

# God's Holiness, Sin, and You

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**Bible Verse:** 1 John 1:5-10  
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You know, my friends, times like we're living in these days, so disrupted, so disorienting, so uncertain about the future, it is so very very vital for us to come back to the word of God and to think about things and be instructed from God's word about the things that are of eternal consequence and eternal value. I know these times are hard for us right now, they're hard for our family, they're hard for your family, they're hard for our church family, it's so hard to be apart like this and, you know, frankly it's an unprecedented time as we look for the right decisions to make without much of a precedent to follow, we're making precedence with what we do here, it's at a time like this where it's so easy for earthly things to dominate our affections, a little bit of fear creeps in, a little bit of anger, a lot of impatience, a lot of frustration maybe, and it's easy to just let those things become a little bit of a whirlpool that just brings you down and sucks you down into a lot of unprofitable thinking and a lot of unprofitable living. And someone asked me earlier today, "Are you going to keep preaching four times a week until we meet again?" You know, my answer was, well, we all need the word of God. We need the word of God right now to help us think properly, for us to respond biblically and there's so much information, so much conflict and so much competing narratives for our attention and trying to sort it all out is just enough to make your head explode, and we always are going to do better when we're grounded in God's word and we come back to what's truly significant. And friends, I know that many of you think that this pandemic and the reaction to it and the effect on constitutional rights and what this means for the economy and all that, look, I'm not diminishing the fact that those things are serious but what you and I should do as students of the word of God, what you and I should do as believing Christians is never lose sight of the fact that the things of earth are always going to be temporary and passing. I've lived long enough to survive the big so-called crisis with Y2K from 2000, you young people can Google that and laugh at what people were upset about 20 years ago, but we just have to keep coming back to God's word and see what's of transcendent importance and that which is of enduring importance, and frankly that which is most important to your life. This disruption is not the most important thing to build your life around, there is something far more critical for you to grounded your life on and to respond to in your life that was true before this disruption, it's true now and it will be true in years to come when this disruption has been forgotten, and it will one day be forgotten. It's the nature of life that these things pass. But you and I need to discipline ourselves, we need to come to the word of God and see what it has to say so that we are thinking right vertically and we are thinking right horizontally, and tonight that we're

thinking right internally and that our life is a reflection of the fact that our salvation is real.

We're going back to our study of 1 John tonight and we're going to pick it up where we left off last time, chapter 1, verse 5. Chapter 1, verse 5, and down through verse 10 will be our text for this evening and I'm going to read that now. If you're sitting at home, I'd encourage you to sit up and open your Bible and to give respect to the word of God even in the way that you position your body as you listen to the word of God being taught. God's word is holy. God's word is inerrant. God's word is true and it's fitting for us to respond to it properly no matter whether we're in a public setting or in a private setting, even our physical posture shows something of the attitude that we have toward God's word.

1 John 1:5 says this,

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

John had stated one of the primary purposes of his letter in verse 4 just before our text here, he said, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete"; that you and I would have a full expression of the glad contentment of knowing Christ manifested in our lives, manifested in our hearts, that that would be the internal perspective that we have, the internal sense of reality that we have. We're grounded in joy and in a sense of praise to our God. And immediately following that statement, "I'm writing to produce your joy," comes this extended text that in the original language starts with the word "and," showing that verse 5 is connected with verse 4. He says, "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light." God is light and this is a metaphor, light is a metaphor for the holiness of God and what does it mean that God is holy? We're going to stretch this out a little bit, we're going to tease this out a little bit here this evening.

There are two aspects theologically, you could say, to the reality of holiness as it pertains to God, God's holiness means, first of all, that he is separate from everything else, that there is nothing like him in all of the universe. Exodus 15:11 says this, "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?" These were the words of Moses after God had just led the people of Israel miraculously through the Red Sea. He delivered them from a pursuing Egyptians army that was bent on their destruction. God parted the Red Sea, the children of Israel

walked through on dry land, and when the Egyptian army, the greatest army in the world followed into the sea, God released the waters back upon them and that Egyptian army was drowned, it was destroyed, its power was utterly broken. His people were safe on the other side, the enemies of God and the enemies of God's people were destroyed within and Moses in response to that miraculous event gives those words in the midst of a longer song of praise to God, "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who can do that? Who can do what we just saw? You are majestic in holiness. You are awesome in praises. You work wonders." And the idea is that what God had just done had established how separate he was that there was no one like him anywhere in the universe. He has the power to do whatever he pleases and so there's that aspect of holiness, that God is separate from his creation. He alone is God. He alone has the power of omnipotence to execute his will. He is the eternal living God and he reigns over all of his creation. No one like him whatsoever. He is separate and distinct from everything else. That produces a sense of praise.

