

# What is God like?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today I'd like us just to turn back for a few minutes to 1 John chapter 1, the second passage that we read. And we're going to be thinking a little bit about the second half of the passage.

We can read again verse 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.

I think every one of us would agree that today we live at a period of time and in a nation where many people have little or no time for God.

It's absolutely amazing to come to a community like this where you see such a high percentage of the community coming out to church. But we know that that's not the way it is pretty much everywhere in Scotland.

People have no time for God now and have very little interest in him. And that's tragic and worrying for many reasons.

[ 1 : 10 ] It's tragic because in so many ways all the principles that we value in the Western world, things like freedom and equality, discovery and charity, these are all principles that are based on biblical truths.

And if it wasn't for the Christian heritage that we've had in the last particular 500 to 600 years, we wouldn't have many of these things. And today when people are rejecting God and rejecting the Bible, they're actually throwing out the very foundation on which the Western world was built. And it's also tragic because today when people reject God, all too often the God that they've got no time for is not the God of the Bible at all.

And that's compounded by the fact that on the one hand, God is very often misunderstood. People like to think the worst of God. A good example of that is the concept of anger.

So people look at the parts of the Bible where it says that God is angry and people don't like that. And they say, well, I don't want anything to do with a God who's angry. And yet it's so ironic because at the same time you can look in the news today and you can see Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish climate change activist.

[ 2 : 30 ] She's becoming a world famous activist. And one thing about her is that she is angry. She's really angry with leaders, with businesses, because of the way in which they're treating the planet.

And yet her anger is admired. And people think she's wonderful for it. And yet God being angry for abuse of the environment and many other things is seen as unacceptable.

God is misunderstood and people have no time for him. On the other hand, God is also misrepresented. And that's maybe been the biggest problem of all.

That people who have claimed with their lips to believe in God and to follow God have misrepresented him by the way in which they've lived their lives.

And the result of that is that you can look around your neighbors or your colleagues, even your classmates at school, and you will see lots of people who don't know what God is really like and they walk away from him and don't want anything to do with him.

[ 3 : 44 ] And all of this that we see around us all the time is raising two of the most important questions that we can ever ask. One, what is God actually like?

And two, how do we get back to him? For us as Christians, the question, what is God like, is the great question that we are discovering the answer to more and more every day as we get to know God.

And the great message as to how to get back to God is the message that we want to proclaim to our community. So we need to have clear answers to these questions. We want to know God more

and more and we want to be able to tell people how to get back to him.

So these are really important questions for us as Christians. And for someone who's maybe not yet a Christian or not sure, if that's where you are today, you also need to think about these questions because it's crucial that you actually know what God is like so that you know what you're pushing away, if you are pushing God away.

And it's important that you don't risk your whole eternity on a false assumption or a misunderstanding.

[ 4 : 59 ] So we need to ask these two questions. What is God like? And how do we get to him? And the amazing thing about the Bible is that it's giving us the answer to both of these questions.

The Bible is the means through which we get to know God. And the Bible contains the message as to how we can get back to him. That's why we call the Bible revelation.

We call the whole of the Bible revelation, not just the last book, but the whole Bible is referred to as revelation because it's the way in which God reveals himself to us.

And it's the means by which we get to know him. And of course, the pinnacle of that revelation is Jesus Christ himself. And that's what John speaks about at the start of this chapter.

He says, that which is from the beginning, what we've seen and heard with our eyes, what we've touched concerning the word of life, that's referring to Jesus and the fact that he's been made manifest, he's been revealed.

[ 5 : 57 ] We've seen him. We testify it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which has been made manifest to us. John is talking about the fact that throughout the whole Bible and in particular in Jesus Christ, God is revealing himself to us.

And the reason God is doing that is so that we might have fellowship with him. You see that in verse three. He says that we might have fellowship with him and with one another.

And that's the amazing thing about God. He doesn't just reveal himself so that we would know about him. He reveals himself so that we might actually know him and have fellowship with him and with each other.

In other words, God wants us to know what he's like and God wants us to come back to him. And these are the two questions.

