

If We Confess Our Sins...

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Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. I am Terri Kochi.

I'm a member of the Women Reading Women in North Berkeley community groups. Today's scripture reading is from 1 John 1, verse 5 through chapter 2, verse 2, as printed in the liturgy.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

[1 : 1 7] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 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. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you for that scripture reading, Terry. Good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew. If you're new here, I'm one of the pastors here.

Our lead pastor is on sabbatical, so you might be seeing me a little bit more. Yeah, that's just how it is. That's the way it goes. Will you join me in prayer as we come into God's word?

[2 : 3 0] Lord, we come before you wanting to acknowledge that you are a God. God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is your love toward us.

As far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so you, Lord, show compassion to us.

Lord, would you make us a people that say wow to those truths? Help me to preach this morning in a way that does not just convey that I believe these things are true, but help me to preach in a way that conveys that I believe these things are beautiful.

And I pray that you'd convince my friends, my brothers and sisters here, those exploring who Jesus is and what you're about, would you convince them as well that this is not just true, but it's beautiful.

This is good news for the world. And would you do so, Lord, to the glory of your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So we are now in a series in the New Testament letter of 1 John.

[3 : 41] We're calling the series Life, Light, and Love. And last week we began it talking about the God who is life. John opens up by stating what his intentions are. Eternal life has appeared to these apostles in the flesh, in history, and they cannot help but proclaim what they saw and what they heard and what they touched and what they beheld, Jesus Christ.

The eternal life itself come into the world to bring us back into fellowship with the triune God for our joy. But today we move on from 1 John's intentions to the actual content of this letter, to the actual message that Jesus gave his apostles to share.

Today we move on to the first thing we absolutely have to know about God in order to come into this completeness of joy and fellowship that he wants for us. Now I have a question for you.

If you were to summarize the main message of Jesus, like what he came to reveal to us about God, the central truth that he wanted us to know about God, in a three-word sentence, God is fill in the blank, what would you say?

God is love. I heard a lot of love right there. Love, all right? I imagine many of us, even those of us who aren't Christians, might say love. God is love.

[4 : 59] Everybody knows that one, right? Everybody loves that one, that saying that God is love. It's one of the most famous passages in the Bible. It's one of the most famous descriptions of who God is.

It's popular at weddings. Even people who aren't Christians, this is what they know that Christians believe, that God is love. And you know this famous saying, God is love, it actually does come later here in this letter, 1 John.

It comes later in chapter 4, but the thing is, we're not there yet. It doesn't come, again, until chapter 4. And the interesting thing about our passage today, still very much in the beginning of 1 John, is that the message, the main point, that 1 John wants to transmit from Jesus, the starting point truth from which the whole rest of this letter flows, in order that people might have this fellowship and joy that's appeared to us, is not that God is love.

Actually, as it says here in verse 5, this is the message we have heard from him and proclaimed to you, that God is light. And in him is no darkness at all.

Now why in the world does this letter start with, God is light? Why is that so important? What does that even mean, that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all? Well, I think that what 1 John is meaning to say is that we have to start with the reality that in this world there is light, and there is darkness.

[6 : 25] There is truth, and there is falsehood. There is good, and there is evil. And that God is light means that he is completely opposed to darkness and falsehood and evil. And I want to try to unpack that for us this morning, because it's so important.

It's so important. Because unless we are convinced that God is first and foremost light, we will actually never really experience his abundant life and the fellowship and joy that he intends for us.

Unless we're convinced that God is light, we won't know him truly as he is, as the God who is love. So will you look with me at verses 5 through 7? Let's think about this for a second, all right?

Verses 5 through 7. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin. Now one trick I want to teach you for interpreting the Bible, one trick that I think can help us better understand the significance of many of these verses is to try to imagine the opposite of what these verses are saying.

[7 : 38] Like try to imagine the alternative to what 1 John is saying here. So try to imagine with me, what if God wasn't light? And what if in him, he like allowed within himself darkness, or even a lot of darkness?

