

God Is Light

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[0 : 00] So we're going to look this evening at the theme of God being light, God is light, which comes across very much in this letter that John writes to an unnamed church or churches that he was addressing specific problems in.

And it's true, isn't it? All of it's true. That's what we believe. That's why we're here. Because we believe this to be the truth. The truth of God's Word and the truth that He has revealed for us. And that is exactly what John is trying to get across as well. It's not something that you can take or leave. It's not something that's adaptable. It's not something that you can just manipulate according to your circumstance.

It is revealed truth. It's revelation. It's the revelation of God. And He speaks a lot in these verses about the message. He uses that word a lot. The message that is messaged.

That which we've had from the beginning, He says, which we've heard, which we've seen. And then in verse 5, He speaks about this. This is the message that we've heard. And He uses that word a lot.

[1 : 12] And the message comes from the same word as messenger, which is the same word as angel, as the one who brings truth. That truth has been revealed.

And it's a consistent truth. Because one of the greatest truths of the Bible is that God is light and the implications of God being light. That's been the truth from the very beginning.

And it's been the truth of Scripture from the very beginning. It's consistent. In Genesis chapter 1, He says, let there be light. The only one who could say that.

The only one who could make that declaration that the world in which darkness prevailed could have light spilled into it by the great one who is light himself.

So from Genesis chapter 1, where God created light, right through to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, who in John 12 said, I am the light of the world.

[2 : 08] Where He took on that declaration of being the one who was going to bring spiritual life and light into the darkness of rebellion and separation from the God who is light.

We have that consistent message. And the specific message of John throughout this chapter is that he's linking the reality of God being light and His character, the purity and the holiness and everything that goes with that, to how we relate to one another as Christians.

And so you find that slightly later on in this episode, he speaks about because God is light, He's also love and the implication of that.

And we'll speak a little bit about, a bit more about that tomorrow. But if you see in verse 7, He says, but if we walk in the light, see in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

There's an implication to that. And in chapter 2 and verse 7, He said, I'm not writing an old commandment. I'm writing a new one, and that new commandment is that you love one another.

[3 : 19] And again, He says it in chapter 3 and verse 11, where He says, this is the message, that message again, that word that comes that you've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

So He links this theological truth, this revelation of who He is, with how we live together as people and that commonality of love that reflects what it means to walk in the light.

So He says He is light. As believers, we walk in the light. And walking in the light is loving one another. And they're all interconnected in what He is saying as fundamental and as true to His very being, to His very character, to His very nature.

Because He's addressing, as all these letters were, they're addressing specific problems and specific issues. And John was writing about false teaching that was coming into these young churches, false understanding that was taking theological declarations, but it wasn't leading to love

and unity, it was leading to division and selfishness and hatred.

And there was camps and there was tribes, and there were theological pride from people who thought that they had the truth of God and who were coming into these young churches with their teaching that was dividing these young churches.

[5 : 00] But what John is saying is a fundamental importance, and it's important for us all, is that knowing God and knowing who God is means loving our spiritual siblings, our brothers and sisters in the faith, 10 times in this very short letter, John calls the congregation, dear children.

He says it at the beginning of chapter 2, they're my little children, or my dear children. And that's the emphasis throughout his letter and throughout his understanding of people who are followers of Jesus.

He says it's not secondary, it's not something that's a byproduct, it's critical to who we are, it's not unimportant.

And it's not about just being good with people, some are, it's not about being introverted or extroverted or sociable, it's much, much deeper than that.

It's about a transformation of our hearts, a transformation of who we are as believers, and what we think of other believers and how we love them.

[6 : 12] And the challenge is whether we love them, I guess, sometimes in our lives. Danger is that we might treat other believers as if my knowing God and my knowing Christ is actually irrelevant, irrelevant to how I treat, think of, speak to and deal with other Christians.

Not making any connection or any serious connection between why God being my Savior for Christians tonight and Him being the Savior of my fellow believers makes a huge difference to the way that I live.

It's really significant. Why is that? It's because it's the most powerful witness that is in any community.

It's the most powerful testimony to the living reality of Jesus Christ. See how much they love one another. It's a testimony of the early church.

And that's because it reflects an understanding of who we are, what sin does, and then what Christ does to transform that.

[7 : 31] And it's not soft, and it's not sappy, and it's not insignificant. It's gutsy, and it's strong, and it's powerful, and it's impossible without the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

So what's the theological truth that underpins the importance of community with one another? Well, it's this truth that God is light, that God is light.

It's part of His deep, profound theological revelation of John. God is light, and then in chapter 4 verse 8, God is love, both coming together.

That is that God is the source of all life. When it speaks about God being light, it's that He brings life into the universe, vitality. The sun is a kind of physical reflection of that, the energy and warmth that that brings reflects the life of God that He brings into this universe.