Now there's a second aspect that we talk about when we talk about God's holiness, there is his moral perfection, his absolute moral purity and absolute moral integrity. In Deuteronomy 32:4 it says this, "The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He." And so God is perfectly upright. There is no injustice in him. There is no unrighteousness in him. God is not like us. We can tell lies and we do things that are wrong and we lust in our hearts and we covet in our hearts in ways that swirling around in our inner being. God is not like that. He is not like us. He is not tempted to evil, indeed the Bible says that he cannot be tempted by evil. So God is morally perfect and he is impeccable. He cannot be tempted to evil, let alone do evil actually. So he is separate and he is morally perfect and as we study those doctrines, we get a sense of something of the great majesty of God.

Now I was thinking as I was looking forward to this evening, when we talk about God's holiness like that, it's good and it's important for us to have a solid doctrinal basis upon which we understand it and that's why we just said the things that we said. My friend, there is a danger, there is a subtle danger that you and I are probably prone to and have fallen into more times than we realize and it's this, we can talk about the theme of the holiness of God in an abstract manner that never really presses its claims on our soul and that's not good. To talk about the holiness of God should not be something that is done in an easy, a casual manner that is comfortable to us. The holiness of God when it is manifested to sinful men is not a comfortable thing and sometimes a narrative passage from Scripture will help us to see into the reality of what holiness is like and give us a sense of what men who were exposed to a glimpse of the holiness of God, how it impacted them and that will give us a sense of how the separate nature of God, the moral perfection of God, what kind of impact it should have on our hearts and how a true understanding of holiness affects us. If you've heard messages on the holiness of God or you've read about the holiness of God and it's never really altered your thinking, it's never really affected you, my friend, it is quite possible that you've never seen the real holiness of God at all and that perhaps you're not even really a Christian if you can just think about, talk about, hear about the holiness of God in a casual flippant manner that doesn't

go down deeply into your soul. That's the point of this passage that we're going to be making tonight.

So before we get into an exposition of the text, I want to take you to the Gospel of Luke 5, Luke 5 and to consider an event in the life of Peter, and here is the point, my friends, here is the point, is that for a sinner to have a true view of the holiness of God, it will shatter him. It will dislodge his thinking. It will disorient him. The great splendor of it will be more than he can tolerate and that is what we see in the Gospel of Luke 5, there is a sense in which the holiness of God leaves us undone and in Luke 5 you see this in the life of Peter. Of course, we could have gone to Isaiah 6 and seen a similar event in the Old Testament prophet but I just read from that passage not too many messages ago and so I wanted to take you to a different text of Scripture where you see the same kind of effect taking place and we're going to read the first eight verses of Luke 5, we're going to take them, read them rather slowly to give us time to reflect upon them and to let what's happening here sink into our minds that we would think rightly about it.

Luke 5:1,

1 Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. 4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."

Now let's pause there for just a moment and realize what's happening. We're talking about professional fishermen who were skilled at their craft, who had worked hard all night and caught absolutely nothing. They had just been on this lake, they had just been fishing and their professional skills were utterly useless. It produced nothing of value in the whole course of their work at night. You don't really have to read much between the lines to see that Peter was just a little bit irritated by the suggestion from this teacher that, you know, that he lower his nets down. "After all, I'm the professional fishermen here. I'm telling you we just did this and nothing worked. It didn't work. There's nothing to be done and we are tired here." But he says, verse 5, "Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.'" He thought he would humor the Lord even though he knew that this was going to be a fruitless exercise based on what had just happened. And what happened? You know the story, verse 6,

6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat

for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.

This was a display of the miraculous power of Christ and the prior inability to deliver anything in that fishing boat, in that fishing expedition there, was suddenly now met with such an outstanding quality of fish, an outstanding quantity of fish that it was starting to sink two boats. This was obviously miraculous. This was obvious that the Lord had just exercised his control over creation in such a way that somehow produced a catch of fish that was unimaginable, that was incalculable, and so much so that those professional fishermen who had been stunned by their inability to produce anything for an entire night of hard work, now they were stunned by the fact that they were being overloaded and they were on the completely opposite end of the experience. And what was Peter's reaction to that? What does a man do when the holiness of God and the deity of God has just been displayed greatly before him and there is a clear undeniable insight into the reality of the nature and the power of God himself. What's the reaction, Peter? You see it in verse 8,

8 ... when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Peter's response to this display of the power of God was a confession of sin. He wanted Christ to leave him because he was, Peter was so grasped by the holiness, the power, the deity, the dignity, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ that he realized that he was not fit for his presence, and the fact of having that brought to bear on his mind in such an undeniable way left him undone just like Isaiah in Isaiah 6 when he said, "Woe is me for I am undone! I have seen the glory of the Lord and I'm a man of sinful lips and I live among a people of sinful lips." They saw the glory of God. They saw the holiness of God displayed and it fractured their minds. It left them undone. It left them shattered and that's what a true view of God's holiness does to us, the extraordinary catch of those fishermen had revealed the miraculous holy power of Jesus right before their eyes and a sinful man was face-to-face with holy deity in a way that he had not expected.

