

The Character Of God & The Life Of Discipleship

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[0:00] Let's turn now to 1 John chapter 1 and we can read at verse number 5.

! This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. And so on down through the following verses. When we read this epistle of John, it is quite clear to us that John loves those to whom he is writing and he has a great care for them and a concern for their welfare that as the children of God they will develop in their faith, they may be kept from the world that is around them.

And I guess as we read the letter, we could see as a title over the whole letter that this is about the character of God and the identity of God's children. And we see that the whole of the letter is framed around two particular themes. And these two themes set out for us the context in which we are to understand the children of God. And there are two themes that are well known to us and the first one is in the verse that we have read. God is light. This is the message. Here is the first theme that creates for us the structure of this letter and under which we are to understand the first part of the letter. The second key theme is the fact that God is love.

And from verse 11, the third chapter, we are to the end of the letter more or less. And it is all about the love of God and how that works and what that means. And we see in chapter 5 that he is writing to them as little children and as fathers and as older people and young people so that they may understand these two themes and understand how these two themes are used in the Bible to ensure that our lives as the children of God are aligned with what God wants us to be and are aligned with his purpose as we have that in his word. And as we look at these verses this evening, we want to see the way in which John is driving home to us hearers the whole sense of the kind of life that they must live as the children of God and at the same time warning them against the powers, the influences around them in life that are likely to influence the way that they live and move them away from the line that God places in his word. And all of these things are relevant for ourselves as the children of God in this world that are pressures which want to take us away from the ways of God. There are voices that we hear around us and in our heads day by day, voices of temptation, voices of sin, voices of the trials and testings of life. All of these voices are there and we must be alert to the danger of these influences upon our lives and upon our faith. We are to remember what God has said and we are to remember the dangers around us and then we can live as those who are the children of God. And in thinking of these verses before us tonight, we want to think of the character of God and the life of discipleship.

And I want to think first of all of the perspective. That is the way in which we view things in relation to each other. And the perspective that we have in these verses is the character of God. It's a declaration that we have referred to in verse 5 that God is light. And we know that light shines.

[4:13] We know the light shining around us this evening. We know that the sun shines with its brightness in the sky. We know that light shines. And natural life is absolutely dependent upon the light that shines.

We also read in our Bibles, for example, in Psalm 104, that that God himself has covered himself with a robe of light. When we are to look for God or look at God, he is the God who is light, who is covered with a robe as light. And Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy that this light is unapproachable. So there is distance, there is separation in the light that we have in God, the light that God is in himself. And when you think of the perspective that we have in the character of God as the God who is light, there are two things that stand out for us in the Bible. And the first of these things is that in God's revelation, he is the God who is the creator, savior. He is the God who at the very beginning said, let there be light. And there was light. And into that light he created Adam and Eve, and he placed them in the garden to live in the light with him. In the very first creation, God is light. Man is in the light with God. And we see that in salvation, as we read it from Genesis 3 onwards, that God's

purpose for salvation is to rescue people from the darkness into which they have fallen and to restore them into the light who is God himself and the light that God is. And that's why we sang in Psalm number 27, the Lord is my light and my salvation. That's why the psalmist prays in Psalm number 43, send your light forth and your truth. God is light as the creator who is the creator savior who saves his people. And one of the dangers is when you think of God as light is that we pause there and that we move on. But the Bible makes it clear that if we do so, we are ignoring perhaps the most important characteristic of God that we have in the Bible, that the God who is light is also the God who is holy. And from down through the Old Testament, we see the way in which the God who is holy shines as the God who is holy shines as the light on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, and the people aren't allowed to touch the mountain because this God is holy. And if anyone touches the mountain, then they are likely to perish. The people are warned that because of the character of God, they are not to go near

God. And we see the same thing in Isaiah chapter 6, where Isaiah is that revelation in the temple of God, where he sees the Lord sitting upon the throne and the heavenly choir are singing in harmony and unison, holy, holy, holy, it's the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And there we see Isaiah, the representative of Israel, our own representative, or the representative of humankind, reflecting, reflecting, showing to us how we ought to behave in the presence of the holy God. What should our reaction be?

