

### **Scripture Reading: 1John 1 & 2**

This morning before we continue with the service, I would like to call our attention to some things from the passage we have just read and as usual, try to relate it to the general situation of things in the present time we are so that we can draw some applications from it. I should apologise that since it's a lengthy new testament passage, we may go through things rather quickly and not about to dive in some areas too deeply. Hopefully though, we can still find one or two things to take away from the passage.

But before that, I want to give an illustration that will hopefully help us get a better perspective on what I'll be talking about. I heard this illustration while listening to a preacher on the internet a couple of weeks ago and I think it's something worth thinking about.

Imagine a newly wedded couple or even one that has been married for a while. One day, the wife asks the husband to help do the dishes as she was already very tired from doing some house chores. The husband asked "is this about divorce" to which the wife responded "what are you talking about, no". The husband confirms again, "so you will not divorce me if I don't do it?". The wife said no, that she only needs him to help with the dishes. The husband then said no, he wouldn't be doing the dishes as there is a game ongoing on the TV. Another day, the wife asked the husband to please take out the trash, to which the husband responded "is this about divorce?". Of course, the wife said no, it isn't and so the husband refused yet again. This went on and on for a while. Looking at this couple, how long do you think the relationship is going to last for or what do you think the relationship would look like? Well, hold that thought and we'll come to it later.

Alright, back to the passage we have just read. To help us understand what was going on in the passage, let me briefly go over the context in which the letter was written. John, the writer of this letter was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus and the only one who was not killed like the rest of the Apostles. It is estimated that John wrote the letter around the 90s AD which shows how old John would have been as at the time of writing it. This also shows that many years have passed from the early days of the gospel and John had seen this change for what they used to be. There were quite a lot of false teachings floating around and really confusing Christians who weren't too deep in knowledge.

A popular teaching going on at that time was based on Gnosticism. Gnostics had some beliefs which made the core foundation of their teachings:

1. Evil results from contact with the physical world and so Jesus could not really have been a human being
2. To be saved is to be set free from concern with life in this world
3. Salvation has nothing to do with matters of morality or of love for others

We may look at these beliefs and teachings today and easily point out the flaws in them. However, it wouldn't have been so easy back in the days. These were teachings by people who claimed to have attained a higher level of spirituality than the average person and also, these people were regarded as the intellectuals of that time. Add that to the fact that they are misleading people who might not have been well grounded or matured in the true word of God and you can see how this false teaching could have spread like wildfire.

Now, you may be wondering why we need to care about these false teachings, they were from nearly two thousand years ago anyway. Well, when we look at the core of the whole teaching, we can see why, which is also the reason why the letter of John to the Christians at that time is still relevant, even to us today. At the centre of the teaching is the idea to separate the kind of life we lead and our spiritual relationship with God. The idea of wanting to live as we like while enjoying the benefits of salvation isn't a new thing and is still core to many teachings today. Let's take a deeper look into how the teachings in the time of John are similar to some of the popular teachings you may come across today. Like I said earlier, the core idea to these teachings is the separation of the life we lead and our relationship with God. In modern Christianity, people prefer to see Christ as their saviour rather than as both their Lord and Saviour. People prefer to dwell in the grace part of the gospel and not on the life the gospel teaches to live because after all, Ephesians 2:8-9 says "8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV)". Because of this verse and many other verses that talk about the abundant grace of God, one of the most unpopular words among many Christians is work. The idea that whatever we do doesn't matter since we have been saved. This has so much gone far to the extent that many don't see the necessity in living by the commandments of God, even those mentioned by Christ himself.

Similar to this is the concept of sin. The passage we read today, speaking about how we are forgiven through the sacrifice Jesus made and many other verses that assure us of our eternity as a result of salvation through Christ has rendered the concept of sin irrelevant for many. The belief that Christ has forgiven us of our sins, past and future is a motivation for many to live their life carefree of sin. It simply doesn't matter. After all, God's love for us knows no bound.

