

Walking in the Light

By Paris Reidhead*

1 John:

“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; (For the life was manifest, 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;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. 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. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 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 that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:1-10)

Our text for this morning is the sixth verse, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”

The overall theme for these sessions I’ll be privileged to speak to you is “Evidences of Eternal Life.”

Some years ago, forty years ago or more, a young pastor graduated from Moody Bible Institute, and became the teacher and leader of two small churches in Western Illinois. As he had read and studied 1 John, he thought that it would be very good if he could have a three month period in which he spoke from 1 John, and the people would agree together to read the entire little letter every week. This was not going to be too great a task for them, nor for him, and one that he felt would have blessing.

About five or six weeks into this, one of the deacons of one of the two churches came to him and said, “Pastor, I’ve been born again!” “Well,” he said, “I know that - you’ve testified; been a Christian for many years.”

“Oh, no, no! I’ve been a professing believer, but this past week, for the first time, I knew what it was to pass from death to life.”

Before the three months were up, there were twenty five of the members of one church - and about the same number of the second church, who’d been members for years - that testified to having been born of God.

Now, you would expect, would you not, that this was not unlikely. We’ve been hearing for decades - probably some of you, for me, for decades, for that matter - you’ve been hearing that wise careful observers (I do not count myself one - I’m really just repeating what I’ve read from their pens or heard from their lips) maintain that probably only about one out of ten of the members of evangelical churches in America give Biblical evidence of having been born of God. And you will also realize that it’s been stated repeatedly by many (and again, I’m but the one who’s carrying someone else’s study) probably no more than one half of one percent of those who make first time decisions for Christ in evangelism in America give evidence of having been born of God twelve months later.

One of Satan’s grand strategies, it does seem, has been to reduce the Gospel of Jesus Christ down to a formula, so that people can get in; having subscribed to the formula, whatever it might be, with not having repented, not having been born of God, giving no evidence of having passed from death to life, other than subscription to the formula! And the consequence of this is, that in your ministries, you (you will be ministering for the Lord, and I trust that’s everyone hearing my voice) are going to have people come to you and say, “You know, I’m not sure that I am a child of God. I’m not sure that I’m born again.”

Well, that's a question that's handled in a very great number of ways. I, in the past, have handled it by saying, "What do you mean? I've known you for years! We've been members of the same church. We went to the same Bible school. What do you mean?" Laughed it off.

Well, if a person were to go to a friend of the family who's also a physician, and say, "Doctor, I think perhaps I have 'the big C'; I think I may have cancer." Would that person, coming with that concern, to a friend who is a doctor, want the doctor to laugh it off, pat him on the back, smile at him and say "Oh, you've just been reading too much of the Reader's Digest or something." Would they want that? Oh, I don't think so.

If the doctor is truly a friend, you know what he'll do? He's going to say, "Well, I trust that you do not have it. But since you have a concern, I'm going to do everything possible to alleviate that concern. Every test known to medicine will be used, and we're going to find out. We can't wait a day - we'll begin now. And I will bring you back as soon as I can make the arrangements for the further tests." That would be the wise way, and the kind and loving way for a doctor to deal with someone who had suspicion of a need.

And I believe that what we're going to be considering in these days constitutes the "Divine X-ray Machine" - the Word of God. I have marked each of the verses that I'll be giving to you in my Bible, and when someone comes to me with that question, I treat it very seriously and say, "Well, now, since I look only on the outside, and all I hear is what you say, I can't pass judgement on that question that you've raised. Let's go to the divine x-ray machine, the Word of God, look at it carefully and prayerfully, and ask the Holy Ghost to be the x-ray power that will reveal your heart to you, that will divide between the soul and the spirit, and show you your true state."

Some years ago, the one who was colleague and associate of Leonard Ravenhill¹, Tom Hare, was at Chicago South Side Alliance Church with Dr. Tozer², just before he was to leave to return to Ireland. He'd been many months ministering here in the States. Dr. Tozer said, "Well, Brother Hare, are you going to do a lot of preaching when you get back to Ireland?"