What he says, woe is me, for I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips amongst a people of unclean lips. And so tonight, the perspective for your Christian living and mine, the perspective for life in this world is that God is light, and humankind cannot survive without the light that flows and radiates from God. That's the light where we find the hope of salvation, and that's the light where we find every reason why we can never be saved, because this God is holy.

[8:47] The character of God. The light that there is in God. And the primary focus in these verses, as it must be in our own lives as we begin to think of life as the disciples of the Lord Jesus, the primary focus, this God, our God, is the holy God. And we begin with the holiness of God and our own personal sinnership. And the marvel of the character of God, the God who's light, the marvel of that is that He causes that light to radiate into the world and to connect with the world so that the light that God is is distributed amongst humankind. And that's the wonder of the proclamation of Jesus about Himself, I am the light of the world. John says, no one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son has made Him known. Jesus is not simply the exegesis of God, the expression of God, the revelation of God. He is the emergence of the light of God from the holy presence of God into this dark world. The God who is light is continuous now with the Jesus who says, I am the light of the world.

And there begins the marvel of our salvation that there is that emerges into this world, the coming of the Son of God, taking your nature and presencing Himself in the darkness of this world.

And the connectivity, the distribution of light does not end there. And that's why we are here this evening because the connectivity reaches people like you and me. And that's again what Jesus said in John chapter 8. Who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

And Paul speaks in Ephesians of the way in which once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Discipleship. We are here tonight as those who are the children of God. We are here as the end result of the distribution system of light. And the connectivity of that distribution that we are here as expressions of the light that flows from God.

[11:43] And surely that itself is a place where we ought to pause. That as surely as the life that there is in Christ is the life that we have as God's children.

That the light that there is in God is the light that is in our hearts. And the light that we are now ourselves. You are the light of the world.

The perspective. The God who is the creator saviour. The God who is the holy creator saviour. Has shone his light in the person of Jesus.

And shone through the person of Jesus. Into your heart and mine. And we come to think of communion. And we come to think of the sacrament of the Lord's table.

And we do so because of all of these connections that God has put in place. That has brought about the inner change in our lives.

[12:51] That should and does bring about the external change that is visible in the world. The perspective.

What do you think your relationship with God is? Do you think you are light or do you think you are darkness? Sometimes we do feel that we are darkness.

And we do feel dark. And we feel darkness like a cloud hanging over us. But that can never change the fact. That as the children of God.

We are children of the light. And God's light dwells within us. The light that speaks of his salvation. Secondly.

There is participation. How do we take part in the event of salvation? And in the very journey of the people of God.

[13 : 55] Who are the light of the world? How do we participate? In God's event of salvation. We do so with this marvelous word that is repeated in these verses.

But we have it in verse number 7. If we walk in the light. As he is in the light. We have fellowship with one another. There is something that we have in common.

There is something that we share in common with others. There is something that makes us companions along life's way. There is something that because of that companionship.

And what Paul speaks of in Philippians 1. Because of that partnership. We have much to say to one another. We have much to share with each other. We have much to have communion about.

We have fellowship with one another. And that fellowship is based on the fact that we are light. It is based upon the word of God.

[15 : 03] It is based upon the passion of the Son of God. As John says in verse number 3. Our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son.

Jesus Christ. What does give to us tonight the sense of sharing?

We overlap in culture. We overlap in our daily habits. We overlap in so much of everyday life. But what is it that we have in common?

Is it not something to do with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? And as John says, our fellowship is with the Father.

There is an inclusiveness in what he is saying. In the sense that they as the apostles and the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

[16 : 02] They have this fellowship. And now he is extending that to describe what they have with the apostles. With the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And as soon as the Bible speaks of God as Father. It speaks of an intimacy.

A closeness. A love that goes beyond any other relationship in life. It speaks about sharing in God. And having God's embrace.

And as we read in chapter 3. Having God's love poured in our hearts. So that we are the children of God. With the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus as the Son of God who came into the world. Christ as the Anointed King. What they share in is all about the God who is light.

[17 : 05] The God who is love. And we know that as we read the Father in Heaven. And we know that as we read the New Testament.

We understand that that fellowship. We have it in the sharing of the Spirit of God in our hearts. It is the sense of participating.

