

Made for Friendship (2) - Barriers and Bridges - 1

John 1:5-2:2

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[0 : 00] ideal friendship, the ideal relationship, would be one in which there was never any lies, there was always complete openness, there were no dark secrets. We saw last week, Genesis 1 and 2, that we were made, God made Adam and Eve for friendship that was perfect, and there was that kind of openness, there was that kind of honesty, both with one another and with God. But then we saw in Genesis 3, and we understand this in our own lives, that friendships can be lost, can be spoiled because of sin. There are things that we do that can harm our relationships, and therefore, in that situation where we live in a fallen and a broken world, one of the essential aspects of honesty that we need, and the Bible directs us to, is we need honest confession, honest confession of sin. If we were perfect, that kind of confession would not be necessary. We are talking in particular this morning about friendship with God, and if you look at verse 5, see how God is described by John.

This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you. God is light. In Him, there is no darkness at all. God is absolute truth. In Him, there is nothing false. God is absolutely pure. There is no stain on His character. God is completely good. There is nothing evil in Him. Therefore, God has no need of confession. But for the rest of us, we do. Today, I want us to think about the importance of being honest about our sin, and honestly confessing that sin. That John tells us here that it's vital to friendship, to fellowship with God. But as we go, we'll also see that these truths apply to our own friendships with one another. We're going to see this big truth that sin is a barrier to friendship. And we'll also see that confession and trusting in Jesus is a bridge to restored friendship with God. So, let's begin thinking about that. Let's recognize with John that sin is a barrier to friendship. Three ways he speaks about it. In verse 6, if we claim to have fellowship with God, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. To put that another way, here is a way of thinking that my sin doesn't affect my relationship with God. Or in human terms, my sin doesn't affect my relationship with other people. One of the things that John likes to do in his writings is he likes to use opposites, dark and light, truth and lies. And one of the reasons that he does that, especially with darkness and light, is to remind us that there are opposites that cannot exist together.

So, place yourself in a completely dark room. The blinds shut, the curtains are closed. There is darkness. But the moment the blinds go up, the curtains are open, what happens? Light floods in, darkness is dispelled. Light and darkness cannot exist together. And so, there is a lie that we can tell ourselves in verse 6 if we disconnect what we believe with how we behave. We believe in a God who is perfectly holy, who is absolute light. So, we misrepresent Him if we think we can do whatever we please and it's no big deal. It was Jesus who said, if you love me, you will obey my commands. What we believe should influence our behavior. We need to walk in the light, he will say, in order to maintain fellowship with God. So, sin is a barrier to fellowship with God always. In verse 8, puts it another way. Here's another false claim. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. So, here is the danger, the danger that lies in your heart and in my heart, and it's the temptation when we've done something wrong to blame someone else. Or there's that temptation to minimize, to justify ourselves and our actions. So, we do something wrong and we say, well, that's just who I am. Or that other person, they provoked me, so I had no choice. Or perhaps we say, well, it didn't hurt anybody else, therefore, it's not really a big deal. We can deceive ourselves thinking that we didn't do anything wrong. We are experts at lying to ourselves. Now, one of the ways that Jesus teaches us that is He says to people, we can be like hypocrites. You know, we can be great at seeing the speck, the tiny problem in somebody else's

eye, in somebody else's life. Well, we're missing the great, whacking great log in our own eye. We're really good at diagnosing others, but we're really poor sometimes at seeing the sin in our own lives.

[5 : 52] Why is that? This week, we've been playing a game at home, a spy game. So, again, make the room completely dark. And then I would have a small torch, and the boys would hide. And basically, we'd wander around in the darkness with a torch, and they would spend the whole time trying to hide, trying to evade capture. Teaching important spy craft at an early age.

God's Word, the Bible says, God's Word is like a searchlight. So, God's Word is like that torch. It reveals truth. It exposes sin and darkness in our hearts and our lives. But what do we do?

Sometimes we choose to run and hide from that Word of truth. We don't want to be confronted with the darkness in our hearts, so we pretend that it's not a problem. So, we keep far away from God and His Word. We deceive ourselves. Again, verse 10, there's a third false claim.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His Word has no place in our lives. Some people in John's day were saying, I don't have a problem with sin, full stop. There was this really dangerous false teaching that was saying that it was possible to be perfect in this life, which is going to add a crushing weight of expectation that actually nobody could ever achieve. The teaching went that, well, since Jesus has defeated sin, therefore the Christian can live a life of complete victory.

