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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Privilege, Proclamation and Perspective**

**1 John 5:18-20**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the blessing that this church is, that you have still kept us going all these years and it's by your grace and your grace alone and we're just grateful and thankful for that. And so this morning, Lord, again we're just about through our look into 1 John and I'm just grateful for that as well and I just want to continue to pray as we open up your book that your Holy Spirit would guide us, accompany us and make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I say, this is -- we've arrived at the final paragraph of 1 John, John's epistle, this is our 23rd message. We have one more after this but it's just we're winding down. This is 1 John 5:18-21: John says: *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding,*

*so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Well John concludes this letter by first telling us about the privilege we have of God's own protection. Quote -- *"He who is born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."* And that's followed by a proclamation that the world itself is divided into two very distinct parts. Quote -- *"We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."* And that's followed by a perspective given only to believers, again -- quote -- *"We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true."* So John leaves us in this letter knowing that we have been the recipients of privilege, of proclamation and of perspective all pointing to the gifts we have in salvation.

And if you recall it was a couple weeks ago we ended our last message on 1 John with some very powerful and blessed words concerning the privilege that we have as believers in Christ. And again, this is what John said, he said: *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* Now John says everyone who is born of God does not keep on sinning, not

meaning that all of us eventually are going to become sinless but that every born again believer who has the Spirit of Christ within him cannot successfully embrace habitual sin. I mean the reason why a believer does not keep sinning is because we know that we have this internal war within us between our spirit and the Spirit of Christ now living within us if we embrace habitual sin because we have Christ himself who is now living within us. And because we have Christ now living within us, we begin to want what Christ wants, we begin to love what Christ loves, and we begin to hate what Christ hated. It's all part of the privilege that we have in being chosen as one of Christ's sheep.

This is what Jesus said in *John 10:27*. He said: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* See Jesus very jealously guards his sheep and insists that nothing can take them out of either his hand or out of his Father's hand. And the reason why John tells us next, he says: *But he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* And as I said last time if you can only begin to grasp how precious the gift is that you've received if you're a child of God, you'd be stunned, I mean, you would be speechless.

That we have Jesus's own words that he personally chose you and that he paid for you with his own blood on the cross, you hear the voice of God while the vast majority of the world does not. You follow the Good Shepherd while the rest of the world either laughs at him or ignores him or hates him, and you have God's own word that he protects you so that the evil one cannot touch you. As I said, billion dollar lottery winners have absolutely nothing on us. We have won the greatest prize the universe has ever known and we never bought a ticket. We did absolutely nothing to deserve this, and we each have our lifetimes to show our gratitude.

And so what follows this privilege we've received is a proclamation. God goes on to proclaim in the starkest of terms the binary distinction that this world is divided into. John says: *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* You know binary means two choices. Now it's well known as a computer term, that means the presence of electrons or absence but it's come to mean any of two choices: Plus or minus, black or white, day or night, good or evil. You know, when folks describe their sexuality as being non-binary, they're saying they refuse to be limited to only two choices, male and female. Well God says something in our text this morning that the vast majority of people in this world don't know, don't realize and don't believe, and that is that this world is divided spiritually along

binary lines as well. And again this is what God proclaims. He says: *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* John is telling us that this world consists of only two different groups of people: There are those who are indwelt and protected by the Spirit of Christ himself and there's the rest of the world, that is the rest of the entire world which lies under the power of the evil one.

