

1 John 1:1-2:2

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[0:00] Well, good evening. Please do turn back to that passage in 1 John that was read to us earlier. 1 John chapter 1. Tonight we're going to be in verse 5 onwards.

! But I do want to begin just by reading those first four verses again, John's prologue to his letter. So let's bow our heads and ask for God's help, and then I'll read verses 1 to 4.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this letter of 1 John that you have caused to be written for our good. And now we pray that you would give us ears to hear your word tonight, and that you would use it to feed our hearts and to bless us for our eternal good.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So 1 John 1 verse 1. 1 John 1 verse 1.

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[2:00] But John also makes clear in those first four verses that that fellowship with Jesus and through him with God is only possible through the message of the apostles, those first disciples.

A lot like John, handpicked by Jesus to be his witnesses, and then empowered by his Spirit to proclaim his saving work. but that of course begs the question what is the message of the apostles by which we can enjoy fellowship with God and it's that question that John goes on to answer in these verses I want to focus on this evening beginning at 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 and we can sum up what follows under three headings three foundational truths to grasp and hold firmly to if we are to enjoy genuine fellowship with God and we've read the first already number one God is light God is light and in him is no darkness at all so John begins that verse by reminding us of his unique apostolic authority that is this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you and as what he's teaching us isn't something he or any other human thinker has dreamt up but what he heard and received from Jesus and that message begins just like our universe with God and light only here God doesn't just create the light he is the light light speaks of God's goodness of how like the sun he constantly pours forth life and energy and blessing on his creatures light speaks of God's truth how like the sun he's the source of all light and knowledge in the words of C.S. Lewis

I believe in God as I believe in the sun not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else but above all light speaks of God's absolute moral purity God is light and in him is no darkness at all just as darkness cannot survive exposure to the light of the sun so evil cannot survive exposure to the holiness of God he is perfect perfect in goodness perfect in justice perfect in love and faithfulness and wisdom and power and that truth is the starting point of any fellowship that we might enjoy with God God is light in fact John makes two great statements about God in this letter here God is light then chapter 4 God is love but notice the order John starts not with the truth of God's love as we might do today but with God's holiness now ultimately because God isn't double minded he's not made up of parts his love and holiness are really the same thing just different facets different ways of looking at the same diamond that is God himself but the Bible speaks of God's different attributes to help our limited minds to a fuller more accurate understanding of his being and character and the fact that John starts with God's holiness is significant what it means is that we won't begin to grasp what is meant by God's love until we've grasped what is meant by his holiness we won't sing and mean amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me until first we've sung and meant holy, holy, holy

Lord God almighty and whatever spiritual experiences we claim we won't have true genuine fellowship with God until we've faced up to his absolute moral purity the perfection of one whose eyes are too pure to look on evil and who cannot tolerate wrong think of Isaiah when he saw the Lord in the temple woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King the Lord almighty or think of Simon Peter on the deck of his fishing boat after that miraculous catch go away from me Lord for I'm a sinful man or think of John

himself and his vision of the glorified Jesus in the book of Revelation when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead

God is light before coming to church before opening our Bibles before we pray before we head into another week here is where we begin with the blazing purity and goodness of God no fellowship with sin apart from that but as Isaiah Peter and John all experienced meditating on God's holiness will immediately drive us to a second realisation the second foundation of true fellowship with God namely that we are sinners verse 5 this is the message we've heard from him and proclaimed to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all if we say we have fellowship with him 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 you know it's like when you put on a white t-shirt or what in the gloom of your bedroom you think is a white t-shirt and then head out into the sunshine and realise that your white t-shirt isn't white anymore it's mainly grey with a little bit of stale yellow under the arms and some spots of orange from last week's bolognese that's what it's like for a sinner to come into the pure light of God's holiness to see God for who he is light is to see us for who we are sinners but of course that's uncomfortable so our natural instinct is to try and cover up sin and in this section