What if he was still cool with fellowshiping with those who walked in darkness outside of the light? What if God was cool with all those who did not practice the truth? Imagine that.

What would that mean for us? Even if we still held on to our favorite passage, God is love. It wouldn't be so compelling anymore, would it? Well, I think it'd mean that his love was a compromised love if we didn't also recognize that God is light.

Like sure, God is love, but it's a love that just tolerates and coexists and commingles with darkness and falsehood, right? And I wonder if that's how a lot of us understand God and his love when we say God is love.

We understand the love of God through the lens of this cultural moment that we're in where we just have this simplistic and selective acceptance and tolerance, where we so often just say certain things are just okay.

[8 : 46] Hey, that unhealthy thing in your life, that bad habit, that selfishness, that greed, that gluttony. Hey, it's okay. We all do it. We're all human, and therefore it's not so bad.

It's not that offensive to God. It doesn't really grieve him in any significant way. God's ultimately just about accepting all of us anyway, right?

Just as we are. That's what God's about, right? Making us feel better about ourselves no matter how much of a mess we're in. Let's just hold hands, sing kumbaya, and worship the God of low or maybe no standards at all, right?

It is something to cry about. But my question is, is this really the kind of God we actually want? Is this really the kind of God that we believe the world needs?

Do we really want a God who can have fellowship with darkness? Do we want a God whose love does not absolutely abhor and hate the darkness in and around and within us?

[9 : 48] Do we want a God who doesn't burn with wrathful passion against all that is wicked in this world, even what is wicked within us? You know, recently, one of our youth mentors shared a question with me that he got from one of our youth.

And I don't know who this youth was, but I think the question really illustrates why we need a God who is light and in whom there is no darkness. The student asked the mentor, wouldn't it be better if God just got rid of Putin?

Wouldn't it be better for the world? And I won't get into all the complexities of answering this question. I'll leave that to the mentors. But I do want to highlight the impulse behind that question, right?

Like, God, this is evil. This is evil stuff. And wouldn't the world be better if you got rid of evil? You know, for so many of us, privileged, educated, professional, western types of people who can afford, you know, not to believe in God or who've never been wronged so badly that we've cried out to God for justice, it can be easy for us to think of God as a divine, cosmic teddy bear, you know, just gushing with the kind of generic, sentimental love that the Beatles so naively sang about, right?

All you need is love and flower power. But is permissiveness and tolerance and low-bar acceptance really the same thing as love?

[11 : 16] Is that really the same thing as love? Is that really such a high expression of love? See, I don't think so. And I want to read to you a quote from this Croatian theologian who once had trouble believing in the wrath of God because he wanted to be all about God is love.

This Croatian theologian, his name is Miroslav Volf, he said, I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath?

God is love. And God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come.

According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed, over 3 million were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination.

And I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 100 days.

[12 : 27] How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion, by refusing to condemn the bloodbath, but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness, wasn't God fiercely angry with them?

Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil.

God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love. See, Wolf understands that we need a God who is light, in whom there is no darkness at all.

And this is the God revealed to us in 1 John. Not some generic, ambiguous, anything-goes, feel-good God constructed from our fickle, finite, fallible imaginations. He's the God of Israel.

The triune God revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ in history. Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And yes, he wants our joy, but definitely not on our own sin-stained terms.

[13 : 32] While the God of 1 John, he genuinely wants the joy of the world, while he wants to unite all people with each other into his life of eternal triune fellowship, he's not a God without standards.

And that's an amazing thing about him, that he can unite all peoples and still maintain the highest of standards. See, this God of life, Jesus himself, full of grace and what truth.

He intends for us to live out our eternal lives in a certain way, in a specific way. He wants us to live in his light and in his presence. In his presence, there are some things, many things, that are simply black and white.

