

FORGIVENESS II

Sermon by Scott Lowther

Ephesians 4:32

September 11, 2011



Today is September 11th. I really wrestled with what to share on that. This event, which happened 10 years ago, how has it impacted the United States? How has it impacted the Christian faith, and how it impacted life as we know it? The reality was as soon as the tragedy happened church attendance went up. Ten years later church attendance is back where it was before. Has the moral thread of American changed? Not at all. We look at 9/11 and it fosters animosity towards certain ethnic groups and religious groups and all these other issues. Is that really God's intent in that disaster that we should suffer or was God's intent something more?

I'll just read you one verse that Jesus said in **Luke 13:4-5**: ***"Remember those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."***

I think what happened at 9/11 was God's wake up call for a nation that had started so well and had slowly turned from him and had abandoned his ways. Though we give him lip service on our money our hearts are far from him. We have abandoned him by and large. We've pushed him out of our school. We've pushed him out of our government and we've pushed him out of our lives. We've picked up and gravitated towards every kind of evil that the Lord hates. God's call in 9/11 wasn't to show who was more righteous than who else and whether the people in New York were more worthy and deserving of a disaster than people in San Diego. The point of those things constantly in scripture is geared and driven towards people to repent. Our country did not heed that call. I think since the country did not heed that call we can only expect that those who have not learned from their past will be destined to repeat it. Will we see things like that again? Only God knows. But God's desire is that if his people who are called by his name would humble themselves and pray and we would turn from our own wicked ways, then God would hear from heaven He would forgive our land's sin and he would heal us. The

church needs to pave that way because the unbeliever isn't going to. The unbeliever will continue to walk in darkness. The believer's responsibility is to model a walk with the Lord and a passion for God and a desire for his way.



This was a good week for me and Daniel. We went fishing. On Tuesday night Dan, David Rose and I went down to the dock. These 2 guys were going fishing and I really wanted to go so I asked the guy at the dock if I could go. He said, *"I think we can squeeze you on."* So I said, *"Great"* and they squeezed me on and we chug out to sea. I didn't realize that "squeeze you on" meant you didn't get a bunk. So there's nowhere for me to sleep. It's 2 nights out at sea with nowhere to sleep and it gets darn cold in the middle of the ocean at night. We are 67 miles off shore now. So Dan is very gracious and goes, *"You can sleep with me."* Yeah, it gets even funnier. These bunks are smaller than a twin-size so you can't even lie back to back. You can only lie on your side facing each other or you can face the other way. Dan goes, *"I'm used to spooning."* I go, *"Oh, too much info!"* I know it's just weird. I'm still having nightmares about it! So I have great empathy for Cassie because I woke up 6 times. I had a foot in the face, an elbow in the eye. Dan is all over the place, he runs marathons in his sleep. All and all it turned out to be a really great trip. The Lord taught me personally great things on that trip that I will share with you on another day because today we are pretty full. Really interesting word pictures that God reveals through nature on how we are to understand life. God was really faithful. And actually Dan caught more fish than I did. We all got fish, we got freezers full. As soon as we got back and threw all this quality blue fin tuna in the freezer, the power goes out. So I'm thinking it's still OK. I've eaten some. So far so good.

So let's get to our text. Ephesians 4:32. We are going to pick up where we ended off last week. We are talking about forgiveness. Last week we covered things such as: We have been forgiven of all of our sins, not just some of our sins, we have been forgiven of all of them in Jesus Christ; fellowship is not something that's secondary for salvation; fellowship has nothing to do with sanctification but fellowship is salvation's specific. So being in fellowship with the Lord is part of being saved. You don't lose your fellowship when you stumble around. We'll talk a little more about that today. Because I have been forgiven; because I have been made right with God, I am not to use the righteousness that God has given me, the forgiveness that God has given me, to indulge my flesh. I am not to keep on sinning so that God's grace abounds, in other words, the scripture says.

One of the questions that somebody asked last week said, *“I totally get it. I see Matthew 18. I had a guy tell me last night, “You know I took what you said last week. I went and I applied it to a situation that has gone on for years and God was really faithful and I feel free of it. I feel free and the brother is responding and he’s making it right and I am just so excited.” My response was, “If you do things God’s way everything seems to work out.”* But don’t take that and turn yourself into a Matthew 18 like that’s your ministry now where you hunt down everybody and tell everybody what their issue is. Use that in the context of following God’s word and God’s way all the time. Don’t just apply that one portion, apply all of it that you begin to understand and you’ll see God do great things. I’m just encouraging you, if you have a dispute with your brother, as you saw in Matthew 18, you go to them. If they don’t receive it, you take somebody else with you. If they don’t receive it you take it to the church. God’s way is restoration but you don’t offer forgiveness where the person doesn’t repent. God’s goal and desire is to drive the person to repentance. If the person doesn’t know Christ, the goal is to drive them to the savior. You can’t forgive their sin, only the Lord can forgive their sin. If we cut out the conviction of their conscience by appeasing it with our, *“It’s OK,”* even though they are not repentant, it defuses God’s action in their life.

Somebody said, *“How do I respond when they don’t repent and they don’t turn from it?”* Well it clear from scripture according to what Jesus said in Luke, ***you don’t forgive them***, but it doesn’t mean you treat them badly. Jesus also said in ***Luke 6:27***: We are to ***“Pray for those who despitefully use us. We are to love them and we are to do good to them.”*** But when they don’t respond in a biblical fashion God’s purpose and plan of forgiveness is short-circuited and reconciliation doesn’t take place. Reconciliation between man to man and the more important reconciliation between a sinner to the Lord. We are follow God’s way and we are to always work according to the pattern he showed us.