In the fatherly love of God. And the salvation that He has brought to pass. Because of His love. And in His love. And through His love.

But John wants to address a confusion. And sometimes in our life of faith.

We become confused. And perhaps others can see the confusion. But we cannot see it ourselves. But the fact of the matter is. That it is doubtful that we will go through our life in this world.

[18 : 05] Without at some point. Becoming confused about our faith. And about what faith means. And the confusion here we have is in verse number 6.

If we say this is our profession. This is our confession. This is what we are saying about ourselves. And saying to others. What is the profession? If we say we have fellowship with Him.

Well of course. That's our profession. That's what we profess as the people of God. Our fellowship is with the Father. And with the Son Jesus Christ. But what's the confusion?

What's the danger? If we say we have fellowship with Him. While we walk in darkness. There's a lifestyle issue.

There's a threading of the feet issue. There's my space in this world. And there is God's space. And the confusion here is. That I can claim to be the child of God.

[19:05] I can profess to be the child of God. But the space that I occupy in this world. Can be a space that outside of the zone. That God has sanctioned by His word.

Where His children must walk. And where His children must live. And that may reveal itself. In my morality. Or in my ethics.

Or simply in my doctrine. My understanding of the word of God. There are so many different ways. In which I can step outside of the zone. And live my life here.

As a professing child of God. I'm not realizing. That I've left God behind. That I've left the light. It's not quite that the switch has gone off. And there's no light there. But I'm not walking in the light. I'm then walking in darkness.

[20:04] And we have to. Because the Bible says it. We have to allow ourselves. To think over where we are walking in life. And what zone in this world.

In this life. Do I spend my life in? The world. Is the zone occupied by the world. In all of its own ungodliness. And anti-God kind of living.

Or is it lived exclusively. According to the word of God. In the zone that God has defined. For his children to walk in.

And I speak for myself. And I'm sure that we. Have to be honest. And acknowledge. That in this area. Well we can become confused.

And we can become confused. Through good intentions. Through a desire to. To reach out. To evangelize. And to. To connect further.

[21:05] The light of God with others. We are exposed to the danger. Of becoming confused ourselves. So that instead of those. That we are seeking to evangelize.

Coming to occupy. By God's space. And God's sanction. Sown for his people. That we actually come. And to occupy the space. Of the world. Where God has said. We should not.

Be. Confusing. And John goes on to say that. If that is the case. We lie.

And do not. Practice. The truth. We are simply. Readjusting our lives.

Not just. So that we are living. In some kind of error. But the way in which. The Bible uses the word lie. It is a kind. Of behavior. That is actively.

[22:03] Contesting. The truth. Of the word of God. In other words. If my. If I am living my life. In the zone of the world. Having left God's. Sanctions.

Sown for his people. Then my life. Is a contradiction. Of the word of God. And what God is saying. The light. The life.

The practice. I begin. Once more. To. To walk. In darkness. And then. I don't really know.

Where I'm going. And I say. In chapter 59. Yes. Here is. A wonderful image. Of the people. In his own day. And. They are. In some. In this kind of darkness.

And they are. Groping. For the wall. Like the blind. And they don't know. Where they are going. And that's. The danger zone.

[23:00] The alarm bell. For the. Disciple. For the child. Of God. When. A child of God. Realizes. That once more.

Darkness. Is. Surrounding. And realizes. That. He or she. Can no longer. Feel their way. In the kingdom of God. Then.

Things. Have. Gone. Seriously. Wrong. And that's when. In Isaiah chapter 30. We have. We have the other image. Where.

We hear a word. Behind us. Saying. This is the way. Walk in it. God. God will not. Abandon us. And. In our going astray. The God. From whom we go astray.

Who is. The God. Who is light. Will place his hand. On our shoulder. And bring us back. To. To his. Approved. Sown. For.

[23:54] For living your lives. So that once more. We may walk. In. The light. The participation.

Where are we. Living. Our lives. Tonight. This speaks of. A double life. It speaks of. A contradiction. It speaks of things.

Having gone. Seriously. Wrong. And the right thing. Of course. Is that we haven't. Version number seven. 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. Cleanses us. From all. Sin. If we are in the light. We have the fellowship.