There are things that are of God and there are other things that are not of God. There are things that God celebrates and there are things that he condemns. There are things God loves and things God also hates because God is light.

He isn't some all-permissive father, no. And honestly, he hates the darkness in his children. He hates it, just as I hate it when my own daughters lie to me or hit each other or disrespect my wife, their mother.

[14 : 41] God won't abide with the darkness in his children. He will neither compromise his character nor allow his children to self-destruct in their own darkness. So as the God who is light, he calls out all the liars.

And honestly, if this sounds like a wake-up call, well, it should. It should. Verse six, if we claim to have fellowship with God but walk, that is, if we live in a sustained and unbothered lifestyle outside of God's light, God doesn't care what you claim.

He could care less if you call yourself a Christian. He isn't even that interested in what you might believe in your head. Even the demons believe the right things in their heads. Truth is not something merely believed, it's something lived and practiced and walked in.

If we claim to have fellowship with God but don't walk in his light, then we are lying to ourselves and are far from the only truth that can really give us life.

Now understand that this is a pretty hard word and even an exclusive word. And maybe this is what some of us despise about Christianity or religion in general, these rigid and restrictive standards, right, that only seem to divide and alienate and condemn in the name of some supposedly divine authority.

[15 : 59] The God of light, Moses' God, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, a God who is Lord over our whole lives, Lord over all truth and knowledge and morality and justice. maybe you're not sure if you're ready to bow before such a God.

But can I ask, what is your better alternative? What is your alternative light? A God whose light isn't so bright? Maybe no God at all?

If you are here today and feeling uncomfortable with this God who is light, then one, I've done my job and two, hey, I'm right there with you. I'm right there with you because in my many moments of darkened thinking and living, if I'm honest, I very often prefer other lights, right?

I prefer other lights too, lights that flatter me and shine on just the right spots, maybe my eyebrows and not my love handles, you know? I prefer muted lights that don't expose the dark areas in my life, lights I can conveniently turn off or dim when they don't serve my agenda.

I prefer gentle lights that leave me, that just leave me be and don't purge me toward becoming the man I'm supposed to be. Ultimately, I often don't want God to be light because God as light is terrifying.

[17 : 24] It's terrifying and I don't know if I could handle the God of light. I mean, think about it, God as light, a light brighter than the sun, the very light that inspired and created the sun.

As the Apostle Paul says in his letter to Timothy, the Lord Jesus Christ is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.

This is the God whom our Old Testament saints could not come before. The God who, they had to take off their sandals before, they could not see him or they would die.

This is that kind of light. How could anyone bear to stand in the presence of the God who is light? God as light, as the Holy Lord of all, this can be an incredibly unsettling truth.

I totally get it. I totally get it. But what I need to preach to myself and what I'm here to preach to all of us today is that as scary as this may sound, whether we like it or not, God is light.

[18 : 28] And that's actually good news. It's actually good news for all of us. I mean, consider the alternative. What if something else was light? What if someone else was Lord instead of God?

You know, the enlightenment, right, the enlightenment suggested the lights of what, science and reason could save humanity. If you just put the gods of science and reason into the hands of humans, they could save themselves.

And sure, I will admit, they have shed some helpful light on this world, helping us to discern what is real and good and true. But while much of the world still worships these two impersonal gods, honestly, science and reason have yet to permanently save and unite us all.

And arguably, these two secular gods, science and reason, have even contributed their own evils to this world in the hands of evil people. Nuclear weapons, chemical warfare, think of the countless logical justifications made by various genocidal supremacist regimes, right?

Or maybe you're beyond that. You know you shouldn't have faith in science and reason in the hands of sinful people. Maybe you're more of a post-enlightenment kind of person. You know enough not to trust people or institutions in their use of science and reason.

[19 : 47] You're trying to chart your own path. You're trying to be your own light, right? Like the words of Nietzsche's fictional character Zarathustra, you have your way, I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.