Why did Peter respond that way? Why did Peter say those things? Well, the holy presence of Christ had exposed his own sin. R. C. Sproul in his book "The Holiness of God" describes it this way and I quote, "Peter knew that he was in the presence of the holy Incarnate. He was desperately uncomfortable. His initial response was one of worship. He fell to his knees before Christ but instead of saying, 'Lord, I adore thee, I magnify thee,' he said, 'Please go away. Leave. I can't stand it.' Why did Peter want Jesus gone? Sinful men are not comfortable in the presence of the holy. The transcendent standard of all-righteousness and all-purity blazed before his eyes and Peter was undone."

Now that, my friend, joins together with the definitions of the holiness of God to give us a sense that we are treading on holy ground. I know "holy" is an adjective to talk about

holiness but, you know, sooner or later your vocabulary runs out. Think about Moses in Exodus 3 when he approached the burning bush. The bush was on fire but it wasn't being consumed. Moses approached to see what that was, to see the wonder that he was seeing with his eyes. The voice of the Lord came to him and said, "Moses, take off your sandals, you are standing on holy ground." There is a response that takes place to holiness, a response of fear, a response of reverence, and also a sense of self-understanding that recognizes that we are sinful men; that you are a sinful man, a sinful woman, when you encounter the holiness of God somewhere along the line in your life experience there ought to be something that convicts you, that helps you to see that you are not fit for the presence of a holy God. That is what Isaiah said, "I'm undone." That's what Peter was saying when he said, "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man." You see, there wasn't this casual familiarity with God that just left them as though they were on equal terms, that this was mildly entertaining to have just witnessed a miracle. No, the response of those in Scripture who actually saw the holiness of God were overwhelmed by it. It changed them. It pierced them. It crushed them.

And my friend, we see that reality reflected in this text from 1 John 1:5 through 10. As he talks about joy, he says,

5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

There is not even a little bit of darkness to God. What I want to see, what I want to show you from this text tonight are just two impacts that the holiness of God has on you as it pertains to your sin, and for a true Christian you will find that your own understanding of your spiritual experience is somehow explained by what you see in this text and we're going to go into it, you know, in some detail here.

Let me say a word to those of you that perhaps haven't taken spiritual things too seriously. Oh, maybe you've joined the church or maybe you've been baptized but your knowledge of Christ hasn't been really life-transforming, somehow, you know, you've just kind of skated through with a bit of a testimony but you would have to say if you were honest with yourself that you don't see what the great big deal about holiness is and you don't really see what the great big deal is about your sin. Well, Peter saw that there was, that holiness was a big deal and it made him unfit for the presence of God. Isaiah the same. And in my own testimony, there was a time in my life when the Spirit of God convicted me of my sin and I, not the same word of self-disgust but it was pretty prominent that I remember it 33 years later or however long it's been, who cares, to look and when the Spirit of God convicted me of my sin, I was absolutely terrified of what I had just come to understand and I knew that I was deserving of hell right then and there. And so I fled to Christ, I fled him, asking him to save me and to forgive me for all of my sin and to give my life to him because I likewise was undone. I knew that I was not fit for the presence of a holy God and as a result I deserved damnation.

Friend, it's one thing to say that you don't deserve to go to heaven. We can say that in a rather safe way and make a nod to our sinfulness, but do you in your own thinking, in

your own understanding about your spiritual condition go to the biblical conclusion that you must that says that not only do I not deserve to go to heaven in a negative way, in a positive way what I really deserve is eternal damnation. Apart from Jesus Christ, apart from Jesus Christ I deserve eternal damnation for my sins. You see, that's what the holiness of God produces and that's the effect of the holiness of God. There is no darkness in him and our hearts are deceitful above all else, Jeremiah 17:9. So my friend, these are matters of great eternal consequence. That's why I say it's so far more important than anything that's happening in the world around us today.

