

(1 John #4) Since God Is Light

by J. Glyn Owen

God's holiness is the foundation of the gospel and the basis for Christian fellowship, and it is the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

Duration: 29:42

Scripture: Leviticus 11:44, Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 5:48, John 1:5, 1 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:5

Topics: "God's Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the message of Jesus Christ, which was taught by Him and received by the apostles. The preacher highlights that Jesus is not just the gentle and meek figure often portrayed, but also the Son of God and the source of the message of God's holiness. The preacher explains that fellowship with God can only be achieved through His holiness, and that growing spiritually involves relating our lives to His holiness. The sermon also touches on the concept of God's love, life, and His consuming fire, and raises questions about the necessity of repentance and being born again.

Transcript

Now, last Lord's Day morning, as we were making our way to the communion table, we simply dwelt upon one and the main aspect of the significance of this. When the Bible says that God is light, it means fundamentally, first and foremost, that God is morally pure. It speaks of his holiness.

Holiness means separate from. Now, God is separate in two senses. Transcendentally, as people say, God's very being is different from ours.

He is the eternal God, the creator, and we are but creatures. And he is separate from his world in the sense that there is only one of his, may I say so reverently. There is only one of his kind.

All of us are on the one side of the line. We are but creatures made by him, dependent upon him, answerable to him. God, on the other hand, is self-existing, sovereign Lord and creator and judge of all men.

He is not dependent upon any of his creatures. He is the great independent one and the only. In that sense, God is separate.

Metaphysically, he is transcendentally the great Lord of the universe. But now, what we have here, first of all, is this other aspect of God's separation from all things. He is morally separate.

God has absolutely nothing to do with evil. He cannot look upon evil, says the prophet, as we saw last Lord's Day morning. Now, that is the best.

But now, that is not everything that is meant by this synonym of light. It would be wrong to pass from the major statement of verse 5 without adding that some secondary, though by no means unimportant, facets of the divine nature may also be envisaged right here when John says God is light. For example, you will remember that Paul says, in writing to Timothy, he says something like this.

He refers to God as the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto. Now, this is a slightly different thought. It refers to God in his majesty, in his glory.

The two things are related, but here the synonym of light is used to refer to God as being so full of glory, so full of majesty, so full of sovereignty, so utterly sovereign. Something of this was manifested in the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read that his garments were white as light.

And the light was not in the garments that he wore, but the light was in the depths of his being, and it shone out through the light. The majesty of the humble Galilean emerged from within his nature and manifested itself. He became incandescent, as it were.

You remember what they did? There is only one thing you can do when you see a person of this order. They fell on their faces. Again, some inspired writers employ the word light as a synonym for God when they want to stress his capacity to scatter the darkness of ignorance.

Light is revealing, isn't it? Whenever light comes in, things are revealed. This is what the psalmist has in mind when he says, The Lord is my light and my salvation. Wherever God is, things become clearer.

In thy light, he says in Psalm 36, 9, we shall see light. And then again, we know this very well. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light.

Why is the word a light unto our goings? For this reason, it is the word of the Lord who is light. Now, having said that, however, it is the notion of God in his holiness, his moral excellence, that dominates everything else. And in consequence, this is the fact that becomes what we may speak of as a regulating principle.

In the promotion of Christian fellowship, we must bring all our beliefs to the bar of God's holiness. We must bring our entire behavior to the same bar of the holiness of God. We must bring everything out into the light of his moral purity and excellence.

And let the light of his holiness assess things and adjudicate and determine what is right in his sight and what is not. Now, if we fail to do this, we shall find after a period of professing to be Christians that we're only dealing with shadows. If I fail to allow the holiness of God to assess and to judge me, then I can only become involved with shadowboxing.

I shall never be dealing with the realities of which the Christian faith speaks. I shall never get into the holy of holies. I shall never know the sweetness of communion with God.

I shall always be on the fringe, always in the outer court of things. And this is a terrible thing. Now, it may well be that there are many in the Christian church who feel themselves to be here, in the outer court.

