



## Letters of Love

God is light

April 15, 2018

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: 1 John 1:5-10, John 1:5, Ephesians 4:17-19, Ephesians 5:9, Ephesians 5:11, Ephesians 5:13.

Last week we kicked off a new series based on the letters of the Apostle John... Pastor Austin did just a fantastic job laying the ground work for us. I was blown away watching his sermon, I learned things about the Gnostics that I didn't know... but it really put so much into perspective about the type of situation that John was speaking into...

A church that had so many voices who were saying so many things, and John just had to cut through all of that, and get them re-centered on the Jesus message.

And throughout this series we will sprinkle in more of the history and set the scene even more for what was going on, but today I am going to focus just on the text.

And just a heads up, I am not feeling 100% today... so I am going to try and keep this short both for my own sake, and for yours, so that you don't have to listen to me going off saying things in my clouded head that are not comprehensible. My family has been sick for a few days, and we don't want to get anyone else sick so I sort of keep to myself this morning.

We are looking at a very familiar text, we have done several sermons on this passage, but we are going to take a bit of a different approach on it today.

1 John 1:5-10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** If we say we have fellowship

with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

What you know about God, think about God, and BELIEVE ABOUT GOD will have an enormous impact on the type of person that you are and the type of life that you lead.

If you believe that “god” hates a certain type of person, then naturally you would have no problem hating that type of person. On the contrary, if you believe that God is the most generous person who ever lived and that the way to get the absolute closest to Him is to love others and be generous toward others, then messages like “sell everything you own and give it all to the poor” would not be hard messages for you would they? if you TRULY wrap your heart around the fact that there is something that God ACTUALLY wants you to do, and that your life is just a vapor compared to the eternity that is coming that you will spend with God... then OF COURSE YOU WOULD DO THAT THING.

it applies across the board. IF YOU GENUINELY ARE CONVICTED THAT GOD IS REAL AND THAT HE HAS A SPECIFIC GOAL OR MISSION IN MIND, why would you not give yourself to that mission?

but do you see the dangers that come with that? That is why religion is so often tied to terrorism. if you have enough faith in a god that you believe wants you to hurt people, then you are going to hurt people.

if you believe that the god you serve is a racist, you would have no conviction against racism. If you believe that the god that you serve wants you to live in a mansion and drive the nicest cars, then you will spend your life pursuing those things, if your love for God is genuine. And if your love for God is genuine yet misguided, its very easy to lock in to that zone, and and not be teachable, and get very stubborn.

So as people who whole heartedly do believe in God... it is crucial that we, to the very best of our ability, UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD IS LIKE.

Because we get it wrong A LOT. I get it wrong. You get it wrong. We often see life through our own filter, and then sort of work to mold God into the image that we think that He should have.

So John, who was the last living Apostle... the last person who had actually walked with Jesus, experienced Jesus, and known a PHYSICAL JESUS... He writes this important letter showing what God IS LIKE, AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US.

One of the phrases that you will see a lot in this letter is “BY THIS WE KNOW” - (or something similar to this) and then what John usually does is he shows an example from Jesus’ life and then says how that applies to our lives.

Like 1 John 3:16 -

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

we know what love is because Jesus demonstrated it, and we can tell if that love is real in our community by the way that we respond to it in a similar fashion.

in other words: OUR GOD IS OUR EXAMPLE.

and in the passage that we just read... one of the very first things John does in this letter is he tells us one of the many amazing things that God is. This is an absolutely crucial component of God.

He says “THIS IS THE MESSAGE and we are proclaiming it TO YOU... THAT GOD IS LIGHT.

This is an incredibly important statement.

and all of what John goes on to say here hinges on understanding that God is light, and in Him is NO DARKNESS AT ALL.

In Jewish culture there is something called *yetzer hara* or, “the evil inclination.”

and the big idea behind this concept is that good and evil are always at war with each other... it was usually described using darkness and light, as if they are always in this constant battle with each other, but the idea is that people are inclined to, or drawn to the darkness.

