

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Certainty of Sin, Part 1

Scripture: 1 John 1:5-2:1

Code: 62-4

Tonight we are returning to our study of 1 John, and again thank you so much for the appetite that you demonstrate for the truth of God. It was many, many years ago that I taught 1 John, many, many years ago and I was able in my youth, I was probably barely 30 years old when I first taught through 1 John, and I went through fairly fast and not having the depth of understanding that the years have brought to me and so we're going to be going through this book a little bit slower than we did those many years ago, 30 years ago. But we come to a section of 1 John that is in chapter 1 and runs from verse 5 down through the first line of verse 1 in chapter 2. Let me read that text for you.

"And this is the message we have heard from Him and announced to you that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The dominant word in the paragraph that I just read you and it concludes down in chapter 2 verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin," is the word sin...is the word that appears most frequently in this passage. We're struck by the metaphors of darkness and light, but the word that is clear to us is the word "sin." This is a section about sin.

We could actually title this section, "The certainty of sin...The certainty of sin." Or we could title it, "Confession of sin, a certain evidence of salvation," and maybe that's a better title. Confession of sin, a certain evidence of salvation. John began the epistle in the first four verses with the certainty of the incarnation. You remember those wonderful verses, the verses concerning the eternal life, the word of life, the Son, Jesus Christ, the one whom God manifest, the one to whom John bore witness, the word of life, the certain incarnation.

And in continuing this presentation of certainties, he deals now with the certainty of sin which needed the incarnate one to come and to be the sin bearer. If one is a true Christian, he recognizes the reality of the incarnation, he also recognizes the reality of his sin. And so does John without any fanfare, without any preliminaries, without any greeting at all, leap full force into the issues of certainty. Certain of the incarnate word of life and certain of the reality of sin.

By way of introduction before we dig into this, pastors are shepherds whose responsibility includes protection. A vital part of our duty is to warn people. A vital part of our duty is to protect you from wolves in sheep's clothing, as Jesus put it, to protect you from those who would harm you as we remember in the twentieth chapter of Acts Paul said, "He didn't stop warning the Ephesians night and day with tears for three years because he knew that after his departure grievous wolves would come in not sparing the flock and of their own flock certain perverse teachers would rise up to lead them astray." Watching and warning is an essential part of ministry.

The apostle Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 1 said to young Timothy, "Retain the standard of sound words which you've heard from me and the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you because you are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me." There has been a serious defection from me from the truth. Timothy, you have a guardianship, you are entrusted with a responsibility to retain the truth and to protect it. Back at the end of 1 Timothy he had said in verse 20 of chapter 6, "Guard what has been entrusted to you, avoid worldly empty chatter, the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith."

So there is granted to pastors, all pastors a guardianship. We are protectors of the flock. And that is the attitude with which John writes. John is protecting the faithful. He is protecting them from error by rehearsing and reiterating the truth. He desires to keep them safe in the truth, the truth about the Word of life, the truth about sin, and the truth about everything else that he brings up in this letter. He is acting as a protector protecting the truth which will guard his people.

Turn for a moment to 2 John, the brief little epistle that follows this one, and I want you to understand what drives the heart of John. As I told you, he's black and white, he deals in certainties, and I want you to understand why. Second John opens with these words, "The elder," referring to himself, I told you he doesn't like to use his own name so he finds another way to identify himself, "The elder to the chosen lady and her children," that's the church, "whom I love in truth and not only I but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever." Three times in his opening two statements he refers to the centrality of the truth. I love in the truth, not only I but all who know the truth for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever. Down in verse 4, "I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment to do from the Father." For John, everything is about truth.

Turn the page to the third epistle of John and look at verse 3, "For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is how you are walking in truth, I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

Down in verse 8, "We ought to support such men that we may be fellow workers with the truth." What men? Verse 7, "Those who went out for the sake of the name." Those who went out to proclaim the name of Jesus. We want to support them so that we can be fellow partakers with the truth. I mean, it only takes the reading of the opening statements in those two epistles to understand what drove John. It was about the truth. I understand that. I guess if anything have that heart that John had. I have no greater joy than to know that you walk in the truth, that the people of God walk in the truth. I am truth-driven, I am not success-driven, I'm not style-driven, I'm truth-driven, that is what controls, compels, motivates everything I do, studying the Bible, never to make a sermon or to make a speech but always to discern the truth. Jesus said we aren't free until we find the truth and then the truth sets us free.

