

THE POWER OF PURITY – 1 John 1:5-9

Practicing the Presence of God #4

Alfred Bloomingdale was born into an environment that could be called the envy of many Americans. He inherited a vast fortune from his grandfather who started the trendy department store that still bears his name. He grew up at the center of California social life – Bloomingdale was known as King Alfred and his wife dubbed Good Queen Betts in the most elite social circles. He had fame and prestige. President Ronald Reagan invited Bloomingdale to become a member of his unofficial group of advisors often referred to as *the kitchen cabinet* by reporters. Yes, Bloomingdale seemed to have everything that most Americans dream of – a vast fortune, influential power, and a famous reputation. But just about 2 months before Bloomingdale died at the relatively young age of 66, his life just unraveled.

29 year old Vicki Morgan filed a \$10 million dollar lawsuit against the nationally recognized leader. She claimed that Bloomingdale had been carrying on a secret, 12 year affair with her and had promised to support her for the rest of her life. Vicki was fearful of losing that financial support with Bloomingdale's death. During the publicized trial that attracted much media attention, much of the secret life that the national leader had been living came out. Pictures of him meeting his mistress were shown; cancelled checks amounting to over 1.5 million dollars that he had given to her were presented as evidence. Alfred Bloomingdale died right in the middle of the trial, overcome by shame and sorrow. The heritage of his life was ruined. Instead of being remembered for his benevolence and service to our country, he is remembered

as a man who lived a secret life of immorality while trying to present another life of integrity to the public. In fact, some remnants of the lawsuit haven't been resolved to this day. In the end, Bloomingdale's lack of integrity finally caught up with him and he died a broken, disgraced man.

While the world around us extols the virtues of wealth and influence and fame as powerful forces, there are few personal powers more important than integrity and purity of life. For in the final analysis, a breakdown in these godly virtues can cause a person's life to crumble like a house of cards being hit by a blowing wind. Purity is a powerful force in any person's life. The one who has the inner confidence that all known sin has been confessed and removed doesn't live in fear of what his wife or employer might discover. He doesn't live in fear of who he might meet while shopping at the mall. He doesn't live in fear of what auditors might find when they examine his books. And most important of all, he can maintain a walk and fellowship with the Lord that brings ultimate peace and contentment into his life.

We have been looking at the subject of practicing the presence of God in our lives during these past Sunday mornings. The Bible presents the true and living God as an omnipresent being – one who is everywhere in the fullness of His being all of the time. This means that none of us ever escapes the presence of God. The Psalmist stated this Biblical truth with such eloquence in Psalm 139:7-12:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely

the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Whether we realize it or not, whether we recognize it or not, God is always with us. Now realizing this truth and recognizing it in our lives will have a dramatic effect on us. It will have a dramatic effect on our worship as we saw two weeks ago. It will have a dramatic effect on our treatment of other people, as we saw last week. And it will have a dramatic effect on the purity of our inner lives. Simply put, if we truly recognize the Biblical truth that God is always with us, we will be lead to see the impossibility of hiding secret sins in our lives and will then be freed to have a more intimate relationship with our ever-present Savior.

I would invite you to turn to 1 John 1 as we see 3 very important truths that will affect the purity of our lives as we live in light of them.

The 1st truth is that God by His very nature and being is perfectly pure and holy without any sin whatsoever. The Apostle John uses the concept of light and darkness to describe God's righteousness and moral purity.

READ 1 John 1:5:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Now there are many figures of speech and symbols used in the Bible to describe the character and attributes of God for us, but this concept of light and darkness is one of my favorites for it is most helpful in our understanding of evil and its origin. One of the greatest theologians in the history of the church,

Augustine of Hippo, developed this concept in detail in his classic work called the *City of God*.

One of the criticisms that is most often levied against Christianity by its opponents is the problem of the origin of evil. If God is both all-powerful and good, how can Christians explain the presence of sin and evil in the world. It would appear that God either isn't powerful enough to have prevented evil from entering the human race or isn't good enough to have wanted to stop it. This whole attack on Christianity shows a failure on the part of its opponents to grasp the concept of the true nature of evil. They assume that evil is something that is created – like the sun or a tree or an animal. But sin is not something that is created, and the comparison of God with light illustrates this very clearly. Light is something that is created. In order for us to have light in this sanctuary, somebody had to manufacture the light bulbs, electricians had to wire switches and breakers and there has to be electricity flowing from Consumers Energy to this building. Light just doesn't come naturally – it must be made, it must be created, it must be formed. God created the Sun to give light to the earth, and man makes light bulbs and electricity to have light when needed. But such is not the case with darkness, is it? What do you need to have darkness? Nothing. Nothing at all. You naturally have darkness when there is no light present. By definition, darkness is merely the absence of light. If we turn out all of the lights in this sanctuary and tape black plastic over all the windows, we will have darkness. We don't have to make or create it. It's just there.

