

Sermon: Not Sinless, But Forgiven

Text: [1 John 2:1-11 ESV](#)

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Introduction: Aside from the Gospels, much of what is written in the New Testament is meant to correct heresy or behavior that is not what God wants from his children. And sometimes it is meant to put right and correct distortions and misunderstanding about teaching. Paul wanted to make clear that grace did not do away with the need for holy living. Peter wrote something similar in telling the people who read his letters that holiness was something we needed to strive for. Even John in his gospel and letters insists we need to abide, live and remain in Christ, and use Jesus as our model for behavior.

It seems there was a heresy that also had developed regarding what is called “sinless perfection.” Gnostics in John’s audience even had taken the idea that whatever a person did in the flesh did not affect their relationship with God. John puts all this silliness aside and talks in black and white (darkness and light). He assures us there *are* behaviors that will condemn us, if they become a habit and pattern in our lives.

You will notice that in his attempt to correct Christians, John is not shrill or condemning. But with that in mind, neither is John wishy-washy. He speaks with precision talking about important issues like Truth and falsehood, Life and death, and Light and darkness. John’s audience is his spiritual children. And like any good father, he wants them to have the best life possible now and in the future. He knows what will serve them well.

Let’s listen to our text: [1 John 2:1-2 ESV](#) ¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation (*atonement sacrifice*, NIV) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Illus. I know a man named Bill, who once was a dynamic and respected evangelist. He was a minister in Michigan. Bill was holding a week of meetings for our church and we were out calling on prospects one day. As we pulled up in the driveway to my home, and before we went inside, Bill declared to me that he no longer sinned. I said, “you are kidding me!” He assured me he was not. Later that year Bill proved to everyone that he was wrong in his understanding.

Somehow he had taken out of context what it says later in [1 John 3:6](#) No one who abides in him (i.e., *Jesus*) keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

Bill wrongly thought to himself because he was “in Christ” and personally knew Jesus that he did not (could not) sin. John, the Apostle, is not saying sin is impossible for a Christian. He was saying this would not be common, frequent or without regret. He says later here in chapter 3: **I John 3:7-8** ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning (*lit. the one doing sin*) is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (*i.e. death and separation from God*).

Jesus came to reveal the truth about God and provide eternal life for those who would put their faith in Him and work with the Holy Spirit to show God to the world.

Is the Church immune to sin? Of course not! It is very easy to talk about and condemn others for sinning, like Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, the Roman Catholic Church and all the admitted sexual abuse, and lately the Southern Baptist Convention, but you might recall what Jesus said to those who were so eager to judge others’ failures. **Matthew 7:3-5 ESV** ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Sexual sin is so easily condemned, yet who has not at least lusted in his/her heart which Jesus said is equal with the act of sexual sin? So, is the church, or anyone who is a member, immune to sinning? Of course not!

Remember in **chapter 1** these last two weeks we learned that repentance that leads to confession can cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1:9**). And besides that we learn again:

I. There Is a Solution for the Christian Who Sins (vv. 1-2**).**

A person who identifies as a Christian should never sin *intentionally*. Sin for us should always be the idea of “trying” to do what is right and what the Father wants from His children, but failing. If and when we do sin, John tells us:

A. We Have an Advocate.

Jesus will speak in our defense to the Father when we sin. The word used here is **παρακλητος** which indicates a helper. The KJV and the ESV both translate this word here, “Advocate.” We see the ESV and the KJV translate this same word in John’s gospel (**14:26; 16:7**) “Helper” and “Comforter” respectively. The difference is context. How do you define the Holy Spirit with one word? This word is only used here in I John, and only 5 times total in the entire N.T. (4 of them in **John 14-16**).

In rabbinical literature the word could indicate one who offers legal aid or one who intercedes on behalf of someone else.

Q. Why does Jesus, the Righteous One, intercede with God, the Father, for us who are sinners.

A. He loves us. We are counted righteous not for what we do, but for what Jesus has done for us on the cross, and when we accept Him through faith. An Advocate is the opposite of an Accuser.

Q. Who is our accuser?

A. The Devil. [Revelation 12:10 ESV](#) ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers *and sisters* has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Jesus Christ has provided “the” atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins, but the sins of the whole world.

Q. For whom did Jesus die?

A. Well, not just for the elect as some false teachers say, but for EVERYONE!

Q. Again, does that mean that Jesus’ sacrifice covers the sin of the unregenerate and unbelieving world? Is this a supporting point for what is called universalism?

A. Jesus’ sacrifice must be appropriated by faith and coupled with our obedience.

B. We Have an Atoning Sacrifice (for our sins).

Jesus has provided for us an “atoning sacrifice” as the NIV has it (ἱλασμος) or *propitiation* for our sins as the ESV renders it. The word has “the idea of placating the wrath of God and the pres. passage would then be that Jesus propitiates God w. respect to our sins.” - Rienecker, p. 786

In the O.T., worshippers would provide a perfect sacrifice for their sin with the help of a priest. Now, in the new covenant, Jesus is both high priest and perfect sacrifice (victim) for us. This is what is called “substitutionary atonement.” Jesus took our punishment, and died in our place. And you should notice that the word in [verse 2](#) is “sins” (plural) meaning what we commit daily, and on an ongoing basis.

C.H. Dodd talks about this action Jesus completes as “not so much to pacify and to placate God as to *disinfect* man from the taint of sin, and thereby to fit him again to enter into fellowship with God.” - Barclay, p. 47

II. There Are Results from Our Relationship with God (vv. 3-6).

I John 2:3-6 ESV ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

You can know God or about God (intellect) and not be moral or righteous. You can have an experience with God (feelings) by fasting or living an ascetic lifestyle, or even looking for the right style of music, or somehow believing that if the pastor wears jeans and a polo shirt that will be more real.

