

THE WAY OF VICTORY

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Proverbs 20

⁹ Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart; I am pure and free from sin"?

Proverbs are like that—pithy, straight to the point, and inescapable. (I call them the “One-A-Day” spiritual vitamins of the Scriptures—31 chapters for 31 days.)

The “blood of Christ” (about which we sang this morning) means not simply that Christ’s blood was shed, but that He poured out His very life before God.

The Old Testament picture of sacrifice is that the blood, which is our life (see Genesis 4:4), was poured out before God, its Giver. When Jesus Christ shed His blood on the Cross it was not the blood of a mere martyr, or the blood of one man given for another; it was the life of God poured out to redeem the world.

It is easy to be thrilled by the sacrifices men make; it takes the Spirit of Almighty God to get us even interested in the cost of our redemption to God.

The Cross, was not merely the cross of a man, but the Cross of God—the offering of God for the purpose of bringing back the human race into fellowship with Himself.

Either the Cross is the only way of explaining God, the only way of explaining Jesus Christ, and of explaining the human race, or there is nothing in it at all.

2 Corinthians 5

¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”

²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

If the human race could be all right apart from the Cross, then redeeming act of Jesus was a useless waste.

1 John 1 (NLT)

¹ We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ² This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

⁵ This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶ So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. ⁷ But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.* ⁹ *But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.* ¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

John wrote from a lover's heart. He was the one who leaned his head on Jesus' chest, self-described as "the one whom Jesus loved."

His words express that closeness, that depth of revelation, that spiritual intimacy with Christ.

His words also convey a tenderness toward his readers, for whom he had genuine compassion, and a yearning for their full participation in the life eternal.

This chapter has three parts: our source, our message, and our challenge.

Our life-source produces for us and in us a message—something to be shared, to be given away.

That message produces light—and light exposes what was once concealed by darkness.

Once exposed, we are challenged to deal with what has been revealed.

However, the natural response is not the Christian response. As Jesus spoke with a Jewish elder, named Nicodemus, He reminded him that the natural response is to run the other way (distrusting God's love toward us).

John 3 (NLT)

¹⁶ *"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.*

¹⁸ *"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.* ¹⁹ *And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.* ²⁰ *All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.* ²¹ *But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."*

Now, let's return to 1 John 1 to take a closer look (read the chapter again):

Our Source

The One, the Word, the Life, is a real Person—not a doctrine, not a philosophy—a divine Person who took on flesh and blood and brought divine life back to the human race.

John described their experience so his readers might share in it—words have that power when mixed with faith—fellowship with the church, and fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus, the Christ.

Daily victory hinges on our fellowship—with Christ and with His people. There are no "Lone Rangers" in God's Kingdom. You cannot do it alone, but you can "do all things through Christ who strengthens you."

Our Message

John's message was clear: God is altogether Light, there is no darkness in Him at all. No shifting shadow of change (James 1:17). God will not trick you or take advantage of you. You can trust Him completely.

Fellowship with God means living and walking in the light, as God is in the light: practicing the Truth (doing what God has told us to do).

In this path, fellowship is achieved, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. That tells us that walking in the light is not without its ups and downs. God's people are being perfected through Christ, but they're not perfect yet. Still, there is forgiveness and cleansing available perpetually.

And this message was not only John's; it is yours and mine, as well. A message to share, and share again. And this message is not mere words, it is the message of lives well-lived in dependence on God. We see light in God's light, and other people see light in the light of our lives.

Our Challenge

The challenge to living this way is the encroaching and invasive darkness of sin. Sin is not wrong doing, it is wrong being, independence of God. Even nice behavior, when independent from God's wisdom and grace, produces darkness instead of light.

We need to understand the difference between "sin" and "sins." In the Bible, "sin" is usually an abstraction—a principle or disposition. "Sins" are concrete behaviors, produced by the disposition of sin.

John teaches that God has undertaken the responsibility for immediately removing our guilt from sins and ultimately removing our sin on the ground of the redeeming act of Jesus.

We are guilty from our beginning, due to "original sin," but our condemnation came later. We were not condemned simply because we were born with sin.

Ezekiel 18

²⁰ *The person who sins is the one who will die. The child will not be punished for the parent's sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child's sins.*

Condemnation comes when a man sees the Light and prefers the darkness (John 3:18-19). Each of us has crossed this line, sometime in our early youth.

Of "sin," all are guilty; living in the Truth requires owning up to this. Sin must (eventually) be destroyed, but to do so also destroys the flesh in which it lodges (that's why it will always be with you during this lifetime, and you must overcome it repeatedly).

Of "sins," confession to God leads to forgiveness of the (volitional) act and cleansing of the (emotional) residue. (A physical/relational act will also have physical/relational consequences, which must be separately dealt with.)

Our Victory

This is a practical message. A message for doing, not just reading or hearing.

Our Source—Jesus, the Living Word—is also our Hope and our Deliverer.

Our fellowship is not temporal, but eternal. Our victory (through Christ) is complete and everlasting.

Fellowship with the One who is altogether Light will (eventually) make us light (as He is) also.

Walking in the light each day is the path to becoming light (as He is). In this way, literally, practice makes perfect.

“Walking in light” does not mean never failing, never stumbling (for “we all stumble in many ways”); it means never giving up, always getting up—by God’s grace and power.

Confession to God is the switch that turns on the power—turns on the light. Your will is freed; your emotions are cleansed—then, you will have power to deal with any remaining consequences.

And, all the while, your fellowship with Jesus—with God—and with His church is improving and His blessing is increasing.

Come today and talk with God, your Heavenly Father, with Jesus, your Savior, with the Holy Spirit, your divine Comforter.

Freely confess your sins to Him and receive forgiveness and cleansing.

And, receive power to face the consequences—do the right thing, make things right. Write that note, make that call, visit that person, have that conversation, pay that debt.

Don’t drag that old baggage with you month after month. You want to get it right, put it behind you (for real)—or you wouldn’t be reading this today—but you can’t do it on your own. You need God’s power working in you. This is the way to get that power. Come. Pray.