So it is with evil in this world. God is like light. When God created Adam and Eve, He purposed to have continual fellowship with them. The Bible tells us that God came down to walk and commune with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening every day. There was perfect harmony and union between the Creator and His creatures. But Eve and then Adam chose to willfully disobey God by eating of the fruit that was forbidden to them. When they transgressed God's revealed will, fellowship with God was broken. Instead of joyfully meeting God to commune during their daily walk, Adam and Eve hid from the presence of God that day. Sin had entered the world. It was not something that had been created, but it was rather the absence of fellowship with God. Just as darkness is simply the absence of light, so sin is the absence of relationship with God. Now the manifestations of sin take on many different forms, for there are many practices and attitudes that cause fellowship with God to be broken. But in its final analysis, sin is the absence of fellowship with God. God is light. Fellowship with God brings light and life into any life. But when the light is turned off, there is darkness. When the light of fellowship with God is broken, there is the spiritual darkness of sin that is suffered in the life of any human being.

God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. This is a truth that we must all recognize. For there is a part of our fallen mind that desires for God to meet us halfway. If we just get a little bit better, a little bit brighter, if we clean ourselves up a bit and if God would just compromise on His demands a little bit and meet us halfway, then we feel that we would be alright spiritually. But this type of thinking just rationalizes impurity in our lives. And this type of

thinking isn't realistic because God cannot compromise His character. God is light – in Him is no darkness at all. This is an eternal truth. If we truly desire purity in our lives, we must begin with this concept.

But now let's move to a 2nd truth. **We can't have fellowship with God as long as we are walking in darkness.** READ 1 John 1:6:

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

Now there are many blessings in life that we cannot appreciate unless we adjust to their wavelength. Next Sunday has been designated as Superbowl Sunday by our society. Next Sunday evening, millions of people will be gathered in Super Bowl parties all across our nation. But it doesn't matter how much food they have, it doesn't matter how many people have gathered together, it doesn't matter how good or sincere their intentions, they are not going to be able to watch the Steelers play the Seahawks unless they have a television set capable of transforming the transmission of the game into picture form. Unless they can get on the same wave length as the game's transmission, they will not see the Super Bowl game. Some might not be able to get the football game clearly because their cable went out in a winter storm. Imagine the foolishness of someone sitting on his couch with the attitude *If they really want me to watch the Super Bowl, then they're going to have to alter their production in some way so that I can see it. I'll do the best I can, but they're going to have to meet me halfway on this thing.* It would never happen – nor would anybody expect it to. If somebody wants to watch the Super Bowl next Sunday evening, they are going to have to somehow adjust themselves to the

frequency that is transmitted from the Ford Fieldhouse in Detroit. They are going to have to have a T.V. set that will capture that signal and transmit it into picture form. The airwaves that can make that transmission possible are all around us. But we have to be in tune to those airwaves if we are to actually see the Superbowl.

An infinitely greater blessing than anything else that can be achieved in this world is the privilege of fellowshiping with God our Creator. But the simple fact is that while God is ever present throughout His creation, we are born on a different wavelength from God. God is light. We are born in darkness. We all have been born with a sinful nature. Now we can sit and sincerely desire fellowship with God, but it just can't happen as long as we are in darkness because God is light – in Him is no darkness at all. There is only one way for us to have fellowship with God. We must find His wavelength; we must find His frequency. Happily, God has made a way for us to do this – and this brings us to our 3rd and final truth for consideration this morning.

We can walk in the light with God by confessing our sins and receiving God's forgiveness and righteousness. READ 1 John 1:7-9:

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.

1JN 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Now in the generation in which we are living, we like to complicate issues. There are no simple answers, only complicated issues we are constantly

told. This attitude is a reflection of our rejection of absolute truth. With the prevailing attitude of all truth being relative (which is really a contradiction of terms), all issues must become very complex and complicated so that we can wrestle with what the right action might be for any and every situation.

Our generation has a tendency to complicate sin much more than it needs to be and to try to make it much more complex than it really is.

Calvin Coolidge was the 6th president to assume the office from being vice president upon the death of the chief executive. He was vacationing on his father's farm in Vermont when he heard word that President Warren Harding had passed away. Coolidge was a stereo-typical New Englander. He was a man of very few words. In fact, he was noted for his brevity. On one occasion, a fashionable Washington hostess made a wager that she could strike up a conversation with President Coolidge. But she made a mistake when she shared her little bet with the President. *President Coolidge, I have made a little wager that I can make you say 3 words*, she told our nation's chief executive. A sly smile came across the President's face as he answered simply, *You lose*. But there is one anecdote from President Coolidge's life that I think illustrates the simplicity of the concept of sin in the Bible. It was the Coolidge's practice to attend church every Sunday. One week, the President's wife wasn't feeling well so she stayed home. When her husband returned from the morning service, she asked him what the Pastor's sermon was about. *Sin* was his single word reply. *Well, what did he say about sin*, Mrs. Coolidge continued to probe. *God's against it*, were the President's only words.