Here we have our verse we finished last week. We’ll re-read it then talk specifically about one argument for it.

Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

So we saw the pattern last week, we saw the extent; we saw that “forgave” here is the aorist tense which means it is completed in the past. It’s the Greek indicative mood which just means that it is something that insures that that state is certain and realized. In other words, that that state of being forgiven will never change for you. You will never be forgiven than unforgiven. It is certain, it continues into the indefinite future, it will never change, it cannot be changed, it is definite, it’s “that’s the way that it is”. In other words, God has spoken on that matter and there is no changing it.

So as a Christian in Christ God has forgiven his people of all of their trespasses. That should be a point where we cartwheel down the aisle, if we were charismatic. But we should be excited about it, and happy about it, and grateful for it. That should raise our confidence level and our boldness level in our prayers, in our witnessing, and our desiring for the Lord’s return. If we are not praying passionately,

“Oh come Lord Jesus, let it be today” probably the main reason that we don’t do that is because we are uncertain of how he will receive us, as I said earlier. It’s that important. You are either forgiven or you’re not; you’re a saint or you’re an ain’t; you are one or you the other; you are in or you are out; you’re not vacillating between two different positions in Jesus Christ. That’s the point of what we need to reconcile today because the scripture is so clear on this topic that there’s only one verse that’s ever been used to show something different.

That verse starts off very insidiously with things like this: You have to keep a short account with God. How many of us have been told that? How many of us have had that held over our head? That God forgave you, now you have to **1 John 1:9** the rest of your life in order to maintain that forgiven state. It’s something that people throw out there without thinking through the rest of the scripture. They take that one verse, they pull it out of the context of that book, and they apply it to somebody that I don’t believe that is applicable to a believer at all. I’ll show you why as we continue. I believe that’s John’s evangelistic plead to a person who is stuck in a gnostic heresy. It has to be that way otherwise we have a very strong contradiction of whether or not we have been forgiven and what the extent of that forgiveness looks like.

So if you believe that you have to keep a short account with God, I will tell you this: The more you read the bible, the more confusion you will come up with. Not only will you have a lot of confusion, you will have serious trouble in the sanctification process. You will have tremendous difficulty with that because you will be constantly focusing on your own life instead of the Lord. You’ll be fixated upon how you are doing instead of what he has done. That’s going to be very troublesome when you begin to equate that to how you relate with the Lord.



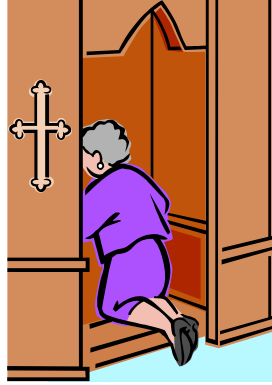
Let me give you some examples of how this used to affect me. I use to be told that all the time. What I would do in my crazy mixed up way of thinking is I would begin to think of every sin I ever committed because I felt far from the Lord. I would say, *“I feel far from the Lord.”* And somebody would say, *“Well that’s because you broke fellowship with the Lord and now your sins have separated you from God so he will not hear you.”* Even though that’s old covenant they throw it at you in the New Testament, don’t they? So I’m like, *“Well, my sins have separated me from God, I have to keep a short account with God and I better start figuring out all the sins that I have committed.”* So I began to make a **“Sin List”**. Have you ever done that? And you start to write down everything you have done wrong? It gets very exhausting. You get a writer’s cramp and you fill up pages of notes. You’re like, *“Oh, Lord I did this and I think I did*

that, and I'm not sure I've ever mentioned this to you, and I guess if I don't mention it you won't forgive me, and I guess if I don't mention it you won't remember, or maybe you do remember it, but I want to make sure I speak on, and write on, all the things that I can remember, but there's still stuff I'm not remembering, and what happens to those?" So my life was tremendously frustrating and I imagined this massive garbage heap in front of me that was always obscuring my view to God. People who say, "Just start **1 John 1:9** it out of there." I would scoop it out as fast as I could but all I could see was that. All I could experience was condemnation and guilt. All I could feel was depressed. All I could feel was, "Lord how come I can't get passed these stupid things that seem to so easily beset me, and I wish that you would come to help me, but I recognize that you won't because I've disqualified myself from your help."

It's that kind of bad thinking and bad theology that has shipwrecked thousands of people in the church. It's that mixture of Old Covenant Law and New Testament grace that leaves people focused on themselves feeling defeated all the time. It's that kind of mindset that causes people to not want to pray, which causes people to not want to worship because they don't feel there is anything to worship about anyway, because they are so discouraged about the fact that God must be so disappointed with them, and so upset with them, and so angry with them because they just can't seem to get it together. God turns a blind eye to them and turns his back on them and just leaves them to wallow in hopelessness. If and when they finally get their act together, and confess each and every sin that they've committed, and whatever is not of faith is sin, then maybe God will let his face shine upon them again, and it will be OK until they mess up. That tentative conditional relationship is a burden that the Old Testament Israelite couldn't even bear up under, and it's certainly something that we couldn't and can't bear up under. Yet we hear it taught so much we think it must be true because that's all we ever hear.

So I want to challenge that opinion based on the rest of scripture that gives us an entirely different message, and I pray and hope that it will be of some kind of blessing to you. I know in my own experience my own understanding of my sanctification process pivoted on whether or not I took **1 John 1:9** to heart every single minute of every single day. It wasn't until several years after I began my walk that the truth I believe from the word of God destroyed that argument. I began to see the reality of what that purpose of that verse was.

