

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 24, 2021

We Are Better Together **“Walking in Jesus’ Footsteps”** **1 John 2:1-6** **Rev. Mike Fordham**

Every United Methodist pastor since 1773 has answered the same 19 historic questions when being ordained. A sample of a few of the questions are: 8) Have you studied the doctrines of The United Methodist Church? 9) After full examination, do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures? 10) Will you preach and maintain them? The very first question we are asked is, 1) Have you faith in Christ? Then there are 3 questions which are very interesting. The first asks, 2) Are you going on to perfection? The next one asks, 3) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Then, along this same line, we are asked, 4) Are you earnestly striving after it? What is interesting is that we are all expected to say yes to all these questions which means that we genuinely are going on to perfection and expect to be made perfect in love in this life. That is an amazing commitment to make. The question is, how many of us took those questions seriously and are striving to do that in which we said yes? The Bible tells us that this is not just what God expects of pastors but is what God expects of all His followers. Let us listen for ourselves at what the Bible says about these truths.

1 JOHN 2:1-6

2 My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

3 And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. 4 If someone claims, “I know God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. 5 But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

GOD WANTS US TO WALK IN THIS LIFE WITHOUT SIN (v.1)

Did you hear what John says in the very first verse is the reason that he is writing these words to the church? He says that he is writing this so that we will not sin. John actually expects his listeners to come to a place where they do not sin anymore. Throughout the Bible, from the beginning when Adam and Eve’s sinned, and then all the way to the end of the Bible in Revelation when God is going to defeat sin and death once and for all, God takes sin very, very seriously. The Greek word for sin in the New Testament is *hamartia*. The word sheds light on what sin is. *Hamartia* literally translated into English is “miss the mark.”

It reminds me of the latest craze in these past few years of the axe throwing experience that people are getting into. I've not done it, but it does look like fun. My understanding is that individuals can compete for bragging rights to see who is the best axe thrower. It all comes down to throwing the axe just right so that when it hits, it sticks into the wood target and hopefully the aim is good enough to also have hit the bullseye. Anything short of bullseye is missing the mark. The bullseye for us in our lives is the perfect holiness of God and anything that falls short, that misses hitting bullseye, is considered to be sin. If there is one thing in the Bible God hates that would be sin. Why? God hates what sin does to us and all of His creation. God hates how destructive sin is. We see that destruction at the beginning of time when Adam and Eve sinned, it separated them from God, destroyed their relationship with God, and sin also brought death to them. God created us to experience His love and eternal, abundant life, but when sin entered into the world it threw a huge wrench in God's perfect plan for us. Soon after Adam and Eve left the garden, sin struck a heavy blow in their lives when one of their son's killed his brother. From that point on sin has left a trail of destruction in its path.

God's will for every person in this world is that we would all be free from the destructive power of sin in our lives. In other words, God's will for you and me is to be holy. Jesus Himself said in *Matthew 5:48*, *"But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."* The Apostle Peter also put it this way in *1 Peter 1:14-16*, *"¹⁴ So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. ¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'"* The truth is that when most of us hear these passages being read, it is pretty overwhelming. God really expects us to be perfect, to be holy. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of holiness and perfection are a list of legalistic dos and don'ts, rules, and laws that nobody can keep, people acting all holier-than-thou, not having any fun in life. Instead, the picture of holiness is quite different in the Bible. When the Bible talks about holiness it is referring to God taking something common and setting it aside to be especially used for His holy purpose. Holiness then is God taking every day, common, broken, human beings and choosing them to be His children and then God making them holy. How then is it possible for us to become holy as God expects?

GOD'S GRACE MAKES US HOLY THROUGH FORGIVENESS (VV.1-2)

God says here in *verse 1* that if we do sin, God has an answer for when we miss the mark, and that answer is Jesus. Jesus is described as working like that of a lawyer pleading our case before the judge. Jesus is our representative before God, continually seeking justice and mercy for us. God knows that we are not able to stop sinning on our own, that we will fall short and miss the mark, so He has sent His one and only Son into this world to fix our problem with sin. The first step is to provide a way for God to forgive all our sins. Jesus came into this world and lived the perfect, sinless, holy life that we are not able to do on our own. Then Jesus came and died for our sins on the cross. Jesus paid the price for our sins with His life so that we can stand before God forgiven of all our sins as if we had never sinned. We then miraculously stand before God holy,

perfect, even though we have sinned and still struggle with it. We call this atonement, or that God made us one with Him, reconciled us back with God through the life and death of Jesus on the cross. This is all made possible through God's forgiveness paid for by Jesus' perfect life and death on the cross for us.

