

**Go Light Your World:
Brightening the Corner Where We Are
I John 1:5-10**

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“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowances for their doubting too,
If you can dream and not make dreams your master,
If you can think, and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same,”
Ah, that is the stuff that adulthood is made of, said Rudyard Kipling.

The biggest little word in the English language is that two letter word “if.” Our Scripture today is full of “ifs.” If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar. If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins. If we claim to have fellowship with God but walk in the dark, we lie. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. The deeper I dug, the more “ifs” I found, five all together in five verses. How can we brighten the corner where we are?

WE CAN CLAIM OUR SIN

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Even more, we make God a liar.

I have a friend who raised four sons. As boys tend to do, they got into their fair share of trouble. Jim used to say, “When one of my sons calls and says, ‘Dad, we have a problem,’ I know its going to be a bad day.”

We have a problem. We err and stray from God’s ways like lost sheep. We follow too much the devices and desires of our hearts. We do those things we ought not to do and leave undone the things that need to be done. The Bible calls that problem sin.

Notice the second two-letter word in every one of these conditional statements. “If we.” Most evangelists would preach this text as if you had missed the way. But not the evangelist John. He preached, understanding that he belongs to this community of people who missed the way, who falter from the vision that God has for life.

Our first reaction to such reality is denial. John Claypool says, “One time honored way of dealing without shadow-selves is to deny them, to simply turn our backs on certain things within us that we find too painful or shameful to

admit, refusing to acknowledge that they even exist.”

So Peter, in the Upper Room, says to Jesus, “These other fickle followers of yours may turn and run in the time of trial, but I will be there for you all the way to the grave.” Jesus replies, “O Peter, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” What Peter did not know would hurt him immensely.

If denial doesn’t work, blame becomes the game. I am always a little suspicious of those who mount intense crusades against the evils of the day. Projecting our shadow-selves onto other people, we then try to destroy the evil by attacking them.

We even like to blame the devil. Flip Wilson used to say, “The devil made me do it!” A woman bought an extremely expensive dress. When she showed it to her husband, he wanted to know why she was so extravagant. “The devil made me do it,” said the wife. “Why didn’t you say, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan?’” asked the husband. “I did, but he said the dress looked as good from the back as it did from the front, so I bought it.”

WE CAN CONFESS OUR SINS

If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God has a remedy for sin. It is called confession, forgiveness and cleansing. As Protestants, we believe that we confess our sins directly to God. He, who knows us best, loves us the most.

Did you hear about the four ministers who decided to be brutally honest with each other in their covenant group? “People are always confessing their sins to us,” they said, “why don’t we confess our sins to each other?” “Good idea,” said the first guilty minister. “I must confess that I love to smoke cigars. When I am out of town I find a cigar bar and puff up a storm.” The second minister said, “You know, I love to play golf. I love it so much that I occasionally pretend to be sick on Sunday so I can join my buddies on the golf course.” “Well,” said the third minister, “I have to tell you, I have lust in my heart every time I see a beautiful woman.” Suddenly everything got quiet. Nobody said a word. Finally the three confessing ministers said to the fourth, “Come on, we’re in this together.” So the fourth minister spoke up and said, “My greatest sin is gossip and I can hardly wait to get out of here so I can tell everybody what I’ve just heard.”

We are wise to make our humble confessions to Almighty God. God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins.

Forgiveness is God’s remedy for a past that even he cannot change. God forgives the wrong we do, so he can rediscover the persons we are. *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us,* said the

Psalmist.

Forgiveness does not erase the facts, ignore the wrong, or excuse the pain. Forgiveness forges a new start. It is a gift of grace that restores our self-esteem, cancels a debt, and sets us free to be all that we were created to be. Forgiveness fits faulty people. I recommend it.

The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The gory thought of animal sacrifices so massive that the blood of lambs would flow through the streets of Jerusalem is something I usually leave out of a sermon. The thought of Blood from the body of Jesus only intensifies the analogy.

But my understanding of blood has changed the past two years. When I go down to Vanderbilt Hospital now, the very first thing I do is have Victoria, whom I have nicknamed Ms. Vampire, draw my blood. The first thing we cancer survivors need is healthy blood. When our blood goes bad, we have to use other people's blood. So as I lay in the hospital receiving the platelets that you so generously gave me a couple of years ago, I sang that old song which goes, "There is a fountain, filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains." The cleansing power of blood, I now understand very well. So the Blood of Christ, spiritually speaking, continues to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It gets the stains out.

WE CAN REJECT THE DARKNESS

If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true.

Darkness blinds us. I have become content the last couple of years to enjoy golf from my lounge chair on Sunday afternoons. It is cooler there. At the 2003 Ford Championship in Miami, Florida, Scott Hoch refused to hit his nine foot birdie putt on the second playoff hole because darkness was setting in. Neither he nor his caddie could get a clear read of the green in the shadows. Unhappy fans booed him but the next day he went on to win the tournament. Scott Hoch knew you don't make championship putts in the dark.

We can get used to the dark. Remember the famous words of Alexander Pope? "Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, as to be hated, needs but to be seen. Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face; we first endure, then pity, then embrace." We have gotten used to some things that I am not sure we want to get used to: war, poverty, greed, pornography. There are a lot of things in this world we ought not to get used to. We ought not to be comfortable because they break the purpose of God in our lives. In John 3:19, he says, "Light has come to the world, but we loved darkness instead of the light because our deeds were evil." Are you brightening the corner where you are?

WE CAN WALK IN THE LIGHT

If we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one

another. Let us come to the light.

Light reveals the world to us. Light helps us see. Light helps us grow. Light gives us the colors of the rainbow and the beauty of a sunset. The light of our lives is Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all,
In him the shadows disappear,
In him the way becomes clear,
In him the light at the end of the tunnel is something
different than an oncoming train.
Let us trust in him and not be afraid.

Let us walk in the light with Jesus. To walk is to get going. To walk is to move on. If we are going to talk the talk, we need to walk the walk. When we walk with the Lord in the light of his love, what a glory he sheds on our way.

Will we practice His divine presence through the routines of the day? When you go out to get the paper, say, "Good morning, Lord, did you really need to make it this hot today?" When responsibilities come, say, "Help me, Lord." When you need direction, say, "Show me the way," and be ready to follow.

As a spiritual discipline one day last week, I decided to smile and speak to people I didn't know. Low and behold I walked into a Chamber of Commerce meeting expecting a meal, only to find a mixer. I met two people looking for a church home. At a service station I met a stranger looking for direction. Downtown I met a homeless man needing something to eat. When you walk with the Lord, be ready for action. It will put us in fellowship with all kinds of people.

Is the corner where you are shining with the light of Christ? What sins do we need to confess? What darkness do we need to dispel in order to walk as a child of the light? Let us use this time to confess our sins and draw closer to God.