they lie about it.

And the reality is, lying just doesn’t seem to be a very “big” sin to most people.

But folks, lying really is very important to God. If we will only search these scriptures, we’ll find that God holds lying to be on the same level as murder and other mortal sins.

Listen to these words given in Revelation 21:8. This is what will take place on the day of judgment.

8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

(Revelation 21:8 (NASB))

This is very serious folks, and God is being faithful to warn us against it. While we remain on this earth, there will be a constant "tug-of-war" for our souls, the "darkness" ever-raging against us, drawing, even pulling, us back into its old "dark" ways. And we lie to ourselves and to others, loudly declaring that we are innocent, and that our sin is someone else's fault. But that simply is not so! We are each held accountable for the sins we involve ourselves in.

This battle for our soul is the battle that the Apostle Paul speaks about in Romans 7, and it takes place in every Christian heart. Paul cries out,

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:15-19, 24-25 (ESV))

Here, the Apostle Paul gives us the only answer that will ever really work for us, and it certainly is not "to tell a lie". It is instead to turn our hearts back to Christ for His forgiveness and His cleansing from our sins. And that is clearly said to us here in 1 John 1:9.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 (ESV))

The old adage from these scriptures is true. "Confession is good for the soul"! Sinning and then lying about it leaves that sin in-place to foment within us and further corrupt our soul. But repentance and confession actually cleanse away every vestige of a sin. Praise be to God!

And that is the only way that verse 7 can become a joyous reality in our daily life. Listen and we will close with these words!

7 . . . walk in the light, as he is in the light, (and) we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5, 7, 9 (ESV))