

Sermon for Sunday, April 29, 2012
Dr. Dan Doriani
Caring for Integrity
1 John 1:5-10

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 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, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1. Integrity: If we have fellowship with God, we walk in the light

Chuck Colson died last week. People once called him ruthless, the 'evil genius' in President Nixon's White House, known above all for his win-at-all-costs attitude. He once said he would "walk over my own grandmother" to ensure Nixon's re-election in 1972. He gathered intelligence on opponents, and compiled a famous "enemies" list. Nixon wrote, "When I complained to Colson, I felt confident that something would be done. I was rarely disappointed."¹ He served seven-month prison term for pleasing Nixon by trying to discredit analyst Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers.

In jail, he was famously repented, believed in Jesus and became a disciple. He wrote a best-selling book, *Born Again*. Skeptics groaned, called it a ploy, and asked, "How long will this last?" Answer: The rest of his life. The same energy that he gave Nixon for four years, he gave to prison ministry, lecturing, speaking and writing for the next forty years.

Today his Prison Ministries has branches in 110 countries. It has proven results – lower recidivism – with ex-prisoners. Colson also toiled to bring the faith to bear on public life, politics and law through his Center for Christian Worldview. More important, people knew him as kind, friendly, humble and repentant – not a hatchet man. He changed inside and out.

Integrity is the topic of the start of our series, "Caring for Integrity." What we call *integrity* John calls "walking in the light." This is John's message: God is light. And if we have fellowship with God, we will walk in the light.

Pagans identify God and the lights – sun and moon. But according to Scripture, God creates the light, dwells in light and communicates his light to us: "God's word is a light for my path... The unfolding of your words gives light" (Ps 119:105, 130).

As his life ended, David testified, "The LORD turns my darkness into light... he is like the light of morning at sunrise, like the brightness after rain" (2 Sam 22:29, 23:4). That is, God *communicates* his light to us, and has the power to transform us. Micah says, "Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light" (Mic 7:8). He brings us out of darkness. So Isaiah told Israel "Let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isa 2:5).

¹ New York Times 4.21.12

But Isaiah knows there is a problem. Some "call evil good and good evil." They substitute "darkness for light and light for darkness." John agrees. The gospel of John says Jesus is "the light of the world" and "No one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 5:20, 9:5, 12:46).

One scholar says John "is dominated by a vision of God – his light, his moral excellence, his efficacious purity." His purity makes us pure.² Because there is no darkness in God whatsoever there should be no darkness in those who say they have fellowship with him.

But 1 John 1:6 labels a grim reality: Many claim to know the God of light, yet live or walk in the darkness. Chuck Colson's life changed, but many who profess faith don't change. What shall we make of them? "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not, literally, *do* the truth."

To "walk in the darkness" is to live in major sin, chronic sin, including rejection of the call to repentance. Pride is a mark of darkness. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and seemed to think it was just fine. Aaron made a golden calf and said, "The people made me do it." Those who crucified Jesus gloated after they murdered him. And Jesus warned his disciples that "a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God" (John 16:2).³

By contrast, real disciples "walk in the light" – they are authentic, have integrity. John permits no illusions. No one is immune from sin – not even those who walk in the light. So he says, "The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin." All sin includes sin as a whole, and each and every sin we might commit.

In fact, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). But, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

The issue: How do we assess behavior that God finds offensive? The response to failure reveals the status of our heart. Is it a paradox? If we walk in the light we are more aware of our sin and quicker to confess it. If we have fellowship with God we know when we stray from him - and we seek restoration.

If we say we have no sin, we say, "No thanks" to Jesus' sacrifice. He gave himself so the Father could offer forgiveness. For everyone commits sins and everyone has character flaws that produce a stream of sin. Someone said, "To be aware of what one has done amiss and to blame oneself, is the part of a righteous man."⁴

Solomon said, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov 28:13). We have a choice: Confess our sin and find forgiveness and purification. Or deny our sin and suffer double loss: we deceive ourselves and miss God's grace.

I recently read a book about integrity and it made good points. Tell the truth, eat problems for breakfast, discipline yourself to complete tasks, make tough calls. But John has stated the essential of integrity: God is light and if we claim to have fellowship with him, we live in the light. That light includes

² Yarbrough, 50.

³ Yarbrough, 55-56.

⁴ Yonge, 885.

awareness of our darkness, confession of sin, and the faith in Jesus, who forgives and purifies, so we can walk in the light more and more. Yet, it's easy to live in darkness.

2. It is easy to live in darkness and deceit

Vaclav Havel was a dissident Czech playwright who understood how communism controlled Eastern Europe for forty years. In 1980, he wrote an essay "The Power of the Powerless," which described totalitarian ways and gave oppressed people a framework to resist. The Polish labor movement or rebellion, Solidarity, adopted his plan. Havel led a similar movement and eventually became prime minister of the Czech Republic.