We can be perfect. Sin is no longer a problem for me. Now, we need to think, what's the reality? What does the Bible teach about what happened at the cross? The Bible is very clear that at the cross, Jesus has won the decisive battle with sin and the devil at the cross. The devil is now a defeated enemy.

[8 : 10] So, for Christians, it's absolutely true to say that because of our faith in Jesus, we are free from the penalty of sin. We will not be condemned because Jesus took the penalty in our place. That's true.

We are also free from the power of sin in the sense that sin is no longer the master that controls us. We have a new master. His name is Jesus. We're now able to say no to sin. So, those things are true, but it's not true to say that we're free from the presence of sin. Sin is still in our hearts. There is still this spiritual battle that goes on and will go on until glory. John gives hope to the church. In 1 John 3, let's just flick over a page. 1 John 3 and verse 2, we're pointed forward to the wonderful time when we will be free from the presence of sin. So, 1 John 3 verse 2, dear friends, now we are children of God. That's a wonderful truth. Right now, if our faith is in Jesus, we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. There's more wonderful things to come, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Everyone has this hope in Him, purifies himself just as He is pure. So, one day we'll be like Him. One day we'll be free from the presence of sin, but not in this life. And John says that people who are teaching that, people who are believing that, are actually calling God a liar. How are they calling God a liar? Because the Bible clearly teaches that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the Bible is also clear on that spiritual warfare that everybody who is in Christ will experience. So, to say that we don't have a problem with sin is to deny the clear testimony of the Bible. It's actually to deny, I would imagine, what's going on in people's consciences, and it's to deny the reality of our lived out experience. So, this is really dangerous. So, what he's done in three different ways, he said to the church really clearly, sin is a barrier to fellowship. Let's apply this together for a few moments. A very basic level, I think the teaching of John and the teaching of the Bible says to us, friendship always requires honesty. Whether we're thinking about friendship with God or friendship at the human level, we need to be those who are willing to recognize and admit the impact of our sin on our relationships. Now, that's something that's going to be painful for us, but it's something that's necessary to us. I may especially at this moment just ask ourselves, those of us who are parents, and we, I imagine, spend a lot of time encouraging our children to say sorry, to confess, and to put things right. But I wonder, is that something that we also are modeling to them? Do they hear us say sorry when we ourselves mess up? But at a general level, we are being taught that it's important for us to own our sin and to confess it and to deal with it. Another thing that the Bible teaches here is that it's important for us to examine our friendships under God's spotlight. So, on Wednesday, in our community groups, we started looking at a new book by Ed Welch called Caring for One Another.

He was talking about humility. But one of the things he was saying is it's really important to be able to apply biblical truth to our problems. That the voice that we need to hear, it is God's voice. We need to hear God's truth. So, when we think about the problems that our sin causes in relationships, whether that's anger or jealousy or lies or gossip, wherever it might be, we need to listen to the Bible, and we also need to seek out other Christians who will apply the truth, who will pray the truth into our lives. There are lots of relationship gurus. There are lots of voices that we could listen to about the way we relate to one another. John is reminding us it's really important for Christians to live under the rule of God's Word in our relationships. And the third thing at this point is to remind ourselves that Christianity needs honest confession. We cannot begin to live as a [13:19] Christian until we come to that point of humbling ourselves, seeing ourselves as guilty sinners before a holy God, and coming to Him to seek the forgiveness that He freely offers through the death of His Son Jesus.

So, we need to confess our sin, and we need to confess our need of a Savior in order to begin the Christian life. But honest confession isn't just for the beginning of the Christian life. We need it for all of our Christian experience, because sin always creates a barrier to fellowship with God. And so, we want to be pursuing restoration, and that involves confessing our sin to Jesus, to God our Father. So, sin is a barrier to friendship with God. And then let's see how Jesus is the bridge to friendship with God. And we're going to see that John is calling Christians towards certain behaviors, but underpinning those behaviors stands the finished work of Jesus.

So, verse 7, the first way that we see this bridge to friendship with God, and we are called to walk in the light as He is in the light.

And if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. So, we are to walk in the light. Now, what does that look like?

John gives us some helpful instruction in chapter 2. For example, in verse number 3, we see, we know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. One of the things about this letter is, John says, Christians are those who obey God and His commands. To walk in the light is to obey God.

