

1 John 1:6-9 Walk in God's light! Easter 3 April 19, 2015

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's never-failing grace and peace are yours through our Lord and Savior who won the victory for us.

God's Word to give us the light of His truth is written in 1 John 1:6-9

This is Your word heavenly Father. Help us to walk in Your truth. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Which of these statements is correct for Christians: "We can do nothing right!" or "We can do nothing wrong!"? One sounds fatalistic, while the other sounds like sinful bragging. Which is right? Both! We have a sinful nature that causes everything we do to be tainted by sin. We have Christ's death and perfect life credited to us through faith, so that everything we do is made perfect in God's sight. With these two opposites applying to us as Christians, we are constantly challenged. But, John encourages us to:

Walk in God's light!

First, we can only walk by God's truth! At John's time there were false teachers who said that physical things were evil and only the spiritual was good. To become more spiritual, they taught that people could expand their minds by experiencing good and evil. So, this gave the false teachers an excuse to sin and call it good. That was the devil's temptation for Adam and Eve in the garden. What a disaster that brought! John warned, "*If we claim to have fellowship with [God] yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.*" What does it mean to walk in darkness? It means to say that a lie is true. It means that when the Bible calls something wrong, people in darkness say that the Bible is wrong. God warned, "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness....*" (Isaiah 5:20) People who reject the truth of God's law will suffer under His curse. If they can't accept God's verdict of sin, they won't believe in a Savior either. They'll be condemned to darkness forever unless they repent.

John wrote, "*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*" (v.8) All people by nature want to deny sin or say it's no big deal. But, we can't avoid our sins or make excuses. We are sinners in the hands of an angry God. On Judgment Day, when He calls out our names, His hand should banish us from heaven forever. Our works won't change that. Our hearts must be changed. Jesus warned, "*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*" (Mark 7:6)

God has given us His truth to change our hearts so we believe in Jesus. Our walk as Christians is still up and down. Sometimes we're in a valley, ashamed of our sins and confessing that we are unworthy of God's blessings. But, then God holds out His truth of Jesus' forgiveness so that we trust in Him to save us. His forgiveness lifts us up above our guilt and assures us that all is well. We want to live for God and thank Him. But after a time, we're tempted to change. As we live for Christ we're lured to think we're better than other Christians. Like the Pharisee in the temple we think: we pray more often, we're more generous, and we're kinder to others. Our good works rather than Christ make us righteous before God. That kind of pride will lead to a fall! While St. Paul was still Saul the persecutor, he thought that he was earning a place in heaven by harming Christians. But, then Jesus appeared and flattened him with the light of His truth. Paul confessed his sins. He later warned the Galatians, "*If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*" (Galatians 6:3)

As Christians, we need to be reminded that we are sinners, no matter what we do! We also need to be reminded that we are always saints through Christ as our Savior no matter what we do! That doesn't mean that we should give up living for Christ. It means that when we tell the truth or help others or show kindness, we give credit to God! Paul wrote, *"It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (Philippians 3:12) Jesus told His disciples, *"When you have done everything you were told to do, you should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"* (Luke 17:10) If we could keep the light of God's truth in our minds, we would more readily walk by faith with Jesus and not rise to heights of sinful pride or fall to depths of despair!

Second, to walk in the light is to live by faith! John wrote, *"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us."* (v.7, 9) How should we picture a Christian walking in God's light? Is it one spiritual victory after another? Is it always saying and doing the right things without sin? Our victory is not in ourselves but in our Lord.

To walk in the light, means that we accept the Bible's description of us. *"All have sinned."* (Romans 3:23) There are no exceptions. Our verses picture sin as something that stains. God created us to be like pure white clothes. But, every time we sin, it's like dumping red ink on them. Our sin cannot be hidden! There is no way to make ourselves clean! The other picture of sin is of something that sticks to us. Think of falling into goopy glue. It gets all over us and then, whatever we touch sticks to us as well. Every sin we have ever done sticks us. It weighs us down and keeps us inclined to sin more! We cannot hide sins from God! We cannot rip those sins away. There is only one thing to do according to John: confess our sins to God!

Then, God assures us, *"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (v.7, 9) The blood of Jesus' sacrifice attacks the worst stains of sin. In His forgiveness, they are all gone! I remember long ago that a bride was preparing for her wedding. Some of her friends had children and had given them markers to play with to keep them busy before the wedding. Who would have thought that one little girl with her marker-covered hands would hug the bride in her white dress! The wedding was delayed for a few minutes for some scrubbing, but the stains were removed. During the wedding Ephesians 5 took on a new application, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."* (5:25-26)

Whenever we confess our sins to God, whatever they are, they are forgiven in Christ. We are cleansed so that we may walk with God. Every time we hear the good news of Christ, every time we think of the cleansing He brought to us in baptism, and every time we receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, we are assured that our sins are gone! We don't have to follow the sinful ways of the past. Jesus has set us free! Whenever we receive His Word by faith, we are not only forgiven as He promised, we are walking with God with renewed strength for our Christian lives!

What does it mean to walk in God's light? Sin is no longer our master. There is no reason to go back into the darkness of sin. Christ has set us free from sin. Paul wrote, *"We were buried with him through baptism... that... we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:4) We won't be perfect in this world, but in Christ we are forgiven and perfect in God's sight! This is God's truth in Christ that will save us. God help us to walk in the light of His Word every day of our lives until we walk with Him in eternity. Amen.