

Light or Darkness?

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we come to the second section of this letter that John, or this almost like a sermon that he gives to probably be passed round a number of house churches, possibly around the Ephesus area.

And the assumption that I make today as we come to it, and forgive me if it's a wrong assumption is that what we're looking at is the truth.

We're looking at what is true. That's why we're here, right? Because as if we're believers, then we've come to recognize God's Word and the revelation that we have in Jesus Christ as the truth.

And that's very much what John is wanting to get across to those who will read his epistle, including ourselves. He is speaking about the message, Corrie mentioned that last week.

This verse five is the message we have heard, and we proclaim it to you. It's something deliberate and clear that he's bringing to the people. You could translate that.

[1 : 0 9] This is the message that is messaged. It's the same root word that these two words reflect. It's the same root word that comes, that is connected with the word angel, the messenger that brings a message.

And he's wanting to get across the message of the gospel, the message of the church, the message that has transformed his and their lives is consistent from the very beginning right through to Christ and beyond its consistent God in the beginning that we read brought light into the world, created the world.

And with all that happened in between, we come to the Christ who in John chapter eight says, I am the light of the world. And John says that he is an eyewitness or an ear witness because he speaks about the message that they had heard.

And he's bringing that to us and he's bringing it to the original readers. And I think in this letter, it's a specific message, isn't it?

As we mentioned before, he's coming to the end of his life. He's probably the last living apostle. And he's got something important to say. And it really is a specific message that he's bringing, a word that he's bringing in verse seven of chapter one.

[2 : 3 5] He says, but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. In chapter two in verse seven, he brings this word that they had had from the beginning, which is a new commandment that they love one another.

And in chapter three, verse 11, he speaks about this message again that you have heard, that we should love one another. So he's built the foundation of loving God.

And he adds now the importance of, or fellowshiping with God and the importance as a result of that of fellowshiping with one another, hugely significant.

And that is the core of what he's saying. The commonality and love we have for each other because that is what walking in the light looks like.

And in many ways, as he takes the significant and important realities, he is subsuming the whole of God's commands to us. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.

[3 : 44] These are the things he's speaking about. And the problem he's addressing is that there is false teaching, creeping in. People coming with a message that's different and understanding that it's different, that is bringing division and selfishness and hatred towards one another.

Bringing theology and bringing people into camps and into tribes with their theological pride. And it's antithetical to the whole gospel, that kind of thinking and that kind of living.

Knowing God means loving our spiritual siblings, primarily. It means loving our neighbour and loving our enemy. And here the focus is very much on the gospel communities and it's about loving and fellowship with one another.

Ten times John says in this short sermon stroke epistle, dear children, dear children.

He says little children are dear children. It's very pastoral. It's very warm. It's very familial. And what he's getting across is that this truth of loving one another is simply not secondary.

[5 : 04] It's not unimportant. It's not an added extra. It is fundamental to our understanding of the theology of God and of knowing who God is and of fellowshiping with God.

This is not about whether we're good with people or not, whether we're introverts or extroverts or sociable or not. It's much deeper than that. It goes right to the heart of our understanding of God.

The transformation that God brings, fellowship with God brings into our lives a whole different view of believers and how we love them, not if we love them.

The danger is, and John was aware of this, of treating other believers as if my knowing God is actually irrelevant to the way I treat them, not making any serious effort to connect why God being my Savior and the Savior of my fellow believers should make any difference to the way I treat them as a believer myself.

And he's wanting to get across it. This is the most powerful witness to our fellowshiping with God, the response we have and the way we treat one another as believers.

[6 : 24] What then is the theological truth that underpins our community with each other? Sorry. A terrible thought just came into my head there about this fly, and it's flying about my head, which is a very time to say, wow, devil's in that fly.

But that's a terrible thing to say because I was at camp many years ago when I was a kid, a football camp. And we were in church, and it was a hot sunny day, and the doors were open, and it was on the highlands, and the door were open, and halfway through the sermon, much to the light of all the kids like me in the church, a dog came in and came down the front, and kind of everyone, you know, you could have been talking about Pluto, and no one would have listened, because everyone's eyes went in the dog, just as I'm seeing all your eyes on the fly.

And the dog came in and went about it and then left, and then at the end of the service, one of the leaders who was being very pious said to this old lady who was walking out of the church, she said, that was a terrible distraction, wasn't it?

I think the devil was in that dog, and she turned around and she said, what's not? That was my dog. It was the minister's wife. So this fly does not belong to anyone, and I don't think I'll offend anyone if I say the devil's in it.

But please try not to be too distracted by it, because I've got some really important things to say here. So what's the theological truth that underpins our community with each other?

[8 : 01] And it is stated here really clearly in verse 5. This is a message we heard from him and proclaimed to you that God is light. Now, there's two really profound truths expressed in this short letter.