So I want to take you through a couple of points here this evening in the remaining time that we have with this text and, first of all, we want to talk about God's holiness and your practice of sin. Your practice of sin. As we've been saying "light" means that God is true and holy. God reveals what is true just like light has a way of bringing understanding to the things around us. As you get older, you prefer to have a little bit less light in the room so that your wrinkles aren't so obvious to those around. You ladies who have cleaned your house, you realize and you understand that the sun shining through the window exposes things that you missed. There is dust and there's dirt in the corners that the brilliant light of the sun exposes that otherwise you would have missed. Well, the holiness of God is like that on our souls and it exposes our sin. The closer you get to the holiness of God, the more you realize how sinful you are. You might have thought back in the day that you were a relatively good person and yet without changing your basic character you come to understand something of the law of God, something of the holiness of God, and it revolutionizes the way that you think about yourself. You realize that you are a sinner even though you used to think that you were someone pretty good, a good old Joe that had a, you know, had a pretty good claim on going to heaven because you weren't such a bad person after all. That's not Christian thinking. That's thinking from the devil, frankly. The holiness of God shows us that we are undone and that we're broken for him.

Now because God is true and holy, God is truth, that means that he is unalterably opposed to all deception, because God is holy he is incompatible with sinful men and that has an effect and it means this, John is talking about fellowship in this passage, we saw it in verse 3, in fact, let's look back at verse 3 for just a moment to pick up the thought here. John says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Fellowship meaning that there is a sharing of life together, sharing of life with a holy God. Somehow, in some manner of speaking, participating in the very nature of the life of God. A true Christian is someone who has been born again, the Spirit of God has done a work in him, the Spirit of God has come to indwell him. And so the Holy Spirit comes to indwell a true believer and brings fellowship and participation in the life of God to everyone that is saved.

Now let's follow the logic here of what John is saying. God is light. God is holy. And now with that thought established and the holiness of God firmly in our minds and the truth of God resonating in our hearts in light of the things that we've seen from God's

word so far, now you see why the necessity of what he says in verse 6 must be absolutely true. He says in verse 6,

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

Here's what he's talking about: he's saying if someone claims to be a Christian, they are making a claim to be in fellowship with God; that they have been reconciled to God; that the Spirit of God dwells within them. Think about it this way: talk is cheap. Talk is cheap. The reality is shown by whether this claimed participation in the life of God has altered the trajectory of your moral character. If you claim to have fellowship with God but you can live comfortably in sin, you can easily tell lies, you can easily cheat on your spouse, you can easily fornicate outside of marriage, and you can just easily do that and you can go on doing that and not have any life alteration taking place, then your claim to have fellowship with God is not true. It could not possibly be true because light drives out darkness and sin and deception are darkness. So what John is saying here is for someone to claim to know God, to be in fellowship with this holy God and yet live a life of unbroken sin, that can only be understood as one reality. It's a lie. It's a falsehood. It's a deception. Whether it is an intentional deception or it's a self-delusion, it doesn't matter. If you are living in sin and claiming to be a Christian, you are lying. It's not true. It could not be true because of the character of God. It doesn't make any difference what you say to the contrary. Holiness is incompatible with a life of sin and when God truly saves someone, 2 Corinthians 5:17, "he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come." So the mark of someone who has genuinely been saved in one part is the fact that they have a life that is reflective of, it is something of a mirror of the holiness of God; that this is an actual impact on your moral conduct. And absent that, your claim to be a Christian is false. You are not saved no matter how much you protest to the contrary, and you are on the path to hell unless you repent. That's what John is saying here.

Look at verse 6 with me again, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness," this is talking about a pattern of life, let me emphasize that here, we understand that we are going to have times where we stumble. The book of James says we all stumble in many ways. We're not talking about the fact that Christians sin here, we're talking about an attitude and a pattern of life that accepts sin without any discomfort, that walks in sin while still professing to be a Christian and carries out patterns of sin without any sense of regret, conviction or repentance. That's different from a Christian who stumbles and then hurries to his Lord to confess it and says, "Lord, please forgive me. I've sinned yet again." The one that John is talking about here has no pattern of confession in his life because sin is just not that important to him. It doesn't matter to him or he is just a slave to it and continues on anyway.

You see, my friend, let me state it just as simply as I know how to do. For a true Christian, God's holiness affects you. It changes you when the Lord Jesus Christ comes into your life, when he saves you and he transfers you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son. When Christ saves you and he opens your eyes to the



way that Satan blinds you and now your eyes are open to the truth of the Gospel. When you once were dead but now you have been made alive in Christ, Ephesians 2. Beloved, these are realities. These are things that actually take place in the deepest recesses of your inner man, and so it is inevitable that that will come out, that it will flow out, that it will manifest itself in your life because the difference between being a Christian and not a Christian is the difference between light and absolute darkness. They're incompatible and so being a Christian is incompatible with a life of unbroken sin, it's incompatible with a settled indifference to God, a settled indifference to his word, a settled indifference to holiness. It's incompatible. That's darkness and if God is light, that darkness can't be there. That's what John is saying so that we see that when God's holiness invades your life, it affects your practice of sin. Light drives out darkness. Holiness drives out sin.

