

First John is written as a sermon and lacks the opening, greeting, thanksgiving and closing greeting that mark most New Testament Epistles (or pastoral letters). The author's key purpose is to defend Christian communities against false prophets and to remind them that as children of God they are to live in the light and love one another. The division in the church seems to come from some docetistic teaching. Docetism was the ancient belief, common in Greco-Roman culture, in the superiority of everything that is "spiritual" over the "physical". It led to much debate and division in the church, and eventually to the first great Christian Creeds (The Apostle's and Nicene Creeds) seeking to articulate the oneness of Jesus as Divine and Human. These false teachers seemed to imply that there is no connection between our spiritual-ity (beliefs) and physical actions (ethics). The pastoral author writes to counter that false teaching, reminding the church of what it means to be a child of God, and to see in Christ the invisible God, modeling our lives – spiritual and physical – on his life and example. The pastoral position presupposes sin as a pervasive, malady characteristic of the human condition, marked by a lack of fellowship or participatory community in the will and heart of God.<sup>8</sup>

**God is light:** We hear under this introduction of this major theme of this section the words of the prologue of the gospel of John 1:4-5: "In [the word] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Light is ascendant, darkness (the characteristic of the world) is passing away in the light (pun intended!) of the power of Christ's atoning death and resurrection.

**WALK:** throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> Testament the action of "walking" is used as a metaphor for one's conduct, ethical actions or way of life. This was common to the Jewish religion and culture.

"Blessed is the one who does not **WALK** in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." Psalm 1:1-2

"Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may **WALK** in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name." - Psalm 86:11.

**what is true:** within the theology of John Jesus is the truth, not just as a theological promise or abstract idea. His person is the truth, which includes a relational dynamic.

"Jesus said to [Thomas], "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."  
- John 14:6-7

*fellowship:* the Greek word is 'koinonia' which connotes not just being together, but a vibrant communal participation and collaboration. It's related to the notion of "abiding in Christ" as we see in 2:6 and John 15.

Blood... cleanses...: the idea of the pastoral letter is that the death of Jesus is a cultic sacrifice, the spilling of his blood restores the possibility and potential of relationship – connection – collaboration between God and the people. Present throughout the four gospels and other 2<sup>nd</sup> Testament writings we see this vision in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish

January 20, 2019

1 John 1:5-2:11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have *fellowship* with him while we are **WALKING** in darkness, we lie and do not do *what is true*; <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and **his word** is not in us.

**2** <sup>1</sup> 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; <sup>2</sup> and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

<sup>3</sup> Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we **OBEY HIS COMMANDMENTS**.

<sup>4</sup> 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;<sup>5</sup> 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:<sup>6</sup> whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to **WALK** just as he **WALKed**.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> Whoever says, "I am in the **light**," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness.<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the **light**, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling.<sup>11</sup> 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.

### John 13:31-35

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

<sup>31</sup> When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.<sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.<sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'<sup>34</sup> I give you a **NEW COMMANDMENT**, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What shimmers in your attention in this reading?**
- **How do the metaphors used in these passages still speak to us today? Or not? (walk, hate, love)**
- **Are we to love everyone (our neighbors)?; or only those in the community of faith (brothers & sisters)?**
- **How do you struggle to walk in the light of God in a way that is coherent, not just lipservice, but practicing what you preach?**
- **What invitation to act, speak or be do you hear in today's scripture?**

but may have eternal life." As well as in Mark 14:22-24 "<sup>22</sup>While they were eating, [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."<sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.<sup>24</sup> He said to them, '*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.*'"

**advocate:** This term is used specifically by John to refer to the Holy Spirit in the gospel as parakletos (or counselor) in John 14:16. We could also translate it as "coach" or "guide" as it conveys the meaning of "someone who is called to the side of another [to help, encourage, heal]."

**OBEY** ere obedience means speaking and acting correctly. It's a coherence between what we believe and how we walk (act). The knowledge of Christ ("perfection") implies an existential reassurance which comes when beliefs is acted upon (not just believed). One's will is ultimately made manifest in what is actually done as opposed to mere lip-service.

**COMMANDMENTS:** The author goes from the singular to the plural, from the "old" to the "new": from the traditional 10 commandments to the summary Jesus in the gospels:

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.<sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. - Deuteronomy 6:4-5

<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.<sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. - Leviticus 19:17-18

<sup>28</sup> One of the scribes came near... and asked [Jesus], "Which commandment is the first of all?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;<sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'<sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31

---

<sup>§</sup> I borrowed freely from *Seek. Find.: The Bible for All People* (The Contemporary English Version) ABS 2006 and *The Epistles of John*. David Resenberg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.