While George Washington was in his first term as president, He borrowed the book *The Law of Nations*, by Emmerich de Vattel, from the historic New York Society Library. And then promptly forgot to return it. Ever. And the library never brought it up. After all, the borrowing patron was the liberator of the country, a national hero, and the first president. You just don't ask *that* guy for your book back. For the next 221 years, it sat on a shelf in Washington's Virginia home, until 2010 when the Mount Vernon staff finally sent it back. The overdue book fines? \$300,000. Fortunately, the head librarian, Mark Bartlett, graciously forgave the fine. Note that forgiveness is never really "free." Someone has to bear the cost. In this example, the library absorbed the \$300,000 fine. As Tim Keller has observed, "...God's grace and forgiveness, while free to the recipient, are always costly for the giver. ... From the earliest parts of the Bible, it was understood that God could not forgive without sacrifice. No one who is seriously wronged can 'just forgive' the perpetrator. ... But when you forgive, that means you absorb the loss and the debt. You bear it yourself. All forgiveness, then, is costly." Jesus paid the price for the debt of our sins that is far too large for us to pay on our own. God then made a way that we can stand before God holy, as if we had never sinned, which is the definition of the theological word, justification. What amazing grace God offers us in Christ to fix our sin problem by loving us through sending His Son in this world to accept us as we are, forgive all our sins, and then bring us back into a right relationship with God where we stand before God holy and perfect as if we had never sinned.

GOD'S GRACE EMPOWERS US TO LIVE HOLY LIVES (VV.3-6)

But God's grace and the way that God makes us sinless and holy and perfect doesn't stop there. God's grace takes it all one step further. Charles Wesley put it this way in his great hymn he wrote, "*O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*", "He breaks the power of cancell'd sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood avail'd for *me*." God has not only forgiven us of our sin, but He has also set us free from the power of sin over our lives. God's grace now makes us new creations. *2 Corinthians 5:17*, "¹⁷ *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*" Jesus does not just forgive us, He also changes us and makes us new persons who do not want to go back any longer to the old, hurting, broken, sin-filled life and commit the same sins. C. S. Lewis wrote, "The command 'Be ye perfect' is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. [God] is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. ... He meant what he said. Those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect — perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality." Once God forgives us God then also changes our hearts so that we want to be obedient to God in every area of our lives. We then want to live lives that obey God's commands and want to please God with our lives. When Jesus forgives us, the Holy Spirit makes His home in our lives

and then begins the restoration process in us making us into being the holy, perfect children of God that God plans for us all to be.

To explain how Christ in us now labors to make us more human, not less, pastor/author Rankin Wilbourne used the following illustration in his book, *Union With Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God*: “Consider two superheroes, Batman and Spider-Man. Batman is a rich and strong man with lots of cool gadgets. His superpowers stem from his external possessions. Spider-Man has a few accessories as well, but he is a superhero because of the spider powers he obtained when he was bitten by a radioactive spider. His nature has been changed. Now he has a new power accessible to him, within him. Christ in you makes you more like Spider-Man than Batman. Something alien to you, from outside of you, has entered into you and changed your nature. You now have power that you did not have before. The trouble with this analogy is that Spider-Man became something more than human, while we instead are being restored to our full humanity. We are becoming more like Christ.” We then experience God changing us from the inside out through the grace of Jesus forgiving us and the power of the Holy Spirit transforming us from the inside out so that the words of *Colossians 3:12-17* become true in our lives as it says, “¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”

One part of our mission at Killlearn is to “encourage growth and holiness” and we have provided for each one of us stewardship packets that have tools that can enable us to grow to be more holy like Jesus. If we will live according to our membership vows of Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, and Witness, we will see our lives becoming more like Jesus in every way. We have sent you the stewardship packets in mail, or if you did not get them or misplaced them, they are also available to you on our church app, as well as our church website. It is our hope that we will make commitments in this coming year that God will use to shape our lives to be holy as Jesus is holy.

May we, as *1 John 2:6* says, live our lives as Jesus did.

Icebreaker I – Have you faith in Christ? Are you going on to perfection? Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Are you earnestly striving after it?

Icebreaker II – Share a time when you've completely missed the mark in a situation.

Icebreaker III – Who is your favorite superhero and why? If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

1. How can you be sure that you belong to Christ?
2. What are two proofs that we know Jesus and that we abide in Him?
3. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus speaks to God "in our defense" (verse 2:1)?
4. What is the relationship between God's love and our obedience?
5. Is there someone you need to forgive?
6. Is there an area in your life where you are struggling with sin?
7. Can you name God's commandments?