You see, the vast majority of the world does not see this choice as binary. At the very least the world sees three choices but most people actually see many more than just three. The three choices that people see with regard to God and spiritual things is that there are -- quote -- "good people," there are "wicked people" and then there's this vast majority of folks who just want to live their lives without having to worry about religious things in the first place. I mean in other words, folks think that there really are -- quote -- "good people," like mother Teresa and the saints and popes and people like that, these are folks that most people easily see as worthy of heaven if such a place even exists. Folks like Hitler or Pol Pot or Stalin, those are in the second category, those are wicked people. These are people who most people are comfortable seeing as worthy of hell. But there's this third category, the one that most people see themselves somehow or other fitting in, it's the folks who are neither particularly good or

particularly wicked, who simply try their best without having any relationship to God or the devil. They represent the vast majority of people who see themselves as neutral when it comes to things religious. They're quite content to take their chances that if there actually is a God who judges that he'll probably be kind, he'll probably be generous and see they really tried their best and that on the whole their good deeds outweighed their bad deeds, so in the end they should also be worthy of heaven. God proclaims in our text this morning the reason why folks think that and it's literally because the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And there's a reason why.

You know, there's a term that has become quite common in these days. It seems to fit our contemporary political climate perfectly and because of that you hear it often. The term is called "gaslighting." Have you ever heard that? Raise your hand if you've heard that. Okay. So most folks have heard that. It's actually a reference to a movie that came out in 1944 starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman entitled "*Gaslight*." And the movie's about a husband who tries to use trickery to convince his wife that she's mentally ill so that he could steal from her. And he actually uses the gas illumination inside the house, it changes every time he leaves, he uses that to convince his wife that she's losing her mind. Well, the movie was just an obscure film until

some time in 2010 it began to seep into our lexicon. And it did so because so many believed that they had been gaslit themselves by the press, by the media, and by politicians.

A Wikipedia article entitled "Gaslighting" by saying: "According to the American Psychological Association, it 'once referred to manipulation so extreme as to induce mental illness or to justify commitment of the gaslighted person to a psychiatric institution but is now used more generally'. The term is now defined in Merriam-Webster as 'psychological manipulation' to make someone question their 'perception of reality' leading to 'dependenc[e] on the perpetrator'."

The number one gaslighter in the universe is Satan. I mean there is no one more capable of making someone question their perception of reality than the enemy of our souls and he does it mainly through deception and lies. This is what Jesus said of Satan. He said: *There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* He is so good at this that the vast majority of people don't even know that they're being spiritually gaslit.

And the article went on to list the primary ways that gaslighting is accomplished. It's amazing to see how closely it mirrors the

tactics of the enemy. You see, gaslighting includes withholding in which the abuser pretends not to understand the victim. It also includes blocking and diverting where the abuser changes the conversation from the subject matter to questioning the victim's thoughts in controlling the conversation. There's trivializing, where the abuser makes the victim believe that his or her thoughts are not important at all, and then there's also forgetting and denial, where the abuser pretends to forget things that have actually occurred. Folks, there's nobody in the universe more accomplished, more skillful in all of these tasks than the enemy of our souls. He's the abuser-in-chief, and he has successfully gaslighted most of the entire world.

And part of the task that we have as believers is to disavow the notion he has successfully spread that there's any such thing as this third category of folks who are more or less neutral towards God, because those folks don't exist. There's no one on earth who is neutral toward God. You are either a child of God or you are a child of God's wrath. There is no neutral ground. You either belong to him or you are his enemy. And again, Paul made that clear in *Philippians 3*. He said: *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly*



*things.*

See, all you have to do to be considered an enemy of God is set your mind on earthly things. And by far the largest group out there thinks that you can ignore God and still be worthy of heaven even though God clearly says otherwise. Stop the average person on the street and you'll find an overwhelming view is that good people go to heaven and only really, really bad people go to hell. And furthermore most people consider themselves to be "good people." They don't realize that God's definition of "good" means one thing and one thing only; it means flawless perfection, perfection such as only God possesses. I mean when God says in *Romans 3:10*: *As it is written: "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE,* he's not saying that everyone is literally good for nothing or that man is incapable of doing anything with any level of goodness whatsoever. I mean, Jesus himself said in *Matthew 12*: *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.* And in *Matthew 5:16* he said: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see -- your what? -- your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* What Jesus absolutely rejects though is this idea of goodness that is relative goodness being the measure that makes us worthy of heaven because none of us is good enough for heaven. The only one who ever had that level of goodness ever was

Jesus Christ. God said: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* I mean only Jesus had a level of goodness that -- quote -- "knew no sin," that is to say a goodness that was flawlessly perfect. Jesus alone possessed that goodness because he was God in the flesh, and the only way we can ever get to heaven is to also have that same level of perfect goodness.

