

Forgiven?

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[0 : 00] Please do have a seat. It is so lovely to see all of you here this morning. We're going to continue our series in 1 John. This is the second one. And we're really hoping that God will speak to each of us, encourage each of us, challenge each of us as we open and sit under his word.

For that to happen, we need God's help. We need God's spirit. So why don't we pray together? Father God, your son, the Lord Jesus would say, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?

And so, Lord, we're here together this morning. Bibles, open hearts, open minds, focused ears, unstopped. And we're praying that you would send your spirit to make this word alive.

That we might discern your voice amidst all the voices crowding in on our lives. And, Father, that we would see Jesus afresh for the first time again.

Father, bless us and help us. We have the audacity to ask in Jesus' glorious name. Amen. This is Anders Ericsson.

[1 : 23] He wrote a paper called The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance. In this paper, he comes up with a rule that is generally agreed, that to become an expert in something takes 10,000 hours of practice.

So, if you want to be a master of playing the oboe, then 10,000 hours. If you practice for 10,000 hours, you might be on the bill at the Usher Hall, the Festival Theatre.

You might even make it to Carnegie Hall in the States. Or perhaps you were inspired by the New Horizon Explorer, and you saw pictures of Pluto when you thought, I'd really like to be an astrophysicist.

10,000 hours of reading books, looking in telescopes, listening to lectures, and you'll have mastered it. Or, you want to be a chess grandmaster.

I play chess every Friday morning at Basics Bank, and I haven't yet won. I need more practice, but if I spent 10,000 hours, chances are Gary Kasparov would have a run for his money, as well as the clients that we see on Friday morning.

[2 : 41] But what about your Christian life? Have you managed to master that yet? Have you got it nailed? Have you got it down? Are you an expert in both knowing about and living out the Christian life?

Well, let's see, shall we? An increasing Bible knowledge. Well, I dare say you're doing quite well. You've turned up to a morning service where we're going to open 1 John, and we're hoping we might learn something, so give yourself a tick.

What about increasing attendance and commitment at church? Well, again, it's Sunday morning. There's a plethora of things you could be doing. You could be watching England get humiliated at cricket.

You could be watching a blank golf course in St. Andrews with people longing to play, but you came to church, so give yourself a tick. A deepening relationship with God.

Well, we hope so, don't we? That the more we learn about God through our increased Bible knowledge, the more we hang out with people who believe the same stuff, we're praying that that relationship might deepen.

[3 : 51] Give yourself a tick, you're almost on the way to being an expert. But what about a major decrease in sinfulness? A major decrease in falling short of the glory of God, but living up to the standard that he commands and requires and desires for our lives.

Now we're all a little bit more, less confident. We're all incredibly up to speed.

We're all incredibly conscious that despite having been Christians for maybe years and years, there is still indwelling, ingrained sin in our lives.

10,000 hours is 59 and a half weeks. Many of us have been Christians for longer, much longer than that. And yet we're still aware of the ongoing fight against sin in our lives.

It still shows up from time to time. Very conscious how we continually fall short, mess up. And sin, we don't do the things that we should do, and we do do the things that we shouldn't do.

[5 : 18] Isn't that the most familiar statement made by the world about the church? Well, they're just a bunch of hypocrites. They talk a lot about sin, and yet we see it so prevalent in their lives.

Sin, despite our very best efforts, is still a dominant force in our lives, whether we like to admit it or not. It's not just us, though. The Apostle Paul, writing at the end of his life, a man who has done more for the furtherance of the gospel than any other human being in history, says in Romans 7, I don't do what I do want to do, and I find myself doing what I don't want to do.

that even he is incredibly conscious that sin is still prevalent in his life. And yet, I wonder if you ever feel like me.

Do you feel like you should be doing better? You should be winning more and losing less. You should be making greater and bigger strides towards holiness.

Perhaps in your darkest moments, you think, well, I must be doing something wrong. Or perhaps, am I a Christian at all?

[6 : 36] Because I wouldn't keep doing this if I was. Perhaps I don't really know God, after all. It's all been a bit tokenistic. Perhaps God's patience has finally run out and forgiveness is no longer available.

How can I be a Christian and still struggle with sin? Well, if you've ever felt like that, and I'm sure we all have, then 1 John in this letter has got some incredibly encouraging things to tell for us.

Some super encouraging stuff. And so I'd invite you to open your Bibles to 1 John. Chapter 1, we're going to read from verse 5. John is writing to an unsettled church congregation where a group have left saying that we can't hang out with you anymore, you're spiritually babyish.

They have a group of people claiming that they're winning the war against sin. And it's unsettled those who remain. And so John writes this letter to reassure them that if they remain in the apostolic gospel, they have the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

He'll also start to confront the false teachers and show why they're wrong. These people claiming sinlessness and perfection. So let's read 1 John 1, verse 5 to chapter 2, verse 2.

