

Born of God

An Exposition of I John

I John 1:5-8

Scriptures

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Exodus 33:20

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I John 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I John 1:5

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you.—What the Son had received from the Father, this the Apostles were to report to the world.

The message that John heard and declared to these early Christians, that *God is light*, came from the One sent to declare God. Ultimately, the relationship that John experienced with Jesus revealed to him the reality of the verifiable nature of God, a revelation which declared that the true God is solely *light* and not an ounce of darkness abides within in Him.

Every honest man knows and will confess that darkness lives within himself, whether he enjoys its company or not. This is not the case with man's Creator. In Him no darkness dwells, nor can any evil be done, in any portion or measure.

Light is emblematic of goodness, purity, holiness, and righteousness. This is Who the Creator is, and His holy nature can never change.

Whatever evil is done in the world, is attributed to the sinfulness of man, both inspired and encouraged by the maliciousness of Satan.

Though God may and will judge evil, He is Himself totally incapable of committing it. The Lord wraps Himself in light, and through His light He created the heavens. So great is God's celestial glory, that not even Moses, for fear of death, was allowed full sight of Him.

Exodus 33:20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

The brightness, glory, and radiance, of God's true nature is far beyond what any organic and material living being could observe and live through. This is why, not until saints are transformed into the image of God's Son, that they will be able to see God's face, and not be limited to merely hearing His voice.

The voice of God is therefore man's only means of perceiving God, until such time that spiritual transformation allows sight.

Isaiah 30:21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Isa. 30:21

The idea is taken either from the practice of teachers who are represented as “following” their pupils and admonishing them if they were in danger of going astray (Grotius); The Jews understand this voice ‘from behind’ to be the *בת כל* *bath kol* - ‘the daughter of the voice;’ a divine admonition which they suppose attends the pious. The essential thought is, that they would not be left without a guide and instructor; that, if they were inclined to go astray, they would be recalled to the path of truth and duty. Perhaps there is the idea, also, that the admonition would come from some “invisible” influence, or from some unexpected quarter, as it is often the case that those who are inquiring on the subject of religion receive light from quarters where they least expected, and from sources to which they were not looking. It is also true that the admonitions of Providence, of conscience, and of the Holy Spirit, seem often to come from “behind” us. That is, they “recall” us from the path in which we were going, and restrain us from a course that would be fraught with danger.

Without God approaching man and revealing Himself through His voice, all men, all mankind, would continue towards eternal death.

There can be no faith without hearing, and no hearing without God speaking. The means of salvation therefore is limited to those humble enough to recognize God's voice, believe it, and ultimately be saved by it.

Not only is God defined by the apostle as light, but He is also revealed in Scripture as *Spirit* and *love*. By these three descriptive truths, it is possible to see the very essence of both Whom and what God is.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I John 1:5

That God is light.— ... These ideas John comprehends: God is Light. Light physical, because (1) it was He who called everything first out of darkness, and (2) from whom proceeds all health and perfection; light intellectual, because (1) He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and (2) in His mind exist the ideals after which all things strive; light moral, because (1) His perfection shows that the difference between good and evil is not merely a question of degree, but fundamental and final, and (2) the life of Christ had exhibited that contrast sharply: once for all. Thus, on this declaration depends the whole doctrine of sin: sin is not merely imperfection; it is enmity to God.

All that is good, holy, benevolent, merciful, and forgiving is contained in this one simple axiom, that *God is light*.

From light comes all that can be conceived as life in the universe. Light is the very source of life, and without it, life could not exist. It is also neither remarkable nor coincidental that God, Who is Himself proclaimed to us as light, brought into the universe material light as an emblem of Himself.

Natural “light is made of particles called photons, bundles of the electromagnetic field that carry a specific amount of energy.” Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity “expresses the fact that mass and energy are the same physical entity and can be changed into each other.” Since God is light, He is a form of energy, albeit spiritual energy. Therefore, God as a form of supernatural energy, surely would contain the ability within Himself to create matter, whether in the natural or spiritual realm.

No doubt we are laymen in the field of physics, but it is not hard to conceive how a supernatural God, Who is Himself light and spiritual energy, could create from His

own essence the universe around us. To create anything, one must have the inherent abilities within oneself to do so. The nature and essence of God gives Him the ability to create from Himself, in whatever manner that might entail, all matter observable in the universe.

Since God is *light* in every respect, then it is not reasonable that He would maintain fellowship with darkness on any level. A truly good and honorable man would never befriend or share intimate fellowship with evil men; the same can be said even more so concerning a holy God. Just as God instructs those who believe in Him to depart and have no fellowship with darkness, it is unreasonable to believe that He would do that which He commands His people should never do.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Prov. 8:13

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.—Because there can never be any truce between the kingdoms of light and darkness (Matthew 6:24), so if we are the friend of one, we must be the enemy of the other.