Tom Hare looked at him and said, "No, Brother Tozer. I've been preaching a great deal while I've been here. I'm going back home to a family cottage that we have, and I'm going to sit down, no telephone, no friends to look me up, and I'm going to have a preview of the judgement seat of Christ. Brother Tozer, I want to find out the worst about myself while there's still time enough to do something about it." Great wisdom, it does seem to me.

When John Wesley³ sent out the young preachers from the movement in Britain, he made this statement. He said, "Young man, as you go, and as you preach, something must happen if you're the servant of God, and anointed with the Spirit of God. You must never leave people the way you found them. Something must happen. When they have finished listening to your message, they should be either glad, sad or mad - but not the way you found them." And I expect that I will have all three reactions during the course of this week. So be it. The fact of the matter is, when we come to the Word of God, we should never be the same. If it's true that these things have been wrought in us, then we should be glad. If there's question, should be sad. If you disagree with the speaker, then perhaps mad. But even that has its benefit because, generally, it results in becoming Bereans, to search the scriptures, to see if these things be so. And so, even that has a salutary effect.

Now, 1 John. When was it written? That's important. Probably, John's Gospel wasn't written until from between 85 and 95 AD, and 1 John was written after that. Adam Clarke, in his commentary, in Vol 5 and page 508 records this, "Tertullian and others say that Domitian, having declared war against the church of Christ in the fifteenth year of his reign, AD 95, ordered John the Apostle banished from Ephesus. He was carried to Rome, where he was immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil, out of which,

¹ Leonard Ravenhill (1907-1994) An English Christian Evangelist and author.

² Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

³ John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement

however, he escaped unhurt. John was afterwards banished to the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, where he wrote the Apocalypse.” Well, presumably he also wrote the little epistle of 1 John, and then 2 John and 3 John.

In John 20:31, we read, from the pen and heart of John the Apostle, “But these are written,” - namely, the Gospel of John - “that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you might have life through His name.”

In 1 John 5:13, we read, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

The first was that “you may believe and, believing, have life” and the second in 1 John “that you may know that you have eternal life.”

I think I know how these little letters were written. It was probably that a group of friends went out to the island of Patmos to visit with the apostle. Even though he was exiled there, he probably could have had friends come to see him. And I rather suppose that, as they were sitting there looking at the lapping waves of the blue sea, they would say, “Brother John, you know, things have changed in the last years. Up where we are, there are some people that are talking about being believers in Jesus, and they’re not like the old-timey ones. They live different, talk different - how do you... how can we tell? We don’t want to exclude anybody that is His, we don’t want to include those that aren’t. Would you write to us and explain, give us what we need to know, so that we know how to handle this situation?” Well, I believe that’s what we have in this little letter. God’s explanation - how we can handle such cases.

Now I call your attention to the fifth verse of this first chapter that I’ve read for you, “This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him, and we declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Now, this is a statement concerning the nature of God. This is not an attribute of God, though many there are who so treat it. This is a statement of His nature, who He is - “God is light”. Elsewhere we read, “God is love”. This is a summing up of the divine essence - on God’s moral side - “God is love”. First is a summing up of the divine essence on the intellectual side - “God is light”.

Now, this is what God is. He’s the one being by whom all else receives the adequate interpretation. One of the translations is, “Darkness in Him there is not any at all”. He’s the only source of understanding - there isn’t any revelation higher than He is. Now that’s a statement as to the nature of God. You can understand, therefore, that God is prompting John to give us this, so that understanding who God is, we’ll have a better understanding of those that are born into His family, and made partakers of the divine nature.

“If we say,” said he, “that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” When I’m giving this sixth verse to that person who’s come to me, saying, “I’m not sure of my relationship with God in Christ,” I ask this question, “Here it is. I didn’t write it. I’m just having you read it and pointing to it. If we say we have fellowship with Him and we walk in darkness, we lie, and we do not the truth.”

