

“Holding on to the Faith”

1 John 2:28-3:9

I have a great confession to tell you all. I have been living in a condition that permits me to do things wrong, to say the wrong things, and to think the wrong things. My confession is that I am a sinner. I am a person unworthy of love, compassion, and grace. I have done things that I am not proud of and I have done things wrong without me knowing that they were wrong. I am a sinner.

I say this because if there is one constant about my human condition is that I will always be a sinner in some form or other. For I believe that the human condition is a broken condition, a condition where we fall prey to the world and do things that don't reflect what it means to be a good person.

I have another confession for you. I am saved by the grace of God through the work of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I am unworthy of the grace that I have received, but grace is a gift that was given to us because God loves us far beyond anything we can comprehend. We don't have to despair because of our condition as sinners. God loves us no matter what we do. As long as we turn to God and accept the message of Christ, then we can take comfort that God love us forever.

In the early Christian community that our letter of John was written to, there was quite a bit of discord amongst the community on sin and what that meant as believers. Sin was something that did affect the early community, as it affects us today in our modern era.

When I look at the passage present, the reading from 1 John 2:28-3:9, I believe the best way to understand the message present is to look at the passage slightly out of order. Not that I am rewriting the Word of God, but I think for us today to grasp the nature of sin ultimately what that means for us I suggest that we take a look at the middle chunk of the reading.

I'd like to turn our attention first to the passage of John 3:4. "Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion." Normally I don't like singling out one verse like that, but I think it is important to really think about this idea. If you look way back to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve took a bit from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you could very well state that act was an act of rebellion. God said don't take a bite of this fruit, yet they did.

I think we can look think of sin this way. We don't follow God's commandments, and we are essentially rebelling. When we do things that harm another person, we are rebelling against God. It's not too hard to get caught up in rebellion in this sense.

I think it is also important to look at the historical understanding of sin in this passage as a way to further grasp this idea of sin that John is presenting. It was commonly understood in the early Christian communities that they were not a part of the world, but rather a part of Christ. It was understood that those outside of the community were caught up in the world and it was the task of the Christian community to save other people from the world. By coming to Christ you were escaping the darkness of the world and entering into the light. John likes to talk about how Christ is the light everything else is darkness.

Much of that concept of light and dark can be applied to this understanding of sin. Living in the world is an act of rebellion, but coming to Christ is turning away from the sin and entering into the light and the community. We gain far more by being a part of the community of Christ than we do by being a part of kingdom of Christ than we do by being outside of it. That is why we do what we do, such as supporting missions, new church starts, and supporting our members and friends in the faith.

Yet there is far more to this passage than just being in sin and the problems associated with that. Making the jump back to the beginning of the passages we have the message to stay with what we know. 1 John 2:28-3:3. (Read the passage). We can know examine the idea that when we keep the faith then we remain in Christ Jesus, that we don't conform to the world. Instead, we become a part of the family, so to speak, of being with Jesus Christ. We remain in the faith always, so that when that day does come where Christ will return, then we are ready and in the faith that he gave us.

I do believe it can be hard to stay in the faith though. The founder of our tradition, John Wesley, often struggled with staying with the faith. He often felt that no matter what he did he would stray from the faith. I must say though, his actions and preaching spoke otherwise. He would write in his journal that he was doing nothing for God, but in reality he was doing great things for God, by reaching out to the people that the institutional church was ignoring at the time. He brought the gospel of Christ to those who hadn't heard the gospel before, in places that few preachers of his time would dare to go.

I think Wesley's experience though is not too much like our own at times. I believe that the burden of sin from past lives or even when we are in the faith can get us down. When we perceive that things are going wrong and that we struggle in keeping from sin we can feel that we are doing nothing for God.

But I am here to tell you, that even though hardship may come, we don't have to despair in sin or the feelings of being lost. I told you at the beginning of the sermon that I had a confession, that I am sinner and that I do things wrong. I struggle with the weight of sin, but I have to surround myself with other people, surround myself with the community that what I am doing for Christ is a worthy cause and that I shouldn't let the weight of sin get in the way.

I believe the early Christian church struggled with these concepts. The orthodox state that our defense against these feelings of sin is to truly immerse ourselves in Christ and the Trinity, so that we can become sanctified, or become more like Christ.

Wesley took to this idea of sanctification, even though he admitted he struggled with sin. He believed that through our faith in Jesus Christ, that by constantly moving forward in faith then we would become stronger in our faith and become more like Christ in our actions. I think we can all think of particular people in our lives, we can think about people that we have gone to church with or that we have known whom the spirit of Christ flows from within them.

I've been fortunate enough to know some people like that. I think they live in a good example of what it means to be in the spirit of Christ. Many of these folks are active volunteers in the church, assisting with disaster relief, or supporting missions. They also live in such a way that gives glory to God, such as in the way they invite people into their home, or the way they greet people on the street. There are countless ways to be an example of Christ, ways that go beyond the scope of this sermon.

What we can take away in remaining in the faith and not letting the burden of sin getting in our way, is that we can remain in the faith by remaining true to our faith in God and again immersing ourselves in the Word and community that we are a part of.

Last week I mentioned that sometimes the greatest enemies of our faith come from within our community. They were people that were once a part of the faith, but for some reason they have twisted the story of faith. In the part of 1 John that we are discussing today the letter mentions that we are to stick to those in righteousness, for even those are righteous are like that of Christ.

This little statement, found in 1 John 7 is the clue that we are looking for when seeking out those to instruct us in our faith and to follow when we are in need of building up of faith. Those that are like Christ are the ones that we should follow as an example for our lives. This goes back to following those that show the faith, for they are the ones that are righteous.

I believe that in this statement we know who to believe I believe those that follow the rule of scripture in their lives and seek to be Christ to those who don't know Christ are the ones who are on the right path and the ones that we should learn from. We have many people in our congregation that are doing this very thing. We are a congregation that is striving to this thing, of sticking to the Word and being the example of faith that Christ calls us to be. We don't have to go looking for the one person out there in the universe that we need to use as an example. We have examples right here for us to learn from, so if you are struggling in faith and are weighed down by the burden of sin, turn to those around you, for they are willing to help you out and point you towards faith in God.

In the hardships of life, we will face challenges to our faith, but keep the faith that we follow in Jesus Christ. John felt that the early community needed to stick to the faith so he wrote the letter to the followers of Christ telling them where to turn when the world got rough and when sin seemed to be coming in. We don't have to live in the fear of sin.

My other confession this morning was that I was a Christian, who was saved by the grace of God through the work of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I say that not to elevate myself, but to state that I have personally felt the grace of God in my life and I want to share that as my testimony to you. I have been the recipient of the gift of faith and grace and I want to share that with you.

Today, if you are pondering the faith of Christ and want to know more about the need for Christ in your life, then come and talk with us. We are here as a congregation to help you discern the faith for you, so that you can have faith in the source of life, the saving work of Jesus Christ. Pray for guidance and pray for examples of faith, so that the burdens of the world don't overcome you. Hold on to the faith of Jesus Christ, and hold on to the faith that you can receive through a relationship with Him. Amen.