A flawless God ruling over a flawless heaven must have fellowship only with flawless individuals, and on that basis nobody qualifies. Jesus made that perfectly clear in *Matthew 5:48* when he said this, he said: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Well the only way we can claim that goodness is by faith, to trust in the gift of Christ's righteousness that he gave to us when he laid down his life on the cross. You see, we by faith can claim Christ's righteousness as our own and stand before God worthy of heaven because of what Christ did, not because of what we did. When we trust Christ as our Lord and Savior, his righteousness becomes our righteousness, and thus perfected we become worthy of heaven.

You see, God's standard, it never changes. The only way any of us can get to heaven is by possessing the same level of flawless perfection that Jesus did. And we can gain that perfection through

faith alone in what Jesus did for us at the cross, because our goodness is not ours, it's his. But the vast majority of people out there think their goodness is more than enough.

So how do we convince people otherwise? I mean after all, the greatest gaslighter in the world has convinced the world that only weirdos and religious whackos believe these extreme ideas. God has proclaimed that the entire world lies under the control of the evil one, so how in the world are we to overcome that? Well, the fact is we are not. As I said, this final scripture by John is filled with privilege, proclamation and perspective. The privilege of God's protection is stated clearly in our text. He says: *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* Well that privilege, that privilege stems from the fact that we've been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, and we've been chosen for reasons known to God and God alone. God made that crystally clear in *Ephesians 1:3*. He says: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*

See, if you're one of Christ's sheep it's because he chose you way, way before you were born, before the foundation of the world was even laid down, that you would receive the privilege of having your sin debt paid for by Christ so that you could be holy and blameless -- quote -- "perfect" before him. I mean before time began God decided to adopt you as a son or a daughter for one reason and one reason alone, and he tells us very clearly as he's speaking to Moses in *Romans 9*, he says: *For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE COMPASSION."* So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Have you ever asked yourself why does the gospel, why did it make sense to me and not to my neighbor, I mean, or my friends or my co-workers or colleagues or even my relatives? Why is it that the dots lined up for me and not for them? Well God says that's my choice, that's my decision, and he gives us no further qualifications whatsoever. And he ends the statement by saying it's not a matter of willing, it's not a matter of running, it's simply a matter of God and his mercy. So if you believe the gospel it's not because you willed to on some deeper level than your neighbor or that you ran better than your neighbor, it's simply because God decided for reasons known only to himself to show you a mercy he has not shown to the rest of the world. That's the

privilege that you've received. And because we have this privilege status from God, we're under his protection so that the evil one cannot touch us. That's what he says.

Now does that mean that nothing from the enemy can assault us? Well, I think if you ask Job that question you'd get a very different answer than the one that the prosperity preachers would like to give you. We all know God doesn't promise to take us around hard times; instead he promises to take us through them. The privilege that we enjoy is the ultimate protection that precludes the enemy snatching us out of God's hands. And just like everyone else, we go through life experiencing the very same struggles as our neighbors, knowing the difference is that God is walking us through these by his grace and his power. The privilege that God gives us is made all the more stark when you come to the full realization that God has literally chosen us out of this kingdom of darkness. This is what *1 Peter* says. It says: *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

See, darkness is the natural state that this world is in but it's a darkness we've been gaslit to believe is actually light. I mean it's God who proclaims to us in no uncertain terms that the whole

world lies under the power of the evil one. And that proclamation is followed by an unfolding of the privilege of a perspective that I've received that is unique to his sheep. Listen to how he puts this, he says: *The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.* Do you understand what God is saying here? In the face of this stunning power of gaslighting that the enemy has, we know that the son of God has come. Why? Well, not because we've out thought or outfoxed the enemy but because -- quote -- *"The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true."*

