

(1 John #3) This Is the Message

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes that God is light, highlighting the importance of holiness and the joy found in fellowship with Him and His people.

Duration: 33:15

Topics: "God's Character"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the message found in 1 John 1:5, which states that God is light and there is no darkness in Him. The sermon emphasizes the importance of accepting the testimony of the Apostles regarding the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. By believing in Christ, individuals enter into fellowship with God and His people. The sermon also highlights the connection between God's love for righteousness and His hatred for evil, and how this principle should guide Christian fellowship.

Transcript

We turn for our meditation this morning to the first epistle written by John in chapter 1, and I would like to read verse 5. 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. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. The thread of reasoning in this passage is quite clear, as those of you who have been with us over the last two Sunday mornings will remember.

Those who accept the apostle's testimony to the fundamental fact of the incarnation, the coming of God in the person of the Son, to take to himself our humanity and become incarnate, those who accept the apostle's testimony to the reality of that event and its historicity, enter by their very faith in Christ and in the gospel into the fellowship of the people of God, to receive Jesus Christ as our Saviour is to find his family as our family. It follows as one thing leads to another. It could not be otherwise.

Then John went on from there to say that he was writing these things to the Christian community in order that their joy might be full or fulfilled. The implication of that statement is this. Christian people can only know fullness of joy in the fellowship of God's people.

If you are truly regenerate, then you can never know fullness of joy outside your fellowship with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with the people of God. If a person finds no joy in the fellowship which is with the Father and the Son and with the people of God, then that raises a question mark about his experience of the renewing work of the Spirit. As sure as we have the life of God in our own souls, as sure

as the Spirit of God has worked savingly upon us and we know ourselves to be one of his people, then we shall find that we can only come to fullness of joy within that sweet fellowship of the saints and fellowship with our Father in heaven.

But now notice. It may strike some of us with amazement that having said that he's writing these things that our joy may be full, John should proceed with the very next breath to speak of God as light, God as holy. He moves from the concept of the joy of the Christian, the fullness of joy, to the inexplicable glories of the holy one of Israel.

Now to the worldly man, these two concepts are essentially and irrevocably antithetical. If you want to have joy, then keep away from any semblance of holiness. If you are going to be holy, you are going to abandon joy and leave it behind.

To the man of the world, the man who knows not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is impossible to think of fullness of joy and fellowship with a God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. But not so for those who have leaned on Jesus' bosom as the writer of this epistle hath. Not so for those who have looked into the face of the Son of God incarnate and have known him.

Here righteousness and mercy kiss each other and embrace one another and become one. Here holiness and happiness meet. Holiness, in fact, is the antiseptic that kills all the particles of germs in the air that would slay the very nerve of true joy.

Without holiness there can be no real, lasting, pure joy. Heaven is the place where joy will be unhindered, unqualified. And one reason for that is this.

In heaven there will be no sin, nor shall the defileth ever enter in. And because there is no sin there, for one thing, heaven can be the place of the consummation of all the joys that we have known in this world. It is joy because there is no sin there.

All is holy. All is pure. The air has been purged.

The atmosphere is as holy as the God who sits upon the throne. And the joy of the Christian comes to its own, comes to blossom, full bloom, and to maturity there in the atmosphere of heaven. Here then we enter upon the second theme in this first part of John's epistle, namely the fostering of the fellowship.

The first theme, the facts underlying the fellowship. The second theme, the fostering of the fellowship that is to be based upon the fact of the incarnation and of everything that our Lord Jesus wrought in the flesh for the salvation of his people. We now turn to the first of two main truths that are interwoven here and that relate to the fostering of Christian fellowship, the condition of Christian fellowship.

What is it? Well, the primary principle that regulates Christian fellowship is found in these very words to which I have referred. This, says John, is the message. This is the message.

Please remember, John is everywhere. John is universally known as the apostle of love. I would not want for one single moment to cast a cloud over that.

It is true that John is the apostle of love, par excellence. He stresses the universality of God's love. He stresses our love for one another.