The first is that one, God is light, and then in chapter 4 verse 8, he says, God is love, to the greatest explanations of the character of God, God is light and God is love.

And when he uses this expression of light, it's a very powerful biblical image and symbol of the character of God that is right through Scripture and often used by John himself.

But there's that life that comes with light that is made clear in Genesis chapter 1 in the passage, the vitality of the created light, of the sun, of energy and warmth and life itself reflected in light.

But it also speaks of revelation as well, goodness and righteousness. And truth in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul in verse 9 speaks about the fruit of the light that is the fruit of the light of God is found in all that is good and right and true.

[9 : 20] So there's revelatory right light in the character of God, goodness. And there is obviously purity and perfection.

I can't really go into the characteristics of light as such, but there's a purity and a perfection that is reflected in light. And in God, he is light.

In him, there is no darkness at all. What an astonishing statement of the character of God. No shadows whatsoever. Nothing sinful, a really significant statement.

Nothing sinister, deceptive, never disappointment within his Trinitarian character. A perfect and equal love between the three persons of the Godhead.

Never messes up. He's never guilty and he's never wrong. God is light. There's this phenomenal parallel to him being light and in him being no darkness at all.

[10 : 22] It's everything. It's everything we are not. You know, we can't create life from nothing and light from nothing as he did.

Any light we create is derived light, of course. It's reflected light, but we can't even hide from ourselves. We try to and we certainly try to hide from others, but there's shadows within us, isn't there?

We battle with personal demons. We fall short of our own standards, let alone God's perfect standards. We are gillridden and we see ugliness around us in the lives that we lead.

And John 3.90, I'm going to come back briefly to these John reflections on light. Jesus says that people prefer the darkness rather than the light.

So there's this, there's the natural recoiling from the character and purity and perfection and infinitude of God. And it's something that separates us from him, from his purity, so that we find ourselves under his just judgment.

[11 : 34] We don't and we can't love him as Lord. Exposes as leaves as naked before him. And that is a hurtful truth for us to consider.

And kind of worse than that, as we recognize from 2 Corinthians 11, that the devil himself, who we sometimes call the Prince of Darkness, he's not specifically referred to that in the Scripture.

He called the Prince of this world and much of the reference to him is about darkness. But he's referred to as an angel of light there because that is in the context of false teaching, which is the same context as here, where Paul exposes deceitful workmen who are disguised as believers but whose deeds expose them.

And that's coming round to what is very important here, not only about our belief and fellowship with God, but how that works out in our lives. But these false teachers were divisive, spreading disunity, disharmony and lovelessness and separation.

So God is everything we're not yet as Christians today. What do we do? We claim to share commonality with God, don't we? We claim, as Corrie preached last Sunday, to have fellowship with God.

[13 : 01] And that's what he was proclaiming. That is, relationship, family ties with, commonality with God. How can we in our darkness?

We can, of course, because, and we know this, because of Jesus, because God in His power and His love chose to reveal that in emptying Himself from the person with His Son and to die in the cross midday in darkness.

The three hours of darkness taking this symbolism very clearly to its spiritual level. And so John speaks here about Jesus Christ in chapter 2 and verse 1.

He's saying, my dear children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin, but anyone does sin. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

And therein he's explaining why we can have fellowship with God, isn't it? Because he explains to them about Jesus, the righteous one. Jesus, the righteous, the light of the world.

[14 : 17] And if you go through the gospel of John, we mentioned that last week, you'll find this theme repeating itself many times through the gospel of John.

John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the light who was life and connects the two together. In verse chapter 3, it speaks about Jesus who overcomes the darkness, the light overcoming darkness and exposing it darkness.

In chapter 8, we mentioned before Jesus makes that amazing claim, I am the light of the world. And in chapter 12, he says, no one who believes in Jesus should stay in the dark.

So there's this transformation and change. And then of course Paul takes that image further by describing Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 as the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

So you have all these interconnecting symbolic pictures of who Jesus is, the righteous one, the right one, the light one, the one in whom there is no darkness, yet the one who becomes the propitiation for our sins, God's own gift to remove and turn away his just wrath against the darkness and blackness and rebellion of our sin.

[15 : 50] And his perfect love he provides, he is all of that Old Testament sacrificial system pointing forward towards the one, the coming of Jesus who empties himself, who sheds his blood, the life being in the blood and goes through the darkness of hell in our place as the God's perfect and only answer to the darkness of our hearts and of the world in which we live in all the brokenness and pain and disordered loves that we recognize.

And it's not an interesting verse. He says, not only for our sins, not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world, is that a universal statement that he died for everyone and that everyone is forgiven.

Only in the light of Scripture we recognize that that can't be the case. But imagine a pandemic and imagine that there's only one vaccination that enables those who become infected to be healed.