In other words, if given the choice with no repercussions, we would choose darkness.

But John says that if we continue to choose darkness, then the gospel hasn't truly gotten ahold of us yet.

John says that we should walk in light, as Jesus is in the light...

we want to be people who are light. Jesus says “you are the light of the world” - so we obviously want to walk in the light. But what does that mean?

I think it is important to understand what John is talking about when he says “light” - because we always attribute it primarily to just being good... to doing good things... to acting good, and then darkness we would automatically default to saying is “bad” - these are the bad things... and where the metaphor does imply that, you don't need to read very far to see that John is being very specific here... because the entire passage we just read was about when we leave things in DARKNESS.

John says this phrase: “if we say” - it is the Greek word *LEGO*, it means “to maintain” - he is talking about the way that we project ourselves... the way that we hide what is really going on behind a layer that we are comfortable with others seeing, even though we know it's not a completely truthful image.

We say everything is light, when we know that it is darkness.

if we SAY we have fellowship with him, when really we walk in darkness... we lie and don't practice the truth.

if we SAY we have no sin, then we deceive ourselves and the TRUTH IS NOT IN US.

if we SAY that we have NOT sinned, we make Him a liar, because God determined that not only DO we have sin, but that it was SUCH A BIG DEAL THAT HE HAD TO SEND HIS ONLY SON TO COME AND DIE FOR IT. Personally, I would never say to God "God, you just DIDN'T NEED TO DO THAT FOR ME."

but we say that to God by the way that we live in darkness.

by the way that we let our bitterness build up.

By the way that we begin to learn what it is that we can get away with... and then pushing it a little further each time... how much anger we can get away with harboring... how much hatred we can have for another person before it starts to show on us. how much anxiety we can carry... how much we can lust before it becomes obvious...

whatever it may be...

but if you have been around here for very long, then you have heard us talk about iniquity... which is "an inward motivation" its a sin that if you try hard enough, you can convince yourself doesn't affect anyone.

The ancient Hebrew word picture for the word iniquity (A-V-N) is the picture is of an eye, a hook, and fish which represented multiplication, and the picture tells us that "whatever your eye hooks to is going to multiply" - Our minds can hook to an idea and it can very quickly multiply into a sinful action which can spiral even further. You get a similar imagery when you read in the Bible and it talks about leaven. In the majority of the Jewish feasts, they would use bread that didn't have leaven in it because leaven represented sin... but at the Feast of Weeks, (or Pentecost,) leavened bread was used because that was their feast to remember the moment on

Mt. Sinai when God proposed to his people... so they used the leaven bread there as a way to say “thank you for joining your unleavened, perfect life, with our leavened, sinful lives.”

well, leaven spreads quickly, which is why Paul says that a little leaven can ruin the whole batch. (Galatians 5:9) So much as a sinful thought, if you let your eye hook to it, can lead you down a very destructive path...

so before long... “not getting caught” is NOT just about what you can think of, but what you can PULL OFF... how much you can steal without being noticed... how much you can do behind someone else’s back who trusts you.

How much you can SAY *to someone* about that person that hurt you that you have let bitterness harbor against, before it actually gets BACK TO THEM. Whatever it is, they are things that are done in darkness from others and John says that when we do that we aren’t practicing truth... and God can have no part in that because He knows NO DARKNESS everywhere that he goes automatically gets filled with light, so if you so determined the keep the lights OFF (keep things a secret) then you are keeping God out.

So I hope that you can see that this concept of light and darkness is much bigger than just good and bad, right and wrong.

Light serves a specific purpose and that purpose is to allow something to be seen. It illuminates... it brings clarity and perspective. It shows you WHAT is already there.

Because until you see it, YOU WILL NEVER, EVER CHANGE IT.

