

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Message by Dave Beam preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church

May 19, 2013

READ I John 1:5-2:23

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

My purpose and prayer this morning is that God will use His Word to awaken lost people to their current condition, and that they will call out to God for mercy and be rescued and brought to true salvation. Furthermore, my prayer is that as God's people we will grow in our discernment and appreciation of our Savior, and be reminded again that our acceptance by God is only and always His mercy and grace. Because of this we can deal effectively with our shortcomings and sins.

#1 THE DECEPTION – The religions of self-righteousness and human goodness promote a dangerous false gospel that is powerless to save a sinner.

#2 THE DISTINCTION – The Apostle John expounds this dynamic using the distinction of walking in the light vs walking in the darkness

#3 THE DELIVERENCE – If we will confess our sins, God in His amazing grace and mercy freely provides His forgiveness, cleansing, and liberation from sin based on the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ.

THE DECISION – Will I confess my sins and trust in Christ, or deny my sin and trust myself ?

#1 – THE DECEPTION

There are many religious voices today saying that they have the key to a relationship with God. The Gnostics of the Apostle John's day were a religious people who claimed to have this special knowledge. They appealed to that human desire to be in the inner circle and one who is "in the know." This letter was written by the Apostle John to expose these false teachers.

The apostle John loved his spiritual children, and wrote this letter so that they would know for sure they had eternal life and were truly in fellowship with the living God of heaven. In this letter He warned the believers concerning the deception and heresy of Gnostic belief. In chapter 5:13, he states "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may you know you have eternal life.

This morning I am praying that God uses His Word to awaken some of you from your deception, and that as you arouse from your complacency that you will comprehend your current spiritual condition and need for a Savior. The Gnostics of John's day had it wrong, and were confusing and deceiving

people. Many professed Christians are deceived by religious leaders telling them they are ok. It would be naïve and unkind for me to think that everyone in this room today is spiritually healthy and has eternal life. It would be cruel for me not to speak to you clearly and directly about these matters this morning. By considering what John wrote to these people he loved over 2000 years ago, the Spirit of God can open our eyes to recognize our current condition and be assured of our eternal destiny. I ask you for your full attention this morning.

Though there are no Gnostics today, there are certainly many false spiritual messages that we need to be aware of and avoid. All false religion springs from the same basic belief, that human beings are accepted by God based on something they do or don't do. This concept pervades our culture. Many so-called churches believe that God accepts people because they are all His children. Because He is their maker, they are fundamentally good. This error reasons that God knows that we have basically good intentions and a good heart, and as long as we are sorry and regretful over our mistakes and faults, that because God loves everyone, He overlooks our shortcomings. After all, no one is perfect. He is understanding and tolerant of our human failures and weaknesses. Such religion calls on you to just have a generic faith in God and do the best you can. When you fail, you need to get back up and try even harder and never give up. God rewards sincere effort, and as long as you are sorry, He forgives your mistakes and faults. You are accepted by Him because you are fundamentally a good person and are His child. If you will simply have faith and understand that He loves you, then He forgives you if you are sorry when you do something wrong. The way to heaven is to believe in God, try to live a good and decent life by obeying Him, and follow Jesus as my example. If I will do my best to follow Jesus example of sacrifice and love, I will be accepted by Him when I die.

Depending on the brand of this false religion, there may be other requirements that you must meet to be accepted by God, like baptism, church affiliation, church attendance, loving other people, avoiding certain immoral practices, like drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, wearing certain clothes, and certain types of entertainment. The lists will vary, but false religion teaches that the basis for acceptance by God is your effort, goodness, sincerity, and doing right. A loving God would never reject someone who is sincere, believes in Him, and really tries to do right.