[9:00] John highlights three ways that we might do that the first is there in verse 6 and we could call this the claim sin doesn't matter verse 6 if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness we lie and do not practice the truth seems there were those in John's day divorcing spirituality fellowship with God from morality obedience to God yes I sin but my sin doesn't matter doesn't impact my relationship with God maybe they thought that God is only concerned with spiritual things so it doesn't matter how I live in everyday life how I treat my spouse what I do with my body or maybe they thought well God will forgive me anyway so I can carry on in this sin today we see it in that big category of people who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious people who want the apparent benefits of spirituality feeling grounded open minded peace filled but don't want to change how they live we see it too in those churches whose primary goal in worship is to create a spiritual high rather than to be challenged and changed by God's word but if we're honest we see it in ourselves and the way we rope off certain areas of our lives from the searching light of God's holiness and kid ourselves that as long as we're in church on Sunday or youth group on Thursday as long as we've read our Bible and prayed in the morning we can leave on one side the hard painful work of daily confession and repentance searching our hearts for unresolved resentments unrepented desires searching our lives for unyielded habits and unsundered relationships well listen to John or rather the Holy Spirit speaking through John as he gives his verdict on sin doesn't matter verse 5 this is the message we've heard from him and proclaimed to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth literally that last phrase is we do not do the truth in other words the good news of Jesus is not something simply to be believed in our heads or even rejoiced at in our hearts but something to be done with our hands in our lives lived out and if we do the truth if we bring our sin into the searching light of God's holiness face up to it rather than hiding it well John has a wonderful promise for us verse 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 his son cleanses us from all sin more of that a bit later for now though let's move on to a second way in which we try to cover up sin the claim that sin isn't me verse 8 if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us so I don't think this person is saying they never sin and we'll meet that claim in verse 10 this person is saying something along the lines of yes I sin but sin isn't really me it's something

I occasionally fall into but it's not who I am deep down I don't have sin a kind of sin problem it's a denial of what the Bible calls the sinful nature the fact that each of us is born with a heart that naturally turns away from God and that even after we become Christians that sinful nature remains until we die today we meet this claim in the moral optimism of secular humanism the belief that humans are basically good at heart and all the world's problems stem from people's circumstances bad parenting poor education the unequal distribution of wealth sort those things out and everyone will be kind and happy we see it too in the church and the so-called therapeutic gospel that's all about affirming people making them feel good about themselves rather than calling out sin and demanding repentance and if we're honest again we do it ourselves don't we

I lose my temper with my children and then blame it on the fact that I'm tired or stressed or ill rather than recognising that out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks or I'm caught in a lie or I

commit some very public sin and I see it as a temporary blip something I've fallen into rather than the outwork of who I am deep down a sinful selfish man with a sinful selfish heart if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us sin doesn't matter sin isn't me but the third lie about sin is the most blatant of all sin isn't sin verse 10 if we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us so this seems to be the complete denial of sin as a category we see it today in the way our world tells us that it's psychologically damaging to think of yourself as a sinner rather than seeing my heart as fundamentally flawed and deceptive

I'm told follow your heart be who you want to be live how you want to live do what you want to do you do you which if you think about it is the very essence of sin only now we're told it's right and good and healthy but it's not just the world that no longer calls sin sin large parts of the church are busy affirming and celebrating lifestyles sexual orientations that the Bible clearly condemns as sinful and destructive even parts of the evangelical church no longer treat the desire for sin as itself a sin that needs to be confessed and turned away from and we do it ourselves too don't we every day we cover up our sin by telling ourselves it's not sin I'm not angry we shout at our spouse I didn't mean that when caught in a lie I was only joking when we said something unkind well look at John's final verdict it's the most damning of all verse 10 if we say we have not sinned we make him God a liar and his word is not in us notice the progression from lying to others verse 6 to deceiving ourselves verse 8 to making God out to be a liar in verse 10 when we redefine sin whether it's church leaders declaring sinful lifestyles permissible or you and me telling ourselves that what we just did wasn't actually sin we are in effect declaring that God whose word is crystal clear on what is right and what is wrong we're declaring him to be a liar which is surely an even greater sin than the one we're trying to cover up but the greatest tragedy is that such denial of sin robs us of the joy and peace and blessing that can be ours when we own up and confess our sin to God which brings us to the third ingredient of the apostolic gospel the third essential foundation of genuine fellowship with God there is a saviour there is a saviour so each of the claims that

[17 : 59] John refutes is followed by a glorious promise of forgiveness for those who come clean verse 7 if we walk in the light as he is in the light the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin it's a picture of being washed completely clean that grubby t-shirt of our sinful heart now spotless and white through Jesus' death for sins or verse 9 if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness so that picture of washing and cleansing is out of the picture of a debt being forgiven or cancelled we no longer owe anything to God for our sin other than our gratitude to Jesus for paying it all and then chapter 2 verse 1 my dear children I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin that is God's free forgiveness there's not an excuse to go on sinning but a reason to stop but