Light and darkness have never been combined, and they are purposed never to be so. In the beginning, God divided the two, and this division will remain, until darkness is no more. It is thus by divine choice that light and darkness should be separated and not be merged—if this were even possible, which it is surely not.

I John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

After declaring what the Lord Jesus revealed to John that *God is light*, the apostle now addresses the very important truth that no man can walk in darkness and rightfully claim fellowship with God.

John thus refutes the false assertions of all those who, though they walked in darkness, insisted they still retained some fellowship with God.

Then as now, men have foolishly assumed they have relationship with the Father, and yet live and pursue sinful and fleshly lives contrary to Him. But any who make such false professions, the apostle boldly and adamantly declares, *lie*. It is incompatible that God, Who is Himself pure light, would maintain any fellowship with darkness of any form. He will not, and Jesus' disciple hopes to make this abundantly clear: that God will never fellowship nor maintain communion with any, who though they profess to be in the light, remain living in darkness. Since to live in darkness is proof, that no true knowledge of God is held, nor any true fellowship with God possessed.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 1:6

If we say that we have fellowship with him—If we reckon ourselves among his friends, or, in other words, if we profess to be like him: for a profession of religion involves the idea of having fellowship with God, (compare the notes at 1 John 1:3), and he who professes that should be like him.

And walk in darkness—Live in sin and error. To “walk in darkness” now commonly denotes to be in doubt about our religious state, in contradistinction from living in the enjoyment of religion. That is not, however, probably the whole idea here. The leading thought is, that if we live in sin, it is a proof that our profession of religion is false.

Until a man knows both Who and what God is, he cannot worship Him properly. It is God's holy nature, and not man's corrupt nature that ultimately defines what is, or what is not sin. Hence, if a man believes that God is not pure light and that a degree of darkness lives within Him, then he can easily excuse the sin he knows operates within himself. Thus, people's view of God will directly affect what they view as sin in their own lives.

Therefore, those who are ignorant of God and the level of divine purity that is His, are equally ignorant of the sin that operates and thrives within themselves.

The point John makes cannot be overstated, simply because this evil world is filled with spiritual liars, many of whom openly claim relationship with God and yet live lives without any visible subjection to His Word, will, or Spirit. There is no doubt a disconnect and contradiction either in what the Word of God reveals to be sin, or in the people who sin, yet claim relationship with God. No doubt the error lies not in Scripture but in such men who will do their very best to try and change the definition of good and evil, and of light and darkness. Consequently, if men reject the truth, then they will very soon seek to change in others' minds what truth actually is. Misery loves company, even as sinners also desire others to partake of the very sin, they themselves engage in.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 1:6

And yet how many there are who are living in known sin who profess to be Christians! How many whose minds are dark on the whole subject of religion, who have never known anything of the real peace and joy which it imparts, who nevertheless entertain the belief that they are the friends of God, and are going to heaven! They trust in a name, in forms, in conformity to external rites, and have never known anything of the internal peace and purity which religion imparts, and in fact have never had any true fellowship with that God who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all. Religion is light; religion is peace, purity, joy; and though there are eases where for a time a true Christian may be left to darkness, and have no spiritual joy, and be in doubt about his salvation, yet still it is a great truth, that unless we know by personal experience what it is to walk habitually in the light, to have the comforts of religion, and to experience in our own souls the influences which make the heart pure, and which bring us into conformity to the God who is light, we can have no true religion.

No doubt an overwhelming abundance of sinful men sincerely believe that they can walk in darkness and maintain fellowship with God; however, it is not men who govern anything heavenly, nor can any enter heaven by their lax human standards. Heaven is God's, and He sets every demand on who may, and who may not, enter it. For most, the great gulf and separation that lies between themselves and God, is not even remotely perceived. Thus, it is sadly assumed that men can continue in sin, engage in it as they will, and still be saved by God. This dangerous assumption has no other end than that men will prove themselves unworthy of eternal life.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

It is a sign of spiritual hypocrisy when men profess to know God but deny Him in their works, and consequently do not do what He commands.

Hence, honoring God with the lips, while the heart remains far from God, proves that a man's religion is false, and no true piety dwells in him. Therefore, very early in John's Epistle, we see one of his main spiritual objectives, is to refute the erroneous and often-times bold spiritual claims that sinners can remain in darkness, yet still be of the truth. This perversion of God's Word is completely contrary from the message that John was exposed to through his relationship with the Son of God.

I John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If Christians walk in the light, the Lord promises that they will experience fellowship with other genuine believers of Christ and have His blood cleanse them from all sin. Such is the grace of God that He will not only forgive the penitent but also completely remove any remnant of sin from him.

Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

It is because of God's own holy and divine nature that He remains willing to blot out transgressions against Himself.

It is solely because of God's holy character, His *own sake*, that He pardons sinners, and not because men are worthy in themselves for any forgiveness.

