

Session 2

An Exposition of I John

I John 1:5–8

Scriptures

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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.

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 his Creator. In Him no darkness dwells nor can any evil be done in any portion or measure.

Though God may and will judge evil, He is Himself totally incapable of committing it.

The Lord wraps Himself in light, and through the agency of light He created the heavens.

So great is God's divine light and 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 are far beyond what any organic and material living being could observe and live through.

Light is emblematic of goodness, purity, holiness, and righteousness.

Not until saints are transformed into the image of God's Son will they be able to see God's face and thus not be limited to merely hearing His voice.

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

There can be no true faith in God without hearing, and no hearing of God's will for man without God speaking.

The means of salvation, therefore, is limited to those humble enough to hear God's voice, believe it, and ultimately through the truth be saved.

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); or from shepherds, who are represented as following their flocks, and directing them when they wandered. The Jews understand this voice 'from behind' to be the *בַּת כּוֹל* *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.

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 revelations it is possible to see the glory of God's divine nature and the primary components that make it up, which are Spirit, light, and love.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, I John 1:5

God is light] . . . No one tells us so much about the Nature of God as S. John: other writers tell us what God does, and what attributes He possesses; S. John tells us what He is. There are three statements in the Bible which stand alone as revelations of the Nature of God, and they are all in the writings of S. John: 'God is spirit' (John 4:24); 'God is light', and 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). In all these momentous statements the predicate has no article, either definite or indefinite. We are not told that God is the Spirit, or the Light, or the Love: nor (in all probability) that He is a Spirit, or a light. But 'God is spirit, is light, is love': spirit, light, love are His very Nature. They are not mere attributes, like mercy and justice: they are Himself. They are probably the nearest approach to a definition of God that the human mind could frame or comprehend: and in the history of thought and religion they are unique. . . . No figure borrowed from the material world could give the idea of perfection so clearly and fully as light. It suggests ubiquity, brightness, happiness, intelligence, truth, purity, holiness. It suggests excellence without limit and without taint; an excellence whose nature it is to communicate itself and to pervade everything from which it is not of set purpose shut out.

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

From light also comes all that can be conceived as life in the universe. Light is the very source of life, and without light, life could not exist.

It is also neither remarkable nor coincidental that God, Who is Himself divine light, brought into the universe natural 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, as a form of supernatural energy, God 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 himself to do so. The nature and essence of God gives Him the ability to create from Himself, in whatever way that might entail, the world and the heavens as we know them.

Since God is *light* in every respect, then it is not reasonable that God 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 concerning a holy God.

Just as God instructs those who believe in Him to depart and have no fellowship with darkness, so it is also unreasonable to believe that He would do that which He, Himself, commands His people never to 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 light from darkness. It is thus by divine choice and not by mere chance that light and darkness should be separated and never be merged into—if that were even practically possible, which it is 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 Jesus Christ revealed to John and many others, that *God is light*, John now addresses the very important truth that no man can walk in darkness and maintain fellowship with Him.

John refutes the false claims of any who, though they walked in darkness, insisted they still possessed fellowship with God.

Then as now, sinners foolishly assume that they can have relationship with a holy God, even if they live in dark behaviors contrary to Him. But all and any who make such unbiblical claims, the apostle assures us, *lie*.

It is simply incompatible that God, Who is Himself light, would maintain any fellowship whatsoever with darkness. He will not, and John wants to make this abundantly clear to all who will hear what Jesus Christ Himself taught His servant about who can genuinely fellowship with the Father and who cannot.

Where darkness is, true fellowship with God cannot be.

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 nature that ultimately defines what is or what is not sin.

If a man therefore foolishly 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. Consequently, a man's view of God will directly affect what he views as sin in his own life.

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

He who is blind to God's true nature is also blind to seeing the corrupt nature of himself.

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 subjection to His Word, will, or Spirit.

There remains a disconnect and a contradiction either in what the Word of God reveals to be sin as or in the people who sin yet claim relationship with God.

No doubt the error lies not in the Holy Scripture but rather in those who will do their best to change the very description of good and evil, and of light and darkness.

Sinners, therefore, who have chosen not to abide in what is good and holy will seek to change the definitions of both. Thus, when men refuse to abide in the truth, then they will soon seek to change in others' minds what truth actually is.

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 sinners think themselves sincere in their belief that they can walk in darkness and maintain relationship with God; however, it is not men who govern anything heavenly, nor can any man enter heaven by his own standards. Heaven is God's, and the Lord sets every standard on who may, and who may not, enter His holy world.

*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,
¹⁰ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

It is a clear sign of hypocrisy when men claim to know God but deny Him in their works, when they profess Jesus Christ as their Lord, but do not what He says, and when they honor God with their lips but their heart and behavior is far from Him.

Therefore, very early in John's epistle we see one of his main objectives, which is to refute the erroneous claims of those both in and out of the Church who walked in darkness yet professed that they maintained fellowship with God directly. This is contrary to the message that John heard from Jesus Christ. If any man claims differently, he has set himself as a rival to Christ.

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 men walk in the light, God promises to them that they will experience sweet fellowship with other Christians and have the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse them of all sin.

God has promised from the very earliest of times that if men repent of sin and turn to Him, seeking to do His will, then all sin can be forgiven.

Such is the grace of God that He will not only forgive the penitent but also completely remove all stain 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 therefore because of God's *own sake* that He pardons sinners, and not because men remain worthy through themselves to be forgiven.

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.

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 so, will the weight and burden that sin produces in the soul be lifted.

It is therefore not enough merely to *hear* of receiving forgiveness; forgiveness must actually be *gained*.

If any also truly desire hope of receiving forgiveness from God, then they must acknowledge their sin before Him.

Psalm 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.

To be forgiven, sin cannot be either hidden or defended but must be confessed.

Therefore, it is nearly impossible for a truly self-righteous man either to be saved or to gain fellowship with the Lord, simply because he will deny the existence of sin within himself.

King Saul is a noted example of this, in whom denial of sin resulted in his losing all that God had purposed for him (1 Sam. 15:1–26).

Contrary to Saul is David's confession of sin, which reveals the proper path to receive actual forgiveness from God.

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.

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

Any who claim they are absent of sin, wrongdoing, or spiritual transgression provide sure proof that they hold not the truth and that the truth does not hold them. If this is properly understood, then every man has a reliable metric by which he can determine whether or not he has true fellowship with the Lord.

This is seen and made visible if the Word of God is both held and cherished within himself. Ultimately, our relationship with the Word of Truth, reveals whether or not any true relationship with God exists. He then who professes to have no sin, cannot and will not have the holiness of God's Word living within himself.

To deny sin is to practically remove all sincere relationship and affection for the truth, which has its main home in the Word of God.

Without the Holy Spirit's influence in a man's life, sin would forever remain undetected and subsequently denied.

Practically, revealing the presence of sin is one of the great works of the Spirit in His attempt to save man.

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.

By God's own holy nature, and not by man's sinful nature, is sin known to be sin.