Let's talk about the origin of this misuse. It's a confessionist view. Where did that start? Did that start in the early church? No, it didn't start there at all. That viewpoint, that mindset in its origin, the farthest back I could find it was in the Babylonian religious system. What they did is they believed that to appease their god or at the very least to stay off his wrath, that they needed to bring to his attention things that they had done that weren't in alignment with what they thought he desired. So if they thought they should kill somebody and they didn't do it, they would bring that to his attention to stave off his wrath or to find favor. So there was verbally throwing forth those things which didn't line up with what you thought was in keeping with the worship of that deity. So that was the first place I could find it. It was very popular and it was something that was publically done.



Roman Catholicism holds to that still to this day, in such a way that it steals joy and freedom from people. As a matter of fact, if you just read simply through their belief statement (I'm going to bring a couple of things to your attention which most people would go, "I didn't know that" but hear it in the light of God) they believed, and still do, that eternal condemnation is avoided through baptism first. As you are baptized you are avoiding eternal condemnation. It is further amplified and stretched forth in the confession booth. If you don't participate in confession, as one of the sacraments, you are not enabled or allowed by them to participate in any of the sacraments. As a matter of fact, confession is required. From their own website, *Catholics Answers*, hear their thinking about confession: **THE BENEFIT OF CONFESSION INCLUDE RESTORED HOLINESS, A GREATER SENSE OF SIN, REMOVAL OF SIN, RESTORATION OF DIVINE FELLOWSHIP, INCREASED SELF-KNOWLEDGE, GROWTH OF HUMILITY AND CORRECTION OF BAD HABITS.** I can tell you from a person who actually went to Catholic Church and actually went to confession, none of those were ever true of me when I went. As a matter of fact I went going, *"Gee, if I all I do is fire up a couple of "Hail Marys" then that's a small price to pay. I guess I should do it all the more."* I looked at it as a way off and when I came to faith in Christ and began to follow him, I began to take some of that baggage with me. I began to think, as most people do, that Jesus forgave me up to that point when I got saved but then the rest of it was up to me to show him I could do it. That bought in that works righteousness that is a filthy rag to the Lord. It brings in error. It brings in a dismissal of his clear teaching. It brings in an undermining of the sacrifice of Christ that brings in every kind of unholy thing that would turn our eyes off what he has done and fix our attention on what we can do. It bought nothing but misery and hardship and discouragement.

So I'm going to challenge you with that point. When we read the New Testament, is confession of sin, post-conversion a requirement for the ongoing sanctification of the believer? I will emphatically tell you according to the word of God, I cannot find one verse anywhere that says that is the case. As a matter of fact, when you read the books that Paul has written, whether it be Romans which is the Magna Carta of sanctification and justification and salvation, nowhere in the Book of Romans does Paul say that a Christian should be confessing his sins post-conversion to maintain forgiveness, to receive forgiveness, to ensure his relationship with God is great. Nowhere does he say that. As a matter of fact he doesn't say that in Ephesians (in fact he says "your sins have been forgiven" and he doesn't have that little

caveat saying “provided that you have confessed each and every one of them); he doesn’t say it in Colossians, Philippians, none of his pastoral epistles, his writings to Timothy or Titus as a young pastor. He doesn’t say, *“Make sure that you set up the confessional booth. Make sure you teach the confessional booth. Make sure that you tell the people to keep a short account with God.”* As a matter of fact when he is writing to the church as he’s writing to correct bad practices and bad doctrines but never once does he mention those. If God was so interested in such a pivotal point of how we are to maintain forgiveness and keep it, that would be all over scripture. It wouldn’t be in one isolated text. John when he wrote **1 John** it was between 85-95 A.D. If the early church is ticking along around 35 A.D. , are you telling me from 35 A.D. to 95 A.D. the church was not in fellowship with God? Of course not. So maybe that verse that people constantly pull out of **1 John** isn’t what it appears to mean. Maybe it means something completely different and maybe it’s totally in aligned with what Paul has already just said to the people in Ephesus. So it’s quite strange that so many New Testament writers would have missed such an important principle if that was required to maintain somebody’s standard with the Lord. Just think about it. How could the church have maintained a relationship with the Lord if that was required and nobody mentioned it? Nobody.

I find it even more interesting in Acts. Paul is speaking to the leaders of the Church of Ephesus and he says this: **Acts 20:26-27**: *“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.* This whole thing is going to revolve around Ephesus today. John is in Ephesus when he writes **1 John**. The letter goes to the Church of Ephesus then goes to Asia Minor. Paul is speaking to the Ephesus leaders and says, *“Look, I’m innocent of your blood. I have not failed to declare to you the whole counsel of God. I’m not leaving out anything. In other words, I’m not leaving out a very important piece of the puzzle and leave it for 30 years later. I’ve told you everything the Lord needs you to know about your relationship with him.”*



“I’m also going to tell you this, that I haven’t ceased to warn you with tears that destructive woes are going to come in from among you and they are going to bring in heresy and it’s going to even deny the Lord. I’ve warned you with tears that that day is coming and John is going to write to address that very issue.”

So Paul has warned them. He said it is coming. He said, *“I’m not going to see you again but I know that heresy is coming your way and that heresy is going to be even denying the sovereign Lord.”* And then he goes off to be martyred in Jerusalem.