A.E. Brooke says, “John can conceive of no real knowledge of God which does not issue in obedience.” - Barclay, p. 50

C.H. Dodd adds, “To know God is to experience His love in Christ, and to return that love in obedience.” - Barclay, p. 50

Barclay, p. 51 - “In Christianity intellectual effort and emotional experience are not neglected - far from it - but they must combine to issue in moral action.”

Throughout John’s writings we hear from Jesus: **John 14:15, 21 ESV** ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

So if we love God, He will certainly love us, and as a result we will love others. AND in that:

A. We Keep His Commandments.

Jesus was asked once what was the greatest of all the commandments and He remarked: **Matthew 22:37-40 ESV** ³⁷ ...“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

If we make claims of being a disciple and faithful follower of Jesus and do not obey Jesus, we are simply living a lie and not being honest about our intentions.

If we are growing in intimacy with God through obedience:

B. We Mature in Our Walk.

We are more consistent. We model ourselves after Jesus. We act and love like Jesus.

Life is a process and has a goal to be achieved. We are in a struggle to defeat darkness in our lives and in the world. We are joining in with God's reign of truth, love and life!

Jack Smith years ago stood up in church and sang "I Believe in God" while he was fighting for his life in a battle with cancer. I'll never forget it!

Where in our text it says: *but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected* or made complete - is talking about the proof of love in fidelity and loyalty in all our relationships.

How is the Christian walk possible? It happens when we live in Him and He in us!

III. There Is Nothing New Really (vv. 7-11).

I John 2:7-11 ESV ⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

A. God has been giving the same message.

Love is the key. It has always been the key ingredient to a relationship with God. The great Schema given to Moses for the people of Israel and recorded in Deuteronomy was still being recited in Jesus' time by devout Jews over 1000 years later and is still true.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 ESV ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

B. There are only two choices in life.

One can live in darkness or live in the light of Christ. If you live in darkness you hate and love self. If you live in the light, you love (obey) God, and self is put in His service. If you want to be right with God, love your brother, John says (v. 10). There is some disagreement here about how to define a "brother" or sister for that matter. For me, I believe this is talking about those whose spiritual Father is God and Jesus also being a brother. The Church above all others must treat *her* family members well. It is about witness and loyalty. Anyone who does not love his brother keeps non-family in the dark and lost!

John 13:34-35 ESV ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Illus. I am not proud of it, but when I was a year out of High School, my first week of college, I was dating three different girls (one from Tipp City, another from Piqua, and one from Lincoln, IL who I had just met in line for class registration). They didn't know that, or I would not have been dating any of them. God demands loyalty. He cannot be one of even a few possibilities to select to love.

Not a Fan, p. 23 - Chapter 1, Define the Relationship (DTR), a great book by Kyle Idleman: “So here’s what I want to ask you to do. In your mind picture yourself walking into a local coffee shop. You grab a snack and get a drink and then walk towards the back where it isn’t crowded and you find a seat at a small table. You take a sip of your drink and enjoy a few quiet minutes. Now, imagine that Jesus comes in and sits down next to you. You know its him because of the blue sash. You’re unsure what to say. In an awkward moment you try to break the silence by asking him to turn your drink into wine. He gives you the same look he used to give Peter. Before he has a chance to respond, you suddenly realize you haven’t prayed for your food. You decide to say your prayer out loud, hoping that Jesus will be impressed. You start off okay, but understandably you get nervous and pray ‘Three things we pray: to love thee more dearly, to see thee more clearly, to follow thee more nearly, day, by day, by day.’ You quickly say ‘Amen’ when you realize you’re quoting Ben Stiller’s prayer from *Meet the Parents*.

Before you have a chance to make things more awkward, Jesus skips past the small talk and gets right to the point. He looks you in the eye and says, ‘It’s time we define this relationship.’ He wants to know how you feel about him. Is your relationship with Jesus exclusive? Is it just a casual weekend thing or has it moved past that? How would *your* relationship with him be defined? What exactly *is* your level of commitment?

The Head of the Church would rather his people be hot or cold - lukewarm is not an option. [Westcott comments here, \(Barclay, p. 55\)](#) “Indifference is impossible; there is no twilight in the spiritual world.” A man is either walking in the Light with Jesus or in the darkness of hatred and death with the father of lies, the Devil.

Conclusion: **John 9:39-41 ESV** ³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

We need to be careful that this is not a commentary on the Church rather than the synagogue.

Barclay comments: “In Jesus, Love reached out to the sinner. To the orthodox Jewish Rabbi, the sinner was a person whom God wished to destroy. ‘There is joy in heaven,’ they said, ‘when one sinner is obliterated from the earth.’” And, of course, everyone else was the sinner who did not measure up!

This is quite a change from [Luke 15](#) where we hear echoed the words: [Luke 15:7 ESV](#) ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Sinning as Christians, does not cause us to be hated by God, it only shows we’re human. And we are liable to fail from time to time, as you and I well know.

But if you are like me, I hate failure of any kind when it affects my wife, my children and certainly Jesus and His Bride, the Church.

I never start out the day thinking: “I feel like really messing up things, today!”

Confession which is born out of repentance and a heart that abides in God’s love cleanses us because of Jesus’ blood sacrifice for all our sins. Jesus is our Advocate. He will defend us and comfort us always, if we will truly love only Him!