John continues if anybody does sin as John knows what we will we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous he is the propitiation for our sins and not only for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world and it's his last promise that I want to home in on the promise of an advocate because it undergirds and explains the previous two John uses three titles for Jesus in these verses that together proclaim his glorious our only and sufficient saviour from sin so first this title of advocate or we might say defence lawyer the scene is a courtroom we're in the dock and by rights we should be condemned but then up steps are our defence lawyer and we can't believe our eyes it's the finest barrister in the land

God's own son rising to speak on our behalf should be Satan standing up to accuse us that's how he's pictured in the Old Testament as the accuser of God's people but by dying and rising again Jesus has cast Satan out of the courtroom and instead he now stands to plead our case and notice to whom it is that Jesus speaks verse 1 we have an advocate with the father or literally towards the father it's the same phrase used in back in verse 2 of chapter 1 of the son being eternally with or towards the father again in John's prologue as well to his gospel John 1 18 no one who's ever seen God but God the only begotten son who is towards the father speaks of God's eternal relation the son's eternal relation to God our advocate is the one person more than any other that the father loves to hear and to answer and that name father reminds us that the message of the apostle is not of a hostile

God reluctantly persuaded by his loving son to forgive us but of a God who so loved the world that he is the one who took the initiative to send his son to save us everything in this court is stacked in our favour the judge is our father the advocate is our saviour but what case does Jesus our advocate plead for there's nothing in us that deserves forgiveness well spot Jesus' second title in

verse one we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous this title the righteous or the righteous point it goes right back to the old testament it was originally used of God himself but it summed up to what God required of his people he is righteous so his people should be righteous but open the old testament almost anywhere and it's very clear that God's people the Israelites were not righteous that like us they spurned and disobeyed the

God who made them and called them so God's prophets particularly Isaiah began to speak of another righteous one a coming servant who would obey God perfectly by his knowledge says Isaiah 53 my righteous servant will justify many which explains why the apostles emphasised Jesus' sinlessness he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth wrote Peter after three years living sharing his life with Jesus or here it's John Jesus Christ the righteous from Bethlehem to Calvary from cradle to cross Jesus obeyed God perfectly summed up in God's verdict on him at his baptism this is my son whom I love with him I am well pleased as Jesus stands in the heavenly courtroom as our advocate it is not our good record that he pleads for we have none but his own perfect righteousness he says to the father in effect father count my righteousness as theirs treat them as if they were me

[23:33] Jesus Christ our advocate Jesus Christ the righteous one final title verse two he is the propitiation for our sins so we've moved now from the courtroom to the temple or tabernacle and a vast queue of worship as each leading an animal a goat or lamb towards the priest and the altar one by one they lay their hands on the head of the animal and confess their sins and one by one the throat of each animal is cut and out flows its blood was the propitiation for sins the turning aside of God's wrath onto that animal instead of the sinner you see God is angry at human sin not in the sense that you and I get angry irrationally flying off the handle but in the sense of being personally opposed to evil and justly punishing it but in his love for sinners

God has provided a substitute a propitiation his own son to bear our punishment suffer for our sin endure our judgment our advocate our righteousness our propitiation in some the complete saviour who lived on our behalf who died on our behalf and who now lives forever to plead on our behalf look again at those earlier promises in chapter one and in particular the ifs that John attaches to them verse seven if we walk in the light as he is in the light the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin and verse nine if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness if we walk in the light if we confess our sins they're talking about the same thing to walk in the light is not to live a life of sinless perfection that's impossible for us this side of death rather to walk in the light is to come to

God in all his holiness and with all our sin it's to stop trying to cover sin up by pretending it doesn't matter or pretending it's not us or pretending it's not sin and to allow the searching light of God's purity into every nook and cranny of our hearts and lives it is to pray with Psalm 139 search me God and know my heart test me and know my anxious thoughts see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting and it's then to confess those sins to God and to take active steps with his help to turn away from them and to live in obedience to his commands now for some of that might even be for the very first time to put our trust in Jesus as the only saviour from sin as a friend of mine puts it Jesus is only ever a prayer away for others those who already know the joy and privilege of fellowship with

God through him it's about the disciplines of daily confession daily repentance and daily dependence for 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 cleanse us from all unrighteousness let's pray