

The Character of God and The Life of Discipleship

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[0:00] The first letter of John and chapter 1 and we can read at verse number 5.! 1 John 1 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 to the end of this chapter.

When we read our Bibles and we learn our Bibles, we understand that the Bible is about God's mission for his world.

And all of the books of the Bible give expression to that mission in different ways. And when we read different books of the Bible, they give expression to the mission of God based upon the needs of those who are going to hear these letters read as they were or who are to read these letters in later generations.

Letters are designed for particular people in particular situations so that they will understand the mission of God and so that they will come to understand the grace of salvation.

[1:16] This letter is exactly like that. It is of course in line with the mission of God. And it is in line with the mission of God because John wants people to know that they are the children of God.

And when we read through the letter, we understand that the reasons that he is writing the way that he is, is because there was a lot of misunderstanding.

There was a lot of misunderstanding. There was a lot of misunderstanding with regard to who Jesus was. There was a lot of misunderstanding with regard to how they should live their lives as the children of God.

There was the misunderstanding as to how they should live their lives in relation to each other. And all of these three elements, they are not exclusive to those who are going to hear the letter from John.

They are elements that we face and are challenged with in the whole life and the experience of Christ's church in the world. And John, in addressing the needs of the people, we could say that he has a double focus in this letter.

[2:26] And the first of these is, in the verse that we read, God is light. And then we have, in chapter 4, the whole idea that God is love.

And these two great proclamations of these, God will hang everything that he is going to say that should affect their thinking, should affect their living, and should affect their relationship with the Lord Jesus.

And when we look even further behind the issues that the hearers are facing in their lives, we understand the way in which John, in particular, in these verses and these strands are through, that in particular, he wants to remind them what faith means, and what it means for those who have a faith, that there is a particular lifestyle and living that is essential, and is also confirmation of the very life of the children of God in their hearts.

And we read through the letter, and it's full of John's love for the people, his pastoral care, he's speaking to his family, because he cares for them.

And today, from these words, we want to think of the character of God and the life of discipleship. And the first thing we want to notice is the perspective, how we view objects in relation to one another.

[4 : 05] And the perspective is the character of God, that in verse 5, God is light. He is absolute illumination.

The psalmist tells us in Psalm 104 that he is clothed about with light as with a robe. Wherever we are going to find God, he is the God who is light.

Paul speaks in writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 6, that God dwells in an approachable light. It's the brightness and the glaring of light that the human eye cannot behold.

And as we read our Bibles, we see that the light that is God, that it shines and makes itself known in two particular ways.

It makes itself known, first of all, in the work of creation. There was darkness, there was chaos, there was confusion. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.

[5 : 13] The Spirit of God hovering over the water brought about order, brought about light, and continued to bring about the beauty of God's creation.

When I hear that God is light, I think of the name of God made known to me in the work of creation. He separated light from the darkness.

He is the God who is light. But when I read my Bible also, I'm reminded that I see the light of God in his salvation.

And we saw that in the Psalms that we sang. Psalm 27, The Lord is my light and my salvation. The same psalmist in Psalm 43 prays, Send your light forth and your truth.

God is light. God is light in his salvation. He shines into the world because of his desire to save.

[6 : 15] And the third way in which we recognize the Bible speaking about God as light, it is with regard to his relationships with the people that he has created.

The light speaks of his holiness, of the brightness of the shining of his character. And I read about Isaiah in chapter 6, and he saw the brightness of the shining of God and as soon as he was aware of the brightness and the holiness of God, he cried out, I am lost because of a man of unclean lips.

He was a sinner. He was confronted with the light of the glory of God. Whatever God shines in his light, as he did also on Mount Sinai with regard to the children of Israel, he was going to come down and he was going to shine brightly.

And he told Moses, tell the people not to come near this mountain because I am coming down in case they perish. The God who is light, who shines brightly in creation, who shines brightly in salvation, and who shines brightly in his relationship with all of his created creatures.

That's the perspective. And God wants us today to recognize that so that wherever I go in life, I'm going to view every object before me.