[15:29] Then in verse 6, whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. So, here we are being reminded that Jesus is our model. Jesus is our pattern. He is the perfect human being. He is the only one who has ever lived a perfect relationship relationship with the people around Him and with God, and we are told to follow His example.

And then in verse 10, another way to walk in the light. Or verse 9, anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother, brother or sister in Christ, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light. So, by loving one another, we're walking in the light. Again, just to scale back, Psalm 119 as an example, we talk about the Bible as being a light for our path, a way of guiding us as to how to live well. So, our goal in all of our relationships is to let God's truth, God's character, God's values, those things that we see in the life of Jesus, we want those to set our course. That's the pattern that we are to follow after. Will we do that perfectly as Christians? No, we won't. But should we aim for that? Absolutely, yes, we should. We should aspire to walk in the light of God's truth.

But here's the good news. Here's where Jesus comes in. What does Jesus do for us when we fail in this? Verse 7. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. God has made provision for his people for our ongoing sin that spoils our friendship with God. So, again, here we are reminded that relying on the death of Jesus isn't just for the start of the Christian life, it's for all of our Christian life.

I read a book before Christmas on the theme of friendship, which really turned out to be more about the importance of repentance and friendship. It was written by a lady by the name of Catherine Parks. The book was called Real, a very helpful book. But she says this, she says, church should not be a place where people cover their sin, but a community of forgiven sinners walking in the light together. So, there's that phrase, walking in the light, and we do so as forgiven sinners. And we're being reminded that Jesus is the one who brings us together.

Did you notice that? If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another. Think about it. Think about it in the summertime, when you switch on a light and the flies and the moths gather around. Well, like moths to a flame, Christians are drawn together to Jesus, the light of the world. What draws us close to one another? It is the fact that we are drawn together in our love for the Lord Jesus and the love that He has for us, for His church. Jesus is the foundation of our shared life

together. And one of the wonderful things about that is, therefore, that the church should be a place where people can be real about weakness and struggle and sin. It should be a place where we don't need to wear masks. Which takes us to the second thing that John points us to. In verse number nine, he says that we are to be those who confess our sin. When we're thinking about confession as a bridge to friendship. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. So again, let's use the spotlight image. God's spotlight shines on our lives and it reveals dirt and darkness. It exposes guilt and things that we have done wrong.

[19 : 53] What are we to do at that point? Our natural response, perhaps, is to try and hide away from that, to try and minimize or justify. John says what we must do, do what David did. We must confess our sin.

We must identify what we have done wrong, to accept responsibility for what we have done wrong, and to seek forgiveness and the mercy of God because we have done wrong.

In a sense, I guess it's the pattern that is, as parents, we try and teach to our children. When we see, perhaps, brothers and sisters fighting, you know, we'll maybe call one or both of them aside and we'll ask them what it is that they need to say. Sorry. What is it that you need to say?

Sorry for. Sorry for fighting with my brother and my sister. And then we ask them, what is it that you need to do to put things right? And we aim for them to pursue reconciliation and restoration, don't we?

It's a biblical pattern. To restore relationship with God, we are to confess our sin, to admit that we have done wrong, to take responsibility and to seek forgiveness. And again, this is painful. It's not just for kids that it's a painful process.

[21 : 27] It's painful for us in our lives. It humbles us. But it's the path to healing and restoration in any friendship that's been broken, whether we're talking about God or another person.

And again, one of the wonderful things about the gospel and where Jesus comes into this is that the gospel reminds us that God knows the very worst about us. Sometimes we think we're really bad and there's darkness. God knows sins in our lives that we're not even aware of, and yet He chooses to love and forgive and to welcome us. In other words, when our faith is in Jesus, we have a secure love. We have a God who sees us as we are and still chooses to call us His children.

So that gives us security, therefore, to confess quickly and to confess honestly to the God who already knows and who is willing to forgive. And I think as Christians, because we're secure in that relationship, because we know we've got that forgiveness and we've been reconciled, we should be quick to seek to make things right with one another. John draws out the hope that God gives us through Jesus in verse 9.

If we confess our sins, God is what? God is faithful. What is it that He is faithful to? Well, He is faithful to that new covenant promise that He made. In Jeremiah 31, there was this promise that a new covenant would be established between God and His people where He would forgive their sins and remember them no more. God is faithful to that promise. God is also just in forgiving our sins. God is faithful to that promise. It's striking. That moral debt that we have before God because of our failure to live right, our failure to love well. God is just to forgive that in the lives of His people. How?

