

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

1 John 1:5-2:6

Hypothesis: We will behave in a manner that is in agreement with what we believe. Another way to state this idea is that we will not continually or routinely act in a manner that is out of harmony with what we believe.

The hypothesis (as proposed) will be found to be true as we consider the total expression of a person's life. Our lifestyle will be an "integrated" expression of the various beliefs we hold. We must be careful to view the whole and not think that a specific incident is a true picture of what someone believes.

The fruit we bear in our lives will give evidence of the species and genus of the tree we are. An apple tree will bear apples and not pears. An apple tree may have a year in which there is no fruit. That may or may not be an indication of anything other than external conditions.

One of the things in vogue today is PC - Political Correctness. In striving to be Politically Correct some people will make statements such as "It doesn't make any difference what you believe as long as you believe in something" Like so many **wrong** sayings that are around – there may be some partial truth in such a claim.

It really doesn't make any difference in *what we believe*, **unless** *what we believe* makes a difference in the way we think, in what we say and in what we do. There is a lot of truth in that idea. We could "believe in" communism and if it did not affect anything about us, then what difference does it make? We can "believe in" Jesus Christ and if it does not affect anything about us, then what difference does it make? The other side of this same coin is that "If we genuinely believe in something, then it **will** make a difference in our lives."

John wrote about three areas of living life that pose some problems in the intersection of belief and actual experience for Christians. Those three areas are our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, where we are in the continuum of our transformed nature, and the actions that we take in everyday situations of living.

Demonstrate Holiness – 1:5-7

⁵This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7 (NASB95)

If we were to ask most Christians if they have a "personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ," the typical response would be "Yes, I am saved." The questioner's response to that answer should be "that was not the question." If we are born-again of the Spirit of God as a result of faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ in which His blood was shed to cleanse us from all sin, then we are saved or justified in God's view. This "salvation" is what makes it possible or allows us to have a personal relationship or engage in fellowship with God. It does not mean that we are actually engaging in such a fellowship relationship (to be somewhat redundant).

That exchange might provoke a question such as "How can I know if such fellowship is happening?" If we understand that fellowship requires being in the same place (not necessarily physically but spiritually) then we can conclude that since God is Light that the evidence of our being in fellowship with God is that we are living life in the Light rather than in darkness.

We must be careful to measure ourselves against God's standard (light) and not compare ourselves with the world (darkness). God's goal for us is that there is "no darkness at all" in us.

God is working on us to prepare us as a bride without spot or wrinkle. Part of God's revelation to us is about ourselves. He will show us areas of darkness in our lives and our response must be to shine the light of the word of God on these and walk in the light.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Walvoord and Zuck) observes that "it is significant that John talked of walking *in* the light, rather than *according to* the light. To walk *according to* the light would require sinless perfection and would make fellowship with God impossible for sinful humans. To walk *in* it, however, suggests instead openness and responsiveness to the light. John did not think of Christians as sinless, even though they are walking in the light, as is made clear in the last part of this verse."

The effectiveness of the salvation provided through the blood Christ shed is ongoing and provides the means for cleansing from sin and sins – past, present and future. Only in virtue of the Savior's work on the cross can there be any fellowship between imperfect creatures and the infinitely perfect God.

John used the concept of light and darkness as surrogates for good and evil. We know that God is completely good and does not have any evil. As John stated it, He is all light and no darkness. We, as Christians, talk about "being in Christ" which is positional and applies to every Christian. The idea of being in the Light is related to the sphere of where true communion with God can occur and is correctly understood on an experiential level.