Havel invites us to consider a shopkeeper, a green-grocer who sells fruits and vegetables in a city in Eastern Europe. The green grocer puts a sign in his window "Workers of the world unite." "Workers of the world unite" is a venerable old communist slogan. Does he put the sign in the window because he believes it? Not at all. He puts the sign in the window because it came from headquarters, along with the lettuce, carrots and onions. He put it in the window "because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be."

If he refused to put the sign in his window, there would be trouble. Accusations of disloyalty. He doesn't operate in a market economy. Disloyalty means the fruits and vegetables stop coming. He would lose his shop and be assigned to work in a factory, with lower pay. More, his children would never be admitted to a university. They would be laborers, like him.

So he puts up the sign to say "I will behave in the manner expected of me... I am obedient and therefore have the right to be left alone." In truth, the sign means "I am afraid and therefore obey without questions."

No one *says* this. It would be embarrassing, would degrade the shopkeeper. He might even rebel against this affront to his dignity. So no one says anything. Rather, everyone pretends to live in harmony. Havel calls this, "Living within the lie."

Havel said residents of totalitarian countries must stop this, cease to pretend that all is well. To "live within the truth" they must live as they would if the totalitarian communist regime didn't exist. Yes, the state controlled all businesses and schools. It banned free speech and free press. But what if the eastern Europeans lived as they should – with human rights?

For example, an American traveled to Poland and stayed with friends. The law required him to register with the local police. His hosts told him, "No, we don't do that. We don't believe the police have the right to know who stays with us." If no one registers, the law becomes unenforceable.

Havel also urge people to start groups of all kinds – for music, sports, literature, philosophy, work – to have independent life, so the state can't control everything. They ran illegal printing presses, and started the trade unions that changed Poland and began the process of liberation. This was "living within the truth."

To live in the truth is to stop acting in ways we know to be false. The grocer doesn't believe the world's workers have united. He knows that if he pretends to believe, he will be left alone and have a marginally better life, materially speaking.

The shopkeeper doesn't realize or doesn't care that when he puts that sign in his window, he supports the system that suppresses him. If one shopkeeper refuses the sign, he loses his shop. But if every shopkeeper rejects the slogan in the window, they are safe, because the state can't close every shop. So the "obedience" of each shop enforces the system on the others.

Havel was no Christian but when he speaks of "living within the truth" and "live within the lie" he is close to the Bible's language and concepts.

- Peter says believers are "established in the truth" (2 Pet. 1:12).
- John wrote that he had "great joy" when he heard his people were faithful to the truth and "continue to walk in the truth" (3 John 3).
- Jesus says, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:13, 16).
- Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you... You shine as lights [or stars] in the world, holding fast to the word of life" (Phil 2:12-16).
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Question: Do you act in ways that you know are false? Do you do what is expected because you fear the consequences if you live in the light?

Do you go along with anything because everyone else does the same thing? Because you don't want to be the first to resist, to stop living some lie? Do you hide the truth from yourself because it's too painful to recognize and to act?

3. Let us examine ourselves, that we may live in the light

John says, "God is light" and if we walk in the light we also "do" the truth. We see things as they are, we see ourselves as we are, and we tell the truth about it. So we confess our sins and ask God to "forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We live in the light when we face our darkness.

The terrible genius of the communist system lay in the way it led people to create their own subservience. Take a childless couple in East Germany. They are eager to adopt a child. All is ready – the interviews are complete, the forms filed, the payments made – and the child will arrive soon. At the last moment, "I'm sorry, Mr. Schneider, something has happened..." This happens once, twice, three times. Mrs. Schneider is distraught; Mr. Schneider is pensive. He goes to the party offices and asks "What do I need to do?" He agrees to become a petty informant; their baby arrives shortly. What do you think he told himself as he informed on his neighbors? "I did it for my wife. I had to do it." Is that the truth?

Around 1930, a 40ish Russian opera singer, saw his career surge. He sang the lead tenor role in many of the best opera houses in Moscow and other Russian cities. One day, after a performance, an official introduced himself.

"Mr. Tischkovsky, your career has been going quite well lately. You're very popular. People like to go to parties with you after you sing. Next time you have a party after a performance, we would like you to invite Mr. Andropov as a guest." It was not stated, but understood, that Mr. Andropov was a KGB informant. The official would never ask the singer to inform the authorities if his friends made a joke about Stalin. That would be crude. No, he receives an invitation to join the system, to "live within the lie" by pretending Andropov is just another opera lover.

Mr. Tischkovsky refused to add Andropov to his guest list. He wasn't beaten or sent to a gulag. He was informed that he had a good career. He should be grateful. If he was not grateful, he might find that his engagements were cancelled. He refused, his engagements were canceled and he and his family slowly fell toward poverty and hunger, before they escaped Russia due to ties in America. I know this story because Mr. Tischkovsky was my grandfather. He was not a Christian at the time, but he was walking in the light. His motives were imperfect – stubborn pride was as important as loyalty to his friends. But he lived the truth.