Now anybody who is passionate for the truth is also passionately set against error. Go back to 2 John one more time and look at verse 9...well, verse 7, we'll start there. "For many deceivers have gone out into the world. The end of the verse, he refers to the deceiver and the antichrist. And then in verse 9 he describes such, "Anyone who goes beyond doesn't abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. The one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and doesn't bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, do not give him a greeting for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." If you run into somebody who is teaching contrary to the truth, have nothing to do with that person. Don't invite him into your house. Don't greet him. Stay away. That is deadly stuff.

And then if you'll go back to 3 John, another time, come down to verse 9, "I wrote something to the church but Diotrephes loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say, doesn't accept apostolic truth, for this reason if I come I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." He says when I get there I'm going to deal with that guy who doesn't listen to the truth. Now this is the heart of a pastor.

As all faithful pastors do, John is totally devoted to the truth. He seeks to teach his people the truth and to protect them from those who threaten the truth. In protecting the church from the intrusion of false teachers, deceivers and antichrists, he must know sound doctrine, he must teach that doctrine and then he must provide tests by which true believers can be distinguished from the false. The first and the starting point, the first place and the starting point to protect a church is to determine who is a true Christian. You'll never be able to protect a church from lies and deceptions, from the influence of antichrist teaching, from false teachers if you can't distinguish who's a real Christian and who is not. If you can distinguish that, you've made great strides in the determination of who is a true teacher if

you know who is a true Christian. This is essential to the church's protection. And that's why I've chosen to do this series in 1 John because the church is utterly unprotected today. It is being scandalized by its tolerances, by its inclusiveness. It is kicking the door wide open and embracing anybody and everybody in the name of love and tolerance and openness.

Consequently it has no will to distinguish. It has no will to discern. And that's why eight years ago I wrote a book called Reckless Faith, subtitled, "When the church loses its will to discern." And I've watched in the eight years intervening, nothing has changed that I wrote in that book. Everything I said was going to happen eight years ago, I'm watching happen before my eyes. When the church loses its will to discern and when it will no longer distinguish the true from the false Christian, it will no longer therefore be able to distinguish the true theology from the false theology. In the book I expressed the obvious fact that doctrinal clarity, doctrinal certainty and doctrinal conviction are critical to the church. And those very things have been weakened in the church. And even on the issue of salvation as I've noted to you many times. The new and inclusive evangelicalism wants to make everybody a Christian, everybody, not just those who name the name of Christ, but people who don't even know about Jesus Christ but who are trying to do their best somewhere in the world. That just opens the church up to its non-discriminating self-destruction.

John, however, understood that as much as possible, deceivers must be identified. Some will be too subtle, there will be some tares growing along the wheat that even we can't distinguish. But as much as possible, deceivers must be identified. False teachers must be identified. Antichrists must be identified. And that is done initially by identifying who is a true believer because if you have a true believer, he's not going to be espousing a false gospel. And so, in the letter of 1 John, you can go back to the beginning of 1 John if you're not already there, in the letter called 1 John, John provides tests by which the church can determine who is a true believer. There is the objective test of doctrine and there are the subjective tests of morality and love. The doctrinal test, the moral test and the relational test. And John moves between these and spirals around them repeatedly throughout this epistle. And in providing the church these tests, he provides the means by which a person can assess his own spiritual condition, a means by which the church can assess someone's spiritual condition and therefore this can be beneficial to the believer because if you pass the test, it gives you assurance of your salvation. And it's beneficial to the church because those who pass the tests then are known to represent the truth. Those who don't are the potential danger to the church.

It is true, John has the goal of making our joy full, making our lives holy and righteous, avoiding sin. And as he says in chapter 5 verse 13 of giving us the assurance that we may know that we have eternal life. There is a personal benefit to this epistle. It's going to lead you to your assurance. It's going to lead you to greater holiness. It's going to lead you to full joy. But at the same time there is another benefit and that is we begin to have the criteria by which we can evaluate who is a real Christian and therefore we can know who the false teachers are.