A practical comparison of light and darkness and the consequences can be found in comparing the destiny of those who embrace Christianity and those who are Secular Humanists. One important area is that of the value of life. The Christian viewpoint is that all life matters and is to be protected. The Secular Humanists view is that life is not important if the possessor of that life is defenseless and cannot fight back as in the case of the unborn and the elderly or someone who is comatose. Life and Light go together just as death and darkness go together. Another important area is the afterlife or what happens following physical death. As Christians, we look at physical life as an opportunity to develop our spiritual connection with our Father in heaven. And this leads to a wonderful, bright optimistic sunlit future. The secular viewpoint is that, at the end of the day, there's absolutely nothing. The curtain comes down onto an eternal darkness. Your soul doesn't exist. You are nothing but a cunningly arranged set of molecules of carbon and hydrogen and oxygen. And when the heart stops pumping, that's the end of it all.

The phrase "with one another" (verse seven) is sometimes taken to mean "with other believers." While it should be true that the commonality of our fellowship with God and His Son would be a genuine basis for fellowship with other believers, the text really is pointing to that relationship a believer has with the Father and the Father has with the believer. Walking in the light (obedience to God and following the leading of the Holy Spirit) leads to fellowship with God. Walking in darkness (disobedience) prevents fellowship with God. John's verdict on anyone who says they have a personal relationship with God and have a lifestyle that is contrary to the clearly revealed will and commandments of God is that "such a person is a liar."

There may be some who will make the claim that they are either so good that they don't sin or that no one has any right to make rules for them, therefore, if there are no rules then there is no sin. John addressed this issue, also.

Confess Sin – 1:8-2:2

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. ¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He

Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. 1 John 1:8-2:2 (NASB95)

It can be argued that John is writing about two issues: Sin and Sins. “Sin” refers to the sin principle in us or what we sometimes call the Old Nature. “Sins” refer to our actions that are contrary to God’s way. The cross is God’s provision for dealing with our Old Nature. It must be put to death. There is no other provision. While the cross adequately deals with the Old Nature, the influence of that Old Nature still impacts us since the parts of our very being (mind, emotions, and will) have been programmed or strongly influence by that Old Nature. We really do need a transformation by the renewing (reprogramming) of our minds to eliminate those old ideas and values after we have experienced the new birth. This is what Paul told the Christians in Rome in chapter 12 of his letter to them.

Some people experience an immediate delivery from some of those “old” influences and then they may struggle to overcome other lingering influences before gaining victory. There are some Christian groups who claim that they are completely “sanctified” immediately at the new birth. That would be an example of someone who would claim to have no sin or lingering traces of influence from the Adamic nature. As Paul wrote in Roman 7 and 8, these influences have no legitimate claim on Christians since we are dead to the Old Nature. As a consequence, we do not have to follow the old impulses.

A simple example may help illustrate this point. It is not uncommon for a Christian to make a statement such as, “he made be so mad that I wanted to hit him, but I restrained myself.” Such a “want to” is clearly an influence of the Adamic nature and Paul would tell that person, “You did not learn Christ that way.” In other words, such a Christian still has some “transforming” to take care of and has not arrived.

What about our actions? Not only do we have the “attitude influence” from the Old Nature, but we will frequently have bad behavior or actions that are contrary to God’s way. The Blood of Jesus deals with our actions that are contrary to God’s will in life. Even when we have been born of the Spirit and have a new nature, we will make mistakes and do and say things that are contrary to God’s will and way. Some people may claim that this doesn't happen to them, but this is not in agreement with the word of God.

A trap into which many Christians fall is that of “denial of the fact that we have sinned.” One of the worst things we can do is to rationalize our bad behavior. If we rationalize our sins, then where is there room for confession, repentance and forgiveness? The way that we deal with such errors so that these do not disrupt the fellowship that we have with God is to admit the error (confess our sins) which He then provides or applies forgiveness. We have confidence that God will not reject our request. After “confession” is done, then we have a restored fellowship with God and that makes that inner sense of well-being possible.

The idea of confession is not some ritualized practice of saying the words “I have sinned.” The concept of the Greek word “homologeō” is “to say the same thing.” In other words, true confession means that we are in agreement with what God has proclaimed about the matter in question. Agreement would imply that we would put into practice the attitudes and actions inherent in the principle or spirit of God’s word and not continue to do things our own way. I believe that is called “repentance.”

The result of such ongoing “repentance” is that fellowship in the Body is strengthened and God’s purpose in transforming us and preparing us for eternity is being accomplished in our lives.

The fact that God will forgive us of our sins is no excuse to go out and sin. The fact that God is so good and more than fair should make us desire to never break the fellowship and

disrupt the joy that we have when we are in close communion with Him. If we thought there were no forgiveness and if we sinned one time, we might think “Well, I have messed up and nothing can be done to fix it, so I will just continue sinning.”

God has provided all we need to live in such a way that we are pleasing to Him. His word and His Holy Spirit provide the target and the guidance system to accomplish the goal. The message that John has given us is that forgiveness is there for those whose lives have been changed.

An interesting observation in the New Bible Commentary is the following: “While Christians do not live in sin, we never (in this life) become completely sinless. The closer we come to God the more sensitive our consciences become and the more we realize that we are sinners. A paradoxical consequence of this is that we now come to appreciate the fact that in our sinful state we are unworthy to approach our great and holy God. We need help. And John assures us that we have the help we need. When we sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense.” This, of course, is the role of an Advocate. Jesus is not only our Advocate, He is also the equivalent of the Mercy Seat in the old sacrificial system, He is the place of atonement and restoration and this benefit is intended for all the people of the world if they will believe it and receive it.

Seek to Obey – 2:3-6

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 1 John 2:3-6 (NASB95)

The word “know” implies more than just a casual acquaintance. This is intimate knowledge available only to those who walk with Him or have fellowship with Him or have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In Amos 3:3 we find the question “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” We do not walk with God unless we agree with Him. Agreement (saying the same thing) is the foundation for obedience. It is only by obedience that the purposes of God (transforming us into the image of Jesus) of making our nature of the same character as His (God is love) will happen. If the essence of “who we are” is being transformed so that Jesus is living in and through us, then it is totally logical that we will behave as He did. This is essentially the hypothesis that we stated at the beginning of our consideration of these verses.

In verse three, we see that the **evidence** that we know Him is that we keep or obey His commandments. The **means** by which we come to really know Him is found in the Gospel of John in 14:23 where we see that those who love the Lord will obey or keep His commandments. This leads to God and His Son coming to the person to “abide” (literally “mansion”) with that person. This sound like a circular argument and it is somewhat circular. The question is how do we get into the circle? It starts with the love of God that provides grace and mercy for salvation and with our response of love for Him. The expression of that love is obedience which leads to fellowship with God and His Son which exposes us to the Light and an enhanced knowledge of God.

John touched on our responsibility in this process in verse six. This responsibility is captured in the words “he ought to walk in the way Christ walked.” “Ought” is from the Greek word “opheilo” frequently interpreted to mean something that a person must “strive or seek to do” or to “fulfill an obligation” in order to achieve some outcome. For example, if a person wanted to have apples, then someone might say, “you ought to plant an apple tree.” There is

another Greek word that is also translated into English as “ought.” This synonym is the word “dei” which indicates a “necessity in the nature of things” rather than a personal obligation. Let’s go back to the apple tree example. We could say that if you want apples, then you “ought” (do something of a personal obligation nature) to plant an apple tree, because apple trees “ought” (by their very nature) to produce apples.

How can you know that you are saved? We typically say that we believe in Jesus. This is true; however, what is the outward evidence of such belief? If we don’t do what He said to do, then we do not believe that He is Lord indeed. How can we actually accomplish this? We can’t, not by ourselves or in our own strength. However, God has provided His Holy Spirit to live in us to supply the power to make it happen. In this role the Holy Spirit is described by the Greek word “parakletos” which is the same word used to describe the advocacy role that Jesus has before the Father when we sin. This means that God is totally adequate and sufficient for all we need. He is there to guide us in the right paths and to restore us when we make a misstep and miss the way.