Psalms 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

If a man received nothing else in this life but forgiveness of sin from God, he would be the most blessed of men. At the core then of all true happiness, joy, peace, and an abundant life, is receiving divine forgiveness. Through forgiveness, relationship with God is healed, so that men may enter into the blessings of God.

Benson Commentary, Ps. 32:1

Blessed is the man, &c.—We are here taught wherein true happiness consists, and what is the cause and foundation of it. It consists not in the possession of the wealth or honours of the world, or in the enjoyment of its pleasures, but in those spiritual blessings which flow from the favour and grace of God; *whose transgression is forgiven*—He does not say, Blessed is the man who never transgressed. For he knew no such man could be found; *all having sinned and come short of the glory of God*, and consequently of that happiness conferred on man at his first creation. But he lays the foundation of fallen and sinful man's happiness on the only foundation on which it can be laid, and that is on the pardon of sin. For as all our misery came in by sin, so it is not likely, nay, it is not possible, it should be removed, or even alleviated, without the forgiveness of sin.

Not until sin is truly forgiven, and not just presumed to be, will the weight and burden that it produces in the soul be lifted. The human soul is also more than perceptive enough, to ascertain if it has been granted God's forgiveness or not.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Ultimately, to be forgiven, sin cannot be hidden, denied, or ignored. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for a self-righteous man either to be saved or to maintain fellowship with the Lord, purely because he will resist the acknowledgment that sin lives within himself. King Saul is a noted example of this (I Sam. 15:1-26), whereas David's confession of sin reveals the proper path to receive God's forgiveness (Ps. 51:1-4).

For any sin then to be forgiven, an acknowledgment of its presence in the heart and life, must be made. To not acknowledge sin, reveals both contempt and disdain, for God's will. To say we have not sinned, is to assert that God is a liar, and the sad result of denying sin will be, that God's holy Word will no longer be cherished in the heart.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Ps. 32:5

I acknowledged my sin unto thee—That is, then I confessed my guilt. I had borne the dreadful pressure as long as I could. I had endeavored to conceal and suppress my conviction, but I found no relief. The anguish became deeper and deeper; my strength was failing; I was crushed under the intolerable burden, and when I could no longer bear it I went and made humble confession, and found relief. The verb used here is in the future tense, "I will acknowledge my sin;" but in order to a correct understanding of it, it should be regarded as referring to the state of mind at the time referred to in the psalm, and the resolution which the psalmist then formed. The words "I said" should be understood here. This he expresses in a subsequent part of the verse, referring doubtless to the same time. "I said," or I formed a resolution to this effect. The idea is, that he could find no relief in any other way. He could not banish these serious and troublous thoughts from his mind; his days and nights were spent in anguish. He resolved to go to God and to confess his sin, and to see what relief could be found by such an acknowledgment of guilt.

And mine iniquity have I not hid—That is, I did not attempt then to hide it. I made a frank, a full confession. I stated it all, without any attempt to conceal it; to apologise for it; to defend it. Before, he had endeavored to conceal it, and it was crushing him to the earth. He now resolved to confess it all, and he found relief.

I John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Personal deception is the greatest deception. The result of this is, that truth can no longer remain in, those who deny their sin. By this it is meant that God's holy Word, and the truth it reveals, will cease to be valued. Ultimately, it will no longer bring joy nor comfort to the soul. When this is properly spiritually understood, then every man has a reliable metric by which he can determine whether or not he has true relationship with God. This is confirmed when the Word of God is both believed and cherished.

Practically, our relationship with the Word of truth reveals whether or not any true fellowship with God exists, since he who professes to have no sin cannot and will not have any true affection for the Word of truth.

Unrepentant sinners therefore, will not value the Word as one finding great spoil. They will not love God's holy commandments above fine gold. They will not meditate upon God's laws in order to obey them. To deny sin is to practically remove the soul from any sincere relationship and affection for the truth. Indeed, personal deception is one of the most dangerous of deceptions, simply because the subterfuge is produced from within a man and not outside of him. Hence, without the Holy Spirit's influence in the sinner's life, sin will remain virtually undetected and subsequently denied. It is also only when sinners are exposed to a holy God, and come into contact with His own Holy nature, that true recognition of sin can be realized.

John 16:8 And when he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, John 16:8

He will reprove—The word translated "reprove" means commonly to demonstrate by argument, to prove, to persuade anyone to do a thing by presenting reasons. It hence means also to convince of anything, and particularly to convince of crime. This is its meaning

here. He will convince or convict the world of sin. That is, he will so apply the truths of God to men's own minds as to convince them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners, and cause them to feel this. This is the nature of conviction always.

The world—Sinners. The men of the world. All men are by nature sinners, and the term the world may be applied to them all, John 1:10; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19.

Ultimately, it is light that manifests darkness, and not darkness that can reveal anything about what the true light really is.