Look at verse 7 with me. He says,

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another,

What he's saying is if we've truly been saved, then we are in fellowship with God and that's going to be manifested in the pattern of life that we live, walking being a metaphor for the progress of a man's life. So if the progress of your life is showing some manner of moral change, of a moral reflection of the character of God, imperfectly I know, I understand that, but an inclination toward holiness and away from sin, the thought of sin is something that you hate, you see sin in your life and you hate it rather than boast about it or tolerate it or accept it in a way that you dismiss it as being anything of any real consequence that you have to deal with. You see, walking in the light is a reflection of having fellowship with the God who is light, and so if you have fellowship with the God who is light, somehow your life is going to reflect light, somehow your life is going to reflect a love for the word that testifies to this light, somehow there's going to be a love in your heart for the Lord Jesus Christ who reconciled you to this holy God. Somewhere those realities are going to be present and growing; even if they flicker from time to time, they will be there. The absence of them is a mark of darkness that is incompatible with the claim of being a Christian so that God's holiness means that a true Christian will have a radically different view toward sin, a radically different practice of life as it pertains to sin than the unsaved man. And if you're saved in your later years, saved as an adult, there will be a discernible change at some point where you look back and say, "I'm not the man that I used to be. What I used to love I now hate. What I used to hate I now love. There has been a change in my heart." Well, that's a reflection of being in fellowship with the God who is light.

There is a poet that said it this way, speaking this way he said, "I'm not what I should be. I'm not all that I'm going to be. But thank God I'm not what I was." Can you identify with that somewhere? I can. I don't mind telling you, I'm not at all the man that I ought to be. After all these years in ministry and after all the years of being a Christian, I'm still not the man that I ought to be. That's awful, isn't it? It's sad to realize that our sanctification has not progressed further than what we would want it to be. And one day when I'm in heaven, I'll be perfected and I'm going to be so much more than what I am right now, but

do you know what? If you knew me back before I was a Christian, you would know that I'm different now. I may not be all that I should be but I'm sure not what I used to be, and for that we give thanks to God. We praise God for that. When I say "we," you and I that have been converted, we can look back and say, "Yeah, I'm not all I should be now but, man, I am different than what I used to be." That's the spirit of what we're talking about. Our practice of sin, the power of sin over us has been broken in a way that it is no longer the dominating defining influence of life that it once was. If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with him, but walk in the light is a reflection of the truth of the inner reality that the Spirit of God brought to us when we were born again.

Now walking in the light is contrasted with walking in the darkness. We can state it simply: a Christian submits to God and pursues his holiness. It's not that complicated, is it? A true Christian submits to the God who is light and pursues his holiness. He desires it to be reflected in his life. Now even as John is writing about these things, he recognizes the reality that Christians will sin, that we will stumble, and I take great comfort in that last half of verse 7 where it says this, it says

7 ... we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The blood of Jesus Christ is acting as a continual cleansing factor in our lives so that God does not hold our sins against us. Our sins are forgiven and there is this ongoing work of the Spirit of Christ to purify us and to cleanse us and to sanctify us to conform us more and more to his image over time. So while we have a changed relationship to our prior practice of sin, we realize that there are still times, there are episodes where we do sin and the promise of Scripture here is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us in those times so that our fellowship, our participation in the life of God is never completely severed. It's never severed at all. We might lose some of our sense of joy when we're in unconfessed sin for a time, but the reality of being brought into the family of God, being adopted into his family, of having the indwelling Holy Spirit, that reality never changes, and in our Christian walk, we can look to this text and understand the sweet reality that Jesus Christ, his blood, his atonement at the cross was so perfect, it was so complete that all of our sins are washed away. That's wonderful truth, wonderful to see what Christ has done for us.

The blood is a picture, it is a reference to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins. It is on that basis that God forgives our sin and releases us from the guilt of it. And as I like to say when I come to this text, friends, look at the end of verse 7 just once more with me there and notice that wonderful three letter word "all, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." You realize that there is no sin in your life that is beyond the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ. You realize that God's love and grace toward you as a Christian is so great that he's forgiven all of your sins, all of the prior darkness in your life is forgiven and God will not hold it against you. Why would he do that? He placed all of your sin on Christ at the cross and he struck down Christ for your sin, and Jesus as we sing, Jesus paid it all, and because he paid it all, because he absorbed all of the wrath of God, that means that all of your sins are forgiven in Christ so that even the darkest episodes of your life, those darkest acts, those things that you would be mortified if

someone knew about, those things that cause you regret, you can look at the cross of Jesus Christ and realize that he cleansed you even from that and there is nothing in your life that hinders you from full and complete fellowship with a holy God because Christ died to bring you and to reconcile you to that holy God.