We shall come to that in this epistle. But he who is universally acknowledged as the apostle of love says, right at the beginning of his dissertation, this is the message. Everything else I am going to say about love and about our love for one another and our keeping of commandments of believing that and the other, it has been based upon and regulated by this cardinal, this primary fact that our God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Now, what does this mean? This morning we can only touch upon it. What is the essence of that statement? What is the essential nature of the message that John is thus proclaiming? What do we mean when we say that God is light? The essence of that statement, it see me, may be stated in terms of the principle that God is the emblem and the source of absolute purity. Now, it is more than that, but it is primarily that.

God is the embodiment of absolute purity and he is the source of all purity. In practice, such holiness is expressed both negatively and positively. Negatively, God is the pledged opponent and enemy of all evil.

Now, this is what the Bible declares right from Genesis, from God of Eden, to the very last book in the Bible, when not the defiles shall enter into the New Jerusalem. This is the God of the Old Testament, this is the God of the New. It is one God that we encounter in the Bible and everywhere this one God stands over against that which is impure and evil and unrighteous, be it on the personal plane, on the domestic scene, on the social horizon, or in international affairs.

The God of the Bible will always, inevitably, and necessarily be against all semblance of evil. The prophet Habakkuk puts it very powerfully, though it might not appear as crisp in our English as it is in the language that he wrote it. He said, God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look upon wrong.

Now, the English there is very weak, but what it means is this, if we may summarize it. You and I, even though we hate sin, sometimes look at it. On a television screen we will look at things that we condemn in life.

On the pages of our newspapers and magazines we look at things that we would condemn from the pulpit and in every other place, and we would have no truck with them. We condemn even what we look at, or we look at what we condemn. In other words, we are compromisers.

We are never wholly consistent. But God, who is light, can't look with any pleasure on darkness. He has no delight in looking upon it.

He turns his back upon it. God has no truck with evil. He is always antipathetic.

He is always on the opposite side. He is the avowed enemy of evil. And the thing, of course, that John is stressing here by saying that God is light is this.

He is saying that it is part of the nature of God so to be. Now, the significance of that is this. It isn't a matter of God's will only, that God has willed to be against evil.

You see, if God had only willed, if he had only decided for a period, or even decided originally for a prolonged period to be against evil, it would be a matter of will, and he could change his mind. God could change if it was purely a matter of his mind or of his will. But, says John, God is, and the verb is is very important here, God is light.

It's part of his nature. And therefore, because it is part of his nature, he cannot change. God cannot change his own nature without ceasing to be God.

Now, that's not an irreverence of the preacher. That is a fact of revelation. God cannot cease to be light without ceasing to be God.

It is his very nature, let us repeat, on that account, he cannot cease to be holy. Therefore, God is always against evil, always against evil. I think, let us take this to our hearts today, is something that you have in the privacy of your life is against the law of God? God's always against it.

You can never involve the Holy One in any compromise with any semblance of evil. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Positively, God delights in all that is good.

Now, I've stressed the negative, but we must bring out the positive. This is the explanation why God hates evil, because he loves what is righteous. He loves what is good.

He loves what is proper. He loves what is fitting. And he's pledged to be on the side of it, and sooner or later in the affairs of the universe, at the last great judgment day, if not before, the webs of human life will be so unraveled, and right and righteousness and truth will be vindicated by our true and righteous and holy God.

As saintly Stephen Charnock rightly says of God's holiness, and I quote very briefly, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue. As sincerity is the luster of every grace in the Christian, so is purity the splendor of every attribute in the Godhead. His justice is a holy justice.

His wisdom is a holy wisdom. His arm of power a holy arm. His truth a promise, a holy promise.

His name which signifies all his attributes in conjunction is holy. He's the holy one of Israel. His name is holy.

So much for the essence of it. Now, how is this expressed? My good people, we can only look at one or two examples this morning. But wherever we look, and whatever illustration we bring forth, we always find the same thing.

We find a pattern. God's holiness in its expression always means this in relation to sinners. When he, the holy one, confronts sinners such as we are, sinners become aware of their condition.

It is of the nature of light to show up what is there. That's what light does, isn't it? You go out on a dark winter's night and you find you don't know where you're putting your feet. And then you take a torch, and the beam of light will show you what's there.