Think about it like this. This may seem cheesy but its the best I could come up with (again, I am tired. not feeling the best). Lets say that you get home, and you take off your shoes and you leave them in the middle of the room. You were just lazy... you sat down in your bed and realized that your shoes were still on and you kicked them off and they landed in the middle of the room.

You go to sleep... and you wake up in the middle of the night and want to go get a snack.

Between your bed and the light switch is a pair of shoes that YOU yourself placed there, but when you head toward your snack in the middle of the night, you can't see a thing and you trip over your shoes that you left in the middle of the room.

you likely blame the darkness. You say "if I would have seen the shoes, then I would't have tripped over them."

But that is always the excuse. "if I had known the damage that this would have caused, I NEVER WOULD HAVE DONE IT" -

but the light doesn't take the shoes away, it just shows you where they are, making it a whole lot easier for you to make the right decision. Which hopefully would be to pick up the shoes and put them where they belong.

Which is why I think its so fascinating that John talks about light and darkness in the same place where he says "if you say you are one thing, but you live a different way... the truth is not in you."

Because the Devil wants you to live your life in darkness. He wants you to have secrets. He wants you to have areas that nobody sees. He wants you to forget where you put your shoes and fill your life with so much darkness that when you try and find your way back home you are tripping over the things that you placed in your own path.

That subtle unforgiveness that you have been carrying, that you forgot was even there but you never dealt with it... so it is just lingering in this dark space, out of sight out of mind, until you trip over it and you think "that came out of nowhere!"

no... you just didn't deal with it when you should have. You should have taken off your shoes at the door. Now you have a broken arm, because you took a shortcut, and you refused to turn on the light... you refused to work out what was going on inside of you and it left everyone worse off from it.

But the most important thing to understand about darkness and light is that they are not even comparable.

Darkness has an infinite power over everything besides light, but it is infinitely POWERLESS AGAINST LIGHT.

Let me explain. If you DO NOT HAVE LIGHT... you only have darkness... you are powerless. This is why Paul says that before Christ, we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1) - because without light, there is no way out of darkness. You can't overcome darkness with willpower, or with a support group, or by throwing a baseball at it... you can't overcome darkness with more darkness. If there is no light, you are hopeless.

But this is the way that John describes the moment when Jesus came into the world in the flesh, at the beginning of his gospel account. He says this (John 1:5):

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

YOU CAN NOT OVERCOME DARKNESS WITH ANYTHING BUT LIGHT. But darkness is not the opposite of light, or of anything for that matter. Darkness is the lack *of* light... the void of light... but it is powerless against light.

and this morning, that is GOOD NEWS. Because we know where the light comes from... we know His name is Jesus... who came in and overpowered darkness with light, and who gave us the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, showing us how we too can overcome darkness by being the light of the world.

Look at what Paul says in Ephesians 4:17-19

“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **They are darkened in their understanding**, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”



Then Paul goes on to say: “to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

He is saying “you don’t have to live the way you used to live anymore... there is a light, and it’s infinitely better and infinitely more powerful, and it will completely change your life. Allow Jesus to root out of problem areas and put on the NEW SELF.

but watch this... because he gives us extremely tangible examples for this.

He then talks about stealing, and he says “let the thief no longer steal.”

So he calls the thief OUT of darkness, but Paul knows that there is no freedom from darkness except for the light. **You can’t turn off the darkness, you can only turn on the light.**

and so what Paul does is he says “let the thief no longer steal, BUT RATHER... Let him turn on a light! Let him work with his hands so that he will have more than enough to share with anyone who has a need.”

Because generosity is the currency of the Kingdom of Heaven. If you want to show someone what Jesus looks like, the first place to start is with generosity. It is a light that shines in the darkest places and will break through just about any barrier.

if your life is filled with anxiety... turn on the light... and the fruit of your life actually coming into light WILL BE PEACE.