So here let's kind of pull all of this together. God's holiness affects your practice of sin, and what we mean by that is that salvation breaks the pattern of sin because the holy life of God has come upon you, and as a result of that darkness is being driven out and you do not continue in the same patterns of sin that you once knew because you now participate in the life of God. The holiness of God could have no other effect. You see, God is holy, God is perfect and his Spirit of God brings that to bear upon your life and changes your heart and changes your desires, and your life lived out in accordance with those new desires shows a break with that prior practice of sin. So this is the way that God's holiness affects us.

Now just a word of encouragement for you. John MacArthur says it this way, he says when you become a Christian and as you grow in Christ, you'll sin less but you'll feel it more. That's one of the odd, for severe lack of a better word, that's one of the strange unusual dynamics of growing in Christ is that your life is increasingly purified but you are more sensitive to sin as a result of it and that's to be understood. So the fact that you are sensitive to sin, the fact that you grieve over sin, beloved, is not a sign that you are not a Christian, the fact that sin matters to you is a very good sign because it's a reflection of the fact that you are seeing sin through the eyes of your holy God and it changes your perspective on it. It's not that we never stumble, that's not the point, the point is what do you think about your stumbles, what do you think about your remaining rebellion, what do you think about those times when you defy God. Well, a true Christian says, "That's not who I am. I did that and I own it and I confess it but that's not what I love, that's what I hate and I hate the fact that I'm like that." That's what the Apostle Paul was expressing in Romans 7:14 through 25 so that he said, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And he came back to the sweet reality that, "Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, that though even as a Christian I wrestle with the remnants of my sinful flesh, Christ has saved me. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin and therefore I give thanks to God," because he goes on to say in Romans 8:1, "there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Christ, I trust You. Christ, I receive You, and while I'm not all that I should be, I understand that Your blood cleanses me from all sin. I don't desire sin the way that I used to, I see it completely differently, I hate it for what it is but I rest in the fact that You have loved me and accepted me and cleansed me through your great eternal work that You accomplished on the cross at Calvary." So if those realities are true, you have true new life in Christ, you've truly entered into fellowship with a holy God, holiness is going to spill over in your own life. It could be no other way, and so that's what John is saying here. God's holiness, your sin and you has this effect, it changes your practice of sin.

So that's the first point for tonight from those first three verses. Well, let's look at the last three verses briefly here tonight. You should see something else about the nature of the holiness of God and it goes to this and we can title it this way: God's holiness and your

confession of sin. God's holiness and your confession of sin. The way that you live and the way that you perceive yourself in relationship to sin, that's what we want to talk about, and what God's holiness does for us is this, is that God's holiness reveals that something is wrong inside us, something's wrong in the deepest part of our being, something is out of whack, something is not right. So in verse 8, look at it with me, the Apostle John says this,

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Again, John is speaking about what our confession about ourselves is at this point. To have sin refers to having a sinful disposition; that there is something wrong inside you, there is a rebellious element within you toward God, and the holiness of God, the fact that God is light exposes that to you. God's holiness acts as a light beam on our dark hearts and shows that there is rebellion there and what John is saying here, the way, the logic of this is, is that because God is light, if you have fellowship with him, if you know the true God, then his holiness shows you that you're not like that inside in and of yourself. To have sin refers to a sinful disposition.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way, I quote, "The question that should confront us all is not simply whether we have committed actions that are wrong. No, the most important question is why did I do it? What is it in me that made me think of it and play with the suggestion? And there is only one answer: there is something perverted in my essential being. Something in me gives rise to evil and iniquity. That is why we have sinful thoughts, sinful desires, and sinful imaginations. Not only do I do wrong, my nature is sinful."

Now beloved, let's just stop there for a moment, let's pause there for just a bit and think about what that means. You know, the natural man likes to think that he's a pretty good person. The natural man is filled with pride and what the holiness of God does is it makes that pride impossible to maintain. When you really understand the testimony of Scripture about your inner man and you agree with it, you realize that you could not say anything like the fact that, "I'm a basically good person inside." No, you're not. You're not basically a good person, you have a sinful disposition that is in rebellion toward God that needs to be subdued by the Holy Spirit and before your conversion that was the only disposition that you had, that was the only thing that you knew was rebellion against God.