[8 : 06] This is what John says. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you, God is light.

In him, there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

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.

[9 : 15] He is the atoning sacrifice, the propitiation for our sins. And not only for us, but also for the sins of the whole world.

This is such an encouraging passage for each of us this morning. Let me show you how it's structured. You need good eyesight. In this passage, John writes three times, if we claim, if we claim, if we claim.

Now when we get to chapter two, he's going to stare these false teachers, these departed in the eye, but it seems very clear that there are people that are claiming this. Particularly those who have left.

So he's going to confront this head on. He's going to talk about sin and forgiveness and Jesus in a really great way. So I think what we see from this passage is there's three ways we can try to deal with sin.

Three ways. The first two are false. I'll just put that out there now before you start changing the way that you live on account of those first two. Here's the first. Chapter one, verse six.

[10 : 23] Sin doesn't matter. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. This idea that, oh yes, I can have fellowship with God, but I can live how I like.

I can have fellowship with God and yet walk in the darkness. To say sin really doesn't matter. It's not anything in the Christian life.

You can have both. You can be sinful and have fellowship with God. So I go to one of these churches that are teaching this and I sit down with the counselor and I say, look, I've messed up again.

This sin that has been habitual and plaguing me for so long, I've done it again and can you help? And the counselor passes me a jelly baby and says, don't worry.

It's not an issue. You can have both. You can have fellowship with God and keep on living exactly how you like. God is much more chilled out than you imagine.

[11 : 31] When he writes things in his book about the wages of sin being death, he's just kidding on. Sin is not a big deal, says these false teachers. It's the opinion of our world, isn't it?

That sin isn't actually cosmic treason before a holy God. It's just a bit of self-indulgent, well-earned naughtiness on the side. There's not many people in Bruntsfield today who are worried about the problem of sin in their life.

Sin, say these people, doesn't matter. Tragically though, it's not just our world that thinks you can do this. There's many in churches who will say, God is love, live how you like.

As long as you're a good person, it'll go well in the end. As long as you've done a few good things that outweigh a few bad things, chill out. Eat, drink, and be merry.

And it will go well. Well. Well, you have to say that if verse 5 is true, that is ridiculous.

[12 : 43] And it's also dangerous. If God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. Literally, God is light, in him darkness, no, none whatsoever.

If that is really true, that God is absolute light, then he can have absolutely no fellowship with darkness. Light, speaking of God's absolute purity, his goodness, the fact that he's fully disclosed himself, that light and darkness cannot coexist.

You go into a dark room, and you turn on the light, the darkness is dispelled, because they can't coexist. They can't live together.

So on a beautiful, this needs some imagination, on a beautiful Scottish summer day, it's a Saturday, and me and Aileen decide we'll go shopping.

Well, Aileen decides that we'll go shopping, I just tag along, because it's what I'm supposed to do. And we walk along Princess Street, and it's very hot, and we get all the way to House of Fraser. And Aileen says, well, we need to turn and go back.

[13 : 50] And she says, I really want to work on my tan some more, but I'm grumpy, and hot and bothered. And I say, well, I want to walk on the shop side, where it's shady. So we go our separate ways. We cannot walk together, if one is in the light, and one is in the darkness, and that is exactly what John is saying.

You cannot walk with God, who is light, if you're walking in the darkness. Saying sin doesn't matter is a complete lie.

Saying we can have fellowship with God, who is light, while walking in and towards darkness is impossible. We lie to others about our relationship with God, that it's real.

And our life is a lie, because we do not practice the truth. In the Christian faith, how we live and what we believe, are intrinsically meshed together.

What we believe about Jesus, is to affect the way that we live in his world. And so this is picked up by Jesus in John's gospel.

[14 : 54] This is the verdict, light has come into the world, but people love darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. This idea of darkness being synonymous, in John's language, for sin and evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light, for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be plainly seen, may be seen plainly, that what they have done, has been done, in the sight of God.

God is light. And to walk towards him, is to live in the light. And to walk away from him, towards sin, is darkness.

So we cannot say, that sin doesn't matter, but their second option, is to say that sin doesn't exist. Look at verse 8 with me, and then verse 10. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word is not in us. Well, if God is absolutely pure and light, then the way I can have fellowship with him, is to proclaim myself, to be absolutely sinless, and light.

[16 : 09] If he is light, then saying, I am light, we can be joined together. If I fake my credentials, if I bury my sin out of sight, that'll do, won't it?

A sinner? No. Not me. Stories told of Spurgeon, speaking at a rally, and being confronted by a man, who claimed to be without sin.

