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Fellowship of the Blood

1 John 1.5-10

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

November 5, 2023

I. Introduction

- A. What is life like?
 - 1. Is it a series of choices between the true and the false?
 - a. Between good and evil?
 - b. Between beauty and ugliness?
 - c. Between white and black?
 - 2. Or is it a matter of values about which there are as many legitimate positions as there are people?
 - a. That life is a series of compromises?
 - b. That everything is some shade of gray?
- B. I have been exploring the internet seeking observations and insights regarding the way people see the world (a very dangerous territory to explore!)
 - 1. Do you see the world in terms of black and white?
 - 2. Or do you see the world as shades of gray?
 - 3. I wanted to know what the prevailing opinion of the world might be on such matters
- C. There are those who see the world in terms of black and white
 - 1. Things are either right or wrong
 - a. Things are either good or evil
 - 2. Very often, those who view the world in those terms are merely calcifying their own prejudices or are fixating their own personalities
 - a. They are at a loss to define the principles on which their discriminations are made
- D. And then there are those who find gray in most everything
 - 1. Nothing is clear as day or dark as night
 - 2. There are no universal principles on which to found their choices, moral or otherwise
 - 3. Such people glory in that gray space, delighting to float on a sea of uncertainty
- E. I decided to apply a highly sophisticated, scientific survey of such views
 - 1. Which was the prevailing view among thinkers and writers and speakers?
 - a. Which position carried the day?
 - b. What was the world's view of certainty v. uncertainty?
 - c. Of good and evil v. moral relativism?
 - 2. And my thorough scientific analysis revealed that the gray won, hands down

3. Ok, so it wasn't so scientifically sophisticated
 - a. But it didn't need to be
 - b. The vast majority of opinions on the matter firmly landed on the side of the gray
 - c. And most of the opinions castigated the black and white views of the world in the most egregious of terms
4. The grays were not so sure of much of anything
 - a. Except they were sure that the black and white view of the world was decidedly wrong
 - b. Decidedly evil
5. But then, that's the way relativism is
 - a. Everything is relative – except relativism!
- F. But there was one exception in my investigation
 1. One outlier
 - a. One opinion that did not correspond with the vast majority of worldly voices
 2. **1 John 1:5–10** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
 - b. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 - c. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - d. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
 - e. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 - f. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
- G. I must confess, I have not been completely forthright in my description of my investigative processes
 1. I did not, as I implied earlier, only use the internet for my investigation
 - a. Because the quote that I just shared was not found when I Googled “white and black v. gray thinking” on the internet
 2. In order to find a quote like that I had to go to the Bible
- H. In our communion series which we began last month we began to study the book of 1 John
 1. The apostle John's first epistle
 2. And the quote I just read is our text for today's message in that series
 3. And John sees the Christian life, not in terms of the gray of moral ambiguity, but in terms of light and darkness
 4. Because God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all
 - a. And His Son, but incarnate God, is light

- b. And because the goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of His Son
- 5. The Christian life is devoted to seeing through the moral fog of shades of gray
 - a. And seeing – truly – what is light, and good, and true, and beautiful

II. **The Purpose of 1 John**

- A. The reason we are using 1 John as our text for this communion series is that the purpose of John in this epistle is resonant with the overriding purpose of our participation in the Lord's Supper
 - 1. Which is to assure us of the redemptive relationship we have with God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - a. Which comes through loud and clear when we, with regularity, remember the Lord's death on our behalf
 - b. And participate together in the fellowship of the blood of Christ
 - 2. And find ourselves united with Christ by faith
- B. **1 John 5:13** (ESV) —
 - 1. **13 I write these things to you**
 - 2. **who believe in the name of the Son of God,**
 - 3. **that you may know that you have eternal life.**
- C. So as we study 1 John together we approach this table with a whole new perspective
 - 1. It is no simply religious exercise
 - 2. In Jesus Christ we find genuine fellowship with Him and with His heavenly Father
 - a. Confident more and more
 - b. In our relationship with Him
 - 3. Knowing that in Christ we have life eternal
 - a. Eternal life – which John defines in his gospel in relationship terms:
 - b. Knowing God and His Son whom He has sent (**John 17.3**)