This next idea is less severe than two I've mentioned. The idea of a bare minimum Christian. The idea of practicing Christianity on the terms of convenience. This is very similar to the illustration of the couple I gave at the beginning. If it has nothing to do with the subject of salvation, then it's perhaps not important. Most people don't necessarily think about this, they don't even see it as their belief but in practice, it is what they do. But isn't the life we've been called to more than just this?

Now, when we look at these ideas, especially the first two, they don't sound too off right? Well, they don't sound too different from those John was writing against either. This is because at their core is the idea to separate our normal daily life from the life we have in Christ.

The natural question that comes to mind then is how does the whole subject of obedience to commandments fit into the gospel of grace. If Galatians 3:11 clearly states that no one can be right with God by law, then how can the subject of obedience to the law be relevant to the gospel? Well, if we look at it closely, there has to be some connections between the gospel of grace and obedience to commandments. A connection between salvation by grace and the way we live our life. After all, the same Jesus who brought this gospel of grace spent a great deal of time talking about obedience to commands as we see in the whole of John chapter 15 for example. To have a clearer view of the big picture, let us go back to our passage of today.

In verse 5 of 1 John chapter 1, John writes: “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all”. John is starting the body of his letter referencing the light he has made mention of in his Gospel in John 1:4-5 which says “<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Which also goes back to the light mentioned in Genesis chapter 1 at the creation. The concept of light and darkness in the Bible is often used to represent good and evil. So, the depiction of God as light with no darkness in Him expresses the purity of God. The perfect and righteous nature of God is represented as light as when there is light, there cannot be darkness. James 1:17 says “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”. Again, expressing the perfection of the purity of God. The absence of any form of darkness in the representation of God tells us there is no evil in him, or sin. He is all good and perfect. Even when we look at the world he created in Genesis 1:31, it says “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day”, meaning God deals in absolute purity and goodness.

Haven established that God is indeed light based on the testimony of Jesus about Him, John in verse 6 of 1 John chapter 1 confronts us with the first reality check. If we say we have fellowship with God and we live in darkness, we lie both in our words and actions. If God being light mean goodness, righteousness and purity, darkness obviously means sin. To live in darkness would mean to live outside the nature of God which Christ demonstrated to us through His life on earth. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14 “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” This tells us that there cannot be fellowship between light and darkness. Likewise, a life in darkness cannot fellowship with God who is light.

It becomes quite apparent that to be in union or in fellowship with God, we too have to be in the light. In verse 7 of our passage, John writes “but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”. Not only does our fellowship with God depends on our walk in the light, even a true fellowship with one another can only happen when we are in the light.

So, how does one get into this light? Verse 8 tell us the first step is acknowledgement of our sin. John writes in verse 8 “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”. Ever since sin entered the world in Genesis chapter 3, our human nature has been corrupted and sin because our natural state. As a result, our flesh naturally acts against what pleases God as written in Galatians 5:17 that “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want”. Romans 3:23 say “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” and verse 10 of our passage says “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us”. What comes next after acknowledgement? Confession.

Verse 9 is a very popular verse and it says “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”. Confession of sin followed by repentance is the means by which God purifies us and brings us from darkness into His everlasting light. Proverbs 28:13 says “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy”. Repentance is the follow-up to confession, turning from an old way. In essence, the processes by which God brings us from darkness to light involves us accepting that we are sinners, confessing those sins and turning from that act or lifestyle of sin to a life that pleases God. And at this moment, we start to see the connection between the way we live our life and our spiritual relationship and fellowship with God.

Let us not forget that this whole purification and redemption from darkness into light is possible as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus. Verse 24 of Romans chapter 3 we read earlier says “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”. Ephesians 1:7 also says “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”. But the work of Christ doesn’t just end at the sacrifice he made on the cross, chapter 2 verse 1 tells us that Christ now acts as our advocate, pleading with the father on our behalf.