You know, so often I come up against folks who feel inadequate in the task of sharing the gospel. I mean after all we're up against the master gaslighter, the one who has all the answers, the one who is more clever than all of us could possibly imagine. But understand what God is saying here. He's saying that he, himself has come in to us to give us understanding. Believer, understand the privilege God is declaring that you have: Christ is in you protecting you from the evil one. I mean this is a world under the power and control of the evil one but we've been given understanding by God himself. On a practical level that means that you get what the world can't hope to get and what you get is the

gospel itself, that God became a man, that he came to this planet and lived out a perfect life and then he took that perfect life to the cross and offered it up as payment for our sin so that when we by faith trust in that payment, we, too, can stand before God perfected, not by our lives, not by our sin, but by Christ's own righteousness.

John follows up that understanding with an even greater privilege, saying: *And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.* We are in God the Father and in his Son Jesus Christ, fully and completely protected. So God's privilege is Christ within us, God's proclamation identifies the enemy throughout the entire world, and God's perspective is just that. It's not some clever insight as to who God is, it's an actual indwelling understanding that's given by Christ. Now does that mean at the moment you become Christian you gain a Ph.D. level of insight into Christian theology? Well you know that's not so. What it does mean though is that in your spirit you have an innate now indwelling sense of what is right, what is true; and it didn't come from you, it came from God. That perspective is enough to give you the ability to share the gospel with anyone.

I've said it many, many times. The most frightening thing for people to consider when they're sharing the gospel is what do I say

when somebody asks me a question that's beyond my ability? How do I answer those questions that people love to ask, questions that are designed to make me or the gospel look foolish. I tell people all the time, I have never, ever encountered a question that I did not have an answer for, but understand frequently that answer consists of a very simple statement of three words: "I don't know." It's a very simple statement but it enables you to respond to virtually anything anyone's ever going to ask you. What's your opinion of the hypostatic union of God and man? I don't know. In fact I have no idea. But I know whom I have believed in and what he's done in my life and any answer that you need I can get for you if you just give me the time. I mean how hard is that? The hypostatic union is how Jesus became a hundred percent God and a hundred percent man. You see, there's not a question that anyone can ask you, whether it's philosophical or theological that you don't have a very simple three-word answer to: I don't know. But I can find out.

The question we're facing this morning is one that people seldom ask because they don't believe that there's even a possibility that there are two choices in this life: Are you of God or are you God's enemy? The whole world is under the power of God's enemy and you have either chosen to opt out of that world and chosen God or you have gone along with the rest of the world not realizing that



in doing so you have declared yourself to be God's enemy. Most folks -- Christians included -- have a hard time with that reality. But again, Paul makes it clear and obvious what our status was as unbelievers when he declares: *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.* I mean that's stunning. That's shocking to somebody who believes they're basically neutral. They don't bother God and they hope God ultimately doesn't bother them. And again, God has insisted right from the start that all of us constantly are facing ultimate binary choices.

Listen to how he put it through Moses in the Old Testament. He says: *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."* See, this is the part that people just, they just don't get. Choosing life is choosing to love the LORD your God, to obey his voice and to hold fast to him. But not making those choices is by default choosing not life but death, not blessing but cursing. And the very same binary choices are made by

Jesus in the New Testament. This is what he says in *Matthew 7*. He says: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

So whether it's life or death or blessing and cursing or narrow gates or wide gates, the bottom line, the decision is always strictly binary. You either choose God and if you don't you have by default chosen the enemy. And that's all the choice that any of us have. We've been gaslit into believing otherwise. And God couldn't have put it more succinctly than what he said in *2 Corinthians 4*. He said: *The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* I mean the enemy has done an incredibly masterful job of convincing people that simply being nice without giving a thought to who God is is the measure by which we're going to be judged. And again Paul is taking that notion apart in this scripture. Again he says: *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*

