

Openness to the Lord

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

While we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But 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 say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the 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 unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

Chapter 2. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

[1 : 21] Oh, may the Lord bless the hearing and the preaching of His Word. On August 12th in 2018, NASA's Parker Solar Probe launched into outer space.

And its mission is, and it was and still is today, to study the sun and how it affects life on Earth. My hypothesis is that they'll discover the sun is pretty important.

In an effort to unlock the mysteries of the sun, the probe has since made many orbits around the sun studying various aspects of its core and the corona, which is the sun's atmosphere.

Yes, apparently the sun has an atmosphere. It's made these huge orbits and swooping arcs passing the sun at various places at various times, trying to catch a glimpse of different characteristics and different angles of our nearest star.

The author of 1 John does a very similar thing in his writing. It's cyclical. He seems to be making the same point over and over, but actually he's drawing contrasts in a few different ways to help us better understand the Christian life, looking at it from different angles.

[2 : 43] Even though this epistle doesn't specifically bear John's name, similar to maybe how Paul might have signed his letters, this letter doesn't have that signature. But the earliest testimony and the style of the writing strongly suggests the Apostle John as the author.

John was the last Apostle remaining alive. As such, the aged Apostle had a lot of influence among the churches. You can imagine he had been with the Lord Jesus.

John begins his letter by highlighting three of the five senses. He saw, he heard, he touched the breathing, living Jesus. This letter is very conversational, intimate, warm, personal, like a father to the children.

Hence the lack of a formal greeting. He writes like a pastor. He's consoling. The whole letter is consoling, urging, encouraging struggling believers. It's an example how the Lord is tender to us and shepherds us in the way we should go.

John had authority among the churches. And he took his position very seriously as he gently and lovingly tells us how we should go. He confronts the spreading of false doctrine.

[4 : 02] Most scholars believe that John was living in Ephesus at the time of this writing, somewhere around 95 AD, before he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. And by this time, there was plenty of false teaching circulating in the churches.

So in one sense, this letter is a bit of a back to the basics Christianity. John was an overseer and a spiritual father to many of these churches. And these early verses that we read can be in some ways a bit challenging.

John's confronting false teaching and patterns of excusing sin that may have infiltrated the churches. Many had misconceptions about what it even meant to be a Christian.

John wants to make it very clear through the use of vivid imagery and stark contrasts that religion and ethics are inseparable. While the church, some of the church, had been taken in by false

teaching, John also wants to assure believers of their salvation.

And he points out what true faith looks like. So our main point for today is God is holy. And he calls us to live in humble, honest confession to receive forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

[5 : 19] God is holy. And he calls us to live in humble, honest confession to receive forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Like any good preacher, I'm going to break this into three points.

Point number one, the standard. If you were to describe God in one word, what would it be? I'm sure we've all asked that question.

Even though all the languages in all the worlds couldn't come close to adequately describing our great God, it's still an interesting ponder, an interesting question to ponder.

And it can be fun to ask our kids. John sets up his discourse by saying God is light. This is a common metaphor used throughout Scripture.

And God uses light to speak in one way of his own self-revelation through the law and the prophets. David says, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. God would make his servant, he said, a light for the Gentiles.

[6 : 21] In other examples of the word, the light is described as revealing and illuminating. Jesus is the light of the world. And like the sun, this light also exposes. It's searching and helps us see clearly.

God does all these things. Light penetrates every dark corner. When a light is switched on in a room, it affects everything in that room. Suddenly we see. God is light.

And then John switches to the negative and says there is no darkness in him at all. Not only does he want us to see what the Lord is like, he wants to help us to understand what the Lord is not like.

Darkness naturally reminds us of sin and evil. There is no evil in the Lord. The darkness gives greater meaning to the light. We see that the Lord is completely clean and pure.

God is holy and morally perfect. There's not an ill, not a hint of ill malice in our gracious God. He never does anything from selfish ambition.

[7 : 28] Never a pinch of sinful wrath. Because of his moral perfection, he is completely worthy of worship and adoration of all creatures for all eternity.

The Lord is perfect and holy, just as we sang this morning. Because of that, he is the absolute source and moral standard of all that is good and right. He's the one that gets to say what is and isn't sin, what is and isn't wrongdoing.

And this metaphor of light and dark means more than just God is morally good. It includes that.

This word for light also means a force. It's not just related to brightness or cleanliness, but a fire. It burns up everything that's not pure.