You know how to walk. When God, who is light, comes near my life, I not only know what is around me, but I know what's within me. Because his light illumines my conscience, illumines my mind, illumines my understanding of myself.

For the first time I know myself when God draws near in holy confrontation. It is as if a shaft of brilliant light suddenly penetrated a sphere hitherto unexposed. Housewives know this to cause consternation from time to time.

When you've dusted a piece of furniture with a nice, polished face, and you think you've got rid of every particle of dust, and then suddenly a shaft of sunshine comes in through a window or through a door, and you look back and you see in the shaft, in the ray of light, you can see a countless multitude of dancing particles of dust that you thought you'd got rid of. You only see it in the ray of light. Close the door, shut the window, and you won't see it, but the light shows it up on an infinitely larger scale.

That is how God's holiness expresses itself as he confronts man in his sin. It brings moral dirt to the mind and fills the consciousness with an awareness of being unlike God and unfit for his presence. Now, faced with the word and vision of God, we hear all kinds of people reacting in a somewhat similar vein.

I hear Job, who, you remember, according to the word at the beginning of his experience, was an upright man and an honest man, a good man. But I hear the upright Job later on during the course of the book that bears his name saying this, and he's come a long way when he says this, but at last he's confronted with God on a closer front and intimate. Behold, he says, I am of small account.

What shall I answer thee? He's been saying so much up until now. He's had all the answers when God says this, Job says that. He's had all the arguments.

He's been a most argumentative, but not now. Behold, I am of small account. What shall I answer thee? I lay my hand upon my mouth.

Men and women, do you know what that means? That every mouth may be shut, says Paul. Our mouths are far too open when we walk away from God. Heaven only knows what we say about ourselves and the arrogance with which we strut abroad, but when a man comes near to God, he puts his hand upon his mouth.

Job goes on. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the year, but now my eye sees thee, therefore I despise myself. The experience of Isaiah, the young prophet, has become universally familiar.

We read it this morning. Seeing the glory of God filling the temple and hearing the voice of the cherubim chanting antiphonally, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Do you remember how he felt? Woe is me, he says, for I am undone.

A young prophet brought up in the temple, probably the son of a priest. I am undone, I'm severed, I'm cut off. Some of the translations put it, I'm lost.

Daniel's experience may not be as widely familiar, but it is of the same spiritual order. Having many times already been alarmed by his confrontation with God, he even tells us there were times when his whole color went from his cheeks. He turned pale as a ghost and felt sick at soul because of the sin of the people that he represented and the holiness of God.

Then he comes to this, O Lord, this is the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments. We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled. To thee, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us confusion of faith.

Confusion of faith. You see, the man that has been confronted by the Holy One and knows what's taking place doesn't know where to look. Have you ever had that experience? You're just afraid to catch the eye of man, woman, child, or anybody else.

Confusion of faith. Men and women that have come face to face with God are confused because of the holiness, of the majesty, of the glory that shines as a light into the depths of their souls and brings to their consciousness the awareness and the memory of what they've done and what they are in the quietness of their own thoughts and in the privacy of their own minds. Confusion of faith.

You have the same thing elsewhere. I can't go through all the possible instances that might be called this morning. Think of Simon Peter when he's seen the glory of the Saviour.

Depart from me, he says, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. He was a disciple now. He's been following Jesus, if I remember correctly, somewhere around six to eight months.

He's changed quite a lot in the meantime. Depart from me, he says. He wants to follow, but he tells the Lord to depart.

Why is it? Oh, it's this shaft of light. He who said to others, I am the light of the world, has come too near and revealed himself too much that Peter feels I must fall back. Beholding the same Lord in his transcendent glory made Paul the Pharisee concede, I know that in my flesh there dwells no good thing.

Now that's the man who's seen himself in the light of God's holiness and light. In my flesh there dwells no good thing. Now, you can't argue a man to that position.

Mere preaching doesn't bring a man to say that about himself. But when God moves and reveals himself by the Spirit and the Word, this is exactly what takes place. Or think of John, and I must end with this.

These quotations I must end. John said, remember it's John the saint, John the martyr, John on Patmos, not John the young disciple now. And he sees the glory of the first and the last relationship one.

