

December 20, 2015

## ***Salvation Comes From the Lord***

In this season of the year we focus on giving and receiving gifts in celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is appropriate that we do this because Jesus is the greatest gift we will ever receive. He was given to us as the perfect innocent sacrifice to completely satisfy the requirement of God's law of sin and death under which each and every one of us stands condemned.

By God's grace we have been saved from the destruction that we deserve and given the opportunity to find new life. Life, now that's a gift! In response to this great and wonderful gift of life we lay down our lives, surrendering our old self-seeking ways, dying to those old drives, being buried with Jesus in the grave of baptism and raised with him. And...then what?

We all know that we still sin. If we claim that isn't true we are liars. The Apostle John says, ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*** (I John 1:8-10) So, how does this work? We lay down our old life of sin, we die to it and leave it behind, but we still sin. How can God save us from such a disastrous existence?

John shows us the way, ***"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you; God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 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."*** (I John 1:5-7)

So, on the one hand we continue to sin even though we have embraced the grace of God. On the other hand God, in his mercy, continues to cleanse or purify us from all our sins. We still don't deserve it, but in his great mercy the Father does just that. He constantly cleanses us from our sin through the blood of Jesus. We are pure, not because we live that way, but because the Father makes us that way.

Again, what should we do in response to this overwhelming grace? It would be insane to go on sinning with abandon, but in the end our self still leads us to sin. But, because we are seeking to ***"walk in the light"***, we are constantly being purified. What does it mean to ***"walk in the light"***? John shows us, ***"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."*** (I John 2:9-10)

We have died to our old self-serving ways, we have buried those old ways with Jesus in baptism and we have been raised by the grace of God to new life. The key to living this new life is not in the keeping of copious rules and regulations. No, the secret to living this new life, the secret to walking in the light, is to love others. The core change in us because we have become children of God through the grace of Jesus Christ is in loving others. How we treat others is the core of our existence as those who ***"walk in the light"***.

In the end, it is all about what it was at the very beginning. God who lives in relationship creates us to live in relationship. He wants us to live in relationship with him and with one another and to find the joy of life in those relationships. He sacrificed his one and only Son to bring us back into relationship with him. It's all about our relationships. So, what happens if we fail in those relationships? What happens if our marriages fail, or our families fail, or our churches fail? What happens if we let ourselves be drawn in to hating and despising others because of our fears?



If we cannot learn to love, John would say, we still live in darkness. The measure of a true disciple is in how he treats others. *"Dear children,"* John begs, *"let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

Just as our Lord lived, so we must live. *"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34-35)