Years go by and John’s coming to town in Ephesus and it’s now 85-95 A.D. What happens is when you see these epistles, the writer doesn’t just say, *“You know what, I’m just going to write a letter and see how things are going.”* It doesn’t work like that. It works like this: The pastor of the church, the leaders of the church get together and say, *“We’ve got issues.”* So they write down what is going on and they’ll write a letter to Paul, or they’ll write a letter to John and then John will respond to correct either things that he’s heard from them personally, or things that he’s heard through people that have come by and told him what’s going on in that church. So John hears that there are some issues in that church. There’s this thing that comes in called “Gnosticism” and it comes a Greek word *gnosis* which just means knowledge. It means that there’s this secret knowledge had infiltrated into the church and it was undermining the gospel. It was coming in, it was cutting out the sacrifice of Christ, it was denying sin, it was saying that all flesh is evil therefore the Lord could never have taken on flesh. It’s just an illusion. Because flesh has to do with sin, and since flesh doesn’t matter because it is evil, then there is no sin. That’s basically in a nutshell what they taught. They taught that all flesh was evil, only the spirit is good, so it doesn’t matter what you do in the flesh. Kind of like we do today, “sloppy agape”. You know, pray a prayer, go to heaven and do what you want. It’s the same mindset or it’s the same as Christian Science which is like Grapenuts, it’s neither grapes nor nuts, and Christian Science is neither Christian nor science. But they deny sickness. They say it’s an illusion. Gnostics did the same. They said sin is an illusion; it’s not real so it doesn’t matter. Jesus didn’t take on flesh, it’s an illusion. That mindset is what causes the leaders in Ephesus to send word to John and say, *“Hey, we’ve got this issue going on and they are doing exactly what Paul said of coming in and denying the sovereign Lord. Can you help?”*

So John writes his letter. His letter goes to the people in Ephesus and then it fans out to the churches in Asia Minor. He’s writing to combat that gnostic heresy. Like most churches, there are 3 groups of people.

- 1) There are people who are saved and know it.
- 2) There are people who are saved and don’t know it.
- 3) Then there are people who think they are saved and they are not.

Each of them is beginning to gravitate towards and kind of tamper and handle this gnostic heresy. John’s writing them to address that specifically and pull them out of it and bring them back to truth. Some people just need to be steered back to be on the right path. Some people aren’t even on the path. His goal is to show clearly the path of life and draw people onto it. Keeping that in mind we are going to see what John says and we are going to pick apart John in the 1st chapter and look to see if it really teaches something completely different than what most of us have been taught.

I want to start with verse 5 in 1 John 1 because I believe it really is the heart of John's message.

1 John 1:5-10 ^{4b} *This is the message* (So when you are writing to say, "Hey, we've got a lot of problems and some issues that we don't seem to be in sync with what Paul taught us. Help us." John comes forth and he brings a very simply message) ***we have heard from him*** (not him as in Paul but the Lord) ***and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*** ⁶ *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 cleanses us from all sin.* ⁸ *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

So there are these vacillating statements of absolute opposites. In 1 John 1:5 it's the basic theme to this letter. It's the basic premise of all the texts that are going to come forth. There are about 40 tests in 1 John. Test, contrast. They all are regarding and based upon this simple verse: ***"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*** Each one of the test is and/or; it's not both. ***If this is true of you, then so is this; If this is true of you, then so is that.*** It's not: If this is true of you, then that's not true of you. It's: ***If this, than that.*** You see that constant variable going through his letter. Look at how many times he says "if" conditional statements. These are statements that are calling us to test whether we are in the faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5: *"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not know that the spirit of Christ is in you?—unless of course you fail the test!* The test of faith, if you want to really see a good place to test of faith, go to 1 John. There are about 40 of them. It has everything in there from denying that the incarnation-the truth isn't in you; denying that you ever sinned- the truth isn't in you; denying that you ever had a sin-the truth isn't in you. There's this great series of tests. One of them says: If you love God and hate your brother-the truth isn't in you. So it constantly is pointing us to the fruit and way, and activity and behavior patterns, that should be true of God's people.

What John is doing here in verses 6 & 7 are very similar, they're companions. Verses 8 & 10 are obviously very similar. So verse 6 is negative, verse 7 is positive. So you can't draw out one verse from a book of the bible and make a doctrine on one verse. You must take that whole book and context of what does it mean to its original hearers, and measure it and let the rest of the bible interpret it. You interpret scripture with scripture. You don't interpret scripture with man's wisdom or what people think. You interpret the word by the word.

Let's look specifically at Verse 6:

VERSE 6

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Now remember the Gnostic's mindset. The gnostic is saying, *"I am in fellowship with the Lord but it doesn't matter what I do with my flesh because sin is just an illusion, the flesh is evil and it doesn't*

matter, Jesus didn't come in the flesh so he couldn't have been crucified. It just doesn't matter but I'm in fellowship with the Lord." John says, "If you say you have fellowship while you walk in the darkness, you lie and you don't practice the truth."

As a matter of fact, I want to bring back from last week, fellowship is not something that has to do with sanctification. Fellowship is something that has to do with salvation. You are either in fellowship with the Lord or you are not. I couldn't find one single instance in scripture where fellowship is used of a believer of God where it says that can be lost, that is in jeopardy, that can be severed, that can be hindered by people's sin. Never.

It says in **1 Corinthians 1:9** **"God is faithful, (not "you" are faithful) by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."** It is God who has put you into fellowship with himself. Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful for he cannot disown himself. So God doesn't kick you in and out of fellowship. You are either saved or you're not. You are either in fellowship with the Lord, or you're not. You are in fellowship with the Lord, not on the basis of what you have done or can do; you are in fellowship with the Lord on the basis of what he has done already. That is a gift. Not of works, so that no one would boast. It is God's grace that saves you. Saving you isn't just wiping the slate clean and its saying, *"Now show me what you got."* Saving you is justifying you. Saving you is committing to sanctify you. Saving you is forgiving you of all your sin. Saving you is putting you in God's family. Saving you is setting is love upon you. Saving you is adopting you into his family. Saving you is changing everything about the old you and making you a new man, a new woman in Christ. If anyone is a new man in Christ they are a new creation. The old is passed away. All things become new and there is therefore no condemnation on you. Ever. Not in-and-out; in-and-out. You are in fellowship or you are not. Fellowship is a salvation issue.