[7 : 51] I'm going to view everything that I do. I'm going to view the places that I go to all under the perspective that God is light. Under the perspective of the shining of his beauty in creation, under the perspective of his promised salvation, and under the perspective that everything that I do has to do with my relationship with God.

And the great display of the light, of the character of God, we have, of course, in the passion of the Lord Jesus.

We may think of the distribution of light. We may think of connectivity. But there is distribution and connectivity when God sends his Son into the world, into the darkness of the world.

The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. Jesus says, I am the light of the world. He knew who he was.

And John tells us in John chapter 1, that no one has ever seen God, that the only Son has made him known.

[9 : 09] In him was life, and his life was the light of men. The perspective of the God who is light, now brought into close proximity with us in the oppression of his Son.

And that's why Jesus says, in that chapter that we read, in John chapter 12, and also in John chapter 3, he speaks of the way in which, if they will follow me, they will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Light illuminates. The other thing that light does, it unveils our true identity. Because under the perspective that God is light today, God wants us, and Jesus wants us to understand, that our response to God being light, is to become disciples of the Lord Jesus, and as soon as we do so, that we walk in his light.

And if we are not doing so, and if we don't do so, then we continue to walk in darkness. The light of God revealed to us in the passion of the Lord Jesus, embodied in his passion and in his work, that reveals and unveils your identity.

And as we move on, that today is critical. If we are to understand the mission of God in building his church, in forming his own family, in having children in the world that are going to be in his eternal family home, it is critical that as surely as John's hearers we're going to understand that this light shows them the kind of people that they are, we need to understand that as we worship God, we need to ensure that we are not confused in our thinking, but that we let the light of God through Jesus and through his word penetrate our lives and show to us whether a relationship with God today is the right one in the sense of being at peace with God or whether it is the wrong one, alienated from God and described by Paul in Romans chapter 5, enemies of God.

[11 : 55] The perspective. Let's not think it's for 60 minutes on the morning of the Lord's Day that we think of God as light as our perspective.

It's a perspective for the whole of life and it shines into our lives to prove who we are and to enable us to see the things that are around us.

The perspective. That leads me secondly to participation. If light is in Jesus and God's kingdom is in light and disciples are to understand who Jesus is, then how do we participate?

How do we become part of God's family? John uses a word which speaks to us of coming together.

In verse number 7, he speaks about having fellowship. It's having something in common. Something that we have a shared interest in.

[13 : 05] Something that is really precious to ourselves and precious to other people. And in a wider world in which we live, people will use the idea of fellowship for so many different things beyond the Bible.

There's a fellowship because we gather around a particular constitution or a particular organization and we share the same interest and we gather together to discuss these interests.

That is a fellowship that speaks of relationships out in the world. But here, there is a fellowship which is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the true use of the word fellowship. fellowship that we have a shared interest in God as the Father who sent His Son and God as the Son who came into the world and in God as the Holy Spirit who shows Jesus to us.

It's a fellowship of sharing that unites the people of God in order to give expression to the faith that they have and the love that they have for God.

[14:25] And perhaps at a general way of gathering to worship God on the Lord's Day is that sense of fellowship. We have a shared interest, we have a common interest, a common desire to gather together before God.

We are here because of that shared sense of our need to come to worship God. and that in itself of course is to be encouraged and is commendable.

But we understand here that those to whom John was writing that they were confused. They were confused about what it meant to live as the children of God.

In verse number 6, if we say, this was their claim, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

They were making a claim. They were basically making a claim that they were the children of God. And in making that claim, their lives were lived in a particular way.

[15:35] They were walking in darkness. The whole idea of walking in the Bible in very simple terms is to walk about on my patio. In other words, it's walking about in my space in the world.

And wherever I go, I have my space and I do certain things in my space. My patio is the way that I live my life. The way that I walk around in the world.

And my patio should be the kind of area to live in my life and that is there as sanctioned by God and by the Word of God so that I walk around in that space where God's light shines on my life and where I'm walking in that light.

But they are claiming that they have fellowship and yet they are walking in darkness. The space that they occupy in this world is a life lived in the service of darkness with no light of salvation with no light of God with no light of Jesus walking about doing the things of this world.

