

Knowing God in a World of Spin

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good afternoon and welcome to the 30-minute service. You'll see in the order of services there will be a couple of inserts. One insert is this yellow card here.
- We're just beginning a new series from 1 John and the series is called Knowing God in a World of Spin. It's a series of four talks on four consecutive Wednesdays.
- So do take that card with you. There's also another card and it's about the strategic position of this church and the redevelopment of the building. It's just an update to let you know what the Redevelopment Committee has been up to in recent times.
- So do take that with you. You might find it interesting to read and to pray about at home. And you'll have noticed today when you came in that there's tea and coffee laid out on the table.
- There'll also be tea and coffee here at the front. So if you're able, if you've got time, do stop after the service and enjoy a bit of fellowship and a tea and coffee together.
- [1 : 0 0] There's also a bookstool here, lots of interesting books. So you're welcome to browse on the bookstool as well. Good. While we begin. Amen.
- Well, we've got the reading from 1 John in front of us here on the yellow order of service. The talk today is called Walking in God's Light. And actually the passage is up to chapter 2, verse 14.
- So I've been quite selected with these verses. We've just got 10 verses in front of us. You might like to read the rest of the passage at home. So, 1 John, chapter 1, verses 1 to 10.
- 1 John 1, verses 1 to 10.
- We proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
- [2 : 2 3] 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. Good. Well, I've called our series Knowing God in a World of Spin.
- And I guess we all get an idea, don't we really, what I mean in that context. I understand spin to be the embellishment of truth. You know, the tweaking of it here and there.

[3 : 31] What we might call, well we see it, don't we, in the political arena quite often. I know Tony Blair in the past has often been accused of spin. Spin is sort of, these days it's the political manipulation of truth.

My dictionary is a little bit too old to capture what I mean by spin in this contemporary world. My dictionary says things like a brief drive in a car or a quick turnaround.

But that's not what we're thinking about here. I'm thinking about the manipulation of truth and that sort of meaning. I hope you're with me with that. So spin has modern connotations but its origin is ancient.

And we'll all remember, won't we, Genesis chapter 3. Did God really say? And the devil sort of subtly distorts God's word to Adam and Eve.

Puts a spin on it. And sadly, you and I, we're born into it. Creatures of spin. You know, we inherit the tendency. I'm told if you look at we children, you soon learn that it's something that they inherit.

[4 : 45] Am I right? I think so. That's what folk tell me. It's called original sin, isn't it? And by that laugh, I take it you're on my wavelengths with this.

You understand what I'm saying. So, Adam was in a perfect relationship with God. And yet he, well, he succumbed, didn't he? To spin.

And the first century church is threatened in the same way. As the gospel goes out and spreads around the Roman Empire, it seems that some people are beginning to place a subtle spin on the message.

And that's why John writes his letter. Just listen to this, what he says in chapter 2. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

And just look down at the text. Just look down at the text in front of you. Look at chapter 1, verse 6. Have a look at that. If we say we have fellowship with him, have a look at verse 8.

[5 : 53] If we say we have no sin, and verse 10. If we say we have not sinned, do you see? Three times in our passage alone. John says, he's saying, if we say this and then do that, we're liars.

Both can't be true, says John. He's saying sort of, let's have some sort of coherence and integrity in your Christian lives.

Cut out the spin. And what a contrast, friends, that is, isn't it? To 21st century society. Don't you think?

Where we've sort of edited out right and wrong. All's relative. No absolutes. How do we decide what's permissible in society and what's not permissible?

Well, in the end, it's democracy, isn't it, in society? Morals are decided by democracy. There's no moral absolutes.

[6 : 56] You know, the weight of the world's opinion decides what is good and what is bad without the absolutes of God's word. We decide for ourselves right and wrong.

I guess there's a lot of debate about this at the moment, isn't there? With euthanasia, I've heard a few radio programs just recently. And so society and the world, well, they're adrift.

You know, like a ship that's lost its moorings. No purpose, no destination, no hope and no backbone. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Just listen to Francis Schaeffer talking about this. He's using the area of sexuality as his case study.

In much of modern thinking, all antithesis and all the order of God's creation is to be fought against, including the male-female distinctions. The pressure towards unisex is largely rooted here.

[8 : 01] But this is not an isolated problem. It's part of the world spirit, of the generation which surrounds us. It is imperative that Christians realise the conclusions which are being drawn as a result of the death of absolutes.