What's God like and how do we get to him? These are the two questions that John addresses in the second half of chapter one. And these are the two great questions that I want us to think about for a few minutes today.

[ 7 : 08 ] So first of all, what is God actually like? The fact that he's revealing himself to us in the Bible means that we can or certainly we should have an accurate picture of what he's like.

And yet often God is misunderstood. Some people may think that God is harsh or strict or cold or angry or distant. What is God actually like?

Well, there's a lot of things that we could say, but I want us to focus on one thing in particular that John mentions in verse five because he tells us something very particular about what God is in verse five.

If you look at the verse together, I'm sure you can see what it says. This is the message we've heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

So what's God like? He is light and in him there's no darkness at all. In using that language of light, John is picking up on an image that really runs through the whole of the Bible that God has described as light.

[ 8 : 20 ] We sang about it in Psalm 27, the Lord's my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? And so here in verse five of 1 John 1, John is just re-emphasizing this clear statement about the nature of God.

And he is saying something positive and negative. In other words, he's saying what God is and what God isn't. He's saying he is light and he's saying he contains no darkness at all.

But what does he really mean when he's saying that and what does he want us to think about? Well, in many ways, the image of light is speaking to us of the idea of perfection.

That's where the contrast between light and dark is so vivid. God is light and he is light to the ultimate level of perfection. There is no darkness in him at all.

And in the original language, it uses a double negative to really emphasize the point. It literally says darkness is not in him, none. And so we are being shown that there is not even the slightest fragment of darkness in God.

[ 9 : 32 ] It's a picture of purity and perfection. Now, perfection is one of these words that's a wee bit hard to really fully describe what it means.

But sometimes thinking in terms of opposites can help us to understand words like that. So when we're thinking about God and when we're thinking about the realm of perfection, it's helpful to ask, well, what's the opposite of perfection?

And at one level, we might think, well, the opposite of perfection is ugliness or evil or horror. These things are the opposite of perfection. And there's a sense in which, of course, that's true.

But at another level, the opposite of perfection is simply imperfection. Therefore, even the tiniest blemish makes something imperfect.

And this is reminding us of the fact that God is the only place where we find absolute perfection. There is not even the tiniest blemish in God.

[ 10 : 39 ] And that's reminding us how utterly amazing God is. And this image is speaking to us of the fact that, in particular, God as light displays a perfect moral purity.

The biblical metaphor of light and darkness is often used to describe the contrast between righteousness and sin. Paul speaks about this in 2 Corinthians.

He says, what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? What fellowship has light with darkness? And so that pure light that we've been pointed to here in God is in contrast with the darkness of sin.

The biblical image, the biblical metaphor, is creating this contrast before us. And so while on the one hand, John is getting us to think about God's perfection in light, on the other hand, we're thinking about sin as darkness.

Now, when we talk about sin, I think, again, it's easy to misunderstand that whole subject. When we think about sin, sometimes it's easy to think that sin is like a sort of set of criteria that sets for us just a list of do's and don'ts.

[ 12 : 01 ] Or it's a set of things that churches use to assess people, like this kind of stuff that you must do, stuff that you must not do, kind of things that you need, boxes that you need to tick.

And we can have this idea of sin that it's just sort of this pile of kind of things that you need to avoid. And if you do it, then you're wrong. And if you don't, then you're right.

And we can think of sin in that kind of small, quite specific way. There's a really good example of that, actually, in a Pete and Diesel song. Some of you may be familiar with Pete and Diesel.

They're just the latest brilliant pop band that Lewis has produced. And in one of their songs, it says that you have to pick up your litter and put it in the bin because if you don't, then that's a sin.

Now, you'll all be singing that song for the rest of the service. Don't let it distract you. Pick up all your litter, put it in the bin if you don't because that's a sin. And it's the idea that dropping litter is a sin.

[ 13 : 02 ] And of course, that's true. We shouldn't just be dropping litter. We shouldn't be careless in that kind of way. But it's easy to think that sin is just stuff like that. Sin is dropping litter.

Sin is swearing. Sin is not going to church. Sin is being greedy. And of course, there is a sense in which that's true.