III. **God is Light**

- A. The first thing we notice in this passage is that John is no moral relativist
 - 1. There is no gray in his thinking or in his message
- B. **1 John 1:5** (ESV) —
 - 1. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,
 - 2. that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.**
- C. When you begin with God there is no floating on a sea of uncertainty
 - 1. No shades of gray to navigate
 - 2. It is light and darkness
 - a. Those are the options
 - 3. And God is one and not the other
- D. Surely we humans struggle within ourselves to sort out the difference between light and darkness

1. We say with Paul:
 2. **Romans 7:22–23** (ESV) —
 - a. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,
 - b. 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.
 3. And then we cry:
 4. **Romans 7:24** (ESV) —
 - a. 24 Wretched man that I am!
 - b. Who will deliver me from this body of death?
 5. That's our longing
 - a. As believers we long to be delivered from the gray into the kingdom of light
 6. The way that's possible is by beginning with the nature and character of God and of Jesus Christ His Son
 7. And so, again, we say with Paul:
 8. **Romans 7:25** (ESV) — 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...
 - a. Only He who is light can create light in us through our union with Jesus Christ
 - b. A union in which we participate as we partake together of this supper
- E. There are, of course, a multitude of adjectives which describe who God is
1. **Exodus 34:6–7** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 ... “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
 - b. 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
 - c. but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”
 2. Those elements of God's character are echoed throughout scripture
 - a. And help us build a growing theology proper – a more and more thorough understanding of the God we worship
- F. But there are not very many nouns that apply to God – that define God for us
1. **God is One – Deuteronomy 6.4**
 2. **God is Spirit – John 4.24**
 3. **God is holy – Psalm 99.9**
 4. **God is love – 1 John 4.8, 16**
 5. **God is a consuming fire – Deuteronomy 4.24, Hebrews 12.29**
- G. Here is the other definitive description of God
1. **God is light – 1 John 1.5**
 2. And then, in classic logical terms, John settles the definition by negation
 - a. **In him is no darkness at all – John 1.5**
- H. Light is reflective of a number of dimensions of God's nature

1. **Holiness**
 - a. His “otherness” – that which distinguishes God from His creatures
 - b. But which is also inclusive of moral purity
 - c. **John 3:19** (ESV) — 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
 - d. So moral actions, the ethics of human behavior, are ultimately defined in terms of light and darkness, of good and evil
2. **Vision**
 - a. Light is a necessary condition for vision – physical and moral
 - b. **Matthew 6:22–23** (ESV) — 22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!
 - c. We cannot see the way to go apart from the light of God
- I. Assurance is rooted, not in us, not in our grayness, not in our moral ambivalence, the internal contest between the spirit and the flesh
 1. Assurance is rooted ultimately in God
 - a. In God’s nature
 - b. In God who is light

IV. **The Rhythm of the Passage**

- A. There are five “if-then” statements which lead us through an application of the light of God in helping us to discover true and genuine assurance
- B. And like the positive and negative definitions of God as light and not darkness
 1. Those “if-then” statements alternate between the negative and the positive
- C. Begins with the negative
 1. **1 John 1:6** (ESV) — 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
- D. Then there’s the positive
 1. **1 John 1:7** (ESV) — 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- E. Then back to the negative
 1. **1 John 1:8** (ESV) — 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
- F. Then the positive
 1. **1 John 1:9** (ESV) — 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- G. Finally, the negative
 1. **1 John 1:10** (ESV) — 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
- H. That’s the flow, the rhythm, of the passage
 1. If... and it’s negative
 2. If... and it’s positive