They've never somehow got in. They don't know what it is to be in sweet, deep, real fellowship with God. Everything is seen from a distance.

If there is one particular key that unlocks the door, there are more than another. It is this key. It is the doctrine of the holiness of God.

And I have to set my sails in terms of belief and behavior in light of the fact that my God is holy. Now, this is so important. In fact, it would not be out of place this morning if we went so far afield as to try and show that the whole gospel of the grace of God owes its nature and owes its terms to the fact that God is holy.

Now, this is outwith our main purpose this morning, but let me say this much. Why, for example, is it necessary for men to repent? But let me ask another question. Why is it necessary, not simply to come to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, why is it necessary to be born again? Let me put the question differently again.

Why is it necessary for men to have the Spirit of God within them? If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. Jude castigates people who are, and this is the last straw as far as he's concerned, they are without the Spirit, he says. And it doesn't matter what else they've got.

They're without the Spirit. And if they're without the Spirit, they're without the camp. Now, the reason is this.

It's because God is holy. The call of the gospel is not come to Jesus Christ and have a friend, to go with you back into your old ways of living and live just as you lived before, but having a friend with you. No, no, no.

Oh, He is a friend. He is a friend. There never was a friend like Jesus.

But the fact of the matter is this, that along with the summons to receive Jesus as my Savior and my friend, there is the summons to repent, to turn around, to turn away, to turn my back upon sin. Why? Because God is holy. The God to whom Jesus Christ brings me all the time is a God who is holy.

Therefore, I must repent. Therefore, I must be born again. Therefore, I must have the Spirit of God Himself within me.

My own human spirit is not capable of fellowship with God. Oh, I may be a great artist. I may be gifted in one way or another, but the Spirit of man cannot commune with the Holy Spirit of God.

I must be purged. I must be cleansed. I must be made anew.

And the breath of God must be breathed into me. You see, all this is because God is holy. The whole of the gospel, every doctrine in the book, I would say to you, though I cannot pause to prove it.

Every doctrine in the book is what it is and is given its distinctive complexion because of the holiness of God. This stands endless. Now, you will notice in our reading this morning, there is an indication of the importance of this.

Let me just refer to it. In reading of this theme from 1 Peter chapter 1, you remember how in verse 16 there, Peter calls upon those whom he is addressing, scattered throughout Qantas, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. He calls upon them to be holy, but you notice what he does? He says, be ye holy for I am holy.

That's a simple way of saying it, you say. Yes, but you see what Peter has done is this. He has taken a word from the Old Testament, from the book of Leviticus, and he is now applying it to Christians in the new dispensation, and he is saying to the Christians, you have to be holy as God is holy, just as the ancient people had to be holy because God is holy.

Not because God was holy, but because he is eternally holy. In other words, what Peter is doing in his own way is this. This is a truth, he says, which applied to the ancient people.

It's a truth which applies to God's people today. Now, if we wanted to pursue this, I just throw it out to you. You can do this at your own leisure.

If you want to pursue this, I suggest to you that the answer to all that happened to Israel in the Old Testament page is due to the fact that Israel failed to live in a manner that was consistent with the holiness of God. Until Jesus comes and says, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a people who will bring forth the right fruit. And many a church has lost its candlestick because it has followed in the path of Israel according to the flesh.

Because it failed to orientate its life according to the holiness of God. All the disciplines of God in the last resort are related to this fact. He is holy.

And because sin has worked such havoc in our lives, this is the main discipline in which all of us are involved. We might use different terms to explain it, but every man of us, from the pulpit to the last pew in the church, wherever you look, wherever we are, all of us are involved in this. This is the discipline of growing up Christianly and spiritually.

It is to relate our lives to the holiness of God. The man who can do this is a person who is growing up. He is the person, or she is the person, who comes to know in deep and sweetest and satisfying reality what this fellowship is all about.

Because we can only have fellowship with God in His holiness. Now that is the substance of the message. And I trust that the Lord will write this very deeply upon our minds and upon our hearts.