But it's also when it speaks of light, it speaks of God as the one who is the revealer of all truth, in Ephesians chapter 5 and in verse 9, He says, walk as children of light.

[9 : 01] This theme very much throughout the New Testament, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. So the light of God is the light that reflects all that is good and all that is right and all that is true.

And it's a revelation of His character from the very beginning. And it speaks of His purity, light is very pure, and it speaks of His perfection.

In Him we're told there is no darkness at all. That amazing truth, there's no darkness in God at all. Every time we question God, we're presuming that there's something in Him.

That's dark. There's something in Him that's not right. But there's no shadow in God at all. There's nothing sinful, nothing sinister, nothing deceptive, nothing that could ever make Him disappointed in Himself.

And there's this Trinitarian perfection and equality. He never messes up. He never gets things wrong. He's never guilty.

[10 : 13] And it's an astonishing fact because we can't really imagine that. I certainly can't imagine that when I think of my own life and the world in which we live.

But so often we accuse God of being like us and making mistakes or doing, my God, you could have done things differently there.

And we blame God and we are angry at God as if He doesn't know or as if He doesn't care or as if He gets things wrong. If only God knew what I knew, sometimes we think, maybe not consciously, but we act in that way, forgetting who He is.

Because that is everything we are not. We can't create life from nothing. All we can create is derived light or reflected light. And sinfully we choose so often to move towards the shadows, to move away from the light and away from God.

We battle with our personal demons. We fall short of our own standards, let alone God's. Often think that's quite a good way of sharing our faith when people ask about why we became Christians.

[11 : 30] I find that a helpful one for myself, I say, well, I let myself down all the time. I fail my own standards. I don't meet what I would like to be myself.

There's absolutely no way I'm going to reach the standards of God and His perfection and His glory. And it brings me to that point where I see I need someone to be my redeemer, my friend.

How could we possibly stand in the presence of the One who is light? When we see the ugliness of our own hearts so often and see the ugliness often in the world in which we live.

John 3:19, when it speaks about that, I think it was on your screen earlier or in one of your welcome things, God, John 3:16, for God so loved the world. It goes on to speak about, but people prefer the darkness rather than the light.

Is that your experience? Certainly mine, that we battle constantly because we prefer the darkness often rather than the light.

[12 : 33] We recoil from God naturally. Every time you share your faith, you find that, I'm sure, and I find that with people. It's good news, isn't it? But it doesn't seem like good news to people.

And we know that when we're sharing it because we know so many people recoil from it. The minute you start talking about God, people recoil from that, from the thought of Him being their judge or the thought of Him being the one that they are accountable to or the thought of His holiness, even though they might not express that.

We're separated from Him in guilt and we're under His judgment. We don't choose to make Him Lord. He exposes us. That's why when you're struggling spiritually, it's so hard to come to church because it's and there's an exposure.

That's why it's so hard to go up to the Bible when we're struggling because it exposes us. The truth hurts. It leaves us naked and bare before Him.

And that's not easy. That's difficult for us. And that's what we struggle with. And we also struggle, I think, sometimes therefore with false teaching, which kind of messages are back and they're there.

[13 : 42] It's all right. You can just carry on the way you're doing. It doesn't really matter. And that comes from the devil, who we're told in the Bible masquerades as an angel of light.

He doesn't come up as red-faced with horns. It'd be easy to avoid if he came like that, big scary figure. It's not like that. He comes like Jesus.

That's what he comes like. He comes like an angel of light. He comes because he knows the word better than we do. And he can twist it and turn it as he's done from the beginning.

He's a deceitful workman. And he'll come disguised as a believer. But his deeds will expose him.

And the deeds of those who follow his false teaching will expose them because it's divisive, because it spreads disharmony, disunity, and separation.

[14 : 37] So God is everything we're not. We recognize that. But yet, John here calls us children of God.

Calls us those who belong to Him. How can that be? How can we claim any commonality with God who is light and we are sinners? How can we hold this friendship, relationship, family tie and fellowship?

Now you know the answer to that, do you? We all do. It's Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who on the cross, who we will remember tomorrow, as He was on the cross, was exposed to the darkness.

It was that darkness that was the opposite of the light that God had created in Genesis. The physical light, He was plunged into physical darkness at midday because it reflected the spiritual darkness of what He was experiencing on our behalf.

Darkness of going into hell and taking our rebellion and our sin on our behalf. He is, as we're told here, the righteous one, the one who we believe and trust in chapter 2 and verse 1.

[16 : 04] We remember that He is the one who is Christ, the righteous, the light of the world. His light was life, these great images of life and love and light being plunged into darkness.

The one who is life dying. I mean, it's a ridiculous paradox. The one who is light being faced with darkness and yet who overcomes the darkness and can claim to be the light of the world. So that all of us, if we are Christians this evening, who believe in Him should not stay in the darkness.