Before we go any further, let’s do a quick recap on what we have been talking about so that we can ensure everything ties together. We started with the context in which John wrote the letter in 1 John which was to correct some of the false teachings there were going around at that time. We then drew similarities between those teachings and some of the teachings or attitudes people may have towards the Christian faith today. At the centre of both teachings we found an identical concept, the idea of separating the daily life and lifestyle in general from fellowship with God. From everything said so far, we can establish that God purifies us through Jesus Christ from the sins of our old life. If this is the case, then He certainly doesn’t want us to continue living the same life he purifies us from. Let me rephrase that. God doesn’t want us to continue in the same lifestyle or way he has purified us from. Returning to our old ways would make us not better than the description in Proverbs 26:11 which says “as a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly”.

So what sort of life then does God expect us to live? A life in union and fellowship with Him. What then does it mean to be in union with God? As we said before, to be in union or fellowship with God mean we have to be in the light. To walk in this light is to obey God’s commands. In chapter 2 verse 3, John writes “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands”. In verse 4, John continues and writes that if anyone claims to know God but doesn’t keep his commands, such person is a liar. This means it would be false to claim to know God, talk less of being in union or fellowship with Him if we don’t obey His commands. John then writes in verse 5 that those who obey His commands are the ones whose love for God has really been made perfect.

A quick side note here, going back to the popular verse in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace through faith. Personally, I like to see this verse as having two parts to it. The first part is

being saved completely by God's grace as we all know. In the second part, I see us receiving the salvation by faith. And what is faith according to Hebrews 11:1? I like how the New Living Translation puts it – "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see". Meaning that in this new save life we hope for in Christ, we can already start to show the evidence of it. That is, I was a sinner, but now I believe I've been forgiven and saved so, I don't live like a sinner anymore. To continue in my sin would suggest I don't believe anything has changed, and so not fulfilling the second part of Ephesians 2:8. A word of caution here. It is not the righteous life we live or our obedience that earns us salvation, no. Salvation is God's gift to us, obedience however, is our response to this gift. Let me repeat that. Salvation is God's gift to us, while obedience is our response to this gift.

Okay, back to the passage. John writes that those who obey are the ones whose love for God has really been made perfect. Here, John is equating obedience to God's commands to love for God. Well, this isn't surprising as Jesus himself said in John 14:21 that "those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them". It is then easy to see that we show the greatest love for God when we obey His commands. In verse 23 of that John chapter 14, Jesus continued and said "anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them". This further solidifies the fellowship and union we have been talking about. Not only do we have fellowship with God as a result of obedience to God's command, in John 15:14, Jesus calls us his friends for obeying his commands – "You are my friends if you do what I command". In verse 6 of 1 John 2, John writes that the lifestyle of those who claim to be in union with God should be modeled after the life of Jesus here on earth

But wait a minute, does this mean if we ever sin we are no longer in union with God as there cannot be any darkness in Him? Well, no. This takes us back to chapter 1:9-2:1. When we confess our sin, God always forgives us. Take note as in verse 7 of chapter one, it says "purifies" us from every sin. This is a present continuous tense which means we are constantly and always being purified. 1 John 3:8-9 also talks about children of God and sin. What differentiates a child of God from one who isn't is not that a child of God never sins, but that a child of God doesn't indulge in habitual sin. It says in verse 9 that none of those who are children of God continue to sin.

Many Christians often debate whether it is okay for a Christian to sin or not. Does one lose their salvation if they sin or not? My response to these questions is always that these are the wrong questions to ask. We don't set out in our journey with Christ thinking of how many sins we can get away with or at what point it starts to matter. We set out focusing on loving and pleasing him. Sure, due to the weakness of our flesh, we may fall at times but we can be rest assured that we have the blood of Christ to wash us and purify us, making us whole again. Let us think of it from a practical point of view. How many of us plan a road trip by considering how many crashes we can sustain before the that trip would have to be canceled or how many we are going to have a flat tire? Of course, this would be absurd but that doesn't mean we don't prepare to manage anything that happens during the trip, just that these are not the focus of

the trip. The same applies to our journey with God. We know we have God's grace and the blood of Christ to cover for our shortcomings but the shortcomings aren't what we are really aiming for or interested in. We are interested in the walk with God.