We must ask if we live the truth or live the lie. Although we live the truth or the lie as individuals, let's remember that integrity has a social element. Each age has a spirit. No American is tempted to walk in darkness as the Communists did. No one pressures us to put slogans in our shop window, saying "Workers of the world unite." We have freedom of association, a free press, no fear of intimidation, no threat of punishment for dissidence. But every culture makes it easy to walk in light in some ways and to walk in darkness in others.

Where does American culture tempt us to live a lie, to ignore the truth, to live in darkness? Well, we tend to make everything into a commodity in America, to put everything up for sale. For example:

- Buy a prison-cell upgrade for \$90 a night. A clean, quiet, solo cell.
- Permanent advertising tattoo on the forehead – \$10,000.
- Obtain an American surrogate mother: \$20-25,000 per baby. International? Less.
- Be a human guinea pig in a drug-safety trial for a pharmaceutical company: \$7,500.
- Stand in line overnight, Capitol Hill to hold a place for a lobbyist: \$15 per hour.

When we give everything an economic value, we tend to see everything in economic terms. So "What is he worth?" means "What are his net assets?" Or "What's in it for me?" means "What will I be paid?"

We also lie to ourselves or refuse some economic truth. I think of a story I heard recently. A man has three children - 9, 7, and 5 years old. He has a modest income and owned an old car that's in need of costly repairs. Instead of fixing it, he decided to buy a new car. He purchased a car with some nice features even though it cost \$32,000, more than half his annual salary. A friend admired the car but said, "Hey I thought money was pretty tight for you. How could you afford this?"

The man replied, "The dealer gave me a terrific offer. He said I could pay \$20,000 for the car and he'll charge the rest to my kids when they turn 21. And it's only 7% per year, which works out to 7 or 8 thousand per child, which sound pretty good. Besides, they'll get some of the benefits."

We know what we'd tell that father: How dare you burden your children with such a debt! Yet as a nation we do that very thing to our children every year. The current federal deficit is roughly \$4,000 per person per year. We should live in the light politically and tell our representatives: "Stop giving me benefits and making my children pay. Either reduce my benefits or increase my taxes or both."

I push the social/economic aspects of integrity for a reason. God blessed many of us with important work, work that could shape our society. You can reshape our culture. But if we think that our faith, our integrity, is a private matter, that won't happen. Our faith isn't just for Sundays or weekends and evenings. Our faith, our integrity, must show itself, for the world every day, and in our work.

The church is a training center, an outpost. The Christian life is like playing an accordion. We come in, go out, and each serves the other. Scripture says of our work: "Whatever you do, work at it with all

your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23). When we go to work, we don't just earn money to pay the bills – although I hope you do that too.

Recall the statement in Micah 6:8: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." Justice is more than a legal trait. Justice means:

- The government uses its power fairly and properly. That includes good legal process and also protection of the weak from oppression by the strong.
- We keep our word, keep every promise, if the power is in us. We care for those who depend on us.
- Justice involves fair and honest business dealings.

God told Moses to command Israel. "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures, in weight, in quantity. You shall have just weights and just balances. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:35-36). The Bible says this many times. Food, wool, silver were weighed. If a merchant shaved his weights slightly, he could charge for a full measure of grain or oil, when he actually gave 98% of a measure. That may not be common today (surely some do it). But the principle holds: Do justice in business. Charge correctly for all services.

If the repair shop charges for the best oil, they should use the best oil. And does pink slime really belong in ground beef? Producers call it "lean, finely textured beef" but it's cheap, processed scraps of meat sinew, fat, and connective tissue. Don't read about it if you want to enjoy your hamburgers this summer.

Decisions can be more subtle. A physician sees a patient who might need a test, a treatment, a procedure. If he or she ordered it, it would generate income. It might be helpful and it's traditional, so no one will question it. Perhaps the patient even asked about it. But the doctor knows it probably won't help, and there is a risk. The physician who has integrity, who walks in the light, blocks the financial factors. He or she has one question – is it good for the patient?

4. Let us repent and turn to Jesus to cleanse us from sin

Whatever we do, in research, finance, manufacturing, medicine, or washing dishes, changing diapers, waiting tables, there is a way of integrity, a way to walk in the light. If you believe in the God of light, you want to do justice, walk in the light. Yet whatever we aim to do, however much we want to work hard, we lose focus, drift to the internet, to music, to a conversation. We make commitments, unaware of how hard it will be keep them. Even if we don't quit, we may give a half effort.

We've stayed away from the private side of integrity today – our character, family relations, our mind, our emotions. I'll leave it to you for now – I think you can appraise yourself. But the simple act of mentioning private integrity reminds us of John's points. God is light; if we have fellowship with him, we will walk in the light. If we're honest, we know we don't always walk in the light. Integrity requires that we see that and admit the ways we fail to "do the truth."

Then "the blood of Jesus... purifies us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."