

Dealing with Sin

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me again to 1 John chapter 1 and to verse 7.

1 John chapter 1 and verse 7. The last few words of that verse where we read, the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

When I was a student in Aberdeen, my minister started to talk about a philosophical movement called postmodernism. He told us a time was coming when because of postmodern thought, people would no longer speak about right or wrong.

There would be no absolute truths and no moral standard by which to judge actions. And he said these things in the very early 1990s, and we were all just a bit sceptical as students.

I mean, how ridiculous that people should actually believe that there is no such thing as truth, that there is no right and no wrong.

[1 : 19] How ridiculous. Little did we know that our minister was telling us the truth, pardon the paradox, and that now, 25 years later, right and wrong are whatever you want them to be, and the truth, well, what's that anyway?

Little did we know that within 25 years, it would be considered wrong and illegal to say that there are only two genders.

Little did we know that within 25 years, it would be considered morally right to assist people with depression to commit suicide rather than to treat their illness.

Little did we know that within 25 years, we'd be told that what has always everywhere been considered sinful and against the will of God should actually be cherished and protected and celebrated.

So I'm sad to say that I was wrong and the Reverend Alec MacDonald of Bon Accord Free Church in Aberdeen was absolutely right when he warned us about post-modernism.

[2 : 36] The situation is so very severe that for me to talk as a Christian minister about sin is itself considered sinful, that it's wrong to talk about what's wrong.

Well, this doesn't seem to make any sense to me. