

Trusting in and Joining the Atoning Work of Jesus
based on 1John 1:5-2:5
David Jahnke, 5/13/18

I spoke last week of how hypocrisy was one of the main factors in the decline of the church; and that if we were walking more like Jesus walked, people would be more drawn to Jesus' Way of life. That is certainly true. But it is so hard to be like Jesus, especially as we come to know him more and more. And that should profoundly humble us. And lead us to present ourselves not as superior saints but as broken people in need of mercy just like everyone else. That says the church is about grace and love rather than moral superiority.

But the pull of Jesus' perfection remains which I will talk about later, along with resolving the guilt that comes with never attaining his level. But I need to first go back the other half of last week's sermon, which was about the divinity of Jesus. And those of you who may struggle with fully understanding or accepting Jesus' divinity.

Please be assured that you have a place here. It was not until the 4th century that the church declared in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is of "one substance with the Father, begotten and not made." So it took the church about 300 years to completely get Jesus' full divinity and humanity. Now people find the greatest relief and joy when they reach that understanding, but for some it may not be until they see Jesus face to face. But you are on the right path if you understand Jesus to have embodied and taught and revealed God's love and mercy and truth as no one else ever has and thus believe he is worthy of following.

But the scriptures are consistent. Even the earliest gospel Mark says that Jesus is the Son of God and shows him doing super-human things. And the church kept building on Mark which probably stemmed from Jesus' revealing himself in special ways to the beloved disciple John during his life-- Jesus seems to have had a special relationship with him so it would make sense that he would reveal more of his mystery to the trustworthy young disciple. And he did the same for Paul after Jesus' death. When the dead leader of the "heretical" movement Paul was opposing appeared to him on earth and then led him up into the heavens, he got a pretty clear sense of Jesus' grandeur.

So I encourage you to go deeper into Jesus' mystery. You should gradually realize that Jesus' divinity makes the most sense of the scriptures; it brings out the full meaning of the crucifixion in terms of our compassionate God entering into and then swallowing up sin and death. And it also explains that pull of perfection deep within your soul. That is God's image which has been planted in you and restored by Jesus and which is triggered and magnified whenever you see and hear and feel love and mercy and hope.

I have been reading John's gospel with my sons and we read a couple of weeks ago about how the Pharisees were challenging Jesus after he described himself as "the light of all life." The Pharisees said that he was testifying on his own behalf and so his testimony was not valid. Jesus knew that they were talking about God's law which demands that two or three testify to any accusations or claims.

Jesus told them that His father testifies on his behalf which is such an interesting claim. Because when you think about it, who in the world could possibly witness to Jesus' being the light of all life? Noone, of course...except for two people...God the Father who was with Jesus in the beginning and who created all things through him. And He will testify on Jesus' behalf at the final judgment. And until then, the Spirit is constantly testifying in Jesus' favor whenever people hear about who Jesus was and what he said and did and otherwise experience the truth of what he revealed.

That is the dawning and the shining of eternal light upon our souls which convicts us of sin and the emptiness of life without God and faith. Without God's image here (*gut*) and revelation here (*head*) there would be no understanding of sin, no feeling of guilt, no judgment, no distinction between right and wrong and no pull toward the good.

The author of 1John not only knew the great blessing of eternal light dawning upon our souls but also its burden because of the high standards of Jesus. And that is why John writes this:

I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Even as God burdens us by revealing his reality and his standards in Jesus, he also eases that burden by way of Jesus' mercy and love in his life, death and resurrection.

N.T. Wright shared a story in his commentary on this passage about a young woman who is so excited about getting a new job and being able to move into her new place. And her parents are excited for her as well. And they buy her a beautiful new chair with upholstery that matches the living room perfectly.

The day before her parents are going to arrive for a visit, she had friends over and some coffee was knocked over onto the fabric and no matter what they did to try and get out the stain, it would not come out. What would she tell them? She hoped they would put off the visit so she could figure out how to get the stain out or commission a new cover. But it was no good; they were on their way. She would just have to tell the truth and deal with their disappointment.

The great news is that when the parents arrive, they were not upset or angry or disappointed. Word had gotten out and they knew about it the whole time and had what was needed to take the stain out. You can imagine the relief and joy of the daughter when her parents said "It is nothing..."; and how much better she would have rested if she had known this all along.

This is life in Christ. We are drawn into a new home, the Kingdom of Heaven. And it is pristine and exciting. And we are given a wonderful seat at the table. But then we knock something over and spill all over the seat or make a mess of the table. Now there is no point in pretending we did not make a mess. Because our Mother and Father and Brother are already here; they are not bothered and clean up the mess immediately or over time.

So my first charge is to let your defenses down; to stop hiding from God's love, mercy and goodness. He knows you inside out anyway and he wants to visit you and let you know that you do not have to be worried or afraid anymore.

Nancy Bassman and I meditate upon a couple of verses and then pray for 20-25 minutes every Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m. And as we were praying, a revelation came to me. I remembered that to atone means to make up for wrongdoing. And while we often turn Jesus' atoning for our sins into an abstract theological matter, it hit me that it is, more importantly, a practical human matter. Jesus does not just make up for our debts when it comes to God, His Spirit is constantly making up for our sins against others and vice-versa. Jesus is always doing what we cannot do very well, which is relieve and transform the pain we have caused others and others have caused us; and even use it to build character and streng and lead us deeper into forgiveness and mercy and draw people to God.