Now, 1 John is also striking a blow at Gnosticism and antinomianism, which prevailed in his day. Many expositors try to make this to be the entire purpose of the little letter, but I hold that’s merely incidental. But it’s there. The Gnostics and the antinomians all held that the enlightened, those that had this higher information and enlightenment, all action was morally indifferent, and meaningless, because once they’d been enlightened, their conduct, however evil, is unimportant. And that was taught. One of those who taught it was Cerinthus. One day, in Ephesus, John is reported, by Polycarp, to have gone down to the bath, the public bath, and he was informed that Cerinthus was in the bathhouse. And he quickly got his robe around him and tied it up and ran out of it, because, he said, “I would not dare stay in the same building where that heretic is, lest God should smite it, and him and me, because I dared to be there when he was there.” Cerinthus was a gnostic, and he was antinomian, and he taught that moral conduct was meaningless - had no moral significance at all.

John declares this, the Holy Ghost declares this, to be a lie. “Walk.” What’s it mean? Well, we understand what falling is. You’ve walked in Minnesota sidewalks in the wintertime; you’ve all had the opportunity to fall, and probably most of us have had the experience of falling. Falling is when we take a step that doesn’t turn out to be a step - it’s a mis-step - and we end up

on the flat of our back or on our knees - however gravity may have dealt with us. But we fall. Now there is no point in the walk of a Christian that he couldn't fall into sin. We're not talking about that. We're talking about walking. And to walk is to fall under control. If you don't think that walking is a fall, then just put your foot down on what looks to be grass, and it's got a hole under the grass. The lawnmower cut it off even, but there's about a four inch depression. I was doing that. Our family had gone out to Oaklands - one of the interesting old estates in Northern Virginia, and I was walking across the field, and my foot went down on what I thought was solid ground, and on that grass, and I found myself lying out prone on the grass. A very undignified position - I didn't hurt myself as much as I hurt my feelings. Cause they said, "Look at that old man, falling and all. What's he been having?" Well, what I had was an accident. That grass looked even, with that same amount of dirt under it, but there was four inches less dirt there. And just that four inches threw me out of balance into the ground. That's a fall. A walk is a controlled fall. But with purpose, and with direction.

And so this text declares that "if we walk in darkness". Walk involves the entire life, its outward aspects. To walk in darkness is to live habitually and intentionally in the practice of sin. It's to profess to have fellowship with God, who is light, and then to walk in darkness and in sin, which is to lie.

In Ephesians 5:8-9 we read, "You were once darkness, now you are light in the Lord. Walk as the children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Fellowship with God. John said to those to whom he sent this letter, "These things are written that you might have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Fellowship with God excludes walking in darkness. We can't claim to have fellowship with God and continue to walk in darkness. Carefully read Ephesians 4:17-32 so that you get a clear, explicit picture of what it is to walk in light, "Walk not as other Gentiles walk" - in the darkness of the mind and of the spirit. What is it? Vanity of the mind - empty headed; the understanding darkened; alienated from the life of God; full of ignorance; blind of heart; choosing uncleanness over righteousness and cleanness. That's the way those who are in darkness walk. "We've not so learned Christ," said Paul in that letter. If we're His, we've learned to walk in the light, to put off the old man, to be renewed in mind, and to put on the new man. Now, fellowship with God excludes - totally excludes - walking in darkness. Now, I go back, and tell you that that person who has been born into the family of God has had certain things happen. Now, we've seen how he's to walk, but why is it to be expected that he can walk that way?

Last June, I had the privilege of being here and speaking to you on "So Great Salvation". At which time, those of you who were here remember that we gave you some charts with some fifteen numbers on it. And the first of those were, number one, when God wants to bring one out of darkness into light, out of death into life, the first thing He does is to put somebody up next to the sinner, who's a sample of God's grace, to lift Christ before the sinner, to intercede for and to witness to him. And the first phase of the divine operation is to awaken the sinner to his plight, to his danger, to his being dead in his sins.

The second thing the Spirit of God does - through the Word - is to convict the sinner of his crimes, of turning to his own way, for sin is the committal of the will to the principle and the practice of pleasing oneself as the end and reason for their being. And on the basis of having discovered the nature of the crime, the Spirit of God then moves upon the heart of the sinner, through all these agencies of grace, to bring him to repentance. And to repent is to change one's mind, one's intention, one's purpose, one's rule of living, one's principal government - from pleasing himself to pleasing God. And the scripture so explicitly says, "Except we repent, we will perish." (Luke 13:3) No one has been born of God, who has not repented. For it's only on the basis of that genuine change of purpose in the heart, that God quickens saving faith into the heart of the sinner, to reach back to embrace the Son of God. And on the basis of believing in the heart, that God raised Christ from the dead, then he is born of God. He passes from death to life. It has the witness of the Spirit to the fact that he has been born of God.