3. If... and it's negative
 4. If... and it's positive
 5. If... and it's negative
- I. John is the consummate teacher here
1. He gives examples – what assurance looks like
 - a. But that would not be sufficient unless you also have examples of what assurance does not look like
 - b. What is actually the opposite of assurance
- J. As we seek to apply the light of God to our lives, leading us to a life of the assurance of our union with God and Christ
1. John gives us definitive directions
 - a. A spiritual GPS, enabling us to navigate our way from uncertainty to certainty
 - b. From confusion to confidence
 - c. From ambiguity to assurance
- K. I would offer that these “if-then” statements give us **assurance builders and blockers**
1. There those things which build us up in our genuine assurance
 2. And there are those things which block or prevent assurance
 - a. And even tear at our assurance, diminishing our confidence
 - b. Destroying our sense of union with Jesus
- L. There is even a progression of the kind of darkness we exhibit when we reject the light of God
1. That's the way evil works, isn't it
 - a. One small transgression, one little lie, leads to more and more insidious and evil and destructive lies
 2. **Romans 6:19** (ESV) — 19 ... For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness...
- M. **1 John 1:6** (ESV) —
1. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, **we lie** and do not practice the truth.
- N. **1 John 1:8** (ESV) —
1. 8 If we say we have no sin, **we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us.
 2. We start to believe our own press!
 - a. We start to believe our own lies
 3. And then, the final depth of our deception comes
- O. **1 John 1:10** (ESV) —
1. 10 If we say we have not sinned, **we make him a liar**, and his word is not in us.
- P. We lie, we deceive ourselves, and finally, we make God a liar
- Q. Let's look at each statement to see how the light of God is to be applied to our journey of assurance

V. **Assurance Breakers**

- A. First – the assurance breakers
 - 1. Those statements that destroy our assurance, and break down our confidence in Him
 - a. That’s, after all, where John begins – and ends
- B. **1 John 1:6** (ESV) — 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 - 1. It’s possible to come to this place, this sanctuary, this worship center –
 - a. And sing the hymns
 - b. And recite the affirmations of faith
 - c. And agree with the prayers
 - d. And even say “amen” at the appropriate times in the sermon
 - e. On Sunday
 - 2. But then walk through Monday to Saturday as if we’d never been here
 - a. We walk in the flesh, not in the Spirit
 - b. We nurture illicit thoughts
 - c. We prioritize selfish desires over desires for God – in other words, we engage in idolatry
 - d. We tolerate anger toward our enemies – indeed, toward our brothers and sisters
 - e. We foster envy and jealousy by coveting what others have – whether material or position or reputation
 - f. We contribute to dissension in our community
 - g. We gossip about others, spreading rumor and innuendo
 - h. We draw conclusions based on facts not in evidence
 - i. We make assumptions about motives of others, pretending to be able to see into their souls
 - 3. These are all what the Bible says are the works of the flesh
 - a. “Oh, we have fellowship with God”
 - b. But we walk in darkness
 - 4. So our sacred proclamations are a lie
 - a. And we do not practice the truth
- C. **1 John 1:8** (ESV) — 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
 - 1. The first assurance blocker is to say we have fellowship with God
 - a. The second is to say we have no sin
 - 2. If you say you have no sin, the Lord’s table is meaningless
 - a. For why would you celebrate the death of Jesus Christ
 - b. For His death has no meaning, except for sinners who cast themselves on His mercy
 - 3. And to deny sin in ourselves is destructive of our own personalities
 - a. For to say we have no sin is to deceive ourselves
 - b. To conceive of our own self-congratulation
 - c. To write our own glorified biography
 - 4. And then we find ourselves in the gray
 - a. Unable to discover the truth

