

Clean sponges

1 John 1:5-7 (NIV)

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. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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.

Today we're talking about God being the light of the world, and what that means for us. It's particularly apt for this weekend, as lots of people – Christians included – are absorbing themselves in Halloween celebrations. A lot of it is rooted in darkness, even if that's subtle and sugar-coated.

1) The Truth: God is light (v 5)

Time and time again throughout the Bible, God refers to himself as light (v. 5) He created it, he emits it and he defines it. And he cannot be overcome by any darkness. Imagine taking a torch and switching it on. Without switching it off again (because we can't simply extinguish God's light) can you make it so that it doesn't shine on something? No. Even if you block the beam with your palm, it's still shining on your hand. So it is with God – his light is constant and will always be illuminating our world (Psalm 139:7)

God also can't be touched by darkness. He is pure, holy and good. Just like oil separates from water, he cannot be made to mix with darkness. Instead, he remains untainted and darkness will shy away from him.

This is a TRUTH about God that we need to stand firmly on. A truth about his being, his character, his definition. We need to know this truth and be rooted in it, despite the darkness that presses in on us. We are constantly affected by the results of sin in this world; sickness, death, injustice, betrayal... But our Father in Heaven shines his light on all of these things, showing them for what they really are (which is, ultimately, defeated). (Psalm 139:12)

2) The Challenge: We are sponges (v 6)

Unlike God, we aren't able to intrinsically deflect darkness. We are made in God's image but we are imperfect beings, easily affected by the world we live in. We are more like sponges. So, what are we going to soak up from the world around us?

As it says in verse six, we can't claim to have fellowship with God and yet allow ourselves to be drawn in to darkness. Before we knew Christ, we were like sponges sitting in a bowl of dirty mess. We soaked up the mess and spread it all over our lives and the lives of those around us. But Christ shone his light on our lives and showed us that there was a better way. He exchanged our dirty sponge for a clean one, in a crystal clear bowl of water which is sealed with his forgiveness, goodness and strength.

Now, as believers, we need to steward our new lives well. We can't expect to breeze through life unaffected by the enemy's schemes. Not only are we still subject to those things which are out of our control, but we have to make choices that enable us to keep ourselves right before God. Here's a quote which I was really struck by recently, written in reference to a particular current (and unhealthy, I believe) TV programme:

'...then the best thing is to at least treat our brains and souls with the same respect we give a kitchen sponge. You wouldn't put your sponge in the toilet and then use it to clean your dinner plate. Why, then, do we let our brains absorb hours of filth every day and then think we can turn around and use those same minds to be decent, virtuous people in real life?'

We can apply this same principal to all sorts of things that we allow our hearts and minds to soak up. Things we watch. Things we listen to. Idols we worship (self-image, work). Habits we are slaves to (shopping, drinking, I could name others...). Can you think of any in your life right now?

An interesting tangent on this point relates to scientific research that has been done on the link between our thought life and our physical life. Dr Caroline Leaf is a Christian neurologist who has looked into the link between our thoughts (what goes on in our minds) and our

brains (the physical matter that holds our thoughts). Her research demonstrates that our thought life can have a very real physical effect on our brain matter, which in turn affects the health of our bodies. She tells us that we can actually re-programme our brain, and grow new healthy brain matter, therefore literally demonstrating how you can be ‘transformed by the renewing of your mind’.

We live **in** the world, but we’re not **of** the world. The Holy Spirit enables us to keep shining a light on the bits of darkness that creep in. Now that our bowl of water is clean, we can see them more clearly. These things are around us, but God covers us with his forgiveness, his goodness and his strength so that we can withstand it.

3) The Effect: Other people are sponges too

As it says in verse 7 of this passage in 1 John, when we come into the light, we also enter into a body of people who are full of God’s light. We are all purified of sin and together are bearers of God’s light. This then has an effect on those around us.

Being cleansed of darkness, we are able to show God’s light to others through our lives. This idea of being filled with light is not just about our spiritual lives and our one-on-one relationship with God. We aren’t meant to sit there and look clean and pretty and bright (Matthew 5:14-16). We are meant to have an effect on those around us who haven’t met Christ yet.

The reasons for this are twofold.

- 1) It’s for **THEIR** sakes, that they might be freed from the darkness and enter into a life filled with God’s good ways and
- 2) Its for **GOD’S** sake, that his name would be made known and his light would spread throughout the world to all people.

Let’s be encouraged by our potential for good. We are bearers of light in a dark world. And our light, coming from God, is so much stronger than anything that seeks to cast it out.

Sermon Sunday 29th October 2017 - Jess Merrow-Smith