The Lord is pure, but he consumes and burns up everything that is not. If we were to somehow travel to the sun like this solar probe, the closer we got to the sun, the more danger we are of being consumed.

[8 : 33] The power of the sun would consume us. Likewise, his holiness is dangerous to us.

Richard Lentz is helpful here and he says, The holiness of God refers to the absolute moral purity of God and also the absolute moral distance between God and his human creatures.

When we come to grips with the fact that the Lord is perfect and holy, we have to come to grips with our own sin. There's no darkness in him implies that there is darkness in us.

Morally speaking, we are completely different than the God who made us. Now, it's easy to think, I think, that the Lord can easily overlook sin.

The temptation is to think that, that he can just easily overlook it. Because we make the mistake of thinking that God is like us. Walking in darkness, either not seeing or not caring.

Many want a relationship with God on easy terms. But God is not okay with sin. There's no darkness in him at all. We don't need to look far in God's word to see that his holiness and our unholiness are incompatible.

[9 : 47] In Genesis 3, man's first sin banished Adam and Eve from the garden and invoked God's curse. During Moses' time in Numbers 1, if a non-Levite came near the tabernacle or God's presence, they would die.

And Isaiah's glimpse of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 caused him to be terrified. The Lord's sacred otherness threatens our very existence. The scripture, this scripture is an indictment against us.

God is light. And this light is dangerous. So, it's understandable when we read what follows next. He talks about sin. Point two, the claims.

Point two, the claims. In the next series of verses, John puts forth common false claims followed by a rebuttal or a promise.

Verses 6, 8, and 10 consist of these false claims having to do with the nature of sin and God. And each one is set up with the conditional words, if we say. We're going to look at all the false claims together.

[10:59] And then we'll look at the true claims or promises second. The first, these three verses sound very much alike. These three false claims, they sound alike.

And here's where we get into John's cyclical writing. Sounds like he's just repeating himself over and over. And while repetition in the Bible does have a purpose, a literary technique used for memorization or emphasis, a careful examination of these verses will help us see that John is addressing three different specific heretical arguments.

And in some ways, these false claims get progressively worse and more dangerous. The first is in John 6. John continues to use the contrast of light and dark.

It's, it's again, a moral comment. It's a moral argument. John says that walking with the Lord and habitual sin or in darkness aren't compatible.

The two things don't go together. Walking in sin, walking with the Lord don't go together. These contrasts are diametrically opposed to one another. And it's not just like a silly oxymoron, like awfully good or original copy or girly man.

[12:12] It's not like that. No, we're talking about the glorious Lord who doesn't wink an eye at sin. He's clean and pure and doesn't play with things that aren't.

You can't walk with the Lord and in sin simultaneously. And this action verb of while we walk gives us the picture of throwing our weight in the direction of sin.

When we walk, we have momentum. We're journeying in darkness. Not through to another destination, but in darkness. To walk in darkness is to have continual habitual sin.

Worldly desires that a person is unwilling to change, unwilling to turn or repent. And the real crux of the verse is if we say we have fellowship with Him.

If we're walking in darkness or under repentant sin and say we have fellowship with God, John says we're a liar. 2 Corinthians 6.14 says, It's a rhetorical question, of course.

[13:25] The answer is none. When this happens, though, what we say we believe and what our lives show we believe are completely different. We lie with both our words and our habits.

Our verbal confession doesn't match what our lives speak. They're incompatible. It's like a storm clown that brings no rain. Or bread marked gluten-free but with a double portion of gluten in it. Something that promises one thing but delivers another. So we need to ask ourselves, what effect does our confession have in our life today? Are others surprised when they find out we're a Christian?

Do we mourn over specific sin? Not because we got caught, but because we sinned against the Lord we say we love. There's a children's fable where a donkey finds a lion's skin that was left out by a hunter.

When the donkey puts on the lion's skin, he tries to scare all the other animals. And it almost worked. But when he saw that they were frightened at first, he gave a loud bray exposing himself.

[14:43] Turns out he was not the fierce lion but the silly donkey and everybody knew it. While our confession may say one thing, our actions will tell the truth. John Stott says here, religion without morality is an illusion.

Sin is always a barrier to fellowship with God. Sin always breaks fellowship. May it not be said of any of us that our lives are incompatible with what we say we believe.

We cannot be a Christian and walk in habitual, continual sin. Sin. The next one is, the next verse in verse 8 is the next heretical claim.