Now the first test, the first test of genuineness is the test of one's perspective on sin...the test of one's perspective on sin. And if you were here this morning, or if you've been here in the past, you know that it is clear in the Bible that somebody who is truly converted before they ever come to ever genuinely embrace the gospel have a genuinely accurate assessment of their own sinful condition, right? What we were saying this morning. You can't understand grace if you don't understand Law. You can't understand forgiveness if you don't understand sin. You can't understand what it means to be set free from condemnation unless you understand condemnation. You have no grip on the seriousness of your condition in judgment until you've understood the doctrine of eternal punishment and that's what frees you up to the joys of understanding what it means to be delivered from that and have the promise of eternal life in heaven. Regenerated people confess their sin readily. That's what I just showed you in the passage. "If you say you have fellowship with Him, but you walk in darkness, you're a liar. If you walk in light as He's in the light, you have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son is cleansing you from your sin. If you say you have no sin, you're deceiving yourself." On the other hand, "If you confess your sin, you demonstrate to be one of those being forgiven. If you say you've never sinned, you make God a liar and we know His Word isn't in you."

So the first test by which we can measure whether a person is a genuine Christian and therefore we can smoke out the potential false teachers, deceivers, and antichrists is their attitude toward sin. Simply stated, regenerated people confess their sin as a pattern of life. Unregenerated people tend to conceal their sin, the seriousness of it. Since the gospel is about the forgiveness of sin, that's an appropriate place to start.

Now I want to talk to you a little bit about confession. I want to borrow the phrase at the beginning of verse 9, "If we confess our sins, then we are the ones that He is faithful and righteous to forgive and to cleanse." If we confess our sins. The confession of sin is absolutely basic to salvation. And yet again there are people who teach that you don't have to confess your sins to be saved. You don't have to confess your sins to be saved. All you have to do is believe in Jesus. How wrong that is. That particular error continues to rear its ugly head even after we have endeavored to deal with it in the past in the books I wrote called The Gospel According to Jesus and The Gospel According to the Apostles.

Scripture, on the other hand, has an amazing record of confessions, amazing record. Genesis 41:9, "Then spoke the chief butler to Pharaoh, I do remember my sins this day." Genesis 44:16, "So Judah said to the Lord, 'What can we say? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out our sins.'" In Exodus 9:27 Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I have sinned this time." Exodus 10:16, Pharaoh said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God." First

Samuel 15:24, "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, I have truly transgressed the command of the Lord.'" First Chronicles 21:17, David said to God, "I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly." Isaiah chapter 6 verse 5, "The prophet says, 'I'm a man of unclean lips, I dwell among a people of unclean lips.'" I think familiar in particular with some of the Psalms, particularly in Psalm 32 where David pours out a prayer of confession. "I acknowledge...verse 5...my sin to Thee, my iniquity I did not hide, I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." The Bible is literally filled with such confessions.

Psalm 38, the psalmist prays in verse 1, "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath and chasten me not in Thy burning anger, Thy arrows have sunk deep into me, Thy hand has pressed down on me, there's no soundness in my flesh because of Thine indignation. There's no health in my bones because of my sin. For my sins are gone over my head, they're like a flood. As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow and foul and fester because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down, I go mourning all day long, my loins are filled with burning, there's no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed. I groan because of the agitation of my heart." This is a heavy, heavy weight of sin. Down in verse 18 of that same Psalm 38, "I confess my iniquity, I am full of anxiety because of my sin." Psalm 40 verse 12, "Evils have beyond number surrounded me, my iniquities have overtaken me so that I am not able to see. They are more numerous than the hairs of my head and my heart has filled me." There again is a psalm of David in which he is literally devastated by his sin.

As if that's not enough, the next Psalm, Psalm 41 verse 4, "As for me, I said, 'Lord, be gracious to me, heal my soul for I have sinned against You.'" Then there is that great Psalm 51 which I won't read. All of those are confessions of sin. And while some people might think who approach these things psychologically, this is very unhealthy, lack of self-esteem, that this is a way to sort of crush your psyche. The truth of the matter is these are wholesome, healthy, accurate and honest acknowledgments of one's true condition.