Let's look at Ephesians 4 for just a moment here and just remind ourselves of the testimony of the Bible on such matters as this. Ephesians 4 where Paul says this about the unsaved man and using the same metaphor of walking that we're seeing here in 1 John, he says, "this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." Verse 22, "in

reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit." And so we see here that Paul describing the unsaved man said that he's full of darkness and ignorance is within him. He is excluded from the life of God because of the hardness of his heart.

You see, to become a Christian, to have God come into your life, to have holiness invade your existence is to illuminate the contrast with what you are like and how you are not like God; that there are these inclinations toward evil that are in you that are real, and to deny that for the sake of pride, to deny it for any reason whatsoever is to show that you have not been saved at all. The truly saved man understands something about the fact that his heart is distorted and he needs the Lord to save him and deliver him not only from punishment for actions of sin but he needs the Lord to deliver him from the power of sin that's in his heart and to deny that, to avoid that, to argue against that is simply to be proclaiming in a different way, "I'm not a Christian." Look at what John says there in 1 John 1:8. He says, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." You see, a true participation in the life of God compels us toward a confession of sin like that and anyone who denies that is deceived. He or she is not a Christian. It's that plain. It's that stark. It's that unavoidable. This is where the holiness of God leads us. The light exposes the darkness in our souls and so instead of claiming we are without sin, the holiness of God drives us to confess our sins. To confess our sins.

Look at verse 9. He says, "If we confess our sins," by way of contrast, instead of denying sin, verse 9,

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is a picture of an ongoing life pattern of confession like Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6. He told us to pray in this way, "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." You see, the Lord's prayer has built into it a sensitivity to our weakness and vulnerability to the powers of sin in our heart and the reality of sin in our lives so that we are confessing these sins as a pattern of life on a daily basis to some extent or another, that we are laying forth before God and we are being honest before God and transparent before God, going before him in prayer and confessing our sins before him. This is what the holiness of God does in the heart of a regenerate person; as we see the holiness of God and it exposes sin in our lives, we acknowledge it before him, we agree with what his word says about us.

So here's what I want you to see. I want to go back and just kind of do an aerial review, a quick overview of where we've been at in the passage here so far. John laid down a foundational statement in verse 5, "God is Light," and then in the following verses he alternates statements of a negative and a positive sense. Verse 6 in the negative sense, in response to the holiness of God, verse 6, if we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. In a positive sense still in response to the holiness of God, if our life is manifesting light, then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ is cleansing us from all sin. But on the other

hand, alternating back to verse 8, if we say we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves. But alternating on the positive side, if we are confessing our sins, he is faithful and righteous to cleanse us from our sins and to purify us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, to forgive us, to cancel our debt.

So beloved, what you see is that this is a very skillful piece of writing from the Apostle John. He sets forth a broad principle and then he applies it in the negative and positive way so that his point cannot be missed. The holiness of God changes your entire practice and your entire confession of sin. The holiness of God, the life of God in your soul changes the manner of life that you live, we saw that from Ephesians 4 if we had read the rest of the text there, put on the new self, but it also changes your self-perception. A true Christian will not mind telling someone that he is a sinner and that there is an within him. He doesn't try to project self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is contrary to the confession of sin that is made here and so for you to be a Christian, the last thing that claiming to be a Christian is, is saying that, "I'm a good person." Rather to say I'm a Christian is to say, "I'm a sinful person but Jesus Christ has forgiven me, Jesus Christ has saved me from my sin and He is changing me until one day He will bring me into glory." So to confess Christ is not to confess self and self-righteousness, it's to confess sin and to confess his righteousness and his power to save. That's the spirit of what John is saying here.

So he cleanses us and notice there again at verse 9, that John uses that word "all" again, "to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It's not simply that God forgives the sins that you confess but he still holds the ones that you don't confess against you. You know, beloved, I'm really glad it's like that because I'm sure I forget 98-99% of the sins that I commit. I'm so dull to it that I don't even recognize how far my life falls short of the glory of God, but I confess what I know and I trust him for the fact that he is cleansing me from that which in his grace he cleanses me from even though I don't recognize it at the time. This is how gracious and how good God is to us and how faithful he is, that he forgives us like that, a full, total, complete, absolute pardon of sin that he gives to those that are his children. We see something of his grace reflected in that.

So we confess that we have a sinful nature, we confess our individual sins from verse 9, but he goes back one more time to the negative side of things and he says this in verse 10, he says,

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

God said in the Scriptures, he said that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. For someone to say, "But I haven't sinned," is to call God a liar, it's to deny the truthfulness of his word. So what a man says about himself and about his sin is a reflection on God and it's a reflection on what is really happening in his soul.