So how does that message sound to you? You may be here this morning and see nothing wrong with those beliefs. The truth is that if you believe what I just told you is the way to be right with God, then you are on a path to eternal destruction. Please listen carefully. Please take the time to really understand the truth. Please put aside your current religious traditions and beliefs and take an honest look at God's word today. These Gnostic people that were in the church of that day believed in Jesus, and yet were lost. There are many people that believe in God and even are trying to follow Jesus, and are headed for destruction. Beloved, we must be clear and discerning.

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.*

THE DISTINCTION – Walking in light vs walking in darkness

The apostle makes a distinction between two types of people; People who are walking in the light, and people who are walking in darkness. This morning, you are either a person who is walking in the light,

or a person who is walking in darkness. People who are walking in the light are cleansed by the blood of Jesus from all their sin, and therefore have fellowship with God and with others who are also walking in the light. People who walk in darkness often say and believe they are in fellowship with God, but they are self-deluded, confused and lying. They often do not recognize that they are lying, for they are in darkness and can't see what is going on.

Realize this. You may think that you are walking in the light because you are in church, and you hang out with Christians, and the reality is you may be saying it and lying to yourself. The great news is that today God stands ready to rescue you and transfer you out of the darkness into the kingdom of light. God's Word is a light that can lead you out of darkness into the light with Him.

So here is the critical question; How can you know if you are walking in darkness, or if you are walking in the light? I will carefully provide a very clear answer to that question directly from the passage.

Look at verse 8. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* People who are in the dark deny their sin, and believe a self-imposed lie that they are ok. People who are walking in the light see and understand the truth about themselves. The truth is that we have sin and are sinners. If we say we don't have sin, it is because we are in darkness. If you believe that you are basically a good person, and that you are not a wicked sinner, and that you live a good clean life that God would accept, then you are currently in the dark and deceived. If you are walking in the light, the light of God's truth, the light of God's holiness, the light of God's perfection and glory, the splendor and majesty of the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, then when you look at yourself, you will see uncleanness. You will behold the chief of sinners. You will lower your head and cry out for God's mercy. You know that you are spiritually poor, and this makes you sad, and you are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because you don't have it within yourself. You are broken, and humbled, and see the stains and spots and imperfections as one who is not yet glorified. You often cry out and say Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death? You will often feel like an unworthy servant, deserving of God's wrath and rejection.

Again, verse 8 states *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.* Just because we say we are ok doesn't make it so. It matters not that we have a high self-concept and belief that we are ok. No matter how much good we do, and how much we help others, if we say we have no sin, we are self-deceived. No one walking in the light would ever say they are without sin. If we are in fellowship with God, and walking in the light, we will be keenly aware that we do have sin, and that within us dwells no good thing.

I hope that you are seeing the futility and deception of trying to overcome a guilty conscience by telling yourself that you are not all that bad. That is darkness speech. I invite you this morning to leave the darkness, and come into the light. Here's what you will see. You will see the ugliness and wretchedness of your sinful state. When you come into the light, you will be naked and exposed with no excuse and no place to hide. It is a place of humility and vulnerability. It is the reason that people do not come to Christ. They do not want to admit the truth about themselves.

John 3:19-21 *And this is the judgment, the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things*

hates the light and does not come into the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

The truth is that only God is good. God is light, and when I come into the light my evil works of self righteous efforts and moral platitudes are exposed for what they are – garbage, waste and hypocrisy. Filthy rags. Stuff that seems pretty good in the dark (because I can't see it) looks horrible in the bright light of day.

Here's where you need to get real. Here's where you need to ask God for the grace to be honest with yourself, and open your eyes, and see the truth about yourself. You are not a good person. You are not a worthy person. You are a sinner. You have missed the mark and fallen short of the target. You have gone your own way, and lived your life for yourself and the approval of others. You have given the attention and worship due your Creator to yourself and other pursuits. Come into the light and see yourself for who you really are. If you walk in the light, you will never say you have no sin. You will clearly recognize your condition. You will see yourself as poor, naked, wretched, and needy.

