

**Discovering the Power of the Incarnation**  
**Sermon 2—“Power Over Sin”**

Passages: 1 John 1:5- 2:2  
 John 15:1-8

Perhaps you’ve never thought of this before, but the Biblical notion of **Christmas** (the Incarnation) is strongly related to the notion of **sin**. That’s what we’re going to see in today’s study from 1 John as we pursue this second sermon in a series entitled, *“Discovering the Power of the Incarnation”*.

Let’s pray.

How are the Biblical notions of **Christmas** and **sin** related to each other?

As we saw last week, John opens his letter by giving us a *theological vision* of the story of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem! Although he tells us nothing of Mary and Joseph, or the stable in Bethlehem, or the shepherds and wise men who visited, John is very clear about this one fact-- **God came down from heaven and became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ.**

But there’s something more that John adds. He immediately tells us the theological reason for the Incarnation!

**Verse 3—“so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”**

Clearly, for John, the central reason for the Incarnation was to restore **fellowship on earth-- “koinonia”**.

This idea of **koinonia** continues to be in John’s focus as he writes the opening verse of today’s passage (verse 5). Let me read it again:

**<sup>5</sup> 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.**

Now, to say, **“God is light”** is another way of saying that **God is perfect koinonia!** From eternity, the Triune God has existed in a fellowship of openness, honesty and face-to-face communion. But there’s more! Immediately, John adds, **“and in Him there is no darkness at all!”** In other words, there are certain things that cannot exist in the fellowship of the

Father, Son and Spirit. For example, there is no doubt or confusion; there is no resentment or anger; there is no one-upmanship or jealousy. In short, there is no sin!

Now, when John puts this idea together with the fact of the Incarnation, we are confronted with **2 amazing truths!** First, *we, mere mortals, have now been invited to enter into the perfect, sinless light of the eternal **koinonia** of God.* Jesus has brought the circle of heavenly light down to earth so that we might be included in it! And this, says John (in verse 5), is “the message”... the glorious, astounding message “...*that we have heard from Him*” (from Jesus) and which now needs to be announced to the whole-wide world!

And yet, there’s a second truth that is equally amazing to consider: **This invitation puts God in an enormously risky situation!** If you think back to *the first time* that God established His perfect **koinonia** on earth (in the Garden of Eden) and asked human beings to share it with Him, you’ll remember that it didn’t go so well! Indeed, by allowing those two human beings to come in, there was a risk that God’s plans to spread their **koinonia** throughout the world could be ruined!

And that’s exactly what happened! If you remember, Adam and Eve allowed something from outside the Garden (from outside the fellowship of Light) to come in; a darkness that had no place there. Adam and Eve were meant to rule over the animals. Instead, they allowed this serpent *to engage them* in conversation; and not only that, but they allowed it *to confuse them* into believing that darkness was light and light was darkness. As a result of all this, **sin** (the breakdown of koinonia) **entered the world.** Face-to-face communion was replaced by 1) hiding from God, 2) blaming each other and 3) sweating in labour. **Sin** destroyed the original **koinonia** of Eden!

And the same thing is possible now! Even though the second person of the Trinity has come down to us from heaven; even though, in His own human flesh, Jesus is here to re-establish **koinonia** on this earth; even though, in Him, a new Garden of Eden is being planted on earth and a new fellowship of love is growing over the earth...yet, there is always the possibility that Genesis 3 will be repeated! (Of course, **this is not to say that God’s plans will fail; they’ll just be delayed!**)

Here is the risk that God takes with us: In every generation, it is possible that, even as we come into His light, we will bring darkness in with us! Even as we enter the stark-white brilliance of God's perfect ***koinonia***, we have the power to contaminate it with the muddy boots of our own conceit, jealousy, arrogance, envy! These are the very attitudes that undermine and destroy ***koinonia!***

It's for this reason that, starting with verse 6, John suddenly turns his attention to his Christian readers and asks them to examine their hearts for **sin**.

Now, when John talks about **sin**, please don't misunderstand him. He's not talking, in this verse, about the 'one off' incidents that you and I may have committed: I stole, I swore, I lied, I cheated. What John is far more concerned about is whether our inner disposition...our heart attitude...is inclined *towards* those things that build up ***koinonia***, or whether we are inclined *against* them.

And so, examine yourself: Deep-down in your heart, are you selfish? Deep down, are you angry, or conceited, or proud, or rude? Deep down, are you independent or stand-offish? *These* are the attitudes that John calls '**sin**'... because they **undermine and destroy koinonia**.

Now, of course, *you and I can't change our hearts! This means that* the only hope we have is for the Spirit of God to *make us more and more self-aware*, so that, in the awareness of our sinful and deceptive hearts, we can come afresh to Jesus for His cleansing, healing, and ultimate transformation!

This is exactly what John attempts to do in these verses! Indeed, to help his readers become more *self-aware*, he offers a series of three *statements by which they might analyse their hearts*. Each of these statements is two verses long and begins with the phrase, "***If we claim...***". Let's start with verses 6 and 7

***"If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth..."***

Here is our first self-check...an examination of our present situation. Ask yourself:

1. Do I claim to be in the light?

2. If I do, does my lifestyle (the things I say and do; the way I treat others) reveal that light? **Or**, do my actions and words display the presence of darkness?

John's point is simple: **Be aware of yourself!** Are you, by your words and actions, helping to build up the *koinonia* of God, or are you actually destroying it? It's time to stop lying to ourselves!

Herein lies the power of the Incarnation! The incarnation means that we can constantly talk to Jesus. We can walk in His light! So, ask Him to reveal anything in your heart that obstructs or undermines *koinonia!* This self-analysis is critical! For when you do discover that your heart and your attitudes are out of order, the next step is simple. In verse 7, John tells us to *turn to the blood!*

Verse 7—***“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.***

Now, I'm not going to pretend to fully understand how the blood of Jesus works. But one thing I do know—John's focus here is not only on the blood of the cross where Christ was crucified. Of course, it includes that, but John's vision also includes the blood of Jesus' birth...the blood of His circumcision...the blood that surged through His veins and identified Him as truly human! For the fact is that our cleansing comes from **our union** with this perfect man in His life, death and resurrection! This is why our cleansing is not just a once-for-all act, but one that continues as we remain in union with Christ.

This is what Jesus said back in John 15. ***“I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.”*** Indeed, apart from Jesus we wither and die... gradually destroyed by our sin and the absence of *koinonia*.

Let's take a look, now, at John's second statement of *self-analysis* in verses 8 and 9.

***<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***

This second self-evaluation is more focused on our particular words and actions. Ask yourself: Do I ever claim to be without sin? More specifically, am I currently in a situation where I am convinced that the fault for a relational breakdown lies entirely with the other person/people? Is there currently a situation in which I am refusing to accept any blame at all?

If so, John wants us to admit that this attitude is sinful and stands as an obstruction to **koinonia**! And not only must we **admit it to ourselves**, but we must **admit it to others as well!** Indeed, when John tells us (in verse 7) to confess our sins, I'm convinced he's not talking about confessing our sins to God...(or even to a priest)! As James does (in James 5), John is telling us to *confess our sins to one another so that our relationships may be healed!* In other words, *go and admit that you have been a stubborn fool!* This is the only way that **koinonia** can be restored in our relationships, for it invites Jesus to do His healing work in our midst!

Listen again to what John says;

***“If we confess our sins (to each other), he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins (He’ll enter into our mess to unbind our hearts) and purify us from all unrighteousness (He’ll straighten out our broken relationships).”***

We finally turn our attention to John's third 'self-evaluation' statement. It's found in verse 10 of chapter 1.

***<sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.***

Notice that John's third self-evaluation continues to focus on the sin that's in our lives, but this time, *John asks you to look back over your life* and ask: Can I really claim that I have been perfect in everything that I have done in my life? The answer we should all come up with is *“no—I have sinned quite a lot! I've made a mess of relationships! I've been the cause of many quarrels and misunderstandings...even fights and disputes!”*

Of course, if you were to say that you had never sinned in your life, John's response is to point to God's Word which declares that ***“All have sinned—there is no one righteous, no not one!”*** And, of course, God is not a liar!

But the real heart of this third self-evaluation test lies in the opening verses of chapter 2.

***<sup>1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.***

Like a father figure, John doesn't want his children...his readers...to sin. But, he knows they have and they will. And so he has this advice for them. As you allow the Spirit to wake you up and show you the truth of your sins; as He shows you your past and your many mistakes; don't despair! ***"We --notice how John includes himself in this-- have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."***

What John is saying is remarkable. The past sins in your life...the sins that weigh you down with guilt and shame...have been dealt with *inside the koinonia of Trinity*. The past has been forgiven! For the fact is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sins of the world, just as John the Baptist declared He would! In Him (in His life, death and resurrection), the sins of the past have no more bearing on the life of the present; we are free from their guilt and power...

... **unless** of course, we keep bringing them up. And this, may I say, is the greatest trick of the devil. He will make us believe that the sins of the past have power over us.

I talked to a woman recently who said she still feels guilty over an incident that happened early on in her life. She finds it hard to live in freedom today because of her past. These words from 1 John 2 are critical for her to hear—***We have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."***

The point of today's verses in 1 John are mainly to get us to examine our present lives in order to keep sin at bay. For the fact is that God's *koinonia* is

powerful....powerful to deal with all our sin, past present and future, ...as light conquers darkness.

**But**, these final verses are there *to put a limit to our self-examination*. **Yes**, examine your present life to see if you are *building up* or *destroying koinonia*-- this is essential for the expansion of the God's Kingdom on earth. However, don't constantly go back over the past, says John! Believe...trust that Jesus has taken your sins away. "***As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us***". Rest in the fact that, 2000 years ago, Jesus came to earth to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world ... and trust that the past is forgiven.

**Let's pray.**