

Living In the Light 1 John 2:1-14

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and C@5 on 7th May 2017

Sins forgiven

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin."

As we saw last week, John is very clear that people who claim to live in the light of the knowledge of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ won't continue to sin.

And it's one of the tests that we're on the right track in our Christian walk.

But at the end of chapter 1 he says that if we claim we are without sin, and that we have not sinned, we are deceiving ourselves and making God out to be a liar.

Although we know that continuing to sin is inconsistent with our new status as people who live in the light, we're confronted every day with the reality that we still do sin.

I don't think I'm misrepresenting what John's saying here by saying "that's not okay."

It's not.

Every time we sin we add to our guilt before the God in whom there is no darkness.

The guilt of our sins excludes us from fellowship with God — that's the penalty.

And so the first sentence of chapter 2 is a reminder that sin is not okay.

God is not okay with us being sinners.

That old slogan that says "God hates the sin but loves the sinner" means well, but it lets us off the hook — as if I'm not responsible for my sin, when I'm totally guilty.

If I set fire to my neighbour's house, it's no good me going before the judge and saying 'I couldn't help it'.

Or worse still, 'I haven't done anything wrong'.

How is any judge worth his salt going to respond to that?

You'd need a pretty good lawyer arguing your case to get you out of that, wouldn't you?

The good news when it comes to the guilt of our sin is that we have the best person to represent us.

John says in v1

"But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the righteous one."

An advocate is someone who pleads the case of someone else on their behalf... what a barrister does in court when someone's accused of a crime.

Jesus is with the Father, day and night, pleading the case of guilty sinners like us before the judgment seat of the Father.

There are two reasons why Jesus is the only one who can do that.

Firstly, he is the righteous one.

I couldn't plead for you before God and you can't plead for me because we're both guilty ourselves and have our own sins to answer for.

But Jesus has no sin of his own to answer for.

And secondly, in v2, John reminds us that he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The image switches from the courtroom to the temple here.

Jesus can't just ask the Father to forgive us without something happening to put right what we've done wrong.

That's the basis of our justice system in the Western world.

Our jails are now called 'correctional centres' because something not correct has to be corrected — plus we want to see people's lives put right too.

There has to be a correction made for our sin.

In prison there's a sacrifice of liberty — of freedom to come and go and do as you please, but in the past (and still today in some parts of the world) the penalty would be the sacrifice of a life.

And it sounds over the top, but that's what the next grumpy, unloving word out of your mouth deserves.

That's what the next selfish action you take deserves.

Every sin is so serious that it demands the sacrifice of a life — your life.

That's what the Old Testament sacrificial system taught about the seriousness of sin by requiring the sacrifice of an animal for the sin of the person who sinned.

If you're someone who ranks sin on a scale of 1 to 10 and think that the little ways you sin are okay compared to what others do, you're very wrong.

Every sin deserves the death penalty.

That's why only Jesus can plead our case.

Because he is the only one who could have paid that death penalty on our behalf.

And he has.

As John says in v2...

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

That's the basis of Jesus' plea to the Father on our behalf.

He is the sacrifice needed to correct the wrong of our sin.

The words 'atoning sacrifice' there translate a word that means 'the means of forgiveness'.

For a prisoner to be released from prison there has to be some evidence that the sentence has been served — the warden's records or whatever.

For a sinner to be forgiven Jesus has to show that our sentence has been served.

And he does that by representing sinners before the Father as the sacrifice of a life that pays for the sin of all believers for all our sins, past present and future.

Hallelujah! Let's stop here and quietly thank and praise God for Jesus!...

Come back to the beginning of the verse:

"I write this so that you will not sin."

John isn't preaching sinless perfection this side of heaven.

But nor is he excusing sin.

He's leading us to the cross of Christ where our sin is to be confessed and dealt with in the only way possible — through the forgiveness that can only be attained through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That's how serious your sin is.

Don't let the slogans...

'God hates the sin but loves the sinner'

or 'Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven'.