Intrigued, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, invited the man, to have dinner with him. Spurgeon interrogated the man, further about his attainment, of perfection. Halfway through, one of the man's answers, Spurgeon picked up his glass of water, and threw it in the man's face.

Surprised and furious, about being treated that way, Spurgeon's guest, expressed himself, very forcefully, and crudely, about the lack of courtesy, and disrespect, shown by his host.

To which the wise preacher, simply responded, Ah, you see, the old sinful man, your sinful self within you, is not dead. He had simply fainted, and could easily be revived, with a big glass of water.

- [17 : 15] If we want fellowship with God, who is light, we cannot fake it, and pretend that we're, living in sinless perfection, in light, as he is. Even if we can fool others, about our perfectionism, God, who is light, will expose, the true reality, of what lurks deep down, in our hearts, and our lives.

So I get up in the morning, I'm late, it's a Sunday, and I wander into the bathroom, and I look in the mirror, and I think, you'll do. Not too shabby. And then I turn on the light, and think that things need, a radical change.

That if we live in darkness, we hide what we're really like, when we come into the light, all our deficiencies, defects, and failures, are on full display.

If we say, sin doesn't exist, verse 8, we deceive ourselves. Verse 10, if we say, we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar. If we say, I'm not a sinner, God couldn't have a problem with me, we need to look again, and fully understand, what sin is.

John Piper defines sin, as the ultimate outrage, of the universe, it is sin, not first and foremost, because it hurts people, but because it blasphemes God. He says, sin is, the glory of God, not honored, the holiness of God, not revered, the greatness of God, not acknowledged, the power of God, not praised, the truth of God, not esteemed, the beauty of God, not treasured, the goodness of God, not savored, the faithfulness of God, not trusted, the promise of God, not relied upon, the commandments of God, not obeyed, the justice of God, not respected, the wrath of God, not feared, the grace of God, not cherished, the presence of God, not prized, the person of God, not loved.

- [19 : 11] Well, if that is, what sin is, then we truly cannot say, that we've made the mark, and lived up to that standard. Verse six, it says, we lie to others.

Verse eight, we lie to ourselves. Verse 10, we make God out to be a liar. There's no mileage, in saying sin doesn't exist, or that sin doesn't matter. So what is the answer?

A problem of sin cannot be resolved, or there's no solution in those two phrases. So what do we do? What is the answer? Well, here it is.

Sin needs cleansing. Sin needs cleansing, present continuous tense. It needs to be cleansed.

Verse seven, 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 unrighteousness. To walk in the light, in John's language, is not to walk in sinlessness.

- [20 : 18] We've already seen that that's futile. To walk in the light, is to align our lives, in the presence of God's beam, of pure radiance.

And to keep, despite our stumbles and failings, to keep walking towards him, with him. That is what it means to walk in the light.

It is not running from God in shame, or denying it before a God who knows, but walking towards God in faith. That is what it means to walk in the light.

Why is that a good thing? Because if we do that, the blood of Jesus cleanses us, purifies us, of all sin.

That blood, which is like a celestial das ultra, that removes every ingrained transgression, every stubborn iniquity, every speck, trace, and iota of sin.

- [21 : 19] It's not like when you spill red wine, on the carpet, you need to go and buy a rug. You just cover it over. The blood of Jesus, washes it away, cleanses us, removes it from us.

It's about saying, my sin is a massive problem. It is a clear and present danger, and it's rushing toward Jesus who cleanses us.

See what it says? It brings us into fellowship with one another. Suddenly, I don't have to pretend. I don't have to put on my Sunday face, and say, sin, that's not a problem for me.

But I can be open, and honest about my struggles. I don't need to spend all my energy, hiding my hypocrisy, or airbrushing over my sin. Suddenly, I'm free to admit, I've messed up again.

Would you help me, align my life again, into the glorious beam, of cleansing light, that is God. It also humbles us under grace. We're not here on our own merit.

[22 : 26] None of us are here, because we've got it sorted out. We're all here, because we failed, and we're failures, but we're looking to Jesus, who's a glorious, cleansing success. Verse nine, what does walking in the light look like?

Well, it looks like when we mess up, not keeping quiet about it, but confessing it to God. Being open, and honest, and real. See that it is sins, if we confess our sins.

He's not talking about sin, in general. He's talking about specific sins. That whatever they are, no matter how big, or how small, if we confess them to him, he will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.

See as well, it's not like coming before a whimsical headmaster, who might forgive you or not, depending on what sort of night he had the night before. It says he is faithful. He is always light.

He is always unchanging. He continuously deals with us, in the way that he unfailingly promises. It's a guarantee. It's not conditional. If you've done this, then I might forgive you.

[23 : 40] If you've tidied your room, then I might let you off. If we come and confess honestly and openly, he will forgive us. He will always forgive us.