But there's also the witness of the life. And the one who, prior to this work of grace in heart and life, walked in darkness, now purposes to walk in the light. And so, Paul, writing to these readers in Ephesus and to us, said, If you see people continuing to walk in darkness, claiming to be the children of God - they're liars! You've not so learnt Christ!

How do you walk? How do you walk? Fellowship with God requires the right attitude towards sin. Now, the first attitude we've looked at is walking in darkness. This is the one who, by choice, prefers to do that which is according to the course of this

world, according to the prince of the power of the air - that rule of life, that moral anarchy - I will do what I want to do. Now, that's one attitude. That's the attitude of the unregenerate, that's the attitude of the lost. But it's one way people walk. Walking in darkness. Once we did. Anyone who declares that he did not ever walk in darkness is certainly not telling the truth. He's making God out to be a liar. He's making God out to be One who said, who was not telling the truth when He said, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Now, everyone who breathes the breath of human life made a choice at the age of accountability, "I'm going to do what I want to do."

Now, in this work of grace, bringing men out of death into life, we've dealt with that, and the purpose of the regenerate heart is to please God. Not like the gnostic who said, "Well, you can have religion, but you don't need, you have no responsibility for any of the things you do." Or the antinomians, who deny that sin was bad. Or those perfectionists who would say they were incapable of sin. Dear friends, as long as you live, breathing the breath of human life, you're going to be subject to temptation. Temptation is the proposition presented to your intellect to satisfy a good appetite in a bad way. And sin is the decision to do it. And there is no state of grace that you'll ever attain that will immunize you to the possibility of being tempted, and of choosing. But that is a great deal of difference, as we will see in the subsequent text that we explore together, between falling into sin, overtaken in a fault, or with a life purpose to practice sin and walk in darkness.

When one has discovered that they have disobeyed God, that they have been overtaken in a fault, they have yielded to temptation, when they have deviated from that firm purpose they made in repentance, to please God in everything; Christian friend, when that happens, what is the procedure we must follow? What must we do? Is it possible, once having been made a partaker of God's forgiving grace, and now, child of God, to fall, purpose to please God, to walk in the light, but we've been overtaken? What's the procedure? What happens?

Well, if repentance was genuine and real, then it means that the moment of discovery, or at some moment in that discovery of the nature of what has been done and how it has grieved God, and how it has dishonored Him, the believer judges himself. Paul, writing to that church at Corinth set it forth, when these had gotten into sin in relation to the Lord's table. Very sacred moment in the life of worship, and yet sin had occurred. And so, the apostle is telling them, "Look. Judge yourselves that you be not judged. For he that is judged is chastened of the Lord, that he should not be condemned with the world."

Judge yourself. What does that mean? Here you are, your purpose is to walk in the light, you've truly been born of God, and your desire is to please Him. And yet, led aside by appetite, whatever it is, you have made a choice that grieves God and grieves you, because your purpose is to please God. What're you going to do about it?

First, you're going to judge it for what it is. Examine yourself, and see what it is, and when you've passed judgement upon it, bring yourself before the judgement, the bar. Sit yourself down as the judge. Call yourself in as the accused. Open the book, the Word of God. Look yourself square in the eye, and say, "This was sin." No excuses, no trying to explain it away. It's sin. Judge yourself. That's scriptural, that's what you have to do.

Then in Isaiah 55:7, we are told, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy, and unto our God for He will abundantly pardon." But what is involved? Forsake. Forsake. Judge it, forsake it. Through with it. Finished with it. It's gone. It's done. No more. Well, that's important. You see, the scripture is very explicit. There are those who say, "Well, I just have a besetting sin," with the intention of continuing to practice it in the future. "Well, I just ask the Lord to forgive me." I wonder - seriously wonder - if in such case there is forgiveness at all.

You know, one time, the Roman Catholics, years and years ago, in centuries past, in another day, they purchased indulgences with money. Purchased forgiveness with cash. But we've improved on that in the twentieth century. We don't use credit cards - that's not the improvement I'm talking about. We've improved on it, because we forgive ourselves - before we've been dealt with God about the matter.

