

BELONGING TO ISRAEL
(Our Christian Identity)
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1 John 1:5-10

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

In the book of Nehemiah we find these words, Nehemiah 7:61 “The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove their fathers' houses nor their descent, whether they belonged to Israel:” vs. ⁶⁴ “....and because they were polluted they were put from the priesthood.” Can you prove that you belong to Israel?

As you may know, the children of Israel were taken captive to Babylon in 587 B.C., under Nebuchadnezzar, and, as Jeremiah had prophesied, they were kept there over half a century, until, under Cyrus of Persia, they were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem, and to enjoy the land of their fathers. Among those that came with Nehemiah, under Artaxerxes, to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, were some who could not prove their heritage, could not prove they belonged to Israel. As a result of not being able to prove their heritage, they were polluted and put from the priesthood. They had to go through the process of cleansing to be considered a part of Israel.

In 1John 1:5-10, the Apostle John told the Early Church, and tells us, how, like them, we must verify our citizenship as Children of God, and show the world we are truly His disciples, citizens of the commonwealth of the New Israel, and children of the Light.

Last week we looked at John speaking of Jesus as the Word of Life; today we will be looking at the following verses of 1John 1:5-10, and we will look at them as John's outline of The Christian Identity, and see if we belong to Israel. Now to be sure there is much more than these few verses that go into our Christian Identity, but, to John, these 4 features were crucial. Actually we could also sum them up as qualities of one who Lives In The Light, but I want us to look at them as Our Christian Identity, whether or not we qualify to belong to the New Israel, whether or not we are Verifiably True Christians, true followers of the Light of the World

The first thing that will show that we are Citizens of the New Jerusalem is OUR WALKING IN THE LIGHT. ⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,.... The obvious truth of walking In the light should be clear to all of us, and simply means that if we call ourselves Christians we should be living a Christian lifestyle.

Our life should be transparently Christian, with no room for hypocrisy, affectation and dishonesty. Over and over and over again Jesus reminded His followers that their lives were to be different from the religious leaders of that day, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes. Much of the preaching and teaching of Jesus was His declamation against those who were a part of the religious establishment, who were supposed to be lights for others to follow, but who were living in the darkness themselves, blind leaders of the blind, who were supposed to be members of the Kingdom of God, but by their sinful lives, could not prove they belonged to Israel.

One of the tricks that the sculptors in ancient Greece used to correct their flaws was to fill their mistakes with wax, but when the wax melted the flaws were, of course, seen. So the Greek word for **sincere** came to mean without wax. When things get hot for your faith, do the flaws show? Does the wax melt? Are you sincere in your Christian confession? Are you without wax?

I was told by some of the old timers before I became one, that horse trading and selling was common in Hindman and Knott County in the early 1900's. They usually traded good horses, but if someone had an anemic, sick, horse, that they wanted to get rid of before it died, they fed it with a good amount of soda so that it would be bloated and healthy looking at just the right time. The horse might make it home from Hindman or it might not. Clearly the seller of such a horse was being dishonest, deceitful and hypocritical.

To walk in the Light as He is in the Light is to live **who** we are. To be a real self. To be without wax or soda. That is why it is better to be an honest sinner than it is to be a hypocritical saint. We have a right, I think, to expect a sinner to be a sinner and a Christian to be a Christian; and to expect a Christian to be a Christian in his home life as well as in his church life, to be a Christian in his professional life as well as in his religious life, to be a Christian in his political life as well as in his devotional life. You cannot prove you belong to Israel unless you walk in the light as He is in the light.

Do you belong to Israel?

Again, FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS is proof that we belong to Israel:
⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another,... But what does fellowship mean, and why is it so important? To be citizens of the Kingdom means precisely what almost all the Baptist Churches in Romania have written on the front wall of their sanctuaries, just above the pulpit, and sometimes on the pulpit, **One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.**

One Lord. Our fellowship is based first upon a person, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We call Him our King, and He is our King, the King of Glory, but He is so much more than just a King. He is our Lord and our Savior. He is the Holy Son of God who is with us in a very special way when we worship; for, as His custom was in Palestine, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He comes to our humble place of worship in a special way on the Lord's Day, so that we may have fellowship with Him, His Father, and the Sheep of His pasture.