- b. For the truth is not in us
- D. **1 John 1:10** (ESV) — 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
 - 1. Assurance blockers
 - a. To say we have fellowship with God, but walk in darkness
 - b. To say we have no sin
 - c. Now – to say we have not sinned
 - 2. “I’m just fine”
 - a. “I’m good enough”
 - b. “God will be happy with me in His heaven”
 - c. Because I’ve not done anything so offensive as to place my eternity in jeopardy
 - 3. Even though God says, “For all of have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”
 - a. You say, “God, You are a liar”
 - 4. Do you want to meet Jesus and tell Him that He is a liar?
 - 5. You might be able to conjure up some sense of assurance by deceiving yourself
 - a. And denying that you’ve ever offended God
 - b. But it would be fake assurance
 - c. It would be fake news
- E. That’s what it looks like to block your assurance of union with Christ
 - 1. That’s what will destroy your walk of faith
 - 2. That’s what will cut off the branch you’re sitting on

VI. **Assurance Builders**

- A. But you don’t have to live like that
 - 1. You can, as believers in Jesus, live in such a way that your assurance is constantly and consistently growing
 - 2. John gives us wonderful assurance builders
- B. **1 John 1:7** (ESV) — 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - 1. If we walk in the light
 - a. That is, walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh
 - 2. **Galatians 5:22–24** (ESV) —
 - a. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
 - b. 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
 - c. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
 - 3. Those are set in contrast to the works of the flesh which I described a moment ago
 - a. That’s what walking in the light looks like

- C. **1 John 1:9** (ESV) — 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
1. What a contrast with the assurance blockers!
 - a. Blockers – saying we have no sin; saying we have not sinned
 - b. Builders – confessing our sins!
 2. Is confession a normal and regular part of your devotional life?
 - a. Is confession one of your prayer patterns?
 3. More than that, do you confess to one another?
 - a. To a trusted friend, in confidence?
 4. **James 5:16** (ESV) — 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. ...
 - a. Sometimes we're not healed because we don't use our physical illnesses as an occasion for self-examination
 - b. And when that self-examination reveals sin, we don't confess our sins to one another!
- D. But what a promise if we do!
1. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!
 2. **He is faithful!**
 - a. He has promised that the death of Christ – which we remember in the Lord's Supper – is sufficient to forgive the sins of all those who ever believe in Him
 - b. And He will not fail in keeping His promises
 3. **He is just!**
 - a. Because God did not play fast and loose with sin – but laid them all on Christ in His death on the cross
 - b. God has paid the penalty of our sin through the death of His Son
 - c. So His forgiveness of all those who trust in Jesus is just and righteousness
 - d. Christ is the propitiation for our sins
 - e. He is the wrath-removing sacrifice
 - f. And God can forgive because He is just
 4. True forgiveness of sins
 - a. Not the fake assurance when we deny we have sin
 - b. But true forgiveness – and true assurance
 5. And not only that – the cleansing from all our unrighteousness
 - a. No need to carry even the stain of sin any longer!
 - b. When we confess our sins
 6. As we come to this table, forgiveness and cleansing are what we see, and touch, and taste
 - a. God has designed this physical experience as a manifest reminder of His gracious blessing for all those who cast themselves on His mercy

VII. **The Fellowship of the Blood**

- A. One final observation from this text
 - 1. And it comes from one of the assurance builders
- B. **1 John 1:6-7** (ESV) —
 - 1. [Blocker] 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 - 2. [Builder] 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- C. Blocker – if we say we have fellowship with him – God
 - 1. Builder – we would expect to hear John say, if we walk in the light we have fellowship God
 - 2. But he doesn't say that
 - a. He says if we walk in the light we have fellowship with one another
 - 3. It's not that we don't have fellowship with God – we do!
 - a. But it goes beyond that
 - b. We have fellowship with one another
 - 4. And that's why we call this Lord's Supper "communion"
 - a. And that's why we do it together
- D. And it's the fellowship of the blood
 - 1. **1 John 1:7** (ESV) — **7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.**
 - 2. We are blood brothers
 - a. Joined, united
 - b. With God, with Christ – to be sure!
 - c. But with one another
 - 3. We are never closer to one another than when we share this meal together
 - a. Through the blood of Jesus
 - b. Who cleanses us from all sin