We have the communion. Our life is aligned. With. With the. The word of God. And with the law of God. And therefore. We have communion. With God. God. And we have communion.

[24 : 54] With. Each other. And that's why. We're here. Tonight. That. If we've lost. The communion. With God. If we lost. Communion. With each other. That we're here.

Tonight. To. To allow God. To put his hand. On our shoulder. And to say to us. This is the way. Walk in it. And to bring us back. To the place.

Where we are walking. In the light. With him. Where we have. True. And genuine. And sincere. Communion. And fellowship. And go to the communion. Table. To the Lord's table. As those. Who. Have the communion. Restored. And as those. Who have the communion. Live. And living. In our experience. And therefore. Able to participate. In the Lord's supper. In the sacrament. Designed for our strengthening. Because of the very center. Of the fellowship. That John is. Is referring to here.

[25 : 52] Is. The very cross. Of Jesus Christ. It's remembering. The Lord's death. Until he comes. The blood.

Of Jesus' son. That. Cleanses us. From all sin. The sin. That has. Separated us. From God. The sin. That has. Disqualified us.

From entering. Into the presence. Of God. At the center. Of our relationship. Of communion. Is that the blood. Of Jesus. Cleanses. From all sin. And tonight.

I want us. To think that. When we read. The blood. Of Jesus. We remember. The holiness. Of God. When we read. The blood of Jesus. We remember.

A sacrifice. For sin. When we read. The blood of Jesus. We remember. As we go into chapter 2. The way in which he speaks. Of propitiation. For our sins. That big word.

[26 : 49] That sometimes. Scales. Scales. That big word. That speaks to us. Of a sacrifice. Offered. That covers your sins. That turns away.

The wrath of God. So that we have peace. With God. So that we have fellowship. With God. And when I. Think of the blood. Of Jesus. And I think of the cross.

Of Jesus. I think of the. Holiness. Of God. Expressing itself. In holy wrath. Against the sin. Of humankind. As the sin bearer.

Bears the wrath of God. And as he enters. Into the darkness. Of the forsakenness. It's blood. Of sacrifice. Because of sin.

Because the holy character. Of God. Finds expression. Needs to express itself. In wrath. Against sin. And. In the moment. That Jesus says.

[27 : 45] It is finished. He has made. Made peace. By the blood. Of. The cross. And we. Marvel.

At. The way. In which. The cross. Of Jesus. Speaks. About the love. Of God. That God. So loved. The world. And that's. Really important. But we.

Should. Marvel. To the same. Degree. That when we look. At the cross. Of Jesus. That we. See the expression. Of the holy. Character.

Of God. Wrath. Does not belong. To his character. But holiness. Does. And. Wrath. Is the expression.

Of his holiness. Against our sin. And that's why. We. We. Read. Of Jesus. In Psalm 22. And this. Whole body.

[28 : 40] Beginning to. To disintegrate. To fall apart. Because of the weight. Of divine wrath. Until at last. He says. It is finished.

And what are his last words? Father. Into your hands. I commit to my spirit. It's the father's love. For his children.

That brings. The son of God. To the cross. And it's that. The restoration. Of that sense. Of God's fatherly love. And the heart of his son.

That confirms to us. That the peace. Is there. To be found. And so. Our participation. Is absolutely. Dependent. Upon what God. Has done in Christ. The one who is the. Propitiation. For his sins. The wrath. Turning sacrifice.

[29 : 37] Of the cross. That means. There is peace. For you. And for me. There is. Therefore. No. More. Condemnation.

To those who are. Than Christ Jesus. And that's why. We go to the Lord's Supper. And we participate. Of the sacrament. Of the Lord's Supper. And we do so.

Because. Our whole. Life. As a child. Of God. Is based upon. The fact. That. Jesus. Loved me. And gave.

Himself. For me. Because he died. He died. So that. We. May. Live. So there is a perspective. There is. The participation.

And finally. There is. A prescription. The participation. Is very much about. What. God. Has done. But the prescription.

[30 : 34] Is about. What you. And I. Have to do. And the. Prescription. That. Assigned. To us. Has to do. With our sin.

And when we. Read about sin. In version number 8. And in version number 10. We see that there is. Once more. A double confusion. There is. In verse 8.