Or as we like to say today, you do you, man. You do you. Follow your own inner light, make your own meaning, discover whatever it is that makes you happy. But let's be real.

We all make for terrible lords. We all make for terrible lights of our own lives. You do you is not only a terrible way to live because it's selfish and individualistic, but it's an impossible and self-destructively crushing way to live.

Like who the heck am I to make my own meaning? How could I bear the burden of finding out what makes me happy? And what if my search turns up empty? What hope then is left?

Maybe that empty search and that hopelessness describes some of us here today. And if so, I really feel for you. I do. And I believe that you are trying your hardest and we so respect your search for life-giving light and truth here, your quest to live a life of love and truth.

[21 : 01] But may I suggest that unless we come to terms with this message that God is light, we'll never live the joyous lives of love that we were made for. I understand how God is light and the implications here can seem pretty terrifying.

Like if you're walking in darkness and therefore not in God's light, you cannot have fellowship with God. That's what it says here. And maybe some of us here live with that kind of fear like am I walking in the light or am I walking in the darkness or am I walking in the light enough, right?

And how can I know? I mean, I'm not perfect but I try. And maybe in this tightrope of trying to walk in God's light where you find yourself continually falling, you are tempted to either avoid the sin and darkness in your life.

Just put it out of your mind or you tell yourself that your sin is actually not that bad, not that offensive to God. This is how my little girls deal with their many, many sins.

My youngest girl, Leah, she's two. When she knows she's done something wrong, she chooses the route of avoidance. She turns her head away in shame. She won't apologize.

[22 : 10] She won't say sorry. I can lock her in her room for days. She will not say sorry. I have. She stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the wrong she's done.

And I can see the shame and the guilt on her face, the fear of what might happen if she faces the truth that what she's done is wrong. She doesn't want to face it. But then my oldest, Cammie, she's the opposite.

She'll push her sister over, she'll slap our dog, she'll blatantly disobey us and then when called out for it, she'll just ham it up, you know, smile, giggle and say, sorry, right?

Like it's a game. Like we're just looking for a magic word to absolve her of this behavior that she is not totally convinced is really bad in the first place. But what I try to teach and communicate to my girls is that yes, their sin is wicked.

They're really bad. I tell them that every day. You're so bad. Because sin, it paves a path of self-destruction and harm to others and this whole world.

[23 : 16] Even what we might consider the smallest offense, the smallest sin, the smallest act of selfishness and malice, of just lack of concern for someone else is the very seed of every atrocity ever committed in the world.

People don't go into markets in Buffalo and just shoot people up just like that. That doesn't happen just like that. That seed of sin is within each and every one of us and it's up to us whether or not we want to feed it or whether or not we want to walk in the light.

But you know what? 1 John says that even so, even though the seed of sin is within all of us, what I pray my girls learn is that even though our sin is far worse than we could ever imagine, there is nothing to be gained by hiding or minimizing our sin.

But there is everything to be gained by admitting our sin and receiving the full forgiveness and mercy of God in Christ. Yeah, that's right. I want my girls to know that they are awful little sinners.

I want them to know how heinous their sins are, how much they deserve the consequences of bringing more and more darkness into this world. But I also want them to know that God is light.

[24 : 42] God is light, which also means that no darkness is too dark for His light to expose and to expel from their lives. listen to verses 8-10.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. And this is God's word to us this morning, that the answer to our guilt and shame is not to say that we have no sin.

As it says in verse 8, that's only to deceive ourselves and to walk further away from the truth. Even worse, as it says in verse 10, to say we have not sinned is to neglect God's word, is to call God a liar. No, the best response to the God who is light is not to diminish the brilliance of His light and to lower His holy standard that requires perfection.

And nor should our response be to downplay our darkness, to downplay our sin. No, the best response is to tell the truth, to admit our sin all of it. Proverbs chapter 23, chapter 28, verse 13, whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

[26 : 02] Even when we confess them before the holy God of light who hates sin with all His being and He wants to put it to death. Look at verse 7. Walking in the light, it doesn't exactly mean that we don't have any sin.