It says right here in verse 6, **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie."** So walking in the light or walking in darkness in this passage here is not referring to how you are walking. It is referring to where you are walking. So again you don't let extra-biblical passages or extra-biblical thought interpret the bible for us. We interpret scripture with scripture. Walking in the light is a description of the salvation relationship. It is not a description of how you are behaving.

We've got three verses here. We are going to let the bible interpret for us what it means to walk in the light and contrast light and dark so we can see what John would be saying.

- 1) **Acts 26:18:** *"To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins."* Constantly in the word of God you are going to see this mindset. You're going to see a darkness and light contrasted with each other. Often in that you're going to see that tied to the forgiveness of sin. Particularly in Acts here you see it tied to the difference between being under the power of God or under the power of Satan. A person who is under the power of Satan would be an unbeliever. A person who is under the power of God would be a believer. It says **"their eyes would be open, that they would turn from darkness to light."** This is a salvation issue. It's not a behavior issue. We hear so often that when you walk in the light it means you are behaving. When you walk in darkness it means you are out of fellowship with the Lord. That is not what **1 John** teaches at all. What **1 John** is teaching is that if a person is gravitating towards gnostic heresy and hasn't come to faith in Christ because they don't believe in sin, then they deceive themselves and they have no truth. Then they need to come to faith.

- 2) **Colossians 1:12-14:** *"¹² Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* So that transference from darkness to light is indicative of redemption of being saved, or being taken from under the control and power of Satan to be redeemed, to being forgiven, to being put into God's household. That's the mindset of when scripture is talking about darkness and light. Do you remember when Jesus said, **"You refuse to come to the light because your deeds are evil because men love darkness rather than light."** Jesus himself clarifies, "I'm not just talking about how somebody behaves. I'm talking about not how they walk; I'm talking about where they walk. Are you walking in the world because you are a worldling or are you walking with the Lord because you are redeemed?" That's the difference between dark and light.

- 3) **1 Thessalonians 5:5:** *"⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness."* I can't imagine it being any clearer than that.

VERSE 7

"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 cleanses us from all sin. Now follow, the emphasis on this verse is not how we walk, it is where we walk. I want you to look very closely. Walking in the light can include sin. You see that, it's very clear. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, by doing that the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from sin. So part of walking in the light would include stumbling. So again it's not how you walk, it's where you walk. Are you walking with the Lord or are you walking with the devil? Are you in darkness, meaning you haven't been saved, or are you in light, having been redeemed? It's not

anything other than that. It's not saying, "*Well, if you're a Christian and you are messing up, you are walking in darkness and you're backslidden.*" It's not what this means at all. It is John trying to bring truth and light to people who are in darkness who think they have a relationship with the Lord and really don't because they are denying everything that they need to agree with the Lord about. A man can't be saved if he doesn't admit that he sinned. A man can't be saved if he doesn't turn from it. A man can't be saved if he doesn't believe that Jesus is the only way. A man can't be saved if he doesn't believe that Jesus Christ was God incarnate. Those are things that you must believe in order to be saved.

How would a person believe such a thing? He would only believe such a thing if he knew it from the word of God. We'll see in:

VERSE 8

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Now this verse is certainly not speaking of a Christian. There isn't a Christian I know who would ever make such an outlandish claim to say that they've never sinned. Nobody would say that. Who would say that? A gnostic who says there is no such thing as sin. Sin is an illusion. A Christian Scientist – the same thing. Those are the kind of people who would say that evil doesn't exist, it's a figment of your imagination, and there is no such thing as sin. The gnostic in John's audience would say, "*Well, that's what I say.*" You can't confuse because John says the word "we" that he is including himself in the text here. Certainly he is not saying, "*I John, the Apostle, believe I never committed a sin.*" He would never say that. Why does he use the term "we"? I think it is probably one of those things that you want to have interaction with the people and so you include yourself. So if one of the pastors got up here and says, "*If we keep on getting drunk, we are not going to be able to walk with the Lord the way we should.*" He's not confessing that he is an alcoholic. He's just making a statement saying "we" or anybody in our congregation that would say that would be having a difficult time. John is saying the same thing. He's not saying, "*I'm including myself and those who deny sin.*" We know that's not true of John. So John isn't saying that that is his stance. He's saying, "***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.***" So no Christian would ever make that claim especially considering that the text clearly states that the truth is what? ***Jesus is the way, the truth and life*** is not in that person. Who is a person who does not have Jesus Christ? Who is a person that does not have the truth? An unbeliever. Do you not know that the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, unless of course you fail the test? It's very clear that **1 John 1:8** is not speaking of a Christian. It's speaking of a gnostic.

VERSE 10

Same is true of **1 John 1:10** ¹⁰ ***If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word has no place in our life.*** Again, what kind of a Christian would make that outrageous claim, "I've never committed a sin." Nobody. Look what it says here. What's true of them is the word has no place in their life. So the truth, Christ is not in them, and his word has no place in their life. Anybody who says they are a Christian, who doesn't have an experience with Jesus Christ with his spirit reigning in you and has no place for the word of God in their life, would better seriously check their relationship

that they think that they have. If you have no place for the word and Jesus being the incarnate word in your life, that person can't claim to be a person of faith, can they? This passage isn't speaking of a Christian in either of these verses. The passage is speaking both of these verses are poignantly aimed towards gnostic.