So you look at this and say, okay, what's the behavior that identifies these folks, these are enemies of the cross of Christ. Are they persecutors? Are they attackers of the gospel? These are folks who lie and cheat and deceive in order to get people to deny the gospel? No. They're just people who set their mind on earthly things. And Jesus goes even a step further. He calls these people fools. Luke 12, it says: *Then He -- that's Jesus -- spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." 'But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* Jesus says simply aiming your life at earthly goods makes you a fool. Paul says that to those who are perishing the very notion of the cross is the stuff of fools. He says: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

So here's the big question. How do we mere mortals overcome the

fact that this whole world now is under the power of the evil one and that the message that we're trying to share with the world is one of absolute foolishness to those who are perishing? Well God's got the answer as he always does. It's in 2 Corinthians 2. This is Paul, he says: *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

Do you hear what God is saying in this? He's saying your job is not to out-fox, out-think, or out-convince the god of this world. Your job is to be the aroma of Christ. How do you do that? Well you do that by abiding in Christ. How do you do that? You abide in Christ by studying Christ, by praying to Christ, by learning about Christ, by growing Christ so much so that when you enter and leave a room somebody said, "I just smelled the aroma of Christ." God says some folks will smell that aroma and be absolutely thrilled but he also says others will smell the very same aroma and be very, very unhappy. What God is saying here is that the aroma

of Christ to some is going to stink of death while to others it's going to be the sweet fragrance of life. And you and I don't decide who is who in this; God does.

I mean many of us are familiar with the scripture in Isaiah about God's word, which says: *So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* And I've often heard that scripture quoted as guaranteeing that God's word will always draw people to Christ. God's word never returns void, never returns empty, but that's not what God is saying. The second part of that verse says: *So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* What God is saying there, and what the aroma of Christ guarantees is that no matter what the response to the aroma of Christ is, no matter what it is, either way it will accomplish what God purposes for it. And to those whom Christ is the savor of life unto life it's going to glorify God's mercy, but to those to whom the aroma of Christ as to savor of death unto death, it's going to glory God's justice; and either way it accomplishes what God purposes and succeeds in the thing for which he sent it. See, our job is not to convert people; that's the Holy Spirit's job. Your job is to be simply the aroma of Christ.

Paul asked the most obvious of questions. He says, "Who's sufficient for these things?" Well, the obvious answer is no one. You and I are not capable of defeating the one who has the whole world under his control, but God has no expectation that we have to. See, it's not us doing the defeating, it's Christ in us who as our text declares -- quote -- *"has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."*

So to sum up our text, our privilege is verse 18: *"But he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."* That's God's protection. God pronouncement is verse 19: *"We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."* That's a world under the control of the enemy and a choice to be made between only two parties: You are either a child of God or a child of God's wrath. And finally our perspective is verse 20: *"We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. This is the understanding we receive from him who is true."*

See, our task is not to win all debates at all cost but to give an account for the hope that's within us. It's not to argue someone into the kingdom but to simply be the aroma of Christ. Paul put it best, he said: *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's*

*word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. Let's pray.*

*Father, I just praise you and thank you for who you are. I praise you and thank you for the privilege that we have been given. I fear for the proclamation you have made that this world is divided in two different parts, that the world itself is under the power of the evil one, and I also thank you, Lord, for your perspective that you alone can give that we have your understanding within us as a gift. And Lord, I just pray that we would understand that and recognize that we have the ability to share the gospel with anyone and simply by understanding an answer of "I don't know" gives us the ability to say anything to anyone and not fear what questions they have. So I pray you would give us again more and more impetus to share the gospel with people who have been gaslit, who are on their way to hell and don't even know it. Give us the boldness we need to share that gospel, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*