In fact, it's presupposed here that we have sin that needs to be cleansed. See, walking in the light is about direction, not perfection. And the proper direction, it begins with confession.

Now wait. How could we confess our darkness before the God who is light with any expectation of a good outcome for us? Well, it's because here, verse 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And no, this is not some blanket forgiveness like, oh God, He's just gonna forgive me no matter what. That's His job. That's His duty. That's just what He does. We just say sorry and He forgives. No, it is God's prerogative to forgive.

He doesn't have to be merciful. But the God of light does absolutely have to be faithful and just. And that's why verse 9 is one of my all-time favorite verses.

[27 : 09] If we confess our sins, look, it doesn't say He is merciful and gracious to forgive us our sins. It says He is faithful and just to forgive our sins. What? What?

How does that make sense? How is it just for the God who is light to forgive my sin? Well, look down with me at the last two verses of our text. 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, He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Two words to learn today. Advocate and propitiation. Advocate and propitiation. Burn them into your memory, teach them to your kids, share them with your coworkers.

Advocate and propitiation. The good news of the gospel is that though God is light and we are participants in darkness, we have an advocate. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, who, like a lawyer, stands in the court of heaven.

[28 : 19] Jesus Christ stands before the Father for us. And while the devil indicts us for breaking the law again and again and again, our advocate, Jesus, the righteous one who fulfilled the law for us, says, yes, Father, Andrew, He did it again.

But I would remind you that there has already been a propitiation, that is, a satisfaction, an atonement for his sins. And as evidence for the court, Jesus rolls up his sleeves and shows forth his nail-pierced hands and he pleads our case saying, Father, I would remind you that Andrew's sins and the sins of his brothers and sisters and the family of God all throughout the world for all time, they've been put to death.

They've been nailed to a cross. And that the wrath due them and their sins, it's already been exhausted upon me.

When I, the light of the world, endured the darkness of Good Friday's cross in their place, there is blood for their cleansing, mine.

I've already shed it. The blood of Jesus poured out for the forgiveness of sins. So Jesus says, so Father, forgive these children who have repented of their sins and come to be united with us.

[29 : 36] You must. He says, you must, Father, because you have to be faithful and you have to be just. There is no double punishment. It's once and for all.

Justice has been satisfied. We did it, Father. We did it. We've written and fulfilled the greatest story ever told. The victory of God as both just and the justifier.

And that's the gospel. That God is just and the justifier. Victory of light over darkness without compromise. God is light.

He remains light. And somehow we are forgiven because of what Jesus Christ, our advocate, has done. The propitiation for our sins. And this is the gospel.

This is the gospel. The good news that we don't need to hide our darkness from the light. but that the God who is light, he does us one better. And he draws us into his unapproachable light, once unapproachable yet now approachable through the cleansing, propitiating blood of our righteous advocate, Jesus.

[30 : 46] What kind of people do you think that forms who believe this truth? How free do you imagine that they would be knowing that the God who sees all, the God who is light, and who knows every darkness in each and every one of us is still able to forgive us without at all compromising his justice.

forgiveness. There's nothing else like this. This is the beautiful truth of the gospel, that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins because he was merciful and gracious to pour out the blood of Christ for us and satisfy the wrath of God in our place.

This is the gospel. Will you pray with me? Lord, would you bring us, would you bring the world this kind of liberty this freedom to be real about who we are before you?

We are wretched sinners. We have done things that we ought not to have done and we have not done the things that we ought to have done. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We have not given you all the glory, honor, and praise that is due to you. And still, we have the gall to think that we're not that bad. Lord, forgive us.

[32 : 13] Lord, forgive us. Convict us of sin by your spirit. And as you convict us of sin, would you enliven us with the beautiful truth that you still love us in Christ, our advocate, our propitiation.

Thank you for this gift, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.