

A Life That Shines - 1 John 2v6-11
[Deeper Sheet 2.15.09]

Ten years isn't a lot of time, but it's enough time. It's enough time to know that the church can be a greenhouse for redemptive work in the world. It's enough time to know that the church can also be a breeding ground for disappointment, anger, bitterness, and resentment. A church is a community of people who have found new life in Christ and yet are on a journey which constantly brings their brokenness to the surface. There's enough room in the cracks and the crevices of our brokenness for darkness to thrive.

Within as little as sixty years after Jesus' death, questions were being raised about who Jesus really was. If the body is evil and Jesus had a body, some wondered, could Jesus really have been God's Son? Suddenly the church was trying to navigate a whole host of differing perspectives about Jesus, and things got ugly fast. So bad, in fact, that in the letter of 1st John, John appears to be addressing the first church split. Having been one of Jesus' disciples, John addresses the situation the only way he knows how: love.

John had been there from the beginning. He'd seen Jesus' compassion toward the sick and the needy. He'd watched his rabbi wash feet at the last supper. He was there when Jesus looked down from the cross and told him to take care of his mother Mary. He knew that in the face of overwhelming darkness, Jesus had been a light that shined. And what made that light so brilliant was love. So John's words to a fractured church were "Whoever claims to be in Him must live as Jesus did." In short, "You have got to love one another."

Living in anger, bitterness, and resentment is like stumbling around in the dark. It's possible for the darkness to grow so furiously in the cracks and crevices that we become blinded by darkness. It is equally possible for the light of God to permeate human lives so deeply that darkness is burned away. Just because darkness happens *to* us doesn't mean that darkness has to happen *in* us. To live a life that shines is to focus our attention on those things that have been done for us rather than those things that have been done to us. We seek to live lives of gratitude rather than lives of entitlement. We want to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is this love of Christ" so that we can experience "the fullness of God".

In what ways has your church experience felt like a greenhouse for redemptive work?

Likewise, in what ways has your church experience felt like a breeding ground for disappointment, anger, and resentment?

Based on his experience with Jesus, John suggests that the proper response to the controversy is love. Where are you currently experiencing conflict with other people? What might a loving response look like?

How would you describe the difference between gratitude and entitlement?