John says other things about God. He says God is love. He says God is life.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that our God is a consuming fire. All these things are true. But fundamentally, this is the message.

All those are true, but they're related to this. This is the base. God is holy.

And in Him is no darkness at all. Now, if that is so, if this is so important and so cardinal and so far-reaching in its impact and its influence, there is one thing that we want to be clear about, namely the source of this message. You see, we can almost overhear some of the Gnostic heretics that John had in mind saying, All right, who are you to talk like that? Where did you get that from? You see, the Gnostics were saying that it really doesn't matter what you do in the body because the body is evil anyway.

And because the body is evil anyway, it doesn't matter if you sin morally. These things really don't matter. They can't affect your relationship with God because it's only your spirit communes with God.

They had some notion such as that. It's very difficult to put it into words, but it was something of that order. Sin did not matter.

That is the main thing. They excused all kind of sensuality and things of that order and within that general realm. Therefore, one can overhear them asking the Apostle John, Where did you get that from? God is holy.

It was a new concept to them if they were not Jews, if they were not brought up on the scriptures of the Old Testament. And many of them were not. Now, John therefore, very carefully here, tells us something about the source of the message.

You notice how he puts it. This then is the message which we have heard from him and we proclaim to you. I want you to notice two things there.

It appears so simple and yet it is so very important in this context. The author of the message is the one to whom John refers to as him. Look at the word.

This is the message we have heard from him. Now, who is he? Well, the reference, of course, is very clear. It's unmistakable.

The reference is to the subject of the previous verses, verses 1 to 4. Who is he then according to verses 1 to 4? Well, he is the one, says John, who was from the beginning. He is the one concerning whom John said, we have heard him, we have seen him with our eyes, we have looked upon him and we have touched. Now, what he's saying? What he's saying is this.

This message has come into the world very especially and very definitely and has come to the apostles from the lips and the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Says John, we're not spinning something out of our own imaginations. This is the message we have heard of him, from him, from him.

So then, the apostle, in stressing the importance of the message, equally underscores its source. This is something that was taught by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Incarnate Lord. How very important this is.

Some people's concept of Jesus Christ is so utterly one-sided. They think of him simply as the gentle, Jesus, meek and mild. And they have such a beautiful picture of him as they think beautiful, but which is not necessarily moral.

But the real Jesus of history, the real Jesus of history who lived with the apostles, was one who taught not only the love of God, but the holiness of God. And says John, it is so important, we've got it from him. This is the message.

But we need to take this seriously. I repeat, John has become known to the communities of the world as the apostle of love, and he is that. And when we get on into the body of this epistle, we shall see how John says that we need to have love for God as God has love for us, and we need to have love for one another.

There is no withdrawing of that. Love is absolutely indispensable, says John. And God is love, and it all starts there.

For God so loved the world, as in John's Gospel 3:16. We love him because he first loved us, is here. This is love, he says.

Not that we love God, but that he loved us. And he gave his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Oh, the love of God is important.

And yet, he says, this is the message. This is fundamental. This is basic.

Everything else must be seen under the archway of the divine holiness, the divine light. And then you notice John finishes this off. He's quite an artist here.

The author of the message was the Lord, he says himself. We heard it from him. And this is the message we have heard from him, and we understood, declare unto you.

Now, I think that John's we has reference there to the apostles, of course. Because this message stems now from the apostolic community who bear witness to the truth that Jesus taught. But you notice that John puts it in the plural.

As if to say, how cautious. As if to say, I'm not the only one who teaches this. This is what we teach.

This is what the apostolate teach. This is what the apostles teach. In other words, it's not the fancy of a Paul, or of a John, or of a Peter alone.

This is something which is so important that the whole apostolic community stand as one. This is what we heard from him, and this is what we declare to you. In other words, nothing has been lost in transit.

We, the apostolic community, are pledged to declare this unto you. Oh, my friends, if only we could have the sense of the importance of this gripping us this morning. God has revealed himself in his holiness to men in Jesus Christ.

Sin could not simply be wiped off the slate. Sin had to be atoned for. Sin cannot simply be forgiven.