[23 : 42] Because the justice of God fell on Jesus at the cross on our behalf. Jesus paid for our moral debt and our shame on our shame on the cross so that we might be purified from all unrighteousness.

That our slate might be wiped clean. It's what we'll remember today when we share the Lord's Supper. We will remember the cost to God, the cost to Jesus in forgiving us, in bringing us to God. Last thing to say is, in terms of bridges to friendship with God, we are invited in this section to run to Jesus. Chapter 2 and verse 1, we see John is both optimistic about the Christian life and realistic. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. So it's possible for a believer, because we're led by the Spirit, because Jesus is our master, to say no to sin. That's something new for us when our life is in Christ. But, so there's optimism, but here's the realism. But if anybody does sin, bearing in mind that this battle with sin still rages, when we're pulled into a sin that spoils our friendship with God, what hope do we have?

We run to Him, because we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. So here's the picture. Here's our hope. Jesus is our advocate. So now we're in the courtroom.

God the Father, He's the judge. And we're in the dock. We're being tried for things that we have done. Our sin. And we have Jesus. Jesus, our advocate. Jesus, our defense lawyer. And He's making a case before the Father. Now, His case is not that person in the dock is innocent. He's not saying, James Ross, he's innocent. He's never done anything wrong. Jesus is saying, yes, James is a sinner, but I have paid the price on the cross for His forgiveness and for His acceptance. That's our hope. Jesus is pleading our cause, and He has served as, verse 2, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. That's part of Jesus' case. I have performed that function. I am the atoning sacrifice. [26 : 35] What does that mean? That He has faced the verdict for our sin, God's righteous anger against sin and rebellion that should fall on us. God in His love sent Jesus. Jesus, in love, took that punishment for us so that we might be forgiven. And that remains our only hope for forgiveness and fellowship with God, that objective fact that Jesus died for us. Notice at the end of verse 2 who this is for.

This is open to anyone. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. This is an invitation to anyone. How do we know this love and friendship that the Bible says we were made for? How do we, as sinful, guilty people, come into friendship with God? Well, John says it begins with humble confession, recognizing I am a sinner, and it involves trust that He, Jesus, died for me. Now, to apply this to our life and to our friendships, there is a Scottish proverb that says open confession is good for the soul. Biblical truth. Often, when people are getting married, they'll get advice that says you should keep short accounts with one another. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Now, that's good advice, not just for a marriage, but for any friendship, whether that's a human friendship or a friendship with God. To be humble, to recognize there are things that we do, things that we say, attitudes in our heart that spoil the relationships that we have. And so, at a human level, we need at times to confess, but it's absolutely vital before a holy God who's all light and no darkness that we humbly confess our sin to Him. Another thing we are reminded of by John is that Christian friendship, in particular, grows in the light. When we gather together as a church, we're not gathering as a social club. We're not gathering because we come from the same place and we share the same kind of interest. Our shared life is rooted in the love that God has for us, that He's shown to us in Jesus. Our shared life is rooted in the worship of God, in hearing the Word of God together, in prayer together. And so, if it is the case that Christian friendship grows in the light, let's be praying to God that we would be those kind of friends. Let's be making sure that in our own lives, we're moving towards God, we're moving to build our fellowship with the Lord Jesus so that we would be a good Christian friend to others, that we'd be sharing God's Word, we'd be sharing prayer, we'd be bearing burdens together. And the last thing, and the wonderful thing that John reminds us of, is that Jesus offers us the kind of friendship that in our hearts we all dream of? What makes us in our relationships at times really insecure? Or why is it that at times we struggle to confess our sin and our failure? Why are we trying to project a certain kind of image where we have everything together and we are absolutely complete? sometimes it's because at heart we are deeply, deeply afraid. What if that person finds out the real truth about me and they no longer want anything to do with me? What if it turns out that I can't live up to the standard of expectation that this other person has of me? So we can find ourselves really insecure in friendships. But what about when we think about friendship with Jesus? When we hear the gospel, we hear that Jesus knows everything about us. The good, the bad, the ugly, He knows it all.

[31 : 16] That shame that we carry, that stuff that we're desperately afraid that someone else will find out about Jesus knows. And He doesn't just know, He goes to the cross and bears the shame and the guilt of it for us.

And then He welcomes us in. Then He welcomes us into the family of God, that we could be adopted, that we could enjoy a friendship that's not just for now, but is forever. Let's pray together. Lord God, thank you for this wonderful...