But if we think that that's all that sin is, then we're not really being accurate. Because sin in reality is not this kind of little list of boxes to tick or list of do's and don'ts.

Sin is far bigger than that. Sin is the horrible, harsh reality of everything that is wrong with the world. Sin, in other words, is an utterly real life subject. Because when we talk about sin and when the Bible talks about sin, it is talking about everything that ruins and spoils your life.

[ 14 : 08 ] It's talking about suffering and pain and illness and hardship and inequality. All of these things are the consequence of sin. Everything that is horrible in your life, everything that worries you, everything that causes you pain, all of that is because of sin.

Everything. So do you worry about your children? Why? Because sin is real. Do you struggle with pain and illness? Why?

Because sin is real. Do you turn on the news and think, oh man, the world is so broken. Why is that? It's because of sin.

Every murder, every abduction, every expression of hate, every war is all because of sin. We must not have a small view of sin as though it's just dropping litter or not going to church or having too many beers.

We must have a big view of sin because sin is everything that is wrong with the world. And nobody in here can struggle to find things that are wrong with the world.

[ 15 : 13 ] Think of the stuff that you wish wasn't there. Think of the things you would change. Child slavery, famine, drug addiction. All of these horrible things are there because of sin.

Sin is a massive thing. But the crucial thing we have to remember is that sin is defined by God. Sin is defined by God. How? Well, sin is defined by God because sin is everything that God is not. Sin is not defined by what we identify as good or bad. Sin is defined by that which is in any way contrary to the perfection and purity of the God who is light.

That's captured really well in the catechism. Those of you who maybe remember the catechism from when you were young, question 14 asks the question what is sin? And the answer is sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

[ 16 : 26 ] In other words, God has his standards and sin is anything that either doesn't reach those standards or that contradicts or breaks those standards.

In other words, sin is everything that God isn't. Everything that's bad and horrible in your life or in the world around us is the opposite of everything that God is and everything that God wants.

In other words, sin is simply un-God-ness. God is light. sin is darkness. Darkness is the lack of light. Sin is the lack of God. Sin is defined by God because it's everything that he isn't. And this is hugely important for all of us because it means that every time you see something sinful or horrible in your life or in the life of somebody you know and love, you must remember that's not what God is like.

So every time you hear a politician make a promise that you know that they won't keep, remember that is not what God is like. Every time you see someone just looking after their own selfish interests, remember that's not the way God does things.

[ 17 : 51 ] Every time you see people who are not being cared for as they should be, who are being hurt or neglected or abused, remember that is not God's way of doing things. And every time someone hurts you, remember that that is not the way God behaves.

And that of course is so important, why it's so important for us as Christians to be really careful of our conduct in our day-to-day lives because if we go around in our lives and we're cruel or selfish or cold or arrogant towards people, we are showing the people around us exactly what God is not. And we're not representing him well at all. Everything that's horrible in the world is exactly what God is not.

If something is wrong, it's because it's going against God's way of doing things. and that's so crucial to recognize because so many people, as we've said, walk away from God, dismiss God because they completely misunderstand him.

People see all that's wrong in the world and they blame God. And yet all the stuff that's wrong in the world is the very opposite of what God has told us to do. And it's a result of not fulfilling God's purposes but rebelling against God's purposes and disobeying him.

[ 19 : 23 ] Everything that mucks up our lives is not because of God. It's because the world has been ruined by the effect of sin. John is reminding us that sin is darkness.

But he's also reminding us that there is not one ounce of that darkness in God. God is utterly pure morally.

That means he never lies ever. He never neglects. He's never selfish. He's never corrupt.

He is never ever evil in any way whatsoever. It's logically and mathematically impossible for God to do any of these things.

I'm sure every one of us here would agree that we don't like evil. I don't know what the mobile signal is like here but if you took your phone out just now and went on BBC News homepage you would just see tons of stuff that's horrible.

[ 20 : 38 ] And all of that is tragic and we don't want it. We don't want darkness. We don't want sin.

We don't want all the horrible bits in the world. But this is where we see something that is so important for us to remember because this is what so many people get wrong. If sin is all of that stuff which is not God which is the opposite of God that means that the only place where we can go where there is no sin is to God.