There's only one vaccination, but while there's only one way of being healed, that vaccination still needs to be applied, it still needs to be taken, it still needs to be individually brought into the life of the person.

It provides no healing if it remains in a cupboard. And I believe that's the sense in which John is speaking about Jesus' atoning work here.

[17 : 34] It is the only solution. It is the only cure, it's the only answer to the diagnosis we find ourselves in. But it remains only a meaningful and life-changing cure if we embrace and take that salvation of Jesus to ourselves.

The Christ Himself is the message. He's the one in whom we trust. And because of what Christ has done in laying our trust in Him, we become sons and daughters of God, covered by the righteousness of His light and then dwelt by His life-giving spirit.

So we can be people who say, we've seen the light in many ways. We've come to the light. We've confessed the darkness of our sins and no forgiveness.

So I want to finish with this last section which brings us back to the beginning in a sense because we're called to walk in the light, aren't we? In verse 70 he says, but if we walk in the light, it's assumed as believers who fellowship with God, who is light, we walk in the light, then we have fellowship with one another.

Now that's the conclusion really of what he's saying. God shares His light with us and we fellowship with Him. We emphasized that last week and it's our major emphasis that the reality of being Christians is fellowship with God.

[19 : 08] It's knowing God. It's walking with God. It's knowing that we've been released from spiritual darkness and the solitary confinement of not knowing God and coming into His presence, walking the hills with our heavenly Father, asking just in His character and who He is in His light and in His presence, making up for the lost time and seeking to live anew in a fresh way, looking and facing our living God, reshaping the reality of our lives from the four dark walls of deceit and darkness and unbelief into the freedom of His light.

And He speaks of it here as a fellowship with God is walking in the light. It's a great picture. Walking is simply that habitual direction of our lives.

It defines who we are. We use that in what walk of life are you in and which direction are you walking in the way we think.

We use it in that term and that's what it means here. It's the direction in which we're traveling as people that defines who we are, the trajectory of our lives, the choices that we make, the decisions, all to be made in fellowship with God in prayer, in relationship, in listening, in waiting, in meditating, in this character of God.

And I think it's significant that generally speaking in Scripture it's called a walk because a walk is not really a picture of flamboyance or drama.

[20 : 53] It's kind of the everyday thing. The everyday way we live is our relationship with God. I mean even the walking race in the Olympics need to be jazzed up a bit to make it exciting so that people wiggle our hips and do things that make it quite funny.

But if it was just an ordinary walk, no one would watch it. And there's that sense in which the walk we have and the fellowship we have with God is our everyday direction.

In his company, the perspective it gives us, the awareness of the obstacles that he opens our eyes to, our own heart that he reveals to us so that we are changing it all the time and living in the light of his truth, this character.

And that involves a couple of things as we go. The first is confession of sin in verses 8 to 10 particularly. He speaks about walking in the light and the paradox of in doing so confessing sin.

You know, he says if we walk in the light, see in the light, we have fellowship one another. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. The truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all righteousness.

[22 : 07] If we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar. His truth is not in us. Isn't that interesting that in this walk of light, this walk with God, he wants us to be honest and open and confess that we're imperfect.

We're to reject the whole idea that we are sinless. We're to reject the whole idea that our sin doesn't matter. He says if we say we have no sin, the NIV translate that, if we claim to be without sin or if we claim not to have sin, and it's quite a strong word that is translated that way, it's kind of making a demand.

No, I'm not, don't be ridiculous. I'm not a sinner. And that wasn't sinful. He says don't claim to be like that. Don't defend sinful behavior and make it justifiable as if it's okay.

And don't claim to not be sinners. He's saying that you've been exposed by the light, the light of God looks into our hearts and he sees everything. And when we live in such a way, okay, flies, bands, it's not easy today.

I'm nearly finished. So I'm going to persevere, so my last point will be to the brass band, okay? But the importance is that, it's this recognition that these things are not insignificant.

[23 : 35] If we say we're, it doesn't matter if we're sinning or not, or if we say, well, I'm sure God doesn't see that, or we were deceived by our own goodness, then we're making out God to be a liar.

That is a blasphemous accusation, we're saying God isn't like, we're saying God isn't truthful. He's like, I know my heart better than God. Really God, I think you've got things wrong there.

I'm not sure if you needed to send Jesus all the way to the cross because I'm not so bad. And we make him out to be a liar. And that's tremendously significant because we're putting ourselves above God.

We're saying we're the standard, we're what's important, and God doesn't really know he's old, it's a long time since he revealed himself.

If we think like that, as Christians, and we often do, it may be not expressively in that way, but we'll lose sense of God's presence, and we don't lose our salvation unless we habitually are living that way, unless we've decided that God is wrong and that we are right, and that there is another theology, there's another way, there's another truth.