And it questions the existence of sin altogether. The first false claim admits that sin exists. But John confronts those who say that sin doesn't exist at all.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. It's important to note here that there was a heretical idea beginning to circulate among the other early churches that threatened to undermine the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

[15:51] And the idea is that mankind doesn't actually have a sinful nature inherited from Adam. And it eventually, this idea eventually became known as Gnosticism. In John's day, the main threat of Gnosticism to the early church was the denial of the existence of sin.

They believed in this dualism where deeds done in the flesh don't really affect the spirit or the soul. They're somehow unconnected. And redemption for the Gnostic is not through confession of sin, since sin doesn't exist, but through enlightenment or personal spiritual knowledge.

And even though this was likely the most dangerous heresy that threatened the early church, it's not dead. It's just taken a different form. At its core, Gnosticism is self-centered.

It emphasizes personal knowledge and experience. Honestly, it's pretty plain to see that in the culture around us. The individual is at the center of everything.

It's where we give authority to our inner feelings. It's the spirit of the age. Inner feelings have the highest authority these days, and therefore must be expressed and cannot be refuted.

[17:05] You are what you feel. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. It harkens back to Satan's original lie that says, you shall be as gods. We become like little gods with the center, with self at the center of it all.

Be true to yourself. Follow your heart. Do what makes you happy. And lest we wag our heads at the culture around us, these same threats infiltrate our thinking as well, but very subtly.

Especially in how we approach church and community. So I have to ask myself, what am I looking for when I come on Sunday morning? What am I expecting? Am I wanting to be fed?

Am I hoping to leave with an inner sense of peace? Do I want to come in and experience Jesus, hear a good word and leave? And these things aren't inherently bad.

In fact, I hope you do leave here well fed with the word of God and have an inner sense of peace. I hope that for each and every one of us. But if that's all we're thinking, it could reveal self-centered motives.

[18:12] When we gather as the church, we have to drop all individualistic motives, notions at the door. We don't gather to serve ourselves.

We have to be careful not to say, what's in it for me? We receive from God, but we also pour out to others. When we sing to the Lord, we're also addressing one another with songs and hymns and spiritual songs.

And this, again, this isn't intended to be a criticism against this church, against us at all, but it's something we need to continually watch for in our thinking. And as a matter of fact, it's one of the reasons that we keep the lights on when we sing.

We want to facilitate not private communion with God, but corporate worship, where we see and hear one another, being ministers to one another. We gather in unity, serving one another with God at the center, not ourselves.

The early Gnostics exalted personal knowledge and truth that was self-centered. But John says it's not truth at all. We deceive ourselves when we live for ourselves.

[19:23] In verse 10, John says, if we say we have not sinned. Now, the first claim deals with the question, can we have fellowship with God and still live in continual habitual sin?

The second deals with the question of whether we actually have a sin nature and the particulars of a false teaching, namely Gnosticism. But the third claim, however, is a little trickier.

Let's look there. Verse 10. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. This might be the claim we are most tempted to make and possibly the most dangerous of the three.

When we say we haven't committed sin, when we actually have, we're staring sin in the face, we're staring God in the face and saying, that's not that big a deal.

In many ways, it can be like examining your face in a mirror and noticing a cyst that wasn't there previously. It's concerning, but you want to believe the best. So you tell yourself it's probably nothing.

[20:34] The cyst might get bigger and grow over the course of weeks and months, but in some ways, you don't want to go to the trouble to find out what it really is. At worst, it just seems annoying, but the longer it goes, the more dangerous it becomes and the more painful it is to remove.

When the Lord reveals, shows us our own sin, it's tempting to try to do the very same thing, to make excuses, to blame shift, to assume it's not that bad.

But this denial has the power to destroy. I think most of us wouldn't deny the fact that we are sinners.

Who among us hasn't said at one time or another, I'm only human? But it's usually with a calloused attitude toward our own ungodliness. We often suddenly live with the undercurrent that our sinful actions just aren't that bad.

It wasn't really lust. I just love beautiful things. I wasn't really rude to her. I was just telling the truth. It wasn't really sinful anger against my child.

[21 : 39] Their behavior made me crazy. It wasn't really a lie. It's just a different way of recounting the facts. Each of us tend to think that we're more righteous than we really are, but we need to be very specific about our sin.

I want to be willing to stare my sin in the face with God's eyes and not just say that has to change, but I need a redeemer. And the Lord wants to provide that redeemer.

The Lord has provided that redeemer. Point three, the truth. Point three, the truth.