God in order to get away from all the horrible things that are in the world we need to go to God because he's the only place. He's the only person who is light and who has no darkness.

But people don't do that and maybe you don't do that. That's one of just the great tragedies is that in order to get away from horrible stuff in our lives people go to something other than God which

means they're just going to find more brokenness and more ungodness.

And we see it in loads of different ways. So people struggle with insecurity and self esteem. And so in order to fix that instead of going to God they go to social media and try to get likes and followers and reaction.

[ 22 : 06 ] And for a while it maybe makes them feel better but it's like a constant chase trying to be recognised trying to get more and then if you put up a post and it's not liked or not followed you end up feeling more insecure.

And so what you did to solve the problem is just making the problem worse. In the same way people crave intimacy they long for intimacy people feel lonely and so in order to address that emptiness they go to pornography.

and so they just try to fix one horrible thing with another one. People long for admiration they want people to think a lot of them and so they maybe fight their way to a good job and a good income so they can build a flash house and build a nice car and be really successful because they think if I have a big fancy house and if I have a big fancy car people would admire me and so they think it's going to make them feel better.

In reality if I pulled up outside in a big Rolls Royce what would you think? You'd think that guy's even more of an idiot than we thought. And all the time we try to solve one aspect of brokenness with another because the only place you can go to find non-sin and non-brokenness is God.

It's a bit like imagine you're away on the mainland you're in Glasgow or Edinburgh and you're feeling really homesick for Lewis. I'm sure everyone here knows how that feels and you're just longing to be back and you feel so unsettled you feel so homesick.

[ 23 : 54 ] The answer to that situation is not to go to London the answer is just to come to Lewis. If we hate sin if we hate everything that's wrong with the world if we wish it was different then let's go to the one who actually is different let's go to God because he is light and thanks be to God in him there is no darkness at all and whenever you see something dark please just remember how perfect and pure God is.

So in this chapter God's revealing himself to us we're able to see what God is like he is light he is perfect he is amazing and if we want to get away from all the darkness and horribleness of sin we need to go to God and the amazing truth of the gospel is that God actually wants us to run to him and he's revealing himself so that we can have fellowship with him he doesn't want us to keep our distance he actually is calling us to himself and wants you to come to him to run away from all the brokenness in the world and to run to him but that brings us to our second massive question which is how do we get to him if we recognize that God is light and that we need him how do we come to him well in verses 6 to 10 John gives us a brilliant answer first of all he tells us that before God we cannot pretend anything now when we think of the fact that

God is perfect one of the immediate problems we face is that we recognize well we don't match up to that if God is at that standard and I am not and we can think well I need to make the best impression of myself to try and be as good as I can towards God a bit like a job interview we think well we need to sell ourselves to God and sort ourselves out then we can come to God and we can try and maximize the positives and minimize the negatives John says forget it he says you can't pretend anything to God and he says two important things first he says we can't pretend to have the thing that we haven't got I hope that makes sense we can't pretend to have the thing we haven't got look at verse 6 that's where he says it he says if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth in other words we can't say that we have a relationship with him on paper and then live out our lives as if that relationship is meaningless and lots of people fall into that trap of saying oh well yes I believe in

God I think there is a God and I think about God but it has no effect whatsoever on the way you live your life that's just pretending that you have something that you don't really have the word fellowship I'm sure you know basically means in common and so if we say oh yeah I believe in God and I'm a Christian but yet we live a life that's got no care whatsoever for what God wants then we're not really in common at all we're not in fellowship with God and it's important to remember that naturally we don't have a relationship with God and we can't pretend that we have it if we don't so John saying don't pretend to have the thing that you don't have but neither can we pretend to not have the thing that we do have you see that in verse 8 he says if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us so if

God is light and if that means that there's no darkness in him we can't pretend to be the same we are by nature broken and contaminated by sin just like the world around us we look at all the broken stuff in the world and yet we see the same kind of stuff in ourselves and no matter how much we might want to try and pretend that that's not the case it ultimately doesn't change anything because all we're doing is deceiving ourselves we're leading ourselves astray pretending that we don't have sin that we don't have the thing that we have is going to lead us away from God because sin is a reality in all of us that needs to be dealt with so John is telling us that we can't pretend anything before God and of course that makes perfect sense because if God is light and if he contains no darkness at all then he is going to know straight away if we are pretending so if this church was completely dark and you couldn't see anything and I told you that there's a picture of an elephant on this wall here