[24 : 51] That is causing God to be a liar, and his word is not in us. And that matters because as I said at the very beginning, we come here because we believe God has revealed truth, and it's not just something we decide or make up ourselves.

So as we live in the light, we're walking with God, and that involves confessing our sin. Don't be afraid that your sin's too bad.

How often have we heard people say, oh, I can't come into a church, the church roof would fall down because I'm so bad. Please, give God some credit that he's the living God, and that he knows our hearts, and we don't need any pretense with him.

We are pretending with each other a lot of the time, but we shouldn't be with God. And he says, look, confess your sins because I'm faithful and just. I've punished them in the person of my own son Jesus Christ out of love and voluntary desire for you.

The Christ fully came in as the Spirit did with me in this plan of salvation. So please, I will not punish your sin twice.

[26 : 00] Confess, be honest. And lastly, as part of that, and I think most powerfully, then we fellowship with one another. And that's repeated as the logos, the word, the message three times in this short letter.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. That is the implication that he wants to drive home from this short letter, that we are not to be living our Christian lives on our, it's the whole focus, walking with God is a given.

Therefore we share commonality and love, and we share this road, this walk with other Christians. We're on this road together.

We have an eternal future destination, and that destination is not one birth. We're in that part of a multitude that nobody can number.

And we are to fellowship on that road together and share that road with our spiritual family. Heaven is not me and my God, and even me and my God and reuniting with my earthly family, however significant that may be, heaven is a society, it's a nation, it's a family, it's a flock, it's a people.

[27 : 27] And I think sin in our lives makes us very often want to categorize or identify ourselves in what separates us from one another, isn't it?

We're Scottish, not English. We're Hibbs fans, not Hartz fans, of course. And there's lots of different ways that we separate ourselves out and make ourselves different.

And we do that as Christians, or Presbyterians, not Baptists, Reformed, or Arminian. We have lots and lots of divisions that we make. Now a lot of them are significant and not unimportant.

But what lies beyond that is much more significant. We're not to be naive, we're not to expect everyone to believe the same things in every aspect. But in all honesty, as we are walking in the light, we focus on what unites us rather than what separates us.

It doesn't need to be institutional unity. But in Christ, if we're spending eternity with people, let's start living like that now and confess when we fall short.

[28 : 35] We're walking towards a Trinitarian love, which is a perfect love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the whole of our remaining battle is against sin which revolves around that separation, division, hatred, moving away rather than moving towards condemning, criticizing, avoiding confession, focusing on the multitudes of sins of others without confessing our own and without allowing love to cover over a multitude of sins.

And so we are called to love one another sacrificially rather than saying that simply doesn't matter.

And that's tough. It's not an easy walk. It's so tempting to walk away, isn't it? Tempting to justify ourselves, tempting to say, I know better, tempting to say, I've been badly treated in the congregation.

Let's not just make it theoretical. Let's think of our own sins, the congregation that we're part of here. We are called never to deny the centrality and the command to love one another, and especially love when there's brokenness or when there's division or when we hear things about other people or whatever it might be.

Because if we deny that, the centrality, the significance, and the hard work that's involved in that and the transformation of our hearts, then we're calling God a liar. But we're called to live like that in St. Columbus.

[30 : 10] That's what we'll, you know, we talk about community and family. Important that is generosity, hospitality. We talk about all these things. They're not secondary.

They're not insignificant. They're not just our particular distinctive. They're not things that we can just get tired of and retreat into our own shell.

This is our understanding of fellowship with God. It is basic, important, crucial theology. As we fellowship with God, we love one another.

And that gives us a global perspective as to our Christianity. Stops has been insular and isolated and isolationist in the way we live our Christian lives.

Read this again, read the whole of it again. My little children, my dear children, ten times, old saint, probably not far from his death, who walked with Jesus, who had heard it and seen it all.

[31 : 15] This is the message he wanted to leave inspired by the Holy Spirit, that we have fellowship with God, and therefore, because of that, we love one another.

I wonder what message we will share in our dotage. I mean, let's pray. Father God, we pray and ask your blessing on your word.

We pray that you would take it and apply it to our hearts and to our lives. We would be challenged by it, comforted by it. What great comfort in walking and fellowship with God to know that we can not run away and hide like Adam and Eve did, but we can confess our sins because you're faithful and just to forgive our sins.

Because what you have done is you paid the price, your light, and there's no darkness in you whatsoever. Forgive us when we accuse you of being, having darkness in you.

When we accuse you of lying or being unfair or unjust or capricious or anything that is wrong and sinful, hard to understand a being that is all light in whom there is no darkness and not a solitary being, but one in trinitarian love, astonishing truth.

[32 : 50] May we meditate on today, may we consider the events of what is happening in the city today and meditate on these truths or these realities that we find and look at them with the perspective of being followers of Jesus and the reality that your kingdom will come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.