

3. Walking in the Light: Turning Away From Sin (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles)

Biblical material: John 3:19, 8:12, Rom. 3:10–20, 1 Tim. 1:15, 1 John 1:5–2:2.

Quotes

- The best way to see divine light is to put out thy own candle. *Thomas Fuller*
- No one is a light unto himself. *Antonio Porchia*
- Every false doctrine and every false system of worship introduced into the world by Satan, we shall see, if we look at them carefully, have had for their one sole object the making of the whole story of the love of God a lie. *George E. Fifiield*

Questions

How do we explain this walking in the light? Why are concepts of light and darkness important in speaking of the great controversy? How should we conceive of God and his attitude towards us, according to John? How do we see ourselves, and our sinful state? And how is this resolved? Is Jesus pleading the Father for us?

Bible discussion

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you. God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5 NIV). There is no dark in God, who is defined as light—light as physical illumination, light as essential to life, and light as enlightenment and understanding.

“For if we take up the attitude ‘we have not sinned,’ we flatly deny God’s diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us.” (1 John 1:10 Phillips). In other words we call God a liar—just like the Devil did back in the beginning (Gen. 3:4, 5). And in so doing we support the Devil’s side, and prevent God from helping us. Romans 3:10-20 makes the situation completely clear—no-one is righteous, and we are all sinful.

“My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father.” (1 John 2:1 NLT). This verse is a great reassurance—John is writing to help us understand what is truth and right, so we don’t sin. But if we do, Jesus pleads for us. Yet this statement needs to be rightly understood since Jesus himself said specifically he would not ask the Father on our behalf (John 16:26). Note however that Jesus pleads *before* the Father. He is not trying to convince the Father—because the Father already knows, and he already loves us. No: the pleading is Jesus’ speaking for us before the whole universe, and in response to the charges made by the Accuser of the brethren, the Devil himself.

Comment

“It is in the ethical sense that John here affirms that ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.’ God, that is to say, is the source and essence of holiness and righteousness, goodness and truth; in Him there is nothing that is unholy or unrighteous, evil or false.” F F Bruce, The Epistles of John (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), 41.

In much of John’s writing he illustrates the conflict between God and Satan in terms of light and darkness. In these vivid symbols we understand that God is not arbitrary in how he runs his universe—but in the same way that we need light to live, we need God and if we

reject him and his principles, we place ourselves in darkness that leads to death. We need to see the terrible situation we are in—to recognize that we are going to die unless God heals our sinfulness. It makes no sense to claim we are without sin—as some have done.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world.*” (1 John 2:2 KJV). The old word ‘propitiation’ may also convey the wrong meaning as to the relationship of God to humanity. In some contexts it carries the connotation of appeasement of a hostile and angry deity, which is more related to pagan than true ideas of God. Note this: “In pagan usage a ‘propitiation’ was a gift or a sacrifice intended to appease the wrath of a god and to render him friendly or forgiving. But our God has no need to be appeased or reconciled to us, for He loves men even while they are sinners (Rom. 5:8; Rev. 13:8). It is we who stand in need of being reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).” Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 7, 636.

Ellen White Comments

The words of John came forcibly to my mind, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:8. I was shown that those who triumphantly claim to be sinless, show by their very boasting that they are far from being without taint of sin. The more clearly fallen man comprehends the character of Christ, the more distrustful will he be of himself, and the more imperfect will his works appear to him, in contrast with those which marked the life of the spotless Redeemer. But those who are far from Jesus, those whose spiritual perceptions are so clouded by error that they cannot comprehend the character of the great Exemplar, conceive of Him as altogether such a one as themselves, and dare to talk of their own perfection of holiness. But they are far from God; they know little of themselves, and less of Christ. {LS 84}

God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If there were no light, there would be no shade. But while the shade comes by the sun, it is not created by it. It is some obstruction that causes the shadow. So darkness emanates not from God, but is the result of an intruding object between the soul and God.... Disregard of the light that God has given brings the sure result. It creates a shadow, a darkness that is more dark because of the light which has been sent.... If a man withdraws himself from light and evidence, and yields to Satan’s seducing arts, he himself draws the curtain of unbelief about him, so that light cannot be distinguished from darkness. More light and evidence would only be misunderstood by him. The greater the evidence, the greater will be the indifference. This will lead the deceived soul to call darkness light and truth error. {OHC 26}

Of Christ it is written, “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” John 1:4. Before the entrance of sin, Adam and Eve in Eden were surrounded with a clear and beautiful light, the light of God. This light illuminated everything which they approached. There was nothing to obscure their perception of the character or the works of God. {MH 461-2}

The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will be finally received into heaven--not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence. {7BC 950}