Walking in the light is facing the Word of God. God's Word, specifically His law, brings us to a proper assessment of our condition. The law of God declares us transgressors. God's righteous standard shows us as falling short. The Word of God is a sword that penetrates to the very heart of man and lays bare his thoughts and intents as well as actions. The righteousness that God requires transcends mere physical action and outward conformity. Jesus said that only the pure in heart will see God. Let's listen to God's assessment from Romans 3:10-18

As it is written, None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

At this point, you may be sensing some resistance within yourself. You may be thinking "I know that I am not perfect and have made some mistakes, but I am not that wicked and depraved! That just doesn't describe me. I have some problems, but I am just not all that bad." Listen carefully again to the Word of God: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If we minimize our sin, and affirm that we are not all that bad, we are in darkness. Oh my friend, come into the fullness of His light, and see yourself for who you really are! Be overwhelmed and overtaken by the wickedness and sinfulness of your heart. As your sinful self-righteous heart and mind protest and tell you that you have never shed blood or taken another person's life, come into the light and hear the Savior say that if you have anger and resentment in your heart, you stand guilty of murder. As your self-righteous self proclaims that you would never cheat on your spouse, hear the Savior say that your lustful glance and desire declares you guilty of adultery. Beloved, if you walk in the light as He is in the light, you will see your true condition. Come out of hiding and fully experience the guilt and conviction and helplessness of your depraved status.

Humble yourself before the Word of God. Allow it to crush you and decimate your pride and ego. Feel the judgment and condemnation as you are declared guilty. Allow yourself to carry the weight of

your sin, and the hopelessness and frustration of trying to change your stubborn, obstinate heart. See the vanity of trying to be good enough to be accepted by a perfect righteous judge that has no tolerance for sin and non-compliance. Fully realize that by the works of the law no human being will ever be justified in His sight. Come fully into the light and see your true condition. If you are truly saved, you are here often. If you have never been here until now, you have been hiding in the deceptive darkness of self justification. You can say all day long that you have fellowship with God, but it means nothing. If you deny that this is your condition, you are lying to yourself and others. If you are in the light, you will feel the overwhelming need for a righteousness that you don't possess. In the light you will feel naked and exposed, and long to have a covering for your shame. And if you are there right now, you are experiencing the grace and kindness of God as He is opening your eyes so that you can see what is really true about you.

THE DELIVERENCE

As our kind and gracious and righteous God enables you to behold your weakness and failures, He will show you something else as well. In your need, in your fear, in your confusion and heaviness, He wants you to look and behold something else; a person. See the purity and holiness and splendor of a beautiful and perfect Savior. Behold the perfect, righteous One. Listen as he calls to you, in your heaviness, and sorrow, and desperation:

Matthew 11:25-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

As you stand exposed and helpless, let this invitation and promise touch you like never before. I John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and He is just and He will forgive us our sins and He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* What must we do as we recognize our deep need? Must we try even harder, and labor. Must we do penance, and more good works? Will my sorrow and weeping at the altar be the cure? No! It is time to surrender and enter the rest of His promise. It is time to cease from your religion and your good works. Lay down your filthy rags and scanty fig leaves that can never cover your shame. Come to Christ and agree with Him about your condition. Admit your need. CONFESS your sin to Him. As you stand in the bright light of his holiness and splendor, and see your sin and your guilt, admit and acknowledge openly your wretched condition. Cry out, beat your breast and call "God be merciful to me a sinner". Plead with the one hanging on the cross "Remember me when you enter your kingdom".