Now, much of that which is confession is nothing more than trying to use the Word of God as the means of finding license to continue without intermediate judgement - and such is not what the word teaches at all. He said we're to examine ourselves, we're to judge ourselves and we are to forsake everything God shows us to be sin. And here in the ninth verse of this first

chapter, we are told that we are to confess it as sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But confession without true dealing with it, without true repentance, without true forsaking is just an exercise in hypocrisy and futility.

I remember years ago, I went to one of my teachers here in the city when I was in a certain school. I told him about a problem I was having, and it was breaking my heart because I knew it was grieving God. I had learnt that out in Minnetonka, there were some people there that were having a conference called - at that time it seems to me - "Keswick". And there were men, I think, in one of those years, one of the teachers, preachers, expounding victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It was Cameron Townsend who later founded Summer Institute of Linguistics. And I went to this dear man and said, "Doctor..." And he said, "Now listen. You don't want to go out there and get that heresy about victory. Nobody's perfect. You'll just grow out of a lot of these problems as the years go by. Just be sure that whenever you fail, you ask God to forgive you." The only hope he had for victory was that I'd get older sometime. What a terrible perversion of the truth of God! When it says, "There is no temptation that has overtaken us but what is common to man, and God will, with the temptation, make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it." And when I was looking and yearning and longing for a way of escape, he told me there wasn't any! Just to be sure to confess it. But I knew what he meant by "confess it". What he meant was just say, "O Lord, I've failed again - please forgive." Then I found out years later that's not what "confess" means. I discovered from the Word what it means. You know what it is? It means to call it by name. That's what confession is. To call it by name.

I think I told you last summer, but I'll repeat it, for those who weren't here, an experience I had years ago, in one of our fine Christian colleges. I was privileged to be the speaker for the meetings, evangelistic meetings at the college. God moved, there were some nights when we had people on the platform lined up to tell what God had done in their life till twelve and one and two in the morning. This particular night a group of people had come to the front, and we prayed with them, and some of them had gone to share with the others what God had done in their life, and to confess to their fellow students that which they had done, and ask the forgiveness of the student body. There was one woman, young woman, that came, over at the end. When others were gone, she was there, and I went over, and I said, "What are you here for?" And she said, "Well, I wanted to talk to you alone, because I've got a problem." She told how the previous summer, she'd worked at this certain place, and that something had happened, and she said, "I've confessed it many, many times, but I don't have peace about it."

"Well," I said, "why not, if you've done it many times, let's once more." And I wanted to find out where she was. And we knelt to pray, and she started to lecture God. And after a few minutes of that, I touched her shoulder, pointed my finger and said, "You just continue, I'm going to go, some important things I need to take care of."

"What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, I, I..."

"I'm praying!"

I said, "No, you're not. You're lecturing God, you're not praying."

She said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "You're here for one purpose, and one only - to deal with this. And you've gone all around it, but you haven't done what you knelt to do, which is to confess your sin."

She said, "What is it?"

I said, "Don't you really know?"

She said, "No."

I said, "You have to call it by name, and tell God exactly what you did."

“Oh!” she said, “I couldn’t do that!”

I said, “Where do you think He was when that happened? Asleep? Didn’t see it? Didn’t know about it? You think you’re going to surprise Him? You think you’re going to embarrass Him?”

She said, “Do I have to?”

I said, “That’s what the word means - call it by name.”

And so, we knelt, and she did. And she called it by name. And the fountains of deep broke up in her heart, and then she really broke before the Lord. And after all these weeks and months of going through the motions again and again and again with nothing happening... when she realized that what she’d done, that she had turned aside from walking in the light to walk in darkness, God met her, and she knew peace and joy, forgiveness and restoration of blessing in her life.

Hear it again, “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses from all unrighteousness.” First evidence, How do you walk? Walk in the light.

Father in heaven, we ask Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Thou would apply the Word to each heart and life, and let it accomplish its loving purpose, and bring glory and honour and praise to the name of Thy dear Son, in Whose name and for Whose sake we ask it. Amen.

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