So because that's the case in the middle of that we have 1 John 1:9. It is also a test of faith. It's a test to see whether or not certain things are true of you. Let's look at this verse closely. It is sandwiched between two gnostic challenges. Two attacks against the gnostic heresy - a person who says they never sinned; a person who says they don't sin. So those two thoughts have this verse between them.

VERSE 9

1 John 1:9 ^{ab} If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness Confess here does not mean list your sins out to God. That's an ecclesiastical meaning that some dictionaries bring into the text, but that's not what the original word means and it's not what it meant to the original hearers. Confess simply means this: It's *homologeō* which means "say the same thing." So the context of our passage, those verses in John, is sin. It's do you have any or do you say that you don't. Have you ever sinned or you say that you never have? In that passage and in this verse it's talking about sin. So it's you are saying you must agree, you must say the same thing about sin. So the context is sin. So the word means to "say the same thing". It doesn't mean to list specific sins and throw them out to the Lord to be forgiven. It means you "say the same thing". But you "say the same thing" as who? You say the same thing as the Lord. It's not you say what everybody else says, you say the same thing as God says. It means you are coming to an agreement with God concerning sin. Now remember their heresy was they said they didn't have any. They say they never committed any, they say it doesn't exist. Is that in sync with what God says about sin? Of course not.

God says such outrageous statements about sin like this: ***The wages of sin is death. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** God brings up the fact that everybody is a sinner and that everybody falls short of his glory and that the penalty of those sins is death and that will separate people eternally from God and thus they have no fellowship with God. So if you wipe that out and say, "*No, I have fellowship with God and I ignore all those things*", then you are just as guilty as the gnostic and then this verse does apply to you. People ask if it a Christian verse or is it not for Christian? The answer to that is simply, "*Yes and no.*"

You must come into agreement with the Lord. As a Christian are you forgiven of your sin? Yes. Let's put this verse in the negative first and see if it applies to us post- conversion.

IN THE NEGATIVE



If we are not confessing our sin he is not faithful and righteous to forgive us our sin nor to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The end result of that would be that not confessing means not being forgiven. That's an issue, isn't it? It's a conditional forgiveness predicated upon my doing something. That adds to the process of God saving me because if I'm forgiven by Christ and then I'm not forgiven now I've got to do something to be forgiven again. That goes against the clear teaching of scripture everywhere else. So that can't mean that because it makes it conditional. So if a person is a Christian and they are not confessing their sins, if I take this verse by itself then that means I am not forgiven. A person who is not forgiven of his sins is not a Christian. A person who is not forgiven of his sins is an unbeliever. A person who isn't forgiven of his sins is a person who has never come to agreement with God about sin. So let's keep that in mind.

The word confess again means to agree with or to say the same thing. Confess is in the present tense. It means that there is a mindset here. **1 John 1:9** is written that there is a mindset - that the person if (conditional). If a person comes to a specific mindset and says the same thing that God says about sin – then God will be faithful and just to forgive that person of all of their sin, and all unrighteousness.

The first part of the verse 9 describes a person who recognizes his own sin and comes to agreement. That sin deserves eternal separation, those sins deserve condemnation, those sins have separated me from God, and God would be just to punish me eternally for those sins. That's agreeing with what God says about sin. So that means I'm deserving of the death penalty and if I come into consensus with God about that, that if I agree with God on that, then the rest of this verse will be true .

The second part of this verse 9 gives a spiritual fact that's predicated upon the first part of the verse being true.

There are two actions here for forgiving sin and cleansing unrighteousness. There are two verbs: CLEANSE AND FORGIVE. They are in the aorist tense. Something happened but the mood is different. The mood on this is conditional; it's on the basis of confession or agreement. It's what's called a subjunctive mood. It means that most-likely these things are going to be true if agreement takes place. If agreement takes place, if any person comes into agreement, then this will be true of them. So this is a condition that's tied to the agreeing. So another words, if you are not agreeing, if you haven't come into agreement with God, then the sins are still on you. If you don't say the same thing about sin that God does, your sins are still on you.

So is this something that's true for a believer post-conversion or is this John's appeal and plea for somebody to abandon this gnostic belief and come to faith? Are you a person that says the same thing about sin that God does? If you have said the same thing about God, if you have turned from sin, then you have already done **1 John 1:9** and you don't need to do it anymore. You have come into agreement with God's thoughts on sin. You have turned from them and God has been just to forgive

you your sin. So the walking in the light, the walking with the Lord, is evidence not the cause that you are a person for whom forgiveness is true. In other words, John's plea here, this verse, is not the Lord has forgiven you, now it's up to you to keep yourself forgiven. John's plea is if you are denying sin, if you won't admit it, if you won't own it, if you won't turn from it, if you say that Jesus isn't the only way, if you are not coming into agreement that there is only one sacrifice for sin, then the truth is not in you and the word has no place in your life. But if you come into agreement with the Lord about what the Lord has said about sin, then God will be faithful and just to forgive you of your sin.

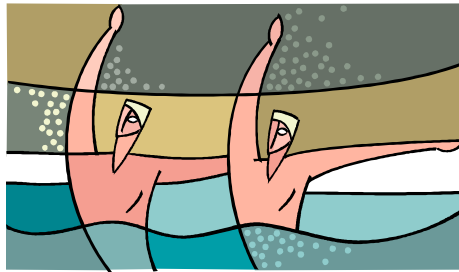
Look at what the rest of the verse says "**to cleanse you from all unrighteousness**". Now let me ask you this, if you have ever come into agreement with the Lord and you have done what **1 John** says here, you have agreed with him about sin and God has forgiven you of all of your sin, and he has cleansed you from all unrighteousness, how much is left? None. Think about it. If you went and followed this verse one time and God forgave you all your sin and cleansed you from all unrighteousness, how much unrighteousness is left? None. That's the point of this text.