No absolutes in our apathetic and tolerant 21st century thinking. For example, they contradict each other. In fact, I was just having a discussion outside before I came in about this very thing.

They contradict each other, but society likes to think that Islam and Christianity are both roads to God. As if God is a schizophrenic God or something.

You know, you hear Thought for the Day, don't you, on Terry Wogan. Well, I do. On Terry Wogan in the morning. All religions, they all sort of offer their pennies worth, don't they? No absolutes.

And yes, sadly, as people living on God's planet, we anaesthetise ourselves. Keep our heads down. No distinction between truth and lies.

[9 : 09] I was back down south at a church in Burton-on-Trent. And I remember it was after the 6.30 evening service. There were still quite a few folk there. And a gentleman came up to me with a little misunderstanding.

So I was explaining the gospel to him. And he reached out his arm like that. And it was nearly touching my nose. It was about half an inch away from my nose. And he said, you bigot. Quite a loud voice.

I said, could you just put your arm down? You might be distressing folk. And so we had a brief conversation. But it didn't last very long. He called me a bigot. When I got home, I had to open the dictionary to see what the word bigot meant.

I didn't actually know. And I didn't like to ask him in that particular situation. So the apostle John is writing in absolutes. Antithesis all the way through.

If this is right, that is comprehensively wrong. John's saying that all the way through. He keeps sort of beating it home into our brains. Just listen to the contrast throughout the letter.

[10 : 12] Listen to this. Darkness or light. Truth or lies. Love or hate. Love the world or love the Father. Death or life. Children of God.

Or children of the devil. Do you see, all the way through the letter is dealing with antithesis, with absolutes. And his letter comes crashing into our church today, doesn't it?

Absolute clarity from beginning to end. That's one, John. And friends, don't we yearn for such certainty? Today. I know I do.

You know, for rock solid assurance. To know that whatever the world throws at us, even death. To know that our relationship with Jesus is certain and can't be tampered with.

It's unchangeable. Just listen. I think this is really the summary of why John wrote his letter. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

[11 : 14] That's chapter 5, verse 13. Don't let the world rattle you, is what John's saying. Absolute clarity, present tense.

You have eternal life, he says to believers in Jesus Christ. And friends, what a thing to know, isn't it, that? What stability that can give us in life.

You know, whatever situations the world throws at us, this life, whatever we come across, whatever the prognosis, whatever mistakes we make it work, brothers and sisters, you have eternal life.

That's what the Apostle John is trying to communicate to us. Just imagine. He's written his letter, 1 John. Don't suppose he called it 1 John, but he's written a letter on the parchment and he puts his pen down and he rolls up the parchment into a scroll and he probably sealed it with some wax, blew out the candle and as the candle just sort of smoked and ebbed away and the smoke drifted upwards, he began to think to himself, well, what shall I call this scroll?

What shall I call my letter? And then he sort of picks it up and we hear the pen scratching again on the outside of the scroll. He puts the pen down and he holds the scroll there that he's just written and he looks at it and he's written on the outside of the scroll that you may know that you have eternal life.

[12 : 49] And his letter, it arrives to us today here. Well, that was an introduction to John's first letter. It's about knowing God in a world of spin.

And now we've got a couple of points. And our first point is encountering life and that's from verses 1 to 4. And these verses are really the foundation of the letter.

Just look at verse 1. Just dwell on verse 1 for a moment. That which was from the beginning. It's very much like the beginning of John's Gospel, isn't it? You remember the beginning of John's Gospel?

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. John's saying, you know Genesis chapter 1, the Word that created the universe?

Well, I've met him and it wasn't a vision or a dream. We're all perched on planet Earth today, aren't we? Am I right? We're all perched on planet Earth and it came from somewhere, didn't it?

[13 : 55] Non-Christian scientists, well, they can't agree. They can't agree how matter came from non-matter one morning on an infinite cosmic scale.

There are a few problems with it. You see it contradicts Newtonian physics. But they come up with ever more remarkable and ingenious theories. And John says in verses 1 to 4, it's all about Jesus.

He came to walk on his planet. The creative Word, we encountered him in time, space, history. Just look at verse 1. Look at verse 1 with me and count the senses.

Look. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the Word of life.

Perhaps 50 years on, people were saying, well, it must have been an hallucination or a ghost or something. To remember Jesus' appeal after his resurrection, he appealed to the disciples' senses.

[15 : 02] Just listen to this. It's in Luke chapter 24. See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

And John says, Amen. He says, I've looked and I've touched and I've heard. This is a Jesus Christ which I proclaim to you is what John is saying.

Why is it so important? You know, this, well, what we call the incarnation. Why is that so important? Have a look at verse 7. You'll notice halfway through verse 7.

The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. In the Bible, blood, it generally means a violent, sacrificial death.

It saves us. A ghost or a philosophy can't deal with God's wrath against our sin. And so, John encountered the word of life.

[16 : 04] And the question is, have you encountered the word of life, friends? And I know, well, some of you might be saying, you might be thinking this, you might be thinking, well, it's not the first century.

How can we encounter the word of life? How can we engage those senses of verse 1? And the answer is, we encounter him through his word.

And we'll see that in verses 2 and 3. The life was made manifest, you see, the life came down, was made manifest, that means the incarnation. And we have seen it and we testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

John's sort of repeating himself there. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim, you see, we proclaim also to you. And now look, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. You see, sort of, God comes down, doesn't he? He's made manifest. John sees it.

[17 : 08] And then John is proclaiming that very same living word. John's saying, you don't need to see. I've done the seeing bit. And now the word I saw, I proclaim.

So that you may have fellowship. That's what John says there in verse 3. Friends, we don't need sight to believe in Jesus Christ.

Sight's reserved for the new creation. The word that John saw and heard, that very same word, it reaches us through John's proclamation.

We proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship. That's what John says. And so if there's someone here, you're struggling with your faith at the moment. The answer isn't trying to sort of muster up more faith.

The answer is to go to God's word. Isn't it? Does that make sense from the passage there? The word is the entry point into God's kingdom. And the word will sustain us in that kingdom.

[18 : 14] And the question is, is your life built on reality and truth? Or have you been evading it for all of these years? Why not seize the moment?

There's some booklets if you want to pick up some booklets. We've got these booklets, How to Become a Christian. And there's some on the bottom of the stairs on your way out and there's some here on the book table.

It's worth taking one of those home if that's you. If you really want to meet Jesus Christ through his word. Now our brief second point is walking in the light.

You'll remember verse 3. John writes, so that we share fellowship with God and his people. And now for the rest of the letter, we see the consequences of that fellowship.

John wants us to live lives of integrity as Christians. John's using the logic of antithesis. And we'll see that again there in verse 6.

[19 : 16] Just look at verse 6 again. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. And then verses 7 to 10 are all about sin in the lives of Christians.

I think as a church we often lose something of the shock of these verses. It's so different to the heresy circulating in John's time about living a perfect life without sin.

So different as well from what we'd imagine. It means that heaven is for sinners. What a shock! Verse 8.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Three weeks ago, I was on Buchanan Street and I was talking to an 18-year-old young man.

He was very bright and he was asking me some difficult questions. But really, the thing that shocked him was that I could be a Christian and still be a sinner. When we got to that point, I'd been talking to him for about five minutes, but when we got to that point, he just walked off.

[20 : 22] He couldn't believe it that a Christian could be a sinner and admit it. He just walked away from me and I began to think whether or not I'd said something wrong to him and whether or not I was faithful to the gospel.

And sadly, we all sin, don't we? We do sin and it is sad as Christians. But verse 9 is good news. Our burdens are lifted away.

Just look there at verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Faithful because of his word and just because of his blood.

Do you remember that? the death on the cross. And friends, you know, God's robbed of his justice by the world's made-up religions.

You know, and John here is saying that we need to proclaim this message here in Glasgow. Look at verse 9 again. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[21 : 35] And actually, I found a verse of a hymn, which is verse 9. Just listen to this. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, I look to heaven and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

Because the sinless saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God, the just, is satisfied to look on him and pardon me, to look on him and pardon me.

So here it is. Let's have integrity as Christians, says John. A coherent Christian life. Walk in the light. Shall we pray?

Amen. Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much for the gospel that John here proclaims to us.

And we pray that you'd help us through your spirit to live coherent Christian lives, lives of integrity and lives that are pleasing to you. We thank you that when we trip up and sin that we can come to you and confess that sin.

[22 : 45] And because of the blood of Jesus Christ, you see us as righteous as your son. So we thank you, Father, and we pray that you'd go with us now. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Do stay for tea and coffee if you...