The great theme of John's Gospel as well as the epistles of John here, we shouldn't stay in darkness but we should begin to reflect.

I always think this is a beautiful picture. We begin to reflect the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

[17:20] We begin, I think, to reflect that light in our faces physically. I think Christians should look sweeter and gentler and warmer and more attractive.

I don't mean in a beautiful terms of the world's attractiveness but there's something about the believer's face that should reflect that bitterness and anger and hatred and separation from God has been dissolved.

Our faces should be softer and therefore our lives as a result should be because he's the righteous one and we begin to reflect that. But also because he's the propitiation for our sins.

That was the verse that wasn't on the screens in verse 2. He's the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but the sins of the whole world. That's why we can have commonality and that's why what we see in our faces should reflect what's happened in our hearts because Jesus is God's own and only provision that has turned away God the Father's wrath at the darkness that's in our hearts and souls.

Christ is the substitute, he's the advocate for us, he's the sacrifice. Without the sharing of blood there's no forgiveness of sins.

[18:48] We know that but it's taking that and recognizing that he is God's only answer. There isn't a plan B, there isn't a 21st century answer, there isn't any other answer other than Jesus Christ himself and not only for us and that's the great thing.

Sometimes we shrink it all down to, this is just what we believe in the free church are so we believe here in Scotland or whatever it might be and we forget that he's the only answer as you say, not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world.

There's not a, of course we know that, there's not a Muslim saviour, there's not a Hindu saviour, there's not a secular saviour or an atheist saviour, there's only one saviour for the whole of the world and I think that challenges us sometimes to break out of our insularity and thinking that well no one else will believe anymore but there's only one saviour whose can bring light into the darkness of human experience and the death of separation from God and ultimately physical death as well.

Only one way in the whole planet to be right with God, it's a bit like the Covid pandemic we were all through, sort of.

Maybe there was different vaccines but there was only vaccines, it was the only answer, we saw the great difference it made when people actually, unless you're an anti-vaxxer, but generally that was the recognition that there was an answer there but obviously nothing compared with the reality of coming to know the only answer that Christ, that John is speaking about, that's why he cares so much about what's happening in these churches because it's the antithesis of what should be happening when people have come to know the light, that's why he cares so much.

[20:56] This is the message he says, we've heard it, we've seen it, we've witnessed it, there isn't anything else, he was an eyewitness and he says Christ is the message, God is light, I am the light he says, Jesus Christ and he says that's the one, the only way we can become sons and daughters of God is to recognize that we have come into the light and out of the darkness, confessing our sins and knowing his forgiveness.

So just briefly, very quickly as we finish, and I think it's, I hope it's significant to think about it on a Saturday evening before the Lord's Supper as well, tomorrow before communion, is that we are called in verse 7 in the light of God's character and the light of putting our trust in him, we are called to walk in the light as he is in the light.

We have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins. So God shares his light with us, light of revelation, light of life, light of love and we are to remind ourselves spiritually, use your imagination for a little minute, that we are people who have been released from the darkness of solitary confinement into fellowship with God and with his people walking the hills with our heavenly Father, basking his character and in his presence, making up for lost time and

living in his society, the society of his people.

And that can be quite hard for anyone that has lived in a prison, a solitary confinement, the darkness of that.

We watch programs and we keep the documentaries of people who have really struggled to be reintegrated into society or come out of solitary confinement and be brought into the light to see the sky and to see the sun and how difficult it can be and sometimes they prefer to go back into the darkness because that is what they become used to.

[23 : 12] How much more so is that a challenge for us spiritually? It is reshaping and it is not a, you know, I was once in darkness and I have been converted and you are only thinking back to your pre-conversion days and what it would be like.

I think it is a continual struggle for us to reshape our reality away from the four dark walls of our sin and the separation that it brings us from God.

That is a constant reality that our habitual journey, our walk of life is to be towards the light all the time, towards Jesus Christ, our choices, our decisions, our actions, the walk of our life.

That is what he is speaking about, our daily lives are to be walking in the light. It is not a picture of flamboyance, is it?

It is not a picture of dancing, of skipping or running, although these images are, well, I do not know about skipping, but some of these images are used at different times.

[24 : 17] But here he is recognizing it is a daily walk, you know, the walking race. Have you ever seen a walking race? It is pretty dull, 26 miles, you are wagging your hips and it is not very exciting to watch.

You know, it is 100 meters is much better fun to watch, much quicker. But that is life, is not it? It is ordinary. It is in our ordinary trajectory of life that we are walking in the light and fellowship with God in prayer and in relationship with Him, come briefly to speak about with one another.

But it is that, it is facing Him, that is the big thing. It is the really big thing, is that we are facing Him and we are in relationship with Jesus Christ who is the light of the world.