There must be repentance. A merely forgiven man cannot have fellowship with God. He must have a new heart and a new spirit.

All this is because of his holiness. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, then, according to Pauline language, is a kingdom of light. Writing to the Colossians, he says that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

And he's transformed, or transfigured us, or changed us - it's a remarkable word there - from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son. He's translated us. In other words, we've not simply been brought out, but in being brought out from the kingdom of darkness, we have been changed on the way before we come into the kingdom of light.

It's not just a taking out of men from that kingdom, but a transformation on the way into the new. He's made us fit to share the inheritance of the saints in this kingdom of light. Christians, then, have been called from darkness to light.

Peter says we should show forth the excellences of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Therefore, the summons to us is always to come into the light. In John chapter 3, verses

19 to 21, John says this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

Perhaps by nature we all found ourselves there. But then the process is coming into the light, that our deeds may be reprov'd, if there are, or manifest, if they're right. And the summons to all of us is always to come into the light.

John bids us walk in the light. This is wonderful. When people have nothing to hide.

See, this is really what disturbs human relationships. Man comes home from the office one day and he is hiding something. His wife gets suspicious.

Maybe nothing to it, but you know, he's closed shop. Or the boot may be on the other foot, it may be the lady that's coming home, doesn't matter, but you know the principle. And when once you become secretive and opaque and devious and shady, this is when fellowship is disturbed.

This is when we begin to separate and to become suspicious of one another. But when we walk in the light of God's holiness and are open and have nothing to hide, now what happens is this, we may see one another's faults a little more, but we're all on the same footing. And as the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses our sin, we shall have fellowship of one with the other.

This is the basis of Christian fellowship. Christians are called children of the light and children of the day. Let us walk, says Paul in writing to the Thessalonians therefore, let us walk as children of the day, not of the night.

And it is in this context that Jesus turns to his disciples and he says, now you are the lights of the world. We're not lights in the sense in which he is the light, he is the eternal light that was coming into the world, who lights every man that comes into the world. We are kindled lights, our lamps have been lit by him, like John the Baptist.

We were not originally light, but we were darkness. But he, by the spirit of God, has brought light into our hearts, light into our heads, light into our souls. And the children of Israel still have lights in their dwellings, in their souls, in their hearts, however dark it is in the world.

And because of this, Jesus said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven. And my friends, this is so absolutely relevant and so absolutely cogent and logical because you see, if you're among the people of God this morning, our terminus, our goal, our end is light. Come to chapter 18 of the book of the Revelation and you will find that the great Babylon, who epitomizes the enemy of the saints and of God, a great Babylon is cast into the darkness of the day.

But the people of God into the new Jerusalem, there shall be no more night. And we shall need no lamps because the land is the light whereof. Oh my friend, heaven is a place of light, unspeakable light, because not that defilers, not that is unholy, not that is contrary to the character and nature of God, nothing can ever enter there.

This then is the message. As we proceed to see its implications, God willing, next Lord's day, let us be quite clear about this. Let us say to ourselves, may I suggest to you that in your devotions today and tomorrow and during the whole of the week, you say this to yourself.

My God is holy. To resolve many difficulties, many questions that you may now have will be resolved on your knees. And you say to yourself what John says to all of us.

My God is holy. And my calling is to commune, to share the whole of my life on the inside, on the outside. My thought life, my active life of doing, to share the whole thing with a God who is holy, that the same God in his holiness may share with me all that is his to give and to entrust to me that I may use it for his glory in the world that now is.

May God so bless us to his glory. Amen. Let us pray.

Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being and my ways may wholly declare and with a unity and a harmony constantly declare thy being and thy way. Write thy word upon our every heart now and as we go into this day, may it not rather depress us, but may it on the contrary show us that this is the way into the fullness of joy of which the apostle has just spoken in the previous verse. O Lord our God, save us from the devil's lie, but the pure life is a miserable life, and give us to know the peace and the joy and the gladness and the hope and the comforts that can only come to those who commune with thee within the veil from day to day.

And of course, we only ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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