It's John the saint, it's the beloved one. He knew his Lord's love for him. He knew of his Lord's death and resurrection.

John the justified, John the saint. When I saw him, says John, I fell at his feet as dead. Thomas Bilney, in the hymn that we have sung, I'm sorry you didn't know the tune.

I'll see to it next time we'll have a familiar tune. Thomas Bilney put it in these remarkable words, eternal light, eternal light, how pure the soul must be when placed within thy searching sight, it shrinks not, but with calm delight can live and look on thee. This then is the message, says John, God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Do you remember Iago, in Shakespeare's play, saying of Othello, he hath a daily beauty that makes me ugly. He hath a daily beauty that makes me ugly, therefore I'm angry with him. He shows up what is in me.

My dear fellow Christians, that's exactly what God is on a far more infinite scale. He is light in whom is no darkness at all and to live within a mile of him is to become aware of myself. But, and with this I draw to a close, it may be rightly asked, how can men and women whose inner depravity and sinful history have been thus recognized and revealed by God to be so serious, ever hope to have fellowship with God in fullness of joy? The thing is incongruous.

How can you get from here into the fullness of joy? John's surely taken a wrong turning here. Oh my good friend, no, no, no, no, no. Because you see, this is part of the biblical message, when God begins to show men their sins, he's always got something else to show as well.

This is the difference between the accuser of the brethren and the saviour of sinners. When the devil comes after us, he simply wants us to see our sins, if he shows us our sins at all. And he does that to some people, he reminds them of all kinds of things, sins that have been forgiven long ago, the devil brings them up.

He says, do you remember, do you remember? And he throws them before our eyes and he reminds us, we don't know quite what to say, we're not as wise as Martin Luther, who threw his inkpot after him. But when God is revealing to men their sins, he's always got something else to show, and he will show it sooner or later. What is it? There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunge beneath that flood, losing all their guilty state.

If we confess our sins, we shall come to that later on in our study. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. These things I write unto you, that ye sin not, but if any man sin, we have an advocate with God.

Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. The light which is God shines into the caverns and recesses of our souls to show us ourselves, but the light which is God never stops there. It points us to the Savior.

Thomas Bilney didn't stop there because Thomas Bilney knew the Word of God and knew the Savior. Oh, how shall I, he says, having spoken of the holiness of God, oh, how shall I, whose native sphere is dark, whose mind is dim before the ineffable appear, and on my naked spirit bear the uncreated beam? How can it be done, he says, and then he answers his own question. There is a way.

There is a way. There is a gospel. There is a way for man, Christ, of acts blamable, an offering, and a sacrifice.

A holy spirit's energies, an advocate with God. Or in the words that we are going to sing in a moment, let me remind you of William Bright. Coming to the Lord's table, he acknowledges his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who not only reveals God as light but love, and the one who discloses our sins but comes to us from loss.

Listen to his words. Now, O Father, mindful of that love that brought us, that bought us once for all on Calvary's tree, and having with us him that pleads above, we here present, we here spread forth to thee that only sacrifice, perfect in thine eyes, the one true, pure, eternal sacrifice. Look, Father, look on his anointed face, and only look on us as found in him.

Look not on our misusings of thy grace, our prayers so languid and our faith so dim. And these are the words I love very much. For lo, between our sins and their reward, we set the passion of thy Son, our Lord.

For lo, between our sins and their reward, we place, we set the passion of thy Son, our Lord. How can the unholy sinner hope to have fellowship with the Holy God? Here's the answer. It is to know the cleansing of the blood of Christ, and the intervention of his perfect righteousness as our robe.

Between us and God stands the mediator in all his glory, and those who once were afar off are now made nigh by the blood of Christ. My friend, are you there this morning? Have you by faith placed Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection and his covenant promises between you and the reward of your sins? If so, I bid you come into the Holy of Holies, to him who is light and accessible and ineffable and eternal. And in Christ, he speaks peace and pardon and welcome today.

Let us, therefore, come to his table, acknowledging with gratitude the sufficiency of our Lord and the glories of his grace. And may the song of the redeemed be heard in every heart to the glory and everlasting praise of him who so loved us.

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