

Sermon on 1 John 1:8-10 by Rev W Huizinga

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 1:1

The Ten Words of the Covenant or the Confession of Faith

Psalm 1:2,3

Prayer for the Opening of God's Word

Thankoffering

Psalm 143:1,4,5

Read - 1 John 1

Text - 1 John 1:8-10

Sermon

DO YOU HAVE SIN?

1. .The two possibilities.

2. .The two results.

3. The twofold reason for God's action.

Psalm 32:2,5

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn 54:4,5

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our world no longer operates in shades of black and white. Morality seems to come in various shades.

The apostle John however teaches us differently. To him there are no shades of gray or pink. John speaks in terms of light or darkness, truth or lie, the Spirit of Christ or the antichrist. John deals in opposites.

How do you operate? Has our society with its changing morals altered your way of thinking too? Often our society bombards us with a certain morality, for example, with the prevalence and acceptance of *de facto* relations, until we too start to accept it as normal. After all sporting heroes have their live-in girlfriends and receive much publicity. It seems the normal thing to do.

There has even been the trend to deny sin and guilt. In fact some psychologists claim it damages people to speak about sin and guilt. So in divorce cases it is better to have non-contested suits for divorce. Allow people just to separate without rancour, it is claimed.

John thinks and operates differently. The apostle John had to face the challenge of a certain group of sectarians who too denied sin and guilt.

I preach to you the Word of God under the following THEME-QUESTION:

DO YOU HAVE SIN?

- 1. *The two possibilities.***
- 2. *The two results.***
- 3. *The twofold reason for God's action.***

1. *The two possibilities.*

Maybe we should introduce those who wandered in error. In church history we normally call them Gnostics, people who prized *gnosis* or knowledge.

They said for instance that Adam and Eve really did not fall into sin, but instead reached for a higher state. To eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil presented a step forward. Now they knew the difference between good and evil. This was progress. Knowledge is power. The secrets of knowledge elevated them above others.

Yes, they spoke highly of knowledge, as though that was everything. It led to the idea that the body was just an envelope for the soul. Redemption involves the escape of the soul from all bodily defilement, and the absorption of the soul into God, its Source.

They revised every important teaching of the church. For example, sin became a defilement which could be dropped off; creation was an accident; the real God has no dealings with this material world; and the church became a club of the initiated *illuminati*. Gnostics as the initiated held the key of knowledge.

As you read further into the letters of John you discover that these heretics denied that Jesus came in the flesh. These heretics scoffed at the idea that God becomes flesh. *What an idea!*

Yet at the same time their own lifestyle was lawless.

If the words "ethics" or "morality" are taken to mean a system of rules, then Gnosticism is opposed to them both. Such systems usually originate with

the God of evil and are covertly designed to serve his purposes. If, on the other hand, morality is said to consist of an inner integrity arising from the illumination of the indwelling spark, then the Gnostic will embrace this spiritually informed existential ethic as ideal.

To the Gnostic, commandments and rules do not serve salvation. Rules of conduct may serve numerous ends, including the structuring of an ordered and peaceful society, and the maintenance of harmonious relations within social groups. Rules, however, are not relevant to salvation; that is brought about only by *Gnosis*. Morality therefore is ever subject to changes and modifications in accordance with the spiritual development of the individual. Some Gnostics indulged the sinful flesh in a very lawless manner.

We find this to be the case in the days of the apostle John.

We read this whole chapter. In verse six we read:

If we say that we have fellowship with God (who is light and there is no darkness in Him), and we walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practise the truth.

Gnostics believed that in their soul was the spark of divinity. Through the knowledge given to their inner souls they enjoyed fellowship with God. It was an existential experience.

Yet at the same time they allowed themselves to walk in darkness, to walk in a sinful lifestyle. For the soul of man cannot be contaminated by the deeds of the body, in their view. Communion of the spirit of man with God is independent of the morality of the body.

God says on more than one occasion in our text as in this chapter, that this is impossible. To walk in darkness while we profess to have fellowship with God, who is light, is a total contradiction, a lie.