Daniel, that great man of God, to be numbered with a handful of truly godly men in the Old Testament says in chapter 9 and verse 20, "I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin," as if that were a regular pattern of life for him. Indeed it was. In Luke 5:8 Peter himself said to the Lord, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." It was the prodigal in Luke 15:18 who said, "I will get up and go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.'" It was the tax collector in Luke 18 verse 13 beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." It was Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15 saying, "It's a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am chief." These are great statements. Great statements of confession and we are called to such recognition of our sinfulness. This is basic to a true understanding of one's condition.

I want you to turn to a passage along this line back in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Joshua...the book immediately after the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, Joshua chapter 7. I want to point out an incident here and a statement that is very, very important for us to understand. You have in chapter 7 of Joshua a tragic event in the life of Israel. Israel had wandered 40 years in the wilderness. Now it was time to enter the promised land and Joshua was leading his people. They came in chapter 7 after having a great victory in Jericho, you'll remember. They came to the town of Ai, A-i, and they were defeated. They were soundly defeated. Verse 6 of chapter 7, Joshua tore his clothes. This is a sign of grief. He fell to the earth on his face before the Ark of the Lord until evening. Both he and the elders of Israel put dust on their head. This is a recognition of their humiliation. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why didst Thou ever bring this people over the Jordan only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan." If we hadn't ever tried to invade Canaan, we wouldn't be having this trouble. "Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? This people has turned and fled for the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and they'll surround us and cut off our name from the earth." We're going to be literally obliterated by these people once they hear that we were defeated here. So the Lord said to Joshua, "Rise up, get up, why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, that's the problem. They've also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them, they've even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived."

Now you remember when they went in and took Jericho, what did the Lord tell them? "You can't take any spoil," right? You cannot take any spoil. This cannot degenerate into looting. Can't do that. This is not about that. This is a spiritual mission of judgment. But, as we remember, they didn't obey that. They had taken some of the things under the ban. "They've stolen and deceived, moreover they also put them among their own things, therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst. So rise up, consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, we're going to come before the Lord. There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel, you can't stand before your enemies until you've removed the things under the ban from your midst. In the morning you shall come near by your tribes, it will be that the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by families and the family which the Lord takes shall come near by households and the household which the Lord takes shall near man by man.'" We're going to start with the whole group and God is going to show us little by little who the man is. "And it shall be that one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him because he's transgressed the covenant of the Lord, because he's committed a disgraceful thing in Israel."

"Joshua then arose...verse 16...early in the morning, brought Israel near by tribes, the tribe of Judah was taken. God pointed to the tribe of Judah in some fashion. He brought the family of Judah near. He took the family of Zerahites, he brought the family of the Zerahites near man by man and Zabdi was taken. He brought his household near man by man and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, so of Zerah from the tribe of Judah was taken." God identifies Achan as the man.

Now we come to verse 19, I want you to notice how this is stated. "Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord the God of Israel and give praise to Him.'" What was he telling him, sing a tune? Sing a praise chorus and you'll be off the hook? Worship God some way and you'll be okay? No, he says, "I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, give praise to Him and here's how, 'Tell me what you've done. Confess your sin. Do not hide it from me.'"

The way you glorify God is to confess your sin. How in the world does that glorify God? God, I just want to glorify You by confessing my sin. If you really wanted to glorify God you wouldn't have sinned in the first place, right? If you wanted to glorify God you would have obeyed and kept His Word. What do you mean glorify God by confessing your sin?

Well Achan in verse 20 knew what he meant. "He answered Joshua and said, 'Truly I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel and this is what I did. When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold 50 shekels in weight, I coveted them and took them, behold they're concealed in the earth under my tent inside underneath with the silver. I buried it in the tent.'" That's what I did. He confessed completely.

"So Joshua sent messengers, they ran to the tent. Behold it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the sons of Israel, poured them out before the Lord. Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan, the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, everything that belonged to him, brought them to the valley of Achor which means trouble. Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.' All Israel stoned them with stones, burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day and the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger, therefore the name of the place has been called the valley of Achor to this day."