Unless we get beat up by all this sin. Verses seven, nine, and again in chapter two, verse one, John gives the corresponding truth claim to the previous false claims. John said that God is light, but now in verse seven, John says that God is in the light.

It's a subtle but significant change. God is the source of light, but he also dwells in the light. He asks us to walk in the light where he is.

[22 : 51] The picture here is that God is with his people. You can imagine like a fairytale kingdom with a beautiful castle and many archways and parapets and set upon a high hill and far down below are the common peasants, very separated from the king.

But our God is not like this. He's not aloof in a palace somewhere where people have no access to the king. No, our great God lives among the people in the light.

He wants to reveal himself. He wants to be known by us. So he invites us to come to the light and to walk in the light with him. As the Lord is holy and reveals himself, so also we ought to walk in holiness and revelation.

God wants us to be open and honest, not holding anything back. And as we do, we begin to live more pure and upright lives. And John says that a couple things happen when we walk in the light in this verse.

We have fellowship with one another. We have fellowship with one another, which is surprising that he would say that. Right relationship with God breeds right relationship with others.

[24 : 09] I remember a counselor telling me I was having trouble, we were having trouble in our marriage, and the counselor said, your problem is not with your wife, your problem's with God. You have a problem with the Lord.

And I think he was right. God made us to be together, but true biblical fellowship is always predicated on right relationship with God. The second consequence, John says, of walking in the light is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, present tense.

What do we need to be cleansed from if we're walking in the light? Clearly, walking in the light doesn't mean sinless, but a humility to admit wrong, not holding anything back, no secret sin that we're unwilling to let go of.

As I said, like an openness to the Lord. And the action verb is consistent and ongoing, cleanses us. When a baby is first born, one of the first things that the delivery doctor does is wash them off, give them a bath.

But have you taken a bath since that first one? Of course, of course we have. Some take more baths than others, but the same is the true, but with us spiritually, even after being born again by the spirit, we continue to sin.

[25 : 27] We must be washed by that first time by the blood of Christ, but his blood continually washes us of sin. What a comfort. Right. So that even, even our desires are cleansed.

And the result is confession, more confession, a lifestyle of confession. Verse nine, if we confess our sins. Here, John confirms that walking in the light and is living a life of honesty, honesty to the Lord, being laid bare before the Lord in confession.

Ongoing confession is the essence of the Christian life. Ongoing confession is the essence of the Christian life. And if we confess and live this lifestyle of humble, open repentance, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Since the very first sin in Genesis, God promised to send the Savior, to make a way for us to be forgiven. It's something that God himself had to initiate.

He alone has the authority to forgive sins and he's the only one alone who initiated it. So from the beginning, he made a promise to forgive. This plan was set in motion and throughout Scripture, he reminded people of his promise.

[26 : 49] So, John says that God is faithful. He will bring about all his promises. God is accurate and truthful to fulfill exactly what he promised. He's more than able to accomplish it.

And more importantly, he knows exactly what he has to forgive. He's not entering a covenant with us unsure of the deal that he's getting. He's not going to back out because he's suddenly surprised. I'm sure each of us have been ripped off at one time or another by buying a car or a house or some other product when we were promised a certain quality. But because of deception or our lack of our own due diligence, we receive something that is less than subpar.

We get ripped off. But this is not so with the Lord. We cannot hide anything from his searching eyes. Nothing is hidden. He understands the true depth of our sin.

He knows us to our core and he still loves us. The Lord knows what he has to forgive. The Lord knows what he's forgiving. And there's no stipulations given.

[27 : 59] No sin is too bad. No stain is too dirty that he can't clean. And no heart too hard that he can't change. He is faithful.

Now being just to forgive. He is faithful and just to forgive. Being just to forgive is strange wording mainly because we think of justice being done or justice is served as a punishment not a forgiveness.

But God says God is but John says God is just to forgive. The real dilemma though with justice is as we've seen God does not wink at sin.

He can't simply overlook our transgressions with the wave of a hand. Exodus 34 7 says he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

This seems like a contradiction. He can't just forgive. He is just. He is justice. And he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. He's a good judge.

[29 : 04] If he must punish sin how do we actually receive this forgiveness which brings right relationship with God? How is God still just and right and a good judge when he forgives guilty sinners?

The legal demands against our lives is the just wrath of God. There is a debt that we could never pay. But with his death on the cross God laid on Jesus the record of debt that stood against us along with all its legal demands Colossians 2 says.