We as human beings like to complicate the issue of sin. We make our lists of sinful practices, and then we argue over which ones are really sins and which ones are not sins, or which sins are worse than other sins. We often ignore the fact that sin by its very nature is anything that is opposed to the character of God. God is light – in Him is no darkness whatsoever. Whatever does not correspond to His nature is sin.

This is the reason for Jesus taking the hypocrisy of the Pharisees so seriously during His public ministry here on the earth. God is truth. If we are to act consistently with His character, we must be truthful people. That is the reason for John choosing *homologomai* as the Greek word that we translate *confess* in our English Bibles. The word that the Apostle chose literally means to say it like it is or to tell the truth. If we tell the truth, if we admit our actions as being sinful, then God freely forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The Pharisees tried to hide behind a religious veneer. They even used long and elaborate prayers as a pretense for their sinful attitudes Jesus said on one occasion. This was despicable in the sight of God. God knows our hearts. He knows the thoughts of our minds. He knows the intents of our wills. We cannot hide any action or attitude from Him. For us to play little games trying to fool God is one of the greatest insults that we could ever make towards Him. Here he is with us in the fullness of his being and we pretend that we can do something that he wouldn't be aware of. That's what the Pharisees were doing all the time and their actions just galled the Lord Jesus. God has made fellowship with Him possible, but it can only be achieved on the basis of truth – because God is truth. As we confess our sins, as we

admit them to God, as we tell it like it really is in our lives, God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us. But as long as we are trying to hide or cover our actions, living a secret life in darkness while trying to promote ourselves as living in the light, then fellowship with the Lord is impossible.

Almost every winter, at one time or another, we all suffer the inconvenience of a serious snow or ice storm that knocks out electricity for a period of time. Sometimes large limbs break off and come down from trees during winter storms. A month or so ago I was driving to my office in the morning when I had to make a detour because a long limb had fallen down blocking Courtland just up the road. It's interesting to go out and examine some of these limbs that have fallen during the storm. Many times there can be seen some internal rotting or decay that had been developing for some time. The limb looked fine from all outward appearances. It even continued to produce leaves every spring. But inside there was something going on, some internal weakening of the structure. Then a severe winter storm hits, and the snow and frozen water puts extra weight and pressure on the limb. All of a sudden, that extra stress causes the limb to break off from the tree and fall to the ground.

This same process can easily happen in our lives if we are not careful. If we allow that which does not correspond to God's character to fester in our lives, if we allow darkness to enter into the heart of our souls, then our character is weakened. We become filled with impurity and spiritual disease. We might look just fine to our friends and neighbors and others here at church, but there is a weakening process that's taking place inside. And often, when

some extra stresses or pressures hit us, we can falter and crack. We don't have the strength to maintain the façade any longer. It is critically important in each of our lives to maintain purity. It is necessary if we are to continue the fellowship with God that we all desire. And it is also necessary if we are to maintain the kind of strength that we need to face the daily stresses and pressures of life. For God is the source of our strength. We gain strength as we tarry in his presence. The prophet Isaiah said that those who rest in the presence of God exchange their weaknesses for His strength. But we can't rest in the presence of the Lord in fellowship if we are walking in darkness, because God is light. We can only maintain fellowship with God as we maintain a purity of life. Happily, we can do this by maintaining the regular discipline of confession of sins in our lives.

It is my general pattern to conclude my sermon with a prayer. I am going to do something different this morning. I am going to conclude my sermon with someone else's prayer. This prayer was offered and written down almost a thousand years ago by Thomas Aquinas. It is one of the finest prayers focusing on purity of life that I have ever read. I am going to pray this prayer for myself. It will be printed up on the wall so that you can read it and pray it for yourself as well.

“O God, fountain of mercy, I, a sinner, approach you. Cleanse me, sun of justice, enlighten my blindness. Eternal physician, heal my wounds. King of Kings, repair my losses. Mediator between God and man, reconcile me. Good shepherd, lead back this wandering sheep. O most merciful God, call me back

when I flee from you, draw me when resisting you. Lift me up and support me when I rise. Guide my steps.

In sinning I have offended you, hurt my neighbor, and harmed myself. Through weakness I have sinned against you, omnipotent Father; through ignorance against you, all-wise Son; through malice against you, Holy Spirit. And so I have offended the most holy Trinity. Attracted by evil, I have turned from you. In so doing, I have chosen to lose you rather than give up what I have loved; to offend you rather than turn from what I should have feared. How often I have sinned – secretly, openly, and boldly, in word and deed. Therefore in my misery I entreat you not to look upon my iniquity but upon your immense goodness. Graciously forgive all that I have done. Grant me sorrow for the past, and for the future a wise vigilance. Amen.