Wow, this is an amazing thing. He confesses his sin and God kills him and everybody involved. There was obviously complicity with his entire family in the process of hiding this. God kills them all.

Now here's the point. God was glorified in this because he confessed his sin. If he hadn't confessed his sin, and God had killed him, which He had a right to do because God knew he had committed it, somebody might question the justice of God. Somebody might say, "Well, why would You do that? That doesn't seem very loving, gracious, merciful, kind or just. What did he do? Why would God do that?"

But the moment he confesses his sin then when God punishes him, God is glorified as being too pure to look on iniquity. God's holiness is protected. He is saying to him, "Agree that you deserve divine judgment. Acknowledge, admit your sin, confess that you have broken the Law of God so that when God acts in justice against you, He is not dishonored." And it is true that God is glorified when we confess our sin because when God chastens the confessor, God is not dishonored, He is being honored as being righteous and holy. Confession of sin is the noble thing to do. It frees God up to bring punishment or chastening without being accused of being unjust. But men don't like to confess their sin. They develop very complicated philosophical and even religious systems to remove the necessity to confess their sins. They go so far as to deny that sin even exists, or they say that sin is attached to the physical world, it's there, it's going to be there, it's going to remain there, there's nothing you can do about it, so don't make an issue out of it, focus on the spiritual.

All kinds of ways to deny sin. All through history people have endeavored to do that. But the laws of morality are built into man. In Romans 2 it says, "Man by his conscience knows the Law of God." So what does he try to do? He fights against the Law of God that's written in his heart, he fights against conscience, he does everything he can to silence the voice of conscience. He does everything he can to escape the indictment in the hope that in denying sin he can therefore deny judgment. He hopes that if he can convince himself sin doesn't exist, then judgment won't either. That's really what it's all about. It's not just a philosophical thing, it's all about loving sin and not wanting consequences. So you deny that sin is sin, and if you deny that sin is culpability against God, if you deny that sin is a violation of the Law of a holy God, if you deny that then there's no retribution. And it isn't necessary to overtly, philosophically deny sin, all you have to do is live as if it didn't exist, to live as if you were free to do whatever you wanted with no negative implications. There's just a constant effort to escape the reality of sinfulness.

Let me show you another illustration. We went early into the Old Testament, let's go late to the last part of the Old Testament. The prophet is Malachi. And I just...this is just an illustration of what is a major doctrinal issue, this matter of sin that John's going to deal with, but in Malachi there's a word of the Lord, an oracle to Israel and it is a promise of judgment. Verse 2 He says, "I have loved you," and He certainly had. "I've loved you." But your response, go down to verse 6, "A son honors his father, a servant honors his master. If I'm a father, where's my honor? If I'm a master, where's my respect, says the Lord of host to you. O priest, who despise My name. But you say, How have we

despised Your name? What did we do wrong?" It's always that, isn't it? "I didn't do anything...I didn't do anything," like a little kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "You're presenting defiled food," verse 7, on My altar.

God had given a pretty clear set of instructions about what kind of offerings were acceptable to Him. You couldn't bring rotten food, rotten food and offer it to God because you couldn't eat it and so that's what you gave to God. You're presenting defiled food or bread, stale bread, whatever it was, on My altar. "But you say, 'How have we defiled Thee? When you say that, you say the table of the Lord is despised.'" In other words, you're showing Me how you despise My table, you despise that altar. And then in verse 8 He says, "You come with a blind sacrifice, instead of the firstling of the flock, instead of the best without spot and without blemish animal, you come with a blind animal that isn't going to do you any good because this blind animal can't survive anyway and it can't find its food or its way or protect itself. And that's what you bring for Me, is that not evil? And when you present the lame and the sick animal, is it not evil? Why don't you offer that to your human governor, would he be pleased with you? Would he receive you kindly, says the Lord of hosts." That's exactly what they were doing, they were giving Him the blind and the lame and the sick. And then they were saying, "What did we do? We didn't do anything?"