And John speaks throughout this lecture of the way in which the love of the world and the things of this world they are not the things that are of God. They are the things that belong to the devil himself the God of this world.

[17:06] And immediately we have not only confusion but a complete contradiction that they are claiming one thing and living their lives in another way.

And John tells them that they are lying and they do not practice the truth. Not simply that they are not agreeing with what the Bible says but living their lives in complete opposition to what the Bible says.

And God wants you and I today to be on our guard with regard to this very thing that we may make a claim that we are the children of God.

We may make a profession that we are the children of God. but we need to be on our guard that our lives are not lived in a way that contradicts that.

That the space that I occupy in life is no different to the space occupied by those who have no faith and who have no God and have no desire for God. And if I say today that I am a child of God and I am so immersed and blended in with a lost world in its darkness that there is no distinction then I am getting confused and I am risking the whole of my salvation because of my confusion.

[18:41] It is not something that was alien or specific to those who were hearing this letter from John. It is something that appears time after time in the history of the church that you and I can be so confused in our thinking that we think we can become Christians and be Christians and our lives don't change at all.

The confusion. There must be conformity in order to prove participation in salvation and to confirm that we are the children of God in verse number 7.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus son cleanses from all sin.

If the space that I occupy is light and when I think of that space that I occupy which is light I think of three particular sources that give light into my space that govern my thinking and govern the way that I live and I think of the God who is light who speaks through creation who speaks through his relationships with me I think of the God who is light I also think of the sun who is the light of the world and all that he is in his passion and all that he has done in his work that is the light that shines into my space and thirdly I have the light of the word of God so that there are three closely linked sources of light radiation of light into my life that enable me to walk in a way that is in harmony with God consistent with the word of

God and the means of establishing that fellowship that communion that walking with God that not only confirms that I'm the child of God but where I find the blessing Abraham was a friend of God God told Abraham in Genesis 17 walk before me and be perfect occupy the sun in this world defined by me walk in that place be perfect go on in your relationship with me the Bible also tells us with regard to Enoch in Genesis chapter 5 that Enoch walked with God and he was not because ultimately God took him to be with himself it is that sense of friendship with God that sense of communion with God it is that sense of having our lives permeated by the word of

[21:51] God walking in the light we have fellowship with one another and notice he does not say that we have fellowship with the father and with the son we have fellowship with each other and here is the formation of God's family who are the others who is going to have fellowship it is John and the other apostles with all of the people in the churches that they are speaking to it's the gathering of people around the Lord Jesus and around the word of God we have fellowship with each other and that's what defines ourselves today as the people of God that because of the way in which the light shines into our lives because we are persuaded to be disciples of the Lord Jesus that because of that we have fellowship with each other we worship

God together we talk to each other about God we talk to each other about our experiences as the children of God we have fellowship with each other and there is a vital ingredient at the very center of that participation which ensures that our participation in the fellowship and in the communion goes on forever dare I say wherever there is fellowship wherever there is commonality or community there will be issues and problems and John wants them to understand here that that will surely be the case in the relationship with God because of the kind of people they are but he says the blood of Jesus son cleanses us from all sin my walk with my

God and with my savior in the zone defined by him and my relationship with my God is maintained by God through the passion of Jesus and through the cross of Jesus that my heart is washed continually by the blood of Jesus so that the sin that would separate me from God and does separate me from God is removed and wiped away so that there is continuity not only in my relationship but in my friendship with God and in my walk with God participation how much does the space that you occupy how much is it filled with God and with Jesus and with his word and how much is the space that you occupy filled with a sense of growing appreciation of the preciousness of the cross of

Jesus that wipes away your sin every day and how much is your space filled with a sense of marvelling that the God who is light that he is also the God who is love and that he pours that out into your life every day there is no participation if we're walking in darkness walking in the light confirms our part in the family of God and gives to us every day a sense of belonging a sense of care and a sense of God's love for us perspective participation and finally prescription they were confused about the kind of life that they should live they were also confused about their sinnership and in verse 8 and in verse 10 we see two aspects of that confusion and in verse 8 we read if we say we have no sin they didn't understand that they were sinners by nature as David learned they didn't understand that they had a sinful condition at all living life oblivious to the fact that by nature they were sinners in the sight of