So God says that you have sinned, to argue against that is to slander him, and we see how the holiness of God works itself out. It changes our life. Salvation, reconciliation to a

holy God changes the pattern of your conduct of life and it also changes the entire way that you perceive yourself and the way that you talk about yourself. You understand that God is holy and that you are not and you confess that freely. "I have sin within me." You understand that God is holy and the light of his holiness exposes your sinful thoughts, your sinful words, your sinful deeds, and you don't try to cover that up. You acknowledge it. "I'm a sinful man." That's what Peter said, "Lord, depart from me, I'm a sinful man."

Now let's wrap this up. You know, here John has been talking about the blood of Christ, he has reminded us of the sacrifice of Christ and let me just kind of close this with a couple of closing thoughts here. First of all, we want to understand this, that you get a perspective of God's holiness in another way as well, not simply in the example of Peter, not simply in the way that it changes your life and your confession of sin, but the supreme way that we should look at the holiness of God, the supreme way that we should see how he views sin is to see what he did with his Son on the cross. He crushed him. He crushed him. Isaiah 53. God crushed his Son on the cross. That gives us a measure of how great his holiness is that his beloved Son would be crushed and bear the full weight of the wrath of God on behalf of his people. God's holiness is so great and so complete and so vivid that he crushes his Son and we see the Son in agony at Gethsemane, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from Me. But nevertheless not My will but Thine be done." Crying out on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It's not simply in definitions that we see the holiness of God manifested, although it's important for us to understand those ideas of separation and purity. It's not simply in the experience of Isaiah and Peter where they turned their face away, as it were, from the glory of God and ask him to leave because it's so unsettling and uncomfortable for them to be in his holy presence, although we see it there. The climax of which we see the holiness of God displayed is what he did with Christ when Christ took our sins upon himself and, beloved, there at the cross, there in the hours of darkness as darkness enveloped the infinitely wonderful Son of God as he bore the weight of sin on our behalf, there we see the magnitude of the holiness of God and how completely intolerable sin is for him, that when even his Son took sin upon him, God, as it were, turned away and left him in darkness. That's the measure of the holiness of God.

Now let me say one other thing to close on this note. There is something that you and I need to recognize as we bring this whole passage to bear on our thinking, it's this, it's that in verse 7 he said, "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin," verse 9, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If the blood of Christ has been applied to your soul, if you are a genuine Christian, you need to understand this, that the holiness of God now for those of us who are reconciled to him, while we revere him, while we honor him, while we have a healthy reverence for him, beloved, we don't fear him in the sense, we don't fear his holiness as that which is going to crush us anymore because we understand that he crushed his Son on our behalf. And to understand the fullness of what this means and what the fullness of the impact is, we go back to that purpose statement that we have emphasized so many times already, 1 John 1:4, John says, "These things we write so that our joy may be made complete." Once you have worked through all of these things that John speaks about here, you understand that the holiness of God now becomes your position of joy, that there is justice in the

universe, that there is forgiveness in Christ, that a holy God in Christ has dealt with your sin, he has purged you and cleansed you from all of your sins, and in love and grace and mercy and peace and patience, he has reconciled you to himself so that you now belong in the presence of a holy God. So that for us as believers who understand the outworking of these things, believers where the holiness of God has impacted us in our practice and in our confession, and we see the firstfruits of the holiness of God working themselves out in our lives, we understand now that the holiness of God is our place of joy, that we find joy in his holiness because holiness is who our Father is and he has said that he accepts us in his beloved Son. He's brought us into his family. He has shared his holiness with us, one day to have it in perfection when we're glorified in heaven with him forever. So while this holiness humbles us to the uttermost on a human level, it also comes and, as it were, places a finger under our chin and causes us to look up at the God who's been merciful to us in salvation.

Beloved, do you know God like this? Do you reverence his holiness? Has it affected your life? Does it affect the way that you think and talk about your very self? If it has and you're trusting in Christ, then I want to tell you that God, this holy God is your source of joy and that's why John wrote, and we'll continue to explore these things as we continue our study in the days to come. God bless you.

Let's pray as we close.

*Dear Father, I just pray that You would take these things and sanctify them to our hearts. May each one who has heard these words apply them rightly to their spiritual condition. For the true Christian, Father, to find comfort in the blood of Christ and to find the joy that Your holiness brings to the soul that has been sanctified in Christ. For the nominal Christian, for the one who is not saved, may holiness strike fear in their hearts. May they understand that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and may that fear motivate them to flee to Christ, to cry out for mercy, to be reconciled to a holy God through the life, death and resurrection of Your most blessed Son. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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