We miss the mark of worship if we neglect to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ each time we meet, and if we fail to glorify His Holy Name. He is worthy of all our praise. If angels in

heaven praise Him, let us offer all our praises unto Him. If God the Father would say of Him, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," then surely we ought to render Him more, much more, praise than we do. Praise the Lord, you saints of His, whom He has redeemed from the hell of life and the eternal hell which is to come, o praise and glorify His Holy Name. Praise Him for coming to earth to share our human joys and sufferings; praise Him for suffering and bleeding and dying for our sins; and praise Him for rising from the dead, for ascending to God's right hand, for sending to us the Holy Spirit of joy, goodness and fellowship. Oh praise His Holy Name.

One Lord! But also: One Faith. Our faith cannot stand in the wisdom of man, or in the discoveries of science, or in the logic of the philosopher, but only in the Power of God. That is not to say these things are not important; but the truth of the Christian faith is the experiential truth that nothing can refute. As an old song says, "I was there when it happened and I guess I ought to know." I know the Truth of God's word, for I have experienced it; I know the truth of salvation because God saved me when I trusted Jesus as my Savior. But above all, with Paul I can say, "I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Because of the One Lord, the One Faith, and, the One Baptism, the symbolic dying to self and rising with New Life in Christ--because of that we have Fellowship one with another, and our fellowship is centered, not in the preacher, not in the deacons, not in human beings, but in the Living Christ. When we come to worship, old self is dead, and we don't need to resurrect him. Let him remain dead; for Jesus Lives! No other matters. In Him we have that blessed fellowship that proves we belong to Israel, for Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another."

James Stewart writes in one of his sermons, "*It is when you have experienced the constraining love of Jesus in the secret place of personal devotion that the love of Brethren comes mightily into its own...There is no fellowship in the world like the fellowship of those who have had a common experience of Jesus.*" Love of the brethren in this holy fellowship is proof sufficient our divine descent, that we indeed belong to Israel.

A further proof of belonging to Israel is WALKING IN CLEANSING. I will always remember my Mother's demand of cleanliness, and how that she would grab me and wash behind my ears, and on the back of my neck, and literally scan my visible body to see if there was any speck of dirt on me. I also remember how that she would sometimes spit wash me with her handkerchief when we were on the train to Ashland to visit her sister and family, or when we were on the Allen Brothers' Bus Line (later called the Blue Ribbon Bus Line) to Garrett to shop at the company store. I must confess that to my childish mind there was absolutely no reason to get a hard washrag cleaning, or a handkerchief cleanup, before arriving at our destination. Of course, I know the reason, now. I was her child, and she wanted her child to be clean; for it was a matter of her motherly pride to keep your 'youngens' publicly presentable, and it reflected on her. Moreover, she was trying to teach me also to be self conscious about how I looked.

Since God created us in His own Image, He wants us to look like Him. And since He is Holy, He wants us to be Holy. To walk in the light is to live a life of goodness, for that is what

holiness is. To say that God is holy is to say that God is Perfectly Good, or morally Perfect. He is separate from all His Creation not because He is absolutely different from His creation, but in the absolute degree of His Perfection as the Creator. To be created in His Image means that we were created to be moral, to be good, to be righteous. But we have fallen from that Image, we have sinned and come short of the Glory of God. One cannot argue that there is no goodness in man, for such an argument would negate the truth that we still have a semblance of His Image. Although the human race has a degree of goodness, we are essentially a fallen race. We make our own rules about good and bad, right and wrong, morality and immorality, instead of following the rules of our Creator Who designed us, and, Who alone knows how we best perform. So, to bring the needed fix for all the viruses in our system, He gave the Law to guide us, knowing of course that we would not keep it, but at least that we would know what was right and wrong with us until we could get a totally new fix, a new creation, through the sending of the Holy Spirit into our Hearts crying Abba, Father.

Now we who have been born again have the Holy Spirit in our hearts telling us what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, good and bad, and what He tells us is always consistent with what the Bible has already told us about immorality and impurity and sin. Moreover the Holy Spirit gives us power to overcome sin. Having said that, I hope you do not think I am saying to you that, since we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we will always do the right thing and follow the Holy Spirit's program. The fact is that we still have the temptation to fall back on the old operating system of the flesh, still are tempted and weak and in danger of falling into more sin and error.

Of course the devil is always there to push the right buttons to tempt us to do the wrong things. So we are always in danger of getting dirty all over again, just like the little boy whose mother washes his face only to find it dirty again. But we belong to God by the creation, and now by the Re-Creation; and God wants us to take the responsibility of staying clean! Because He loves us, because we belong to Him, because we reflect Him, because He is our Father, He wants us to be perfect, to operate in the moral way in which we were created and re-created. Alas! We do not live perfect lives; but we can walk in the cleansing of the blood of Christ, who cleanses us from all sin. To WALK IN CLEANSING is proof that we are of Israel, that we are truly Christians.

The final proof that we belong to Israel in this first chapter of First John is found in such strong statements that they sound too strong for one called John the Beloved, but they are his statements. Listen:

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Clearly, oh so clearly, John is saying, to belong to the New Israel, WE MUST WALK IN TRUTH. He prefaces his three statements with 'if we say'. The implication in all three instances is that those who are saying so are actually lying. We might say that we have fellowship with God, but if we walk in darkness, we are lying. Many might say, as many do, "I have fellowship with God in nature, why should I go to church?" But those who say that live by their own moral standards, not by God's, and therefore are liars because the truth they do not do. That is the first

group that John disqualifies as not belonging to Israel, for their words of honey come from bitter hearts, from unsaved, unconverted lips.

The second group says, "Well, after all, sin is just a concept, an outdated one at that, by which religion seeks to control the weak, and subjugate the masses. Since there is no such thing as sin, I will just live by my own rules, do my own thing, and be about my own business." That might work for a while, but then, a friend or a child is brutally murdered, and what of sin then? When someone hurts them or their families, they may not call it sin, but they must know that it is. Call it what they will. Sin is still sin, and it is just as red and as wrong as it has always been. To say there is no sin is to speak and live a lie, when only those who walk in truth can enter those glorious gates of the New Jerusalem. Any fool can speak the language of Zion, but to qualify for citizenship one must speak the Truth in Love.

The third group John speaks about say, "We have not sinned...". John says of them, "Man, you're blaspheming! You're making God out to be a 'liar.' His Word is not in you, 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Such a blasphemous lie proves who your real father is, for he was a liar from the beginning. You are not of Israel, for if you were, you would not utter such blasphemy."

In each of these verses we are being urged and encouraged to be humble and honest and forthright about our Christian lives before ourselves, before others, and before God. We may be saved, and we may be trying to live a sanctified life, but we will not be perfect in this life no matter how hard we try, and while this is not an excuse for not trying, it is the truth that we must walk in, for we will only be totally sanctified when we are glorified, and that will only be when we enter the New Jerusalem, and meet God Himself face to face in that City which shines with the Light of His countenance, and where no other light is needed. To be heirs of Israel, God will, on the day of judgment, demand proof of your citizenship, or you will never enter there, no matter who you are, or what your religion, or what your social standing.

The answer to all three of these suppositions is to confess--

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The good news for all mankind is here. The good news for all imperfect Christians is here. God wants to forgive us. Jesus willingly died as a condemned criminal to save us, to redeem us, to justify us, to forgive us of every sin the very moment that we are humble enough and honest enough to confess the truth that we have sinned and offended a holy and righteous, and a just and loving and living God. Dear Lord, you hate our sins, but you love us; therefore help us to know that we can walk honestly in your sight and that you will forgive us all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When you sin, confess your sin to God sincerely and honestly and quickly, and He will forgive your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

John was also talking to those who professed Christianity but who could not prove they were of Israel, for their lives were being lived in darkness and they were denying the tenants of salvation and righteousness laid down in the light of God's word. They were denying the very truth that they so loudly proclaimed.

Says John, our Christian credentials, indeed our Christian identity is predicated on these four truths--

Walking in Light, Walking in Fellowship, Walking in Cleansing, and Walking in Truth.

Sadly enough, some of those who went to Jerusalem with Nehemiah "could not prove their fathers' houses nor their descent, whether they belonged to Israel:" If you WALKING IN LIGHT, WALKING IN FELLOWSHIP, WALKING IN CLEANSING, AND WALKING IN TRUTH, you have proved that you belong to Israel, and that Jerusalem is your final home. Do you belong to Israel?