[ 29 : 06 ] I might be able to persuade you you might think well maybe there is I can't see it if it was pitch black but if you turn the lights on you would see that I was talking rubbish and in exactly the same way if God is light it means he can see everything he knows everything he doesn't do darkness he doesn't do hiding things we cannot pretend anything before God so what can we do well this is where we come to the greatest news that the world has ever heard what do we do to be in fellowship with the God who is light the answer is that we just tell him the truth we just tell him as it is you see that in verse 9 if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness what do we do to get to God we confess our sins to him it's a great reminder that becoming a Christian is not complicated it's actually very simple because all you're doing is telling

God the truth the real truth the fact that none of us can save ourselves that none of us can pretend to be sinless and that every one of us needs God to save us we just have to tell him as it is and that's actually what the word confess means they always say that you're never meant to use Greek words in the pulpit but you look very clever so I think you'll be fine the Greek word for confess is homologeo so that's two words a compound word homologeo homologeo h-o-m-o-l-o-g-e-o that's the word for confess it's made up of two parts homo which means the same and logeo which means to speak and so to confess basically means to say the same thing in other words you don't come to God pretending anything because he'll see through that straight away you come to God and you tell him what he has always known the fact that you're a sinner and you desperately need him and this is illustrated brilliantly in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector imagine God listening to these two men the Pharisee who said I thank you that I'm not like this man or like other fornicators or adulterers I do this I do that and you can imagine God saying stop pretending that I don't know all the things that you've done wrong and in many ways the Pharisee's prayer is a kind of insult to God's intelligence and to his nature but when God heard the tax collector say God be merciful to me a sinner God would say yeah I know I've always known but I can fix it the fact that God is light is going to expose all of our imperfections but God knows that and he has sent his son to deal with all of that when verse 9 says that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins is pointing to the fact that God in Jesus has provided absolutely everything that is needed to deal with our sin like we're trying to show the children today the cross wipes away our sin and takes it off us and onto Jesus God is saying I am light I can see your sin but I have sent my son to fix everything God has taken care of it Christ has accomplished everything that's needed for us to be saved and all God asks of you is to say the same thing remember the word fellowship means to be in common and that's the amazing thing that admitting to God that we're sinful doesn't make God want to say well clear off it actually means that we're acknowledging what he knows it's the first step of making us in common with God and that's why the gospel is such brilliant news God is revealing himself to you he's talking to you right now through his word he's revealing himself so that you can have fellowship with him and know him as your father he's telling you what he's like that he is light that he's the opposite of everything that's horrible and rubbish in the world he's telling you that he has made provision full provision in his son so that every single mistake you've ever made can be dealt with he is telling you right now that he loves you and that he is here for you and that he will cleanse you and heal you and hold you forever he is telling you that you need him and all you have to do is say the same thing confess yes lord

I am a sinner but I want to be in fellowship with you and I need Jesus to deal with all of my sin for me it's really so beautiful and so simple all we have to do is confess our sins before God and the amazing thing is that when you confess your sins to God what you're basically doing is putting them

into the light so if God is light if we're confessing our sins before God we are putting our sin our darkness into the light now what happens when you put darkness into light imagine you could go into a wee cupboard somewhere here sure there must be a wee door into the pulpit somewhere imagine you could go in there and it was all dark and you had a wee box and so you take the box into the dark room and you close the lid so inside that box is darkness yes and then you bring it out here into the light and you open the lid what happens to the darkness it's gone that's exactly what happens when you confess your sin to

[ 36 : 14 ] God because that is how powerful the cross of Jesus Christ is God is light he's calling us to him and to get to him all we have to do is say the same thing and bring our darkness into his light to be healed and saved and safe forever that's the gospel it's as amazing and as simple as that let's pray he's Thank you.