Moving on to the last section very quickly. We have been talking about God's commandment a lot but what exactly is this commandment? Is it the ten commandments or every command written in the Bible, of which there are hundreds of them? Well, it's actually much simpler than those. Remember Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30 that <sup>28</sup> "come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light". This is true of the commandment we are talking about here. In 1 John 2:7, John states that the command is nothing new, it is the same command the readers of his letter have always known. But then in verse 8, he switches things and says the command is a new one. Is John coming up with a new command than what Jesus had taught? Actually, no. When we go back John 13:34, Jesus said "a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another". We see that this new commandment matches the new commandment John is talking about in verse 9-11 of 1 John 2. We see many references to this command to love one another like in John 15:12 "my commandment is this: love one another as I love you", Luke 10:27 "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself."

So far, we've seen two kinds of love in our today's passage: love for God and love for one another. Well, these two make up the greatest commandments as we see Matthew 22:34-40 <sup>34</sup> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." These two commandments already fulfil the other commandments. And when we take a look at it closely we see that they really do. The ten commandments can be divided into two: the first half relating to God and the second half relating to our neighbors. When you love God, you don't worship any other gods except Him, nor do you call His name in vain. If you love your fellow man, you won't murder him or steal from him. So, we see that fulfilling the commandment of love already fulfills other commandments. Not only this, but living a life of love is living a life of God's nature because we know that God is love (1 John 4:16).

Putting everything together, we can see exactly what is expected of us as Christians living in union with God. The obedience, the walking in the light, they all come from a heart of love. This is the open secret of a Christian life. Our obedience is not from an obligatory or legalistic mindset, rather an expression of love. Our relationship with God is not based on rules but on love for Him. This love is what makes us have the personal and intimate union with him. This is what God calls us to when he saves us. Jeremiah 31:33-34 tell us about what God hopes for in this relationship when it says

<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

<sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

The same we have someone we love always on our mind, we have the Spirit of God in our mind, teaching us what to do. We don't live our life hunting for the next commandment to follow to be perfect. This is where the freedom from the power of law comes and we are guided directly by the one who made and the law and as a result greater than the law. And we know that the spirit of God will never lead us to displease God.

Going back to the illustration of the couple we began with. Is our Christian life today like that husband? Do we just do the bare minimum that guarantees our salvation or are we in love with God and we let that love motivate us in what we do? I want us to examine our lives this morning and reflect on the situation of our love for God. Is there a lifestyle that our love for God isn't strong enough to take away from us? Is there a void in the church especially in ministries that need people to serve that our love for God can't motivate us enough to fill? Are there people around us we can help that we just need to let our love for God make us take the step to lend a helping hand? Let the love for God fill your heart and direct your ways.

Let me do a quick recap on what we've talked about this morning in a few short points.

1. Our fellowship with God is not completely separated from our daily life. Rather, our union with God is evident in the life we lead.
2. To be in union with God is to walk in his light, for God is light and in Him is no darkness
3. We cannot claim to be in union or fellowship with God when we don't keep His commands
4. We are not saved by our obedience. Rather, we are saved by grace into a life of obedience.
5. Jesus is the means by which we are purified and forgiving and he is always advocating for us with the father, even when we fall.
6. The Christian kind of obedience is not a legalistic type but one born out of love.
7. A Christian life is characterized by love for God and love for one another.

Before a close, I would like to read the lyrics of a popular hymn (at least popular back home) as we think about the subject of today's passage and as we look forward to Easter. I'll read just the first verse and the chorus:

***Satisfied with Jesus***

*I am satisfied with Jesus,  
He has done so much for me:  
He has suffered to redeem me,  
He has died to set me free.*

*Refrain:*

*I am satisfied, I am satisfied,  
I am satisfied with Jesus,  
But the question comes to me,  
As I think of Calvary,  
Is my Master satisfied with me?*

And that is the question for us this morning. Is your master satisfied with you? 1 John 3:18 says "dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth". So, my final question to use this morning is that what is your love for God going to make you do?