"You are so profane," He says down in verse 12. Look in to verse 2....or chapter 2, I'm sorry, verse 1, "And now this commandment is for you, O priest, if you do not listen, if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse on you, I'll curse your blessings. Indeed I have cursed them already because you are not taking it to heart. I'm going to rebuke your offering. I will spread refuse, dung, manure on your faces, the refuse of your own feasts." Well that's pretty graphic. "And you'll be taken away with it. Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you that My covenant may continue with Levi, says the Lord of hosts." Boy, God is pretty serious about somebody who doesn't recognize sin. Wow.

Down in chapter 2 verse 11, "Judah has done treacherously, says the prophet, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem. Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves, has married the daughter of a foreign god." I mean, they just disobeyed everything, absolutely everything. They were dealing treacherously in verse 15 against their wives and getting divorces. And down in verse 17, "You have wearied Me with your words, yet you say, How have we wearied You? What did we do?" Same old thing. "And then you so twisted it," verse 17, "you say every one who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and He delights in them and then when punishment comes you said, Where is the God of justice?" That's really the insight and the reason people don't confess their sin is because they want a sin with impunity and then when God comes in with judgment of justice, they say, "O, where is the God of justice? This isn't fair, what did we do? What did we do? We're basically good, I mean, we're doing what You told us, we brought our

offerings," we...so and so and so. And so God is dishonored because they say, "Where is the God of justice?"

You see, that's what people in the world are doing today. They think the God of the Bible, the true and living God, is unjust when we tell them that He's going to send people to eternal hell. They think He's unjust. They think He's unfair, brutal. And that's because they will not recognize their own...what?...sin. It's not until you confess sin that you remove that criticism. As soon as you confess your sin and you say, "God, this is what I deserve, I deserve punishment, I deserve judgment, I deserve death, I deserve hell," and when God then moves to that punishment, He is glorified as holy and just and righteous.

You see it again in chapter 3 verse 8, "Will a man rob God? Yet you're robbing Me. You say, 'How have we robbed You? What did we do...again?' Well you kept back the tithes and offering." So He curses them in verse 9 with a curse. And, of course, God is going to judge, chapter 3 verse 1, "I'm going to send My messenger, he's going to clear the way before Me...John the Baptist...then comes the Lord, He's going to come and some day He's going to bring like a refiner's fire, like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver and purify the son of Levi and refine them like gold and silver so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness." Isn't that gracious of God? Some day He's going to come and refine an unbelieving people. Chapter 4, "The day of the Lord is coming, burning like a furnace the arrogant, every evil doer will be chaff. The day that is coming will set them ablaze neither leaving root or branch. The Lord is going to spare those who fear His name, though," in verse 2.

And whenever you talk about that in the world, you talk about the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming, He's coming in fiery judgment, He's coming in wrath. He's going to pour out His wrath on sinners. What kind of a God would do that? Why would God do that? That's not fair, that's not just. And that's because they refuse to recognize their sinful condition.

That all leads up, go back to 1 John, a couple of other comments and we'll get into it next time, that's what leads up to this. Pouring into the churches over which John had responsibility as an apostle, churches in the country known then as Asia Minor which is modern Turkey, John was particularly responsible, according to early church fathers, for the church at Ephesus which was kind of the mother church of all the others, there were six others in Asia Minor. I've been to ancient Ephesus, it's a short bus ride from the Turkish port of Kusadasi(?), walks through the ruins of the Ephesus of the apostle Paul's time. And that's where John was. Flooding into that city and into the church and the other churches of Asia Minor were the sin-denying deceivers, the sin-denying false teachers and the sin-denying antichrists. And this is what John is facing, teaching that denies sin.

Very much like our day when man is defined not in moral terms but in psychological terms. He's not defined as a sinner. He's defined as sick, mentally sick, emotionally sick, psychologically sick, psychiatrically sick. And he's treated with therapy, or almost exclusively nowadays drugs. His brain is assaulted so that it can only half function. And that's supposed to be a solution. Never in the secular culture of our day is the diagnosis an accurate one. Everything that's wrong in our life, as we learned this morning from Mark 7:21, comes from where? Outside? It comes from where? Inside...it all comes up from inside. That diagnosis is never made. Even the church today is reluctant to make that diagnosis because it's so offensive. And it's offensive because people want to continue to sin without any negative consequences. And so when confronted, they're like the people of Malachi's time...what did we do? What did we do?