Instead, take your sin seriously.

And take it to Jesus in prayerful confession, remembering that he will continue to represent you before the Father, pleading:

"Father I have already suffered and died for this sinner. My righteousness is his now and forever more."

Light, Love and Obedience

In 1967 The Beatles performed on one of the first world-wide attempts at a satellite television broadcast on a program called 'Our World'.

Their contribution was their new song "All you Need Is Love" — one of John Lennon's best-known songs.

His words seemed to be suggesting that the world can achieve anything if people just love one another.

How much better it would have been for his own life and the people around him if he really believed that like he said he did.

Not much more than 12 months later John Lennon had left his wife and five-year-old son for the new 'love of his life'.

It's all very well to talk about loving others, but the talk doesn't mean much if we don't practice what we preach.

In the next section John (the apostle) moves on to one of the major themes of his letter — love.

But he doesn't talk about it in terms of a nice sentiment. Love has everything to do with obedience — the other great theme of his letter.

He begins v3 with another way of testing that we're genuinely in the Christian faith... another signpost.

He says that we know we've come to know him (i.e. Jesus) if we keep his commands.

If we're truly in fellowship with the Father and with Jesus, it'll show up in a willingness and commitment to living by what Jesus has commanded.

That applies to every part of our lives.

Whoever calls themselves a Christian but doesn't do what Jesus commands is a liar.

But in v6 the signpost of obedience to the commands of Jesus assures those who obey that God's love in Christ is doing its work in their lives.

But John is focussing in on obedience to one particular command of Jesus here — to love.

It's the commandment that Jesus gave in the beginning. The beginning John's talking about is the time of Jesus' ministry.

The point of saying that is that nothing has changed in the fifty years up to when John is writing — or in the 2,000 years since.

Some members of the church had gone out teaching new things about Christian belief and living — including teaching that lead people away from obedience to what Jesus had said and taught.

But Jesus' commands are timeless.

And love for others who belong to the fellowship of believers is no exception.

But John says it's also a new command.

It's new in the sense that it's a new way of life that comes with the gospel.

It's a radical new way of life compared to the old way of the world.

And living this radical new way is a signpost for us.

Do we love each other according to the old way of the world — like John Lennon, in words that aren't backed up by actions?

Or do we love each other according to the 'old' new commandment of Jesus to love one another?

If we 'love' in the way the world loves, according to God's word we are still in the darkness of our sin.

If I only love the people who love me back, I'm still living in the darkness.

If I only love the people I approve of, or get along well with, or who do nice things for me, I'm still living in the darkness.

But John uses a stronger word, doesn't he — hate.

Anyone who hates any brother or sister is still in the darkness...

...because to hate another believer is to reject God's assessment of them.

Where he's forgiven them and welcomed them, you refuse to forgive them and love them as Jesus has commanded you.

Our refusal to love is a refusal to obey.

And disobedience to the command of Jesus is sin.

You might not think that you hate anyone all that seriously.

But there's no scale of love and hate in what John's saying here.

They are stark opposites.

In terms of the point John's making here, to not love a fellow believer is to hate them.

And to love a person is to love them like Jesus did.

Jesus held no one's sin against them, because he took the sins of all believers with him to the cross.

And we are free to not hold anything against anyone who is a fellow believer because Jesus took their sin and ours with him to the cross.

So can you see that signpost in your life?

Can you look at your relationships with others here at church and say that you genuinely love them?

Can you see evidence of your love for them — in things as simple as getting to know each other after church or inviting them for a meal in your home?

Can you see evidence in your willingness to share what you have with people who are less well off? Are you looking for those opportunities?

Can you see it in your willingness to forego the things you like to do to spend time with someone who's not doing too well?

They're all things that reflect the character and attitude of Jesus as he loved the tax collectors and sinners... wept with people experiencing loss... put aside his glory to be a servant... and gave his life rather than see anyone perish.

That's love.

Anyone who loves like that is driving past that signpost with assurance that they are on the right track.