The denial. Of a sinful condition. We say. We have no sin. There is. In version number 10. The denial. Of sinful practice. We say. We have not sinned.

That was. Part of the problem. That John was. Addressing. Confusion. How we need to understand. That we are.

Sinners by nature. That we are sinners. By practice. And before. A holy God. There is only. One prescription. There is only. One remedy. The remedy.

[31 : 30] As far. On God's side. Is that he. Sent his son. To be our savior. But for us. What we must do. If we.

Confess. Our sin. He is faithful. And just. To forgive us. Our sins. And to cleanse us. From all. Un. Righteousness.

Our sin. Our law breaking. We are to. To confess. That. And in. The New Testament. In.

The Greek. Original. When. We read the word. Confess. It basically means. That we are going to. Say. The same thing. Together. So.

If you and I. Are going to sit together. And we're going to. Make a confession. We are saying the same thing. About something. We're in agreement. But. But here.

[32 : 28] The confession is. With regard to our sin. And the agreement. Is not. What I agree with you. Or you agree with me. With regard to my sin. My confession.

Is a confession. Where. I agree with. God's estimation. Of my sin. And what God says. My sin. Requires. And that's.

Important. That I'm taking. Ownership. Of my sin. That I'm. Embracing. The revelation. Of God. With regard. To my sin.

The revelation. Of this holy God. And that. I'm saying. Yes. Everything. That you say. About my sin. Is true. Because of. Who you are.

And because. Of what. I. Am. The last. Psalm. I'm going to sing. David. Was. Very. Deeply. Conscious.

[33 : 21] Of this. Very thing. I laid. Bare. My sin. To you. The guilt. That lay. Within me. I made it.

Known. To you. And that's. Where. We have. The prescription. This evening. That. In our very first. Coming. To faith. In the Lord. Jesus. It has. The sense.

Of. Repentance. And confession. Of sin. In the light. Of what God. Shows me. My sin. Deserves. There is no. Entrance. Into. The family.

Of God. Without. Us. Coming. To agreement. With God. With regard. To our sin. Because. Once we. Agree.

With God. With regard. To our sin. We agree. With God. With regard. To. The son. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. We agree. With God. With regard. To. The price. That Jesus.

[34 : 13] Paid. We are. In full. Agreement. With. The key issues. That are central. To our salvation. We cannot. Enter the kingdom. Without that.

And as we. Journey on. As the children. Of God. The same. Is through. Every day. Of my life. And of your life. That there is.

Confession. There is. Repentance. There is. Washing. There is. Cleansing. As we see. John. Describing. In that. In that. Verse. He is faithful. And just. To forgive us. Our sins. And to cleanse us. From all. Unrighteousness. He will do. What he has said. If we do. What he has told us. To say. And the matter of it is. That. It doesn't finish there. The matter of it is. That. If we do. What he has told us.

[35 : 10] To do. And to say. Then he actually. Helps us to do it. In his love. And in his grace. He gives us. The heart of confession. He gives us.

The words of confession. He gives us. The tears. Of repentance. And we come. Once more. To. To embrace. Jesus Christ.

As our savior. Every day. To continue to walk. In the light. With him. And our sins. Are. Forgiven. They're. Carried away. They're.

Never. Again. To be raised. For our judgment. Before God. They are. Separated. From us. Forever. He will. Remember them. More. They will. Never. Anymore.

Be taken. Into account. we have peace with God the peace that is forever. So tonight we prepare ourselves to go to the Lord's table and we remember the prescription.

[36 : 09] We remember who God is and what our sin deserves. We remember what God has done in Christ Jesus to be our Savior. And we remember our need to confess to profess, to repent of our sin.

And thankful that He is a God who by His Spirit and because of His love and by His grace He will give us the kind of heart that will have the right kind of words and that will have these words expressed with sincerity because we love God, because we love the Son of God, because we hate our sin and our sinnership.

And we want to walk in the path where we are God's delight, where we sense God's love every day and where we respond in love to Him and in readiness to serve Him and to follow Him every step that we take in life.

So may God bless His Word to us to give us that perspective, to understand what participation means and to know the prescription applied to our lives every day that we live in this world.

May God bless His Word. Let us pray. Let us pray.