Coming into that church then were people denying the reality of sin. There were those who denied that Jesus was a real person. We talked about that last time, remember? We talked about the Docetists who said that Jesus was a phantom, or the Cyrinthian(?) heresy that said sort of a divine spirit came upon him for a little while and then went away. And they were tampering with the reality of who Jesus Christ is, the Word of life, and that's why John opened with the four verses that he did. We're talking about the real Word of life, the eternal life which we saw and heard and touched and handled.

But there were also in those heresies denial of sin. As part of that Greek philosophical dualism that said the spirit is good, it's all good, it's only good and the physical is bad, it's all bad, it's only bad. And so a Gnostic, or somebody who was developing toward what later became known as Gnosticism, somebody who had this elevated secret religious knowledge would say, "Well, sin is certainly not an issue with me, that's part of my physical and the physical is bad anyway. It's all bad and it's only bad and I can't do anything about it, so it's not an issue with me. But the spiritual is good and pure and I'm pursuing the spiritual." Somebody in this kind of philosophy is not about to confess sin, not about to admit culpability, iniquity, transgression. Confess is a the word *homologeō*, *logeō* means to say, *homo*, homogeneous meaning of the same kind, what is it to confess? It's to say the same thing, to say the same thing about your sin that God is saying about it. To say what's true about your sin. But this developing mystical kind of cultic stuff that was coming into the churches at that time and later developed into full-blown Gnosticism and is still with us in the form of the New Age, it's been around through all of history, didn't recognize that sin was an issue because it compartmentalized the spiritual as distinct from and unaffected by the physical. So John confronts the issue of sin and un.masks these people who have denied that sin existed, that they were responsible for it, that it had consequences, and that they needed to do something about it. And this then becomes the first test by which you can determine a true Christian. Anybody who denies their sinfulness and will not confess it, cannot be a Christian.

"If you say you haven't sinned... verse 10...you just made God a liar." Why? Because God said you have. All the way back into verse 6, "If you say you have fellowship with God but you're living in a pattern of sin in the darkness, you're a liar." In verse 8, "If you say you have no sin, you're self-deceived and that...which was most important to John...the truth, isn't in you." I mean, we need to learn this in the church. A verbal profession means nothing. A person's verbal profession is not necessarily to be believed, it's to be tested, first of all, obviously with how they view Christ. We saw that in the opening verses. But for this section of John, how they view themselves and the reality of sin.

Now in order to initiate the distinction, verse 5 says, "This is the message which we've heard from Him and announced to you that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." This is a great starting point. John says the starting point in understanding sin is the nature of God. Great...great theology. The starting point in understanding sin is the nature of God. If you come to a true understanding of the nature of God, you will then understand what sin is. And next time we're going to go back into this and we're going to find out what it means that God is light...God is light. That's the starting point for any doctrine of sin. It's then the starting point for a true assessment of your own sin which is the starting point to determine whether your own claim to salvation is true and it's the important starting point for the church to determine where the false teachers might come from, they might come from the ranks of those who do not have a true understanding of their own sinfulness. Wish we had more time, let's pray.

Father, it is just a wealth beyond comprehension to know Your truth. We just never cease to be amazed at the depths of it. We do deeper and deeper and wider and wider and we don't get nearer to the edge of the bottom. So rich, so rich. This is a painful subject but a necessary one. Help us to be discerning as to our own lives, to know that we can be assured of our salvation if we genuinely confess our sins. We can also be protected as a church by knowing who it is that has an accurate and biblical understanding of sin, believes it because false teachers will not only have a wrong doctrine of Christ, they'll have a wrong doctrine of themselves. Not only will their Christology be wrong but their anthropology will as well. And those will lead to a wrong soteriology. And so in the protection of Your church we have to start with a true understanding of sin as well as coming to a true assurance by knowing that we do have an accurate doctrine of sin that applies to us and understanding that, we are eager to confess and repent of it. Continue to direct us, fill our hearts with the desire to glorify You, by confessing sin even if it means You're free to chasten us for which we would glorify You for Your holiness. Thank You for our day together and this Word that You've sent to us through Your Spirit, in Your Son's name. Amen.

COPYRIGHT (C) 2012 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).