He is meek. He is lowly. And He died for sinners. He is the great physician that came for the sick. There is no penance or action that will remove your guilt. There is no payment that can relieve the debt. We are bankrupt. All we can do is CONFESS our sins and cry for mercy – and praise His name, HE IS FAITHFUL, dependable, and He is also just. That means He is sinless and perfect. He is the holy lamb without spot or blemish. He is the One who came from heaven, born of a virgin, who has existed with the Father eternally. The One in whom the Father is well pleased. He alone is holy, and the one who can make a sinner clean. He is the One who can take away my stains and my spots and my shame. Only He can remove the guilt, and pay my debt, and take my punishment so that I might be freed. Only He can satisfy the just requirement of the righteousness of God. Only in His sacrifice and death is there an appeasement and relief from the judgment of God. It is only mine to confess and come to Him. To break, to surrender, to yield, to submit.

If I confess my sins, as my Advocate He will plead my case before the righteous judge, and as my Mediator, He will bridge the gap, and as My Savior, He offers His righteous life as a sacrifice and appeasement for my sin. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and deeply acquainted with my grief. But He carried away my sins, He bore them to Calvary, and there satisfied the righteous requirements of a Holy God. He fully took the punishment and wrath due me, and now I have been given His righteousness. If I will confess my sin, and receive Him as my Savior, I am declared righteous, and my sin is removed. He will cover my nakedness and shame with the white royal robe of His righteousness. As my Advocate before the throne of heaven, He pleads my case before the judge, and asks for absolution of my guilt, based solely on His own work that He accomplished in full on the cross of Calvary. And the gavel will fall, and I will be declared forgiven and free.

There is only one way that a sinner can be accepted by a Holy righteous judge. The penalty for my sin must be paid by the shedding of blood of a righteous substitute. There could be no arbitrary forgiveness based on a sentimental whim. This is true love expressed in action! This is real mercy demonstrated. This is beyond sentimental pity. This is a violent and passionate love that is beyond comprehension. How can it be that the righteous pure and holy Son of God would come and take the guilt and punishment for my sin? Yet it is true. And if you will confess your sin, He is faithful and just, and promises to forgive you and cleanse you completely from all unrighteousness.

Beloved, walking in the light is walking in admission of my sin and also trusting in His faithfulness and His righteousness. I refuse to lean upon anything but my Savior and His work. He will cleanse me. He will wash me. He will make me new – every morning. Mine is to confess, His is to cleanse. You can't cleanse yourself and wash away your sins. You need to let Him wash you. Confess your sins and ask for His mercy. If you come to Him, He will receive you. He will never cast you out. He will never forsake you.

As a believer, I have been fully forgiven and delivered from the penalty of all my sins, past, present, and future. But as I am walking in the light, it is through the full acknowledgment and exposure of my sin that the power of that sin is broken in my life. Unexposed sin in the heart of the believer causes much temporal consequence and even judgment if it remains unconfessed. Humility and confession are the means to liberation from the power of sin in my life. Because I have an Advocate, I can fully face my sins. Christ beckons all of us to come to the throne to receive grace and mercy every day. Listen to the experience of a godly prophet of Israel as he walked in the light:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. And above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

Agree with God that you are unclean, and know that He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The cleansing will be painful, like a burning coal touching unclean lips. But your guilt will be removed, and your sins will be covered, and the power of sin will be broken in your life as you walk more and more in holiness, putting off sinful habits, and putting on righteous attitudes and behavior.

THE DECISION – This leaves you with a decision with a decision this morning. You will either choose to admit your sin and trust wholly in Christ for the forgiveness and deliverance He provided through His death, or choose to deny your need for a Savior and cling to your deficient religion, good works and self righteousness.

What do you choose to trust; yourself or Christ? There are only ever those two choices. The first choice is to humble yourself and ask for the grace of God that is provided solely based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The alternative is to maintain your dignity and pride and hold on to your own goodness and religious belief that you are basically good and ok. The first choice leads to the praise and glory of God the Creator, the latter leads to the idolatrous worship of self.

So if the Spirit of God has used His Word this morning to convince you of your sin, and you have seen yourself, I encourage you to agree with His assessment, and then cast yourself at His feet and ask Him for His mercy. He will receive you and cleanse you and set you free! That is His offer and promise.