Verse 9 is an invitation from the people that are experiencing counterfeit fellowship to come into the real fellowship of the Lord. It's people that who have previously denied the sacrifice of Christ, have denied the incarnation, have denied sin, have denied everything that the Lord has told them, they have denied it, they have shipwrecked it, they have subverted it, and it's a call to say, "*Look, that mindset – turn from it. The word of God had no place in your life when you thought that way. The Spirit of God had no work in your life when you were that way.*" But if you agree with the truth, if you agree that God is light, if you agree that in him is no darkness, if you agree that he will transform you from sinner to saint, if you agree that your sin has separated you from God, if you agree that the wages is death, if you agree that there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ and none other and there is no other name given by men among which we can be saved, and if you turn from that you will live. And he will cleanse you of all your unrighteousness. To say that a believer has to keep on confessing for forgiveness is to make forgiveness contingent upon their on-going confession and it removes the atoning work of Jesus Christ from your life. It's a very serious matter.

Let's look at what John continues in his book. If 1 John 1:9 were addressed to the believing Christian post-conversion, it would contradict what John says just a few verses later.

1 John 2:12: ⁴² *I am writing to you, little children* (He's speaking to a believer. He's not referring to kids, he's referring to babes in the Lord) **because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.** Here we have the tense again. The perfect tense completed with present results, indefinite into the future. The indicative mood. Same as Ephesians 4:32. This state is certain, this state will be eternally realized, and this state is unchangeable.

JOHN AND PAUL IN SYNC



John is saying the exact same thing that Paul said to the Ephesian church in chapter 4. So **1 John 1:9** cannot mean it's something else that's required. It has to be an evangelistic verse because he goes on to say that if you are in Christ then you are forgiven. Completely forgiven. John isn't having multiple personality disorder; he is giving the same truth that Paul already gave. He is not out of sync with Paul. They are completely in sync; they are teaching the same thing. He is just saying if you previously didn't come to consensus and agreement with God about sin, you need to, and if you do he will forgive you of all unrighteousness and then this verse 12 will be true of you and he has forgiven you of all your sin. It's very simple but to take that out of context and use it to beat somebody down and say, "*You have to keep a short account with God*" really diminishes and devalues the sacrifice and the atoning work of Jesus Christ where he said "**It is finished.**" It pulls the heart out of your sins and lawless deeds, **I remember no more.** It focuses you on your behavior and your deeds so that you will find favor with God instead of what Jesus has done alone. It transforms grace into works. It pulls away the simplicity and the joy of walking with him by faith. God wants his people to rest in his finished work, not constantly looking at what you can do to improve it. That's the truth of the word.

So what am I supposed to do when I sin? Simply this – repent. Turn from it. I'm sure God is excited when we say, "*You know what Lord, that was wrong. I don't want to do it anymore. Help me to walk with you.*" But to keep going back and saying, "*God, I pray that you would forgive that and this and that other thing and I'm trying to think if there is anything else.*" The Lord would simply say, "*Look, I have forgiven you. Now act and behave as you really are – forgiven.*" You function and change from position of strength, not weakness. You never change from position of weakness. You never change where you are like, "*I have to change because I am so bad.*" You change because you say, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for me in Jesus Christ and I can risk walking by faith because I know that my relationship with him is secure because I know that I have been forgiven.*"

So shall I keep on sinning because I understand I have been completely forgiven? Let me paraphrase Chapter 6 of Romans for you, compressed into a few verses: **Shall I keep on sinning because I understand that I have been forgiven so that grace will abound because God will look really good if grace keeps abounding.**

His answer by no means, “We died to sin how shall we live in it any longer. We should no longer be a slave to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. In the same way count yourself as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace.”

Think about it. How many of us have been living under the teaching of asking for forgiveness? How many of us that have had that have actually had our lives changed? As a matter of fact, I would say how many of us living under that system have been constantly pushed away from the Lord? Feeling that we were too unworthy to come back? Feeling that because we have messed up we needed to do a certain amount of good deeds so that God would see that we were serious this time about wanting to walk with him? Trying and striving in our flesh only to get nowhere? And having people say, “*You just need to confess your sin more*” and never, ever finding that we felt like we experienced the love of God as we did when we first got saved? Something happened along the way. What happened along the way was somebody came in and usurped the simplicity of walking with the Lord by faith. Over the last 50 hundred years ministers having intentionally, I believe, tried to control their people with, “*If we tell people they are free in Christ, they won’t come. We’ve got to keep them guilty so they do stuff.*” It has manifest constant rotten fruit. When a person is free, if the Son sets you free you are free indeed. If your sins have been forgiven then there is no longer a sacrifice for sin. Be joyful. God is pleased with you but it’s not because of you. He’s pleased with you because he sees the righteousness of His Son. He sees perfection when he looks at his people. He sees the righteous obedience of the only one who has ever been righteous or obedient. That has been given to you and you cannot improve it and your stumbling cannot remove it because it was never hinged or predicated upon you in the first place. It was only ever by God’s grace. If it is by grace then it is not of works. If it is by grace then there is no boasting except ***let he who boasts, boast in the Lord.*** God’s desire is to fuel worship and passion from his people by setting them free. Shame on anybody who would heap a yoke of bondage back on them.