God did punish someone for our sins. It was Jesus. But so that we could walk clear and free in the light without the stain of sin with God in the light with in relationship in relationship with one another. He's removed the record of sin that continues and continues to clean the stain. Robert Smith Candlish is helpful here. He says where fear crouches where foul corruption festers he penetrates. He even makes the darkness his own. He takes it upon himself. Yes for our sakes in our stead in our nature he who is light is identified with our darkness.

[30 : 22] Beloved the Lord will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. May we run to him and let the inner depths of our hearts be laid open and bare before his searching light.

And as we come to him his pure light will reveal and search out even the deepest sins we didn't know we had and he'll deal with them gently.

As a skilled surgeon removes a tumor sucking the life of a vital organ he will keep us in the palm of his hand and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. comforting us and wrapping us in light as we walk in him.

Chapter 2 verse 1 here John takes a step back and he tells us the purpose of writing these things. My little children writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

His purpose in writing these is so that we would not sin. He wants to tell us all the dangers of sin but he writes these things so that we would not sin. John realizes the temptation I believe to give license to sin based on the duty of confession.

[31 : 42] Like in other words if we could just live however we want if at the end of it we just confess. It's very reminiscent of Paul in Romans 6 1 and 2 where he says what shall we say then?

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Notice John doesn't say I'll write these things to you so that you sin as little as possible. No, he wants to keep us from all sin. Just like the woman caught in adultery Jesus says go and sin no more. God God cannot condone sin in the tiniest degree and yet the Lord remembers our frame.

He's fully aware of the awful possibility of sin and so a provision is given. He says if anyone does sin so this comment is both severe and tender in nature because our gracious father knows our temptation to be either either too harsh or too lenient with our own sin. We can easily be too harsh or too lenient with our own sin. He puts these perspectives in balance. Keep yourselves from sin but if you do sin but don't sin but if you do.

[33 : 03] It's a it's a helpful balance that gives our minds and hearts a track a path paved by the Lord as evidence of his great care for our weakness and for our growth in Christ.

And then he emphasizes this again by reminding us how Jesus himself is the one who pleads our account. We have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous.

Glenn Barker is says this of these verses where failure occurs the sin must be confessed before the Lord and then abandoned and always the intent of the believer remains the same not to commit sin. If any of his children should fail and commit sin the author is anxious that they neither deceive themselves about it nor lie about their action nor give up walking in the light. The answer to lapsing into sin is not self-deceit but the forgiveness of God made available through Jesus Christ.

When we do sin our natural temptation is to hide to return to darkness to deflect to say it's not that bad to lie to ourselves or blame our circumstances but the Lord says face it head on with a clear unblinking eye come to the light he says forgiveness forgiveness of sin it's the safest place we can turn we have a righteous advocate in heaven interceding for us confirming our right standing with God and our forgiveness of sin in the classic novel To Kill a Mockingbird one of the main characters is Atticus Finch a lawyer in the deep south during the early 1930s he's a heroic figure described as a noble man with a calm wisdom and having a moral conscience so much so that he took a case to defend an impoverished black man

[35 : 10] Tom Robinson even though defending Tom caused Atticus to become the scorn of this racist community so even though Tom faced terrible accusation he was innocent and Atticus was committed to compassion and justice the Lord Jesus Christ himself is our righteous compassionate advocate for us but we aren't quite like Tom Robinson though we have an accuser we aren't innocent there's much that we've done that we should stand trial for but Jesus is not only our advocate who pleads our case despite our sins he's also the sacrifice for those sins he pleads our case and the Lord says he's innocent because Jesus paid the fine God is light and he is in the light he chooses to reveal himself to us we who walk in darkness and have this temptation to hide or minimize sin we're tempted to walk in darkness he's not hiding in the shadows though he invites us to the light not just so that we could be known but so that we could be made clean and all of our relationships be made anew

God is holy and he calls us to live in humble honest confession to receive forgiveness through the blood of Christ the Lord invites us invites you and me to come out wherever we are come to the light and be free let's pray gracious father thank you that you have made a provision for our sins that you call us to the light not to shame us or to expose us in embarrassment Lord you want to forgive and cleanse us continually God reveal the little sins in our heart that we tend to harbor help us to release them to you and comfort us remind us of our salvation Lord but lead us away from temptation and keep us from sin for you are holy father if you should grant conviction of sin I pray that you would also show overwhelming grace you are bounding in steadfast love and faithfulness Lord we thank you for your great love and care for us glorify your son in us we ask Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com peace Bum Bum Bum