Jesus has come bringing us THE GOSPEL OF PEACE...

if your life is filled with hatred... the fruit of your life actually coming into light will be forgiveness.

The light is freedom from the things that hold us captive.

I think of myself this morning, and the way that I feel in this very moment... just awful. Yesterday was even worse. Yet if I worked hard enough to hide that from you, I am sure that I probably could have. I could have just stayed

low key, come up, gave the sermon, gave it all of the energy I could muster up, then go home and probably totally crash...

But how many of you know, that would have been more difficult?

and potentially FAR MORE DESTRUCTIVE, if I just interacted with people the way I normally do and didn't tell them that I was sick... what if I get someone else sick?

But even though most people tend to choose darkness... they choose unforgiveness, they choose to hide things... it actually is a lot more work.

its more work to harbor something than it is to lay it at the feet of Jesus... and look at how simple this is...

In Jesus there is NO DARKNESS AT ALL.

I could have them turn off all of these stages lights... and I could go in the back and turn off the lights that are above us. And do everything that I can to get rid of the light, but the reality is, that when the sun is shining, you can't stop it.

Because shining through these stained glass windows is a light that is keeping everything in this room in our sight.

Because we were MEANT TO SEE.

It would be A LOT of work to black out all of these windows. It would be a lot of work to make this place truly dark.

and to even call what goes on between darkness and light "a battle" would be an overstatement, because light always wins. All the lights are OFF right now, and its still winning.

and if you flip the switch, the darkness goes. Good ALWAYS OVERPOWERS evil... the Gospel always wins.

but I think a lot of us go through every day feeling the way that I feel right now... we stand on a stage, or we limp our way through our days, trying to make sure that nobody knows that on the inside we are totally sick... we are hurt by people who are in community with us, we are mad at even God because we think we should be further than we are...

we followed His voice, and it isn't panning out like we thought it would... whatever it may be.

some of us are angry, and it started with something specific... something someone did to you, something that let you down... but as time goes on, you don't deal with it, and before long, you are angry and you don't even know why.

But I will tell you why. Because whatever your eye hooks to, multiplies. A little leaven leavens the whole loaf...

But I am here today to tell you that you don't have to live like that anymore. That God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, and he wants to absolutely flood your life with LIGHT! add a little light this morning.

Paul goes on to say (Ephesians 5:9), that "the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)"

and here is why I love this... the fruit of light... what does fruit need to grow? IT NEEDS LIGHT. None of these things can grow without light... in other words, none of these things can exist without Jesus. You can't forgive without Jesus. You can't have peace without Jesus...

But the fruit of a life that is filled with light is one that is good, and one that is right, and one that is true.

and Paul wouldn't be Paul if he gave us a problem without giving us the cure... and this is what he says in v11:

"take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, BUT EXPOSE THEM."

you see, that is what makes confession so powerful. John says “if you confess, He is faithful and just to forgive you” - confession can only be done in the light. It can only be done when you can see the things that are not as they should be. The shoes in the middle of the room that you keep tripping over... and you are so sick and tired of tripping over the same thing over and over and over so finally you admit, “that shoe is not where it should be. Lets put it in its proper place.”

It is a light switch.

then finally (Ephesians 5:13) says “when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.”

and it is there that we can live truly free lives. Because God meets us in the broken places, but the gospel will have no affect on the person who doesn't think that they need it.

Live in the light, as He is in the light.

Have conversations with each other. If your life feels like its constant darkness, try and figure out where the light went out. Once its visible, it can be dealt with... it can be weeded out and fixed...

but saying it is fixed when really its broken, thats not going to help anything. Pretending you are not sick, when really you are extremely contagious and infect a bunch of others, that is not going to help anyone. It is going to only make matters worse. There is no darkness in Jesus... and if we live in darkness, we have no fellowship with Him... so lets make it visible this morning.

Once it is visible, it can be replaced by something better.

Overpower darkness with the light of Jesus this morning.