And in so doing we recognize that we are going to be confessing our sins. I think that is really encouraging, comforting. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all the righteous. What a fantastic verse that is. Saying that God knows that we are sinners.

[25 : 31] God knows that we muck it up, that we fail, that we fall, that we stumble. And He wants us to reject any claims of innocence that we sometimes want to make before Him.

And all this self-righteous nonsense that makes us want to look better than other people. And He wants us to be honest and open and not defend sinful behavior and claim it to be justifiable in whoever's name.

But He wants us just to confess it. Because when we don't, very serious claim that we are making God out to be a liar.

And that's a really serious thing to speak about the God who is light, to be accused of being a liar. And so we are not to be habitually walking, in other words, in darkness and saying that we are not sinners. We are to love the sense of God's presence and we are to love walking in the light and all the struggles that come with that.

[26 : 37] That we do it in His strength and by His power. And as we are fellowship with Him, we recognize our helplessness and our darkness and we know cleansing and washing.

Which I think is very much part of what a communion weekend is about. It's about recalibrating ourselves. So please use it as an opportunity to recalibrate yourself. We all need that every day, a recalibration towards the light, towards Jesus and confess if we've been drifting from Him.

He knows anyway. It's not like we're telling Him something He doesn't know. He simply wants us to confess it and to be honest and to know His forgiveness then and His light entering our hearts.

And lastly, within that walking in the light, it's about fellowship, isn't it, with one another. And He says that as we live in the light, as He is in the light, as we walk in the light, as we are in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

And that is very much the theme of what He is repeatedly saying throughout this letter because it's in response to a lack of fellowship that the false teachers have brought into these young churches.

[27 : 51] It's the whole focus. As we walk with God, this is a given, we share the road with our spiritual family.

Our future, and it's very important to always remember our future in Christ, to have that perspective, that heavenly perspective. Life's shorter than a weaver shuttle, even for those, the oldest of us. It's passing like just flash, it'll soon be an eternity. And our eternal destination is not a one-birth destination.

We're not going into a single room. Heaven's not going to be like that. We're not all going to be behind closed doors in our own company, back in solitary confinement.

It's not like that. An eternal home is a feast. It's a family. It's a place of society.

[28 : 49] It's a nation, it's a city. It's a town, it's a village. It's a flock, it's a people together. Heaven is not just me and my God in glorious isolation.

It's me and my God and all of God's children together, my family. And I think that's important because we spend so much of life categorizing our relationships on what separates us, what makes us different.

I mean, within the Christian family. I'm not talking about faith and unbelief here. But I think it would be good for us to spend a lot more time thinking what unites us and what keeps us together.

Are we going to share eternity together? Are we walking in the light? When we are to love them and have fellowship with them.

We don't all need to be the same. We don't need to look the same or think. Now a dull family that would be, would dress the same, look the same, act the same.

[29 : 58] We're all unique. God has made us all unique, made us all different. But we have that commonality of being children, of belonging, of walking and living in the light.

Saying that the light of God is Trinitarian light. He's not an isolate. He's not an individual who is a singular person.

He's God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Who lives in an eternity, infinite fellowship of love and light. And I think the vast majority of the battle we face in our Christian lives revolves around this.

Revolves around expressing our love for Jesus Christ and putting others before ourselves and in loving them before we love ourselves.

My biggest problem, maybe your biggest problem if we confess is self-righteousness, is reverting back to a justification by works. By thinking we're better than the next person, by judging ourselves on the life of other people, by condemning or criticizing, by never confessing our sins to one another, by failing to cover over a multitude of sins.

[31 : 19] Isn't that one of the most remarkable things in Scripture? Because you love covers over a multitude of sins. All the little things that are not really, are not about us wanting to be pure, but are wanting to find fault with others so that we feel better about ourselves.

But true love, any husband and wife knows that, any parents with children knows that. True love covers over a multitude of sins. The little things that often we use as an excuse to be separated from one another.

We just let's just subsume it in a deeper and Christ-centered love for Him.

To deny the centrality of this, I think, and the command to do this, is to call God a liar. And you can't sit at the Lord's table tomorrow if you have anything against your brother or sister.

That has to be dealt with, because it has a command of Scripture. And it's a reminder of the centrality of that truth, as we remember what Jesus has done for us.

[32 : 30] So if you have time this evening, go back to read the whole of John, the Gospel, the first John, if you can. Note how many times he says, my dear children, and why that's so significant for him in the light of what he, the deep, glorious theological truths he speaks about, God being light, God being love.

He was an old saint who had walked with Jesus, who probably in many ways heard and seen it all. And this was his message.

I wonder, is our message, is it what we really share and live? That's a challenge that takes us back, I think, to Jesus, and to His great love and great forgiveness.

Let's pray.