So my second charge is to please let go of the guilt of your errors against others. Jesus is rectifying those things; he is doing everything in his power anyway and it depends on whether people receive His Spirit of forgiveness, strength and many other blessings that restore health and relationships. When they do not, that is not on you.

Now that does not excuse us from atoning work. In fact, it actually leads us to atone more. Because it is the anxiety and fear and guilt of what we have done to others (and not done for them) and sensing that we cannot make up for it that lead us to avoid them and avoid the work. When we know that God is taking care of all of that, anxiety and fear and helplessness dissipate and we are freed to get on with it.

So if you want a deeper freedom and peace, trust that the pull within to love others more and better is real and from God. But also know that God is cleaning up every mess we humans make. Then you will be free to join the work that brings joy and reconciliation and fulfillment and new life...through the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine; to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore. Amen.

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Sermon Questions for Reflection and Application
based on 1John 1:5-2:5
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1. Might Jesus being the Son of God mean different things regarding his divinity? Did Mark understand this exactly the same way as Luke or John or the writers of the Nicene Creed in 325 a.d.?
2. Why would the Pharisees question the claim that Jesus was the light of all life? What do you think of Jesus' response that his Father testifies on his behalf? How does the Spirit testify on Jesus' behalf when they hear his name and what he did?
3. Do you feel the pull of the divine image of Jesus/ Holy Spirit within you regarding the Way Jesus showed the world? What is that Way? How are we doing?
4. Like the young woman in N.T. Wright's illustration, we should sense a stain within that we cannot get out. Do you sense an inability to completely cleanse yourself?
5. What did the young lady have to do regarding the messed-up gift of her parents? What do we have to do regarding messing up the gift of God's image and Jesus' revealing His Way to us?
6. John writes to all of us that "we may not sin." That is sanctification of Jesus, stretching us further into sacrificial righteousness. But if we do sin, what assures and comforts us and makes things right?
7. What does atone for sin mean? Are we called to atone for our sins? Can we sufficiently make up for all of our sins? Since we cannot, knowing that Jesus makes up for our sins is a tremendous blessing. It is a part of our salvation.
8. Jesus does not just atone for our sins regarding God. His Spirit is also making up for them in the world. Will you let go of past sins against others, knowing that Jesus will make up for them and make things right again for those we have sinned against?
9. At the same time, how will you join his Spirit's atoning work, sacrificially making up for your own and others' sins? Can we be a part of atoning for others' sins?

from the past that have a weight

We are told of a new home with pristine furnishings in a perfect setting

Covering it up

Some may not be convicted of Jesus' divinity until they are on the final judgment seat. It was as hard for people in John's day as much as it is now. But it was not hard for John and his followers. John had seen Jesus; he had heard and touched him and experienced firsthand what Jesus did time and again. Without being overt and boastful about it, John speaks of Jesus having a particular love for him, as if John understood who Jesus was better than anyone else. I imagine John's openness to a deeper, more mysterious and even scandalous understanding led Jesus to share things only with him.

The same can be said about Paul. In his case, a radical conversion experience combined with his understanding of the Hebrew scriptures opened him up to deep mysteries regarding the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So if we like Jesus as a spiritual guide or teacher and we like God as an idea, John and Paul come to us today and confront us with the reality that God is not an idea to ponder; and Jesus is not a nice guy with an interesting philosophy. God is 1. a person, 2. a personal Father to all and 3. a personal active force indwelling and guiding all of creation. And Jesus is the light of all life through whom all things were made and who took on all flesh in order to redeem creation and restore humanity to its original purpose and power.

1John Bible Study Week 1

This community's founder (but not the author) "saw, touched and heard Jesus." He is immediately wanting to set the tone for countering the gnostic influence of Jesus' not being of the flesh.]

1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but 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. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us

1. Walking in the light cannot mean sinlessness, right? Why not? What then does it mean?
2. If in fact we say we have no sin, that suggests we are walking in...?

After healing a blind man, Jesus said this to skeptical Pharisees: John 9:39 Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' 41 Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

3. What is the principle at work in both of these Johannine texts?

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

4. So John tells us that being in that light means we should not sin. And yet when we do, what is our assurance?

3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, 'I have come to know him', but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, 'I abide in him', ought to walk just as he walked.

5. In order to walk as he walked, what must we first know?

6. What would walking like him look like?

7. And if we have learned but then pay no attention to whether we are walking as he did?

8. What kinds of Christianity are disallowed by John's Word?

A New Commandment

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says, 'I am in the light', while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

9. Does anyone remember what Jesus "new commandment" was in the gospel of John? The author here recollects it.

10. What is the primary measure of whether we are walking in darkness or light?

An interesting kind of poem follows:

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.

14 I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

11. So little ones have to be reminded of what in 12 and 14?

12. Mature fathers and mothers know what and this implies what?

13. Young people (adolescents?) should be on the path of knowing what in 15 and because of what?

We have been talking in small groups about the challenge