Isn't that great? As we started when we thought how short we fall, time and time again, and yet we have this reservoir of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus that will never run out.

If we confess our sins before God, it is guaranteed. But look closely at verse 9 again. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just.

He is righteous. Well, how can we square that? That when we sin, God can't simply just say, oh, it doesn't matter.

Because that's exactly what someone who was unjust or unrighteous would do. So how can God both be just and yet forgiving? How can God let the guilty go free if he's going to uphold his justice?

[24 : 47] Well, I think that's where chapter 2, verses 1 and 2 are unbelievable. He starts, my dear children, I write to you so that you will not sin.

So because forgiveness is available, that's not carte blanche, a blank check to just go out and go wild. He's saying you need to fight against sin.

I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do, but if you do, we have an advocate before the Father.

We have legal defense. We have someone who stands with the Father and speaks up for us. And not just anyone, but Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

God himself, who became man, who lived a perfect life, stands before God, so that when John Gemmel messes up, Jesus speaks up, if I confess. There's not better legal representation before a holy God than that.

[25 : 55] He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He is the propitiation. He is the one who absorbs God's wrath on our behalf, taking the punishment that we deserve, dying the death that we deserve, so that we can get treated like we'd won, like Jesus did.

So every time I mess up, I have the Lord Jesus standing next to the Father with nails in his hands, saying, I paid for that. I paid for that.

Because they put their faith in me, and my grace is sufficient for them. They don't need to be punished because I was in their place for their sin.

That's how the circle gets squared. Sin really does matter, but Jesus really does solve that problem by taking our sin in our place. It's the best news ever.

I am a sinful, perpetually failing failure who has no right to have fellowship with God as one shrouded in and by darkness. Yet Jesus Christ, the light of the world, stepped down into the world and was snuffed out in my place so that my darkness might be dealt with forever.

[27 : 16] See how it ends, not just for my sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. It is efficacious for everyone. There's no bar we need to get over.

There's only a bar we need to crawl under in confession and repentance and saying, Jesus, I need you. Will you forgive me? You see, sin really does matter, and sin really does exist in my life and yours, and the only answer is Jesus, the one who forgives, cleanses, purifies, who took our place for our sins, and welcomes everyone into that forgiving, glorious fellowship of light and joy, and a second chance if we would just say, Jesus, I need you.

Come and be part of my life. So, five things. Sin is a massive problem. Do not die in your sins.

It will not go well. Do not die in your sins. It will not go well. Somebody will pay the penalty for your sin. You'll either trust that Jesus has or you yourself will.

There's no third way. There's no gray area. It is binary. Faith in Jesus and life and joy forever or dying in your sin and being punished for it. Sin is a massive problem.

[28 : 41] Number two, beware going soft on sin. The minute we go soft on sin, we detract from the glory and honor and grace of the Lord Jesus. The minute we say, sin doesn't matter, we no longer need a cross, we no longer need a savior, and Jesus becomes superfluous to requirements.

Beware going soft on sin. Number three, sin isn't disqualifying. That is good news. That this week, as you go out and you stumble and fall again, it does not mean you're not a Christian.

It means that this day, as every day, we need Jesus. We need to come to him and confess that we need him and trust that he cleanses us. But we must be fighting against sin.

Warring against it in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. This is not cheap grace. This costs the most precious shedding of that most precious blood that we might know forgiveness.

And as we prize that and are thankful for it, we find newfound power to fight sin. And lastly, we don't need to pretend.

[29 : 59] We don't need to pretend. We can be honest about our struggles. We don't need to put on a mask to come to church. We all have a constant, perpetual need and dependence on Jesus.

We have a constant and absolute need of the gospel every day. And if we all say that honestly and openly together, then we'll get on. And we'll get moving towards that light.

and keep orientating our lives around grace and keep declaring our absolute need of the gospel. This is such an encouraging passage. As one who stumbles and falls all the time, I have one who picks me up and keeps me going.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you that today we need Jesus. Thank you that yesterday we needed Jesus.

Father, thank you tomorrow we'll need him again. And thank you that he always cleanses, always forgives, always purifies. So Lord, we're not here because we've got it all sorted, but we're here because he has.

[31 : 11] And so Lord, this week, may we be so thankful for him, the price he paid for us, the sacrifice he made for us, and the role that he now has in standing in our defense.

And would that put new strength in our stride as we fight against sin. And Father, for those here that don't know your forgiveness, that have no experience of your grace, Lord, would you speak to them now and would they turn to Jesus?

Would they face his glorious cleansing light and know that you've forgiven them because of him? Father God, be at work in the remainder of this service in the rest of this day.

And Lord, when we stumble and fall this week, may we look to Jesus and say, Jesus, we need you. Cleanse me from my sin because you paid the price.

Amen.