You and I understand this language about light and darkness. Do thieves not often steal at night, when people sleep and darkness can hide them? We refer to such deeds as deeds of darkness. They cannot stand the light of day. Light on the other hand is bright and beautiful. Light is righteousness.

Some then deny that they have sin. In verse six these heretics claim they can live with God and live in darkness at the same time. In verse eight they claim not to have any sin. In verse ten say, *we have not sinned*. John describes deceivers and those who are badly deceived.

Now if you put all these three statements together, you get a fair assessment of this heresy. In verse eight, we *have* no sin, could mean that they deny having a sinful nature, a corrupt system. Otherwise the expression would most probably be, we have not *done or committed* any sin. But if you combine this expression of not having any sin with verses six and ten, then the complete picture is that they walk in darkness, have a sinful lifestyle, and they deny that they have sinned. So they do not have past sins, yet they walk in darkness and still have no sin. It is a total package. No sins, no sinful nature, and yet walk in complete darkness.

Now I ask you, is the idea that you can worship God, have fellowship with a holy God, while at the same time live in what the Bible calls sin, not a very modern one too? Some may claim intimacy with God while they flout his commandments.

They find nothing wrong with back-handed business deals, nothing wrong with tax-evasion, nothing wrong with two-timing on your girl or cheating on

your wife as long as no one finds out and no one is hurt, and nothing wrong with serving God in your own personal style away from the church.

It is amazing how some people know their past history has pages of sinfulness, their present lifestyle is wrong, and yet they are no worse than others. There is nothing wrong with them. It is the churchmen and pious believers who are the hypocrites, in their eyes. Read Psalm 73. Lawless people who extort, steal, commit violent acts of crime grow fat and sleek. They enjoy health and security. They grow rich. God does not see! What have they done wrong, any way!?

So this heresy is not that strange at all.

We too must be very careful that we do not pride ourselves in thinking, *I have the right teachings; I know the secrets of the kingdom of God; and I am a covenant child of God.* If we say these things while we walk in darkness, it is a terrible thing.

On the other hand, John also portrays another possibility, namely, true believers who sincerely walk in the light as God is in the light. In verse nine of our text we read

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, every Sunday we listen to the words of God's covenant, the ten commandments, as we call them. In these teachings God shows how He is holy and full of light. We learn the difference between good and evil. We need to learn that since our sinful inclinations propel us toward the attractions of sin.

As a result, you and I learn to confess our sins. We become serious and sincere about our sins. The Bible teaches us to identify and to fight against our evil habits of our thoughts, words and actions. The strict and thorough teachings about the ten commandments in the Heidelberg Catechism confirm this. We learn to pray to God, confessing our sins, and asking for forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let this not forget this wholesome spiritual exercise, brothers and sisters, boys and girls. For this is an essential part of the one and only comfort in life and death. To live in the joy of this comfort we need to know our sins and misery. By experience, as well as from the Word of God!

This is very important. For your answer to the question, *do you have sin?*, has results. That is our second point.

2. The two results.

Let's go back to the person who denies having sin and having sinned. John tells such deceivers that they lie and do not practice the truth.

For John, if you declare that you have no sin, you deny Jesus Christ. Why did Jesus come into this world? Jesus came as Saviour. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, as the story about Zaccheus makes very clear. Jesus came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus had to drink the cup of death for us sinners. The truth and justice of God demanded that the Son of God, the son of man, undergo the sentence of death in our place. Jesus died on the cursed cross to undergo God's curse for us sinners.

If you deny that you have sin, you thus deny Jesus. You do not need Him. You can do without a suffering Saviour. God wasted his love on you! You do not need the Doctor. You are healthy and whole!

You see, you do not practice the truth. You lie.

This is bad. Walking in darkness while professing to have fellowship with God is a lie. People can hide their sinful past for years, not confess their sinful past. David suppressed his guilt for almost a year. He never confessed how he seduced Bathsheba, committing adultery with her. No one need know. Cover it up. Meanwhile live like a righteous and holy king. Many men have done that. Some have committed sexual abuse and silenced it for years. They never came out with it; neither confessing it to God nor to the victims and others. Meanwhile they attend church, read the Bible and pray like the righteous.