God and in verse 10 they are saying if we say we have not sinned the two things they didn't have a sinful condition and they didn't practice sin every day total confusion about the thing that's at the center of the breakdown of their relationship with God and that's where we can be today they were here as part of the Christian community that John was writing to and despite being part of the Christian community have an understanding of the word of God despite all of that they were confused about their status and they were confused about their practice as sinners and it is a fearful thing that you can be here today and be equally confused unmoved by the very mention that you are a sinner unmoved by the very mention that you sin in thought word and in deed confused into the sense of dismissing and going to as far as making

[27 : 45] God a liar it's not a means of sitting on the fence or being neutral when I don't recognize my sinnership when I don't recognize that I sin I am saying that God is a liar and that's a serious matter that I can live my life that everything that I do and practice every day of my life that it speaks out against God that it says that God is a liar because I fail to conform what is the prescription in verse number nine if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we confess our sins to put it simply it is saying the same thing about something as someone else it comes with that sense of agreement and so in the context here it is saying something about my sin that someone else

God says about my sin and it is with regard to my sin there is an agreement between what God says and what I say with regard to my sin and using that triangle and these points on that triangle that's where my confession comes I see my sin and I begin to see it the way God sees it I'm seeing it through the eyes of God because of the word of God and because of the spirit of God and what God says with regard to my sin that it is worthy of eternal punishment then I agree with that I say the same thing as God and in the whole idea of confession it is not enough to think the same thing as God because the very heart of confession and of turning away from my sin is to verbalize what I think of my sin and to take what I think of it in the light of what God has said and to say the words over to my

God because God wants to hear me verbalizing my changed attitude to my sin and when I do that God is pleased God promises to forgive my sin to carry away the guilt to remove the burden that David had in Psalm 32 which we're going to sing shortly the burden that he had because the hand of God was heavy upon him and he went on to lay bare his sins before God he went on to speak of the guilt that lay within him being carried away and that's the center the heartbeat of my relationship with

God that it's concerning my sin that I confess my sin to God say the same thing about my sin as God does see what God says about my sin with regard to its condemnation and see what God says about my sin with regard to the cross of Jesus and when I see both these things and say these things then God in his grace and consistent with his character he takes my sin away and today as we close and we leave this building let's think of this prescription and let's think of not just leaving a building but let's think of leaving our sin behind because

God has taken it away and let's verbalize our sense of sinnership in a heartfelt way so that we may come to wonder and to find peace and joy in having our sins forgiven there is no greater joy than to have that burden of guilt taken away and to have peace with God and may God help us today to go forward with the perspective of the fact that he is light on regard against being confused about what living as a Christian might mean and being on regard against the confusion about our sin and ensuring that we are on the same page as God with regard to our sin and on the same page as God with regard to the cross of Jesus and then we have peace then we are children then we know who we are and we know where we are going may

[33 : 17] God bless his word let us pray most gracious God we we we we we give thanks to you for your light we give thanks to you for your light and the person of your son we give thanks to you for the light that shines from the darkness of Calvary cross and help us today oh Lord God to have the light of your truth upon our hearts the light of your spirit upon the person of your son as saviour and bring us to that place where we embrace him and receive him and accept him as our own personal saviour for today and for life and for eternity so hear a prayer and accept us for Jesus sake so closing psalm is at psalm 32 and we're singing it in sing psalms it's on page 38 and the tune is Arlington psalm 32 at verse 1 how blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin his sins are covered from

God's face his death is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him we stand to sing from verse 1 to verse 6 to God's praise how blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin whose sins are covered from God's face whose death is cancelled in God's grace there's no deceit in him!

holy O day and night my strength was up, as in the summertime.

Then I laid bare my sin to you, the guilt that lived within.

I said, O Lord, I have transgressed, and you forgive when I confess.

[36 : 55] You pardoned all my sin, so let the calling free to you, while you are to be found.

Surely when waves are sweeping past, on mighty waters rising past, you'll keep and save us.

Amen. So please allow me to go to the main door after the benediction. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God to the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.