1 John 1:9 is a call, a plea, to somebody who has never come to consensus with what God has said about sin so that they would be forgiven and that they would be saved. If that takes place then **1 John 2:12** would be true of them – ***Your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.*** I want you to see that John doesn’t say, “Your sins are forgiven because you have confessed them all.” He says “Your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake”. Over the years all of us have seen many, many, people shipwreck their faith because they combined Old Covenant Law, confession booth, with New Testament grace never understanding the forgiveness and completeness of what they have in Christ. It has diverted them from keeping their eyes fixed upon him and being joyful and passionate and it turned their eyes inwardly and frustrated them with their behavior and it caused them to just pull themselves out. We’ve seen it over and over and over again.

So what do we do if we sin? We repent. **1 John 2:1-2: “*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 for our sins.*”** The freedom that came to me when I finally realized that I didn’t have this massive pile of sin, before piling up infinitely before me, after I came to faith in Christ, was so freeing I can’t even begin to tell you.

Verse 7, "If we walk in the light, if we walk with him, the blood of Christ continually cleanses from each and every sin." Before that sin even hits you, it is forgiven. It doesn't pile up. It's not God saying, "Now you are stacking up another massive debt to me." It's saying, "You walk with the Lord and you are forgiven." *What if I sin tomorrow? You mean when you sin tomorrow? It's forgiven. What about when you sin on our way home? It's forgiven. What about the sin I commit when I do things that I don't even know? It's forgiven. Why is it forgiven? Is it because I remembered to confess it all? It's forgiven for his name sake so that God receives the glory that he is due, so that God receives the honor that he is due, that salvation becomes something that God's people actually can rejoice in because it is not predicated upon them."*

The last verse I have for you is a very strong passage from the Book of Hebrews. If you saw the power outage and you weren't excited saying, "Maybe this is the day the Lord is coming" and fear gripped your heart, it's probably because you are feeling guilty. If you are like, "Man, I'm not really a person of passionate prayer", it's probably because you are feeling guilty. If you are thinking that one day you'll stand before the Lord but that day brings terror to you instead of comfort, it's probably because you are feeling guilty. The reason you are feeling guilty is because people throw **1 John 1:9** at you for the longest time instead of giving you the context that you'll understand it was a passionate plea for somebody to come to faith. You never rested in the finished work of Jesus. You thought that he started it and now you have to maintain it or finish it. Your sin doesn't separate you from God, your sin doesn't break fellowship with God, your sin doesn't cause you to be unsaved from God, and your sin doesn't cause anything other than the chastisement that God will give you because he loves you. Don't be deceived, God is not mocked. Our sin may still give us consequence, God may still spank us, but our relationship with God is just as firm if we read the word every day and pray 10 hours a day, than if we stumble walking out our door because it's based upon him.

Look at the passionate plea to the writer and he writes to the people in the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:19-22: ¹⁹ *Having therefore, brethren, boldness* (Boldness is a result of confidence. Confidence is a result of truth. If you are not bold, it's probably because you are lacking a little bit of it on the truth side because you've got a little bit of truth with a little bit of air and it's not making you bold) *to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;* ²¹ *and [having] a great priest over the house of God;* (Now here it is. Your boldness is based on his work, an understanding of his work) ²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water."*

You see God's heart here. God's heart here is that you would come boldly to the throne of grace and you can only come boldly if you know you're going to be received. If you don't think you are going to be received, you are going to be timid. But if you come boldly, you come saying, "I don't come in my righteousness, I come in the righteousness of my savior and I know he will never be turned away. I know that you hear all of his prayers therefore you will hear all of mine because I come through him. I come to your throne of grace that I might find grace to help in my time of need because he always intercedes for me and you never turn him away and you never turn him down and I stand before you forgiven in him and because of him

I can come. So I come boldly.” And the Father says, “That’s the kind of faith that honors me. That’s the kind of faith that believes what I’ve said.”

I think it would really do us a great service if we just simply receive what God has said and take it for what he says. If you are a Christian, you’ve been forgiven of all of your sin – past, present and future. It will never stain you, it will never separate you from God, and it will never cause condemnation for you. You will be before him without wrinkle or spot, shining like the Son, because of what Jesus has done. If you are in our mist today and you have never come into agreement with what God has said about sin, then you are not in fellowship with the Lord regardless of what anybody has told you. If you say, *“I’ve never sinned”* or *“I don’t do bad things”*, scripture says **“You deceive yourself and the truth isn’t in you”** and his word has no place in your life. But if you come into agreement with what God says in his word about sin, God will forgive you of your sin and he will cleanse you from all unrighteousness and then you will be walking in the light even if you stumble, because it’s where you walk, not how you are walking. Are you walking with the Lord or are you walking in the world? God’s heart is that you would walk in the light.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you so much for your word today. Thank you for the absolute, complete, forgiveness we have in your beautiful Son. I pray, Father, that the truth would somehow set us all free. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, I will ask very quickly, is there anybody here today who would say, “I have never come to agreement with God about sin and I have never bought the truth of His word and believe that I too have fallen short of the glory of God. I too have sinned and fallen short of His glory. I too have missed His mark of perfection.” With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, is there anybody today who would like to say, “I would like to come in agreement with what God has said and receive Jesus Christ as my Savior to forgive me of all of my sin” and by doing so you will be transformed from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. He will save you; he will redeem you and your sins and lawless deeds he will remember no more. That is the deal that I cannot even begin to tell you how great it is because if he doesn’t pay for your sin you will have to pay for them yourself. So with your head bowed and your eyes closed, is there anybody here today who would say, “Please, I would like that to be true of me”. Just raise up your hand and look up at me and we’ll pray together. Is there anybody at all? Alright. For the rest of us I would just challenge you with this thought: Do not call unclean what the Lord has cleansed. God bless you guys as the saints of God. Amen