

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

1 John 1:5-10

The word "kiss" describes one of the basic rules of sales and advertising. "Kiss": Keep it simple, stupid. Keep it simple. When you are trying to communicate with other people, when you are trying to tell something to someone else, this rule is so appropriate: Keep it simple, stupid.

In other words, when you have a message, make it clear. There are times when it seems like the Bible doesn't seem very simple or very clear, but there are other times when the message is perfectly clear. Today's text is one such example. The message is very simple and very clear. The unchanging message which was introduced last week is defined for us this week. The message of life, which has existed from the beginning of the world, and which physically appeared in history in the person of Jesus Christ, is really quite a simple message.

There are times when we confuse this very simple message. There are times when we don't act like little children, who humbly and sincerely believe whatever they are told. There are times when we get too philosophical, or too theoretical. There are times when we miss the simple meaning of words, and the simple message they speak. John gives us that simple message in verse 5, then in verses 6-10 he gives us three ways in which that simple message is ignored.

This simple message is:

I. A DEFINITION OF GOD: God is Light.

v.5

We have a definition of God in our Shorter Catechism, and it's

a wonderful answer. But it isn't simple. It is detailed. "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Here is a much simpler definition, God is light.

Notice that it does not say, "God brings light." It does not say that "God is a light." Rather, in absolute terms, God is light.

Jesus Christ certainly understood that about himself.

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 1:4 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

This is an Old Testament definition of God as well.

Ps. 27:1 "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"

Pretty simple definition of God. God is light. We don't talk about it too much, though. "God is love." We're familiar with that, but not as much, "God is light?"

Yet, Christians are called "children of light."

John 12:36 "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

Pretty simple words. So what do they mean? At least two things.

A. Light reveals truth.

God's word is frequently called light, or a lamp.

Prov. 6:23 "For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light."

Ps. 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Paul makes it even clearer in,

2 Cor. 4:3 “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them... 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Light equals the knowledge of the glory of God. So what is darkness? Error, ignorance, unbelief, untruth. So when we say that God is light, we say that God is truth. Therefore, God's word is truth. In fact, by definition, God's word is truth.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”

Let me put it simply: If the Bible is not true, in everything it says, it is not God's word. If the Bible is a book with just one error, it is not God's word. Because God is truth and Satan is the father of all lies.

Illus: There is a wonderful illustration of how human beings reject the truth in the conversation between Pontius Pilate and Jesus, at Jesus trial.

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” 38 Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.”

What a searching question: What is truth? I doubt Pilate expected an answer. He probably thought that there was no answer. Probably thought that truth was whatever the people believed.

The world today doesn't know what truth is. We are used to deceiving and being deceived. But it is a question many people are asking today. What is truth? My answer is simple, God is truth. God's word is truth. The Bible is truth. Absolutely, universally, without exception.

Why is that so important? Because truth has become such a relative thing in our society. Many people say that what's true for you may not be true for me. They say what's true today may not be true tomorrow. In today's culture, there is no universal truth. That is why we must proclaim this message, God's word is truth. God is truth. Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life.

God is light, light which reveals truth. Something else about light.

B. Light symbolizes righteousness.

There is a moral symbolism of light. This, too, is abundantly clear.

Isa. 5:20 “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

Eph. 5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Rom. 13:12 "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."

And so the message is simple. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. God is a god of perfect truth. God is a god of perfect righteousness.

Unfortunately, many people reject that light. John 1:5 "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

Why? John tells us the answer to that also. John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

The gospel is rejected by many people because they love their sin. They like the darkness better. My message is simple: Come to this light. Trust in the God who is perfect light, in whom there is no darkness.

Unfortunately, this simple message is too often ignored, and so John has to correct three errors that were common then, and still common now. The first error has to do with our,

II. UNDERSTANDING OF FELLOWSHIP: Walking in the Light.

v.6-7

The error is simply this: People think that they can have fellowship with God yet live in their sins. But, according to verse 6,

A. Sin is a barrier to fellowship to God.

v.6

Walk in the darkness? Live in sin, to habitually and continually disobey God's word. To sin without repentance and without a commitment to change.

These verses also speak about God's relationship with those who sin, but then repent of their sins. My subject next time will be forgiveness. Today my emphasis is this—unrepentant sin is a barrier to fellowship to God. If we say we have fellowship, but live in sin, we lie!

Simple enough. If you say you are a Christian, but live in open and unconfessed sin, you are a liar. Your life proves that you are not a Christian, but a liar.

Again, to be clear, I'm not talking about the person who sins, feels terrible about it, repents, and asks for forgiveness. I'm talking about the person walking in darkness, happy as he could be.

Sin is a barrier to fellowship with God.

Ps. 5:4 "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You."

Ps. 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

Isa. 59:1 "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it

cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

2 Cor. 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”

Why is this so important? Because there are many people today, especially in this so-called Bible belt, who believe that Christianity is nothing more than fire insurance. They pray some prayer or repeat some words, they say they believe in God and trust in Jesus, and they believe they have a free ticket out of hell and into heaven. But they do not, and they will not, come to terms with their sin.

Beloved, if a person says he is a Christian, but his life is characterized by sin without repentance, he is a liar. Sin is a barrier to fellowship with God.

There is a very popular teaching that says just the opposite. There is a very popular form of teaching that says you can be a Christian and assured of heaven, without turning away from your sins. This form of teaching says that you can indeed have a saving relationship with God, and still walk in darkness all your life. There is a very popular form of teaching that you can have a relationship with God as your savior, yet not serve him as your Lord.

It is the teaching that says there is such a thing as a carnal Christian, one who has accepted Jesus as savior but not as Lord. That flies in the face of verse 6. But I do know where it comes from.

1Cor. 3:11 “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you

with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”

In those verses, Paul is rebuking the people because there is jealousy and quarreling among them. He says that they are acting like unbelievers. He is bringing them to repentance. He is NOT saying, you can be a Christian and still walk in the darkness. He is NOT saying, you can receive Jesus as your savior and reject him as your Lord. He is simply confronting them with their sin, and telling them that that they are acting like unbelievers and they must repent.

John goes one step further. He says that we act like unbelievers consistently, if we continually walk in the darkness, if we refuse to repent and turn away from our sins, then we are an unbeliever. The popular phrase would be something like this: If it looks like a duck, and walks like a duck, and sounds like a duck, it is a duck.

Sin is a barrier to fellowship with God. Let me put this same truth in a little different form, the positive form.

B. Obedient living is the proof of our fellowship with God. v.7

Walk in the light = obedient living.

Emphasize over and over, our obedience is not the ground of our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith, and not of works, so that no one can boast. But, if you are saved, if you are a Christian, if you do have fellowship with God, there will be proof!

What is the proof? Obedience. That is James' message.

James 2:14 “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?...17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

The proof is in the pudding. The proof, the assurance of our salvation is in our lives. Obedient living is the proof of our fellowship with God.

v.7

Then look at,

v.6b

Do the truth. Truth isn't something to know up here, truth is something to do!

This is a warning to some, to many in our culture. Warning to those who want a very comfortable Christianity, who want the best of two worlds, who want their cake and eat it too. It is a warning to anyone who thinks that they can go on living anyway they want, happily ever after, and assume that they have a free ticket into heaven. It is a warning to anyone who wants Jesus as savior but does not want to bow to him as Lord and master. Maybe it is a warning to some of you. If you have never surrendered to Jesus Christ as your Lord, do that now. Your life depends upon it!

But my intention is not to scare you, but to challenge you to come to terms with your sin. My challenge to you is for you to walk in the light, and therefore to confess your sins. Because

there are two additional errors which John addressed in verses 8 and 10. Errors dealing with those who would deny the presence of sin in their lives. Some know they have sin and don't care about it. Others can't see their own sin, and don't understand:

III. THE STRUGGLE OF MAN: Confronting Our Sin.

The Christian life is described in the Bible as a battle, a war, a race, a contest. It is, in its very nature, a struggle. Struggle with sin. Old fashioned word used for this struggle: Mortify. Put to death the sin that keeps coming into our life.

Col. 3:5 “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Rom. 8:13 “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Matt. 5:229 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Don't ever be embarrassed to admit that you are struggling with sin. The closer you get to God, more clearly you will likely be able to see the remaining sin in your heart. That's honestly. Self awareness.

Don't ever think that if you are struggling with sin that you must not be a Christian! Sometimes we think that. I've had many people

say those very words to me.

The people I'm worrying about are the ones who aren't struggling! Two reasons: Either they are happy with their sins and don't see any need to change (What I have just been talking about), or they don't think they have any sin left. Those are the people John is concerned about now.

v.8

These are people who would deny that:

A. Sin is inherent in our fallen nature.

Popular expression: "He's a good person." We use those words to defend our good, honest, hard-working neighbors and friends who have no interest in God. We can't imagine that they might be condemned to hell because they are such good people.

Some people think that of themselves. Some people teach that there is no sin inherent in us. Some say that human beings are born neutral, innocent, neither good or bad, and are simply affected by their environment. I have heard it said of children, that a young child shouldn't be punished for things at a young age, because he doesn't know any better. Basis of that statement is a denial that sin is inherent in our fallen nature.

The Bible says that every human being ever born, except one, has had a sinful nature. It is the very nature of human beings to sin. Children, from the day they are born, know how to sin, but they don't know how to do righteousness. Purpose of discipline. They must be taught that they are not the center of the universe, that there are some things they must do and some things they must not do. Sin is what comes naturally. They must be taught to do what is right.

And as human beings, we must continually battle that inherent sinfulness. The Bible calls it the flesh. And the only ability we

have to battle that sin comes from God. We have to be saved before we can start to do battle. The unbeliever, the non-Christian, cannot defeat sin because he does not have the ability. He is a slave to that sin.

Theologians define that with the words total depravity.

Jer. 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Jer. 13:23 "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil."

Eph. 2:1 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

If you deny these things, you are deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you. Equally true of those who deny the fact or the guilt of sin by seeking to interpret it solely in terms of psychological, medical or social causes. We explain away a lot of sin by using psychological jargon. Sin becomes just a psychological maladjustment needing therapy instead of repentance. So we are not responsible for our sins, we just need therapy.

We explain away a lot of sin by using medical jargon. Sin becomes just a disease needing treatment instead of repentance. So we are not responsible for our sins, we just need treatment.

We explain away a lot of sin by using social excuses, blaming

our sins on our environment, or on our parents treatment of us as children, or by seeing ourselves as sinned against. So we are not responsible for our sins, since we are victims not sinners.

Being responsible for our actions is now an old-fashioned idea. These excuses are often used in courts of law, freeing criminals from any responsibility for their actions. They won't hold water in God's court, though!

v.8

One final error that John addresses comes from people who deny that:

B. Sin is evident in our every day lives.

v.10

This is very similar to verse 8, but a little different. Verse 8 dealt with those who didn't think that human beings had a sinful nature. Verse 10 deals with people who think that they can reach a place where they are able to completely stop sinning. Perfectionism. Actually reach the state of being perfect.

I've dealt with people who teach this and believe it. Dangerous, because you stop examining your heart and stop confessing sins to God.

I don't think any of you believe this theologically, but practically speaking, many Christians fall into this danger. How? Many Christians assume that if they haven't committed the big sins, they haven't sinned at all. We limit sins to a few external things, for some people that means drinking, playing cards, dancing, listening to certain types of music. For others that list of big sins includes swearing, adultery, or actually killing someone. Forget about other things, and ignore other more common and even

acceptable sins.

Many Christians never specifically confess their sins to God. They may offer general confessions, but they never really "repent of particular sins, particularly," as the WCF expresses. Many Christians ask for forgiveness, but never really grieve for any particular sin, and never make a commitment to turn away from that particular sin. So these words are helpful and edifying for us all.

v.10

So this is the message, the word of life, which never changes. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Come to Jesus Christ fully aware that you are a sinner, and come with the faith that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for sins.

And my friends, people of God, walk in the light. Day in and day out, put to death the sinful desires that tempt you.

Col. 3:5 "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth."

Rom. 6:11 "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

People of God, walk in the light as he is in the light.