You and I would call that hypocritical. But it happens.

Such people deceive themselves. The alcoholic deceives himself or herself, for they have no problem. They can put the bottle away any time. Indeed, they do so many times a day! Sin is so self-deceptive.

If you tell a lie, boys and girls, you often need to tell another lie to cover up your first lie. Soon you are caught in a web of lies. Sin deceives you.

To say you have no sin, is a lie.

Moreover, John says that *you make God a liar*. That is the worst part of this heresy. As we explained before, the whole gospel presumes man's sinfulness. The whole gospel teaches the need for a Saviour. Each of the four gospels spends most time on the end of Jesus' life, on his suffering and death on the cross. Why? That is what we sinners need. Yet if we maintain that we are good in ourselves, that we are basically and potentially upright and moral, we make God into a liar. The truth of the gospel is denied. The truth is not in us. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, this is terrible. For then we have no fellowship with God. We want no fellowship with other believers. They are all hypocrites, we will claim.

What a terrible result!

There is another result.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess... Note that the term, *confess*, here means to admit, openly state our sins. It does not at all refer to the confessional box where a priest hears your weekly confession. No, you openly admit your sins to the LORD God above. For it is also God, not a priest, who forgives.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, do you confess your sins to the LORD? Or do you allow many suns to go down and many new moons to appear before God finally makes you confess your sins?

Remember your baptism.

Confess your sins and note the results.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What mercy! God forgives us our sins. Please remember that God forgives not only backbiting, pride, greed, lies, insults, but also sins that really hurt and injure other people. I think about murder, rape, violence, and smear

campaigns. God forgave the thief and murderer on the cross. God forgave the murderous Saul. God forgave the adulterous and murderous King David. God forgives freely and fully.

Your baptism reminds you of this time and again. Do not continue in sin. Do not give up. God has made a trustworthy testimony that we have an eternal covenant with Him. He forgives.

But Jesus also cleanses us from all unrighteousness. To clean a cloth used to soak up oil and grease is not easy. Usually we just throw them away. Jesus does not throw us away. His Spirit is the strongest Cleanser on earth. Stronger than a laundryman's soap or any strong degreaser used today. The Spirit takes his time maybe, but He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. It takes a lifetime. Still at the end of life some stains do not seem to go away. Our sinful natures are that stubborn. Yet the backbone of sin lies conquered. Many stains and blotches have disappeared. We pray for that.

*Keep Thou me all my days, O LORD, from evil ways;
Wilt Thou their sway prevent. Then blameless I shall be
From great transgressions free, before Thee innocent (Ps 19, stanza 6,
BOP).*

The Spirit cleanses us powerfully.

We may keep some sins secret from others, though we confess them to God. Why? We learn that God alone can cleanse us. Those sins are far too difficult for us to remove. But God can and does cleanse.

*To Thee I humbly pray, forgive and clear away
My hidden faults for ever (Psalm 19, stanza 5, BOP)*

Proverbs (28:13) says:

*He who conceals his sins does not prosper,
But whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

Why does God do this? He is not obliged. That is our third point.

3. The twofold reason for God's action.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is faithful and just to forgive.

God is faithful. How often did He not forgive his murmuring people of Israel in the wilderness?! God keeps his covenant. Never does He go back on his word. In the new covenant God pledges – *I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more* (Jer. 31:34). It is thus not hard to understand this text. Our God is the great I AM WHO I AM. He does not change.

But God is also **just** to forgive us our sins. That is somewhat harder. In our minds God's justice demands that our sins be punished with a just punishment both now and eternally. Yes, God is just in punishing.

Here you have the divine dilemma.

The divine Judge cannot hoodwink to sin. Yet He is just to forgive!

The only solution lies in the blood and cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through his atoning sacrifice God fulfils his justice. At the same time by this atoning sacrifice God forgives us. All out of justice!

So He is faithful because He promised, He is just because Jesus died for our sins on the cross.

This is our one and only comfort in life and death. All praise belong to the Father and to the Lamb. Amen.