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Marching in the Light: 1 John 1.1–10

JERRY TAYLOR

When we say, “I am in fellowship with God,” we are making a very bold claim. The claim of being in fellowship with God implies that we are living in harmony with God’s divine nature. According to 1 John 4.8 God’s nature is summed up in one word: love. John says, “God is love.”

Therefore, one who claims to be in fellowship with God simultaneously makes the claim of walking in harmony with God’s loving nature. If one walks in harmony with God’s nature he or she will by second nature join God in his redemptive work of love in the world. God’s love is uniquely observable in the world and so are the people who embody God’s divine quality of love.

God’s love walks underneath bridges and down wintry streets in major cities seeking to wrap the blanket of warm concern around the homeless that are outside freezing due to a lack of affordable housing.

God’s love aggressively seeks to provide top quality health care for all those who have fallen through the economic cracks of neglect in America’s affluent society.

God’s love seeks to straighten the twisted face of unfair labor practices that cheat illegal immigrants out of their hard earned wages and make them suffer injustice in silence by threatening to report them to immigration if they complain about injustice in the workplace.

God’s love marches beyond the borders of Iraq and Afghanistan in order to restore wholeness to those wounded in war as “collateral damage.”

God’s love penetrates the dividing wall of race and culture that has turned the church of God into a clubhouse that offers membership only to those who look like us, dress like us, think like us, believe like us and vote like us.

People who embody God’s love are active in the world with God. God’s love empowers his people to ignore the social stigmas that society places upon social outcasts.

God’s love inspires his people to courageously reach out their hands to comfort people suffering from AIDS.

God’s love motivates his people to openly wash the tired feet of the poor by encouraging elected officials to use tax dollars to provide adequate public transportation for those who have no other means of transportation.

1 John 1.5 states that God’s nature is light. He says, “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.” People who are in fellowship with God radiate a special kind of light into a dark world.

Without the light of God the world becomes a war zone where the murderous spirit of Cain inspires people to treat one another with malice, resentment and violence.

In such a dark world one nation seeks the destruction of its rival nation.

In such a world one race sets itself up as “the exterminator” of other racial groups that refuse to be politically dominated.

In a world absent of God's light, gang members murder their own brothers like Cain killed his own brother Abel.

A world without God's light becomes a dangerous place. With the great amount of hateful activity around us we sometimes fear for our own safety. We increase security measures to make sure we protect ourselves from those who live in darkness.

No matter what Homeland Security does to protect us, God's light is the only thing that can give us a true sense of security in the face of evil as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

The Psalmist (Ps 27.1) celebrates the security that comes as a result of marching in God's light. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" It is only in the absence of God's light that fear becomes the frightening monster that makes us cry out in the darkness. Without God's light we have nothing to give the world but our own inner darkness.

It is inner darkness that gives birth to blighted neighborhoods.

It is inner darkness that gives inspiration to every hate group in America.

It was the inner darkness of nineteen misguided hijackers that caused them to fly airplanes into Manhattan skyscrapers.

It was the inner darkness that caused Timothy McVeigh and others to ignite the Oklahoma City bombing.

It was the inner darkness of two men in Jasper, Texas, that made them pull Mr. Byrd to his death behind their pickup truck.

While we read this issue of *Leaven*, someone's inner darkness is organizing sleeper cells all over this country. These small groups are preparing a domestic nightmare designed to awaken Americans from their comfortable beds of false security.

Someone's inner darkness is producing militia groups that speak passionately about overthrowing the federal government of the United States of America.

As recently as December 29, 2008, a very disturbing article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* with the title, "As if Things Weren't Bad Enough, Russian Professor Predicts End of U.S."

Russian academic Igor Panarin is a former KGB analyst and the dean of the Russian Foreign Ministry's academy for future diplomats. He appears in the Russian media as an expert on United States-Russian relations. He is also credited with accurately predicting the collapse of the former Soviet Union almost to the date.

Professor Panarin says that mass immigration, the collapse of the American dollar and an economic and moral crisis will trigger a civil war and the eventual collapse and breakup of the United States around the end of June 2010.

He predicts that when the going gets tough, wealthier states will withhold funds from the federal government and effectively secede from the union. He says that once the United States splits along ethnic lines, foreign powers will move in to divide the spoils.

Recent rhetoric from the Texas Tea Party and from Governor Rick Perry has suggested that Texas secede from the Union. Would that lend minor credibility to the professor's prediction?

However, I believe that the only way the professor's prediction will come true is if Americans refuse to march in the light. Such a thing is probable in any nation that fails to rededicate itself to a common vision of a racially and politically united country. I agree with a statement made by the late Curtis Mayfield, "The peace we keep will be the peace we reap."¹

The storm clouds are gathering on a global scale. The clash of civilizations seems inevitable. Various nations are aligning themselves around racial, religious and cultural commonalities. These are days when real human unity is essential to the survival of humankind.

In order to replace the cruelty and hatred in this world with genuine peace, it is going to take the positive

1. Curtis Mayfield, from the song "We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue," *New World Order*, CD, 1996.

impact of the divine life of Christ, one that is uncontaminated by the spirit of hate.

John says in 1 John 1.1, “This we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

Today the church of Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the eternal life of Christ.

For this reason the church must refuse to endorse the ugliness of violence.

For this reason the church must refuse to condone the senseless slaughter of human beings carried out by the state, no matter how justified such actions may seem.

For this reason the church must resist being manipulated by the political powers of the kingdoms of this world.

The minute the church joins alliances with Caesar is the minute that it loses its own soul.

John says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1.3).

John says we want you to be in fellowship with us because we are in fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The church stands in the world as the reconciling agent, restoring the broken relationship between God and humankind.

As the church we seek to impact a divided world riveted by conflict. We do this by inviting people into a non-manipulative fellowship of reconciliation.

John says that his desire is for people not only to have fellowship with the apostolic community, but also to have fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Today many churches are only interested in getting people into their fellowship. Churches must go further than their concern for institutional survival if they are going to get people into fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

In many instances the church has been unable to impact the world because it often gets bogged down in denominational competition. It has been split into warring factions fighting over doctrinal controversies.

Sometimes the church claims to have fellowship with God but the truth is that fellowship in many of our churches is often based upon race, culture, political affiliation and class. John says it is impossible for Christians to claim to have fellowship with God while simultaneously remaining loyal to the racial and cultural values of a fallen world.

John says it this way, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (1 John 1.6).

Any church that tolerates the negative emotions associated with racial bigotry and political division within its fellowship while claiming to be in fellowship with God is guilty of perpetrating a religious fraud.

John says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 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 John 1.8–10).

God’s light is not designed to destroy us. God’s light helps us to see clearly the unproductive racial baggage that our flawed culture conditioned us to carry in our hearts. God’s light enables us to publicly and privately denounce the destructive lines in the racial script that others have written for us to act out.

We praise God for being the light unto our multiracial feet and the lamp unto our multicultural pathway. God’s light changes our racial paradigms through which we see others in the world. He has translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light wherein, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, “we no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view.”

In this country Christians have lived too long with the internal virus of racial ambition and cultural pride. The virus of racial separation based on hatred and fear has infected the eyes of the church for too long. The church still maintains the record of practicing the most segregated hour in America on Sunday mornings.

This is evidence that many Christians still regard one another from a worldly point of view.

The church's inner vision is so blurred that it sees racial and cultural homogeneity as a biblical doctrine.

America is waiting upon the church for spiritual light that can show people how to walk with those who are racially and culturally different. America is watching our assemblies to see if the rhetoric of our gospel has any true merit when it comes to bringing racial and religious unity among people on this planet.

Can the church provide the model for healthy human interaction among different racial and religious groups? Can we exemplify what true human community looks like? In order for the church to help America see what racial and religious harmony looks like, it must first seek healing for its own eye disease. Before we can address the speck of sawdust in the eye of the un-churched we must address the house beam hanging out of the church's eye.

Jesus says in Matthew 6.22–23, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.”

For too long America has looked to the church for light on the subject of race, only to find out that when it comes to the issue of race, the body of Christ is full of great darkness. In regards to race, darkness in the church is sometimes greater than the darkness that exists in the world.

Today the church must allow Jesus to perform spiritual eye surgery, enabling us to see people of different races and cultures as our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Jesus is empowered to perform laser surgery on the eyes of the church, removing the cataract of racial bigotry and cultural division. His light is powerfully penetrating.

We celebrate the wonderful change that is taking place within us as a result of the surgery Jesus has performed on us. The inner darkness within us has been exposed to God's sanctifying light. Redeemed sinners in the body of Christ now fit the description that Paul gives in Ephesians 5.8, “For you were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Our status has changed. We are people of light.

Now that Christians have been set free from the slavery of inner darkness, we are free to walk in the light of racial harmony. John says, “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” (1 John 1.7).

Therefore let us walk together, children, in the marvelous light. Through the liberating power of the Holy Spirit, let us become freedom fighters that expose the principalities of darkness within ourselves and in the world.

Let us start a new sit-in movement.

- Let us sit in the living room of people who are racially, religiously and culturally different from us.
- Let us sit in the dining rooms of people who have a different worldview from ours and share a meal with them.
- Let us sit in the worship assemblies of others who might have a different theological outlook on things.
- Let us engage in a new wave of protest marches.
- Let us march in the light in order to break down the dividing walls of spiritual and psychological segregation that remained intact after the physical legal structure of segregation was dismantled.
- Let us march in the light so that our social gatherings will be more than the gathering of racially diverse bodies sitting next to each other without their souls ever touching one another.
- Let us march in the light as he is in the light so our fellowship in church will go beyond race, culture and politics.

- Let us march in the light so that the church can have the moral authority to influence the nation away from the murderous spirit of Cain that might express itself in the form of violent civil unrest, unrest that some say is inevitable.
- Let's keep marching in the light despite how numb and tired our feet may become.
- Keep marching in the light despite the darkness that surrounds us.
- March on in the light of love even when we are persecuted by hate.
- March on in the light of love when we are opposed by every wicked power in the world.

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