

Bringing Light into a Darkened World
Session #4: Our Charge
WNCC UWF Retreat, Harrell Center, Lake Junaluska, NC
June 15, 2024, 10 AM

1 John 1:5-10

CEB

⁵ This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you: “God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all.” ⁶ If we claim, “We have fellowship with Him,” and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully. ⁷ But if we live in the light in the same way as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin. ⁸ If we claim, “We don’t have any sin,” we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong. ¹⁰ If we claim, “We have never sinned,” we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

“This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you: ‘God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all.’” [1 John 1:5, CEB.] In this one verse, John points to God’s glory.

Everything hinges on this gracious truth and revolves around this light that emanates from God. . . [In God’s light, we can see] quite clearly that life is not what it can or should be. We continually fall short of the glory of God. . . We live in a world where the light of God reveals long shadows within our lives [and

around us] where evil lurks.”¹ We are challenged each day to resist the temptations that come into our senses from social media, television, sketchy websites, blogs, and even false prophets. We might ask ourselves, are these attractions really sins? There is a simple test.

- Do they separate us from the love of God?
- Do they keep us from doing all the good we can?
- Do they cause harm to someone, some entity, or creation?
- Do they keep us from practicing the means of grace like prayer, study, service to those in need, worship, participating in Holy Communion?

Our answers to these questions, unless we deceive ourselves as John warns in verse 8, we have sinned. John’s text recognizes that while Christians should not sin, we do continue to do so whether in thought, word, or deed. John Wesley recognized this conundrum when he testified after his Aldersgate experience: “I believe, till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that ‘washing of the Holy

¹ James D. Freeman, “1 John 1:1-2:2 Pastoral Perspective” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 2*, eds. David L. Bartlett * Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 395-6.

Ghost' which was given me in baptism.” Clearly after age 10, there must have been issues and we know that Wesley continually sought assurance of his salvation early in his ministry from the Moravians and Armenians. Wesley goes on to recognize that we are all in need of God’s Sanctifying grace to continue our journey to perfection.

In verse 7 and 9 of our text, John gives us the Good News we long to hear: **“But if we live in the light in the same way as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin. . . if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong.”** [1 John 1:7, 9, CEB.] [As]

Christians who live in communion with God, [we] need not deny that [we are sinners], or pretend that shadows do not continue to fall across [our] journey toward the light. [We] should not despair . . . when the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, because in the communion [we] have with God, [we] have an advocate, Jesus, The Light of the World, who is righteous, even when [we] are not, and it is His truthfulness, His atoning sacrifice, that calls [us] out of the shadows and enables [us] with confidence

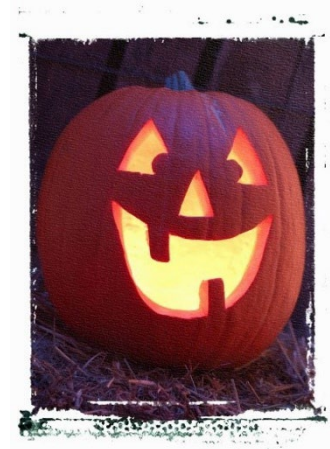
and not in terror to confess [our] sins and to walk toward the light”² relying only on God’s forgiveness and grace.

Today and in our local congregations, we have the opportunity for individual and congregational confession as we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table. In the early days of Methodism, there was what was called a mourner’s bench. You would go to the mourner’s bench and sit—to feel sorry for your sins, to repent, to have the new birth, or to rededicate yourself to Jesus. You mourned for your spiritual condition and then after the service, the pastor and the lay leaders would come over and comfort you and pray for you.³ Whether in our modern congregational setting or in the time of the Mourner’s Bench, we know we can walk together in community and fellowship ready to reach up for help when we have fallen away from the path of discipleship or to reach back to lift-up another onto the path of discipleship. Either way, we are empowered by God’s Sanctifying Spirit which leads to life.

² George W. Stroup, “1 John 1:1-2:2 Theological Perspective” in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 2*, eds. David L. Bartlett * Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 395-6.

³ “The Mourner’s Bench, 2/20/2017. Online: [Methodist History: The Mourner’s Bench \(umc.org\)](http://www.umc.org)

As I prepared this sermon, I was reminded of a Children's Message I would offer on All Saint's Sunday when it fell close to Halloween. I would like to share it with you today. I usually use a real pumpkin so we will have to use our imaginations. While cutting open the top of the pumpkin, from Proverbs 1:7, I would pray, "Lord, open my mind so I can learn new things about you." While removing the seeds, pulp, and gunk from Matthew 6:14-15, I would pray, "Lord, remove the things in my life that do not please You. Forgive the wrong things I do and help me forgive others." While making the eyes, from Psalm 104:24, I would pray, "Lord, open my eyes to see the beauty You have made in the world around me." While making the nose, from James 1:17, I would pray, "Lord, I'm sorry for the times I've turned-up my nose at Your many gifts and your beloved children." While making the mouth, from Psalm 19:14, I would pray, "Lord, let everything I say please You." While lighting the candle, from Matthew 5:16, I would pray, "Lord, help me show Your light to others through the things I do." After I finish the Jack O'Lantern, I would remind the children that Jesus teaches that if we ask God to help us God will because God loves all His children. We then pray together: Lord, open my mind, open my



eyes, forgive me, help me to be thankful, make my words pleasing. And help me share Your light with others. Amen

In order to be “Light-bearers” to a darkened world, we need to find healing for our broken places and to be fed for the journey. Today, as we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table, you will also have the opportunity to come to a healing station as you have need. I pray that each one of us “Light-bearers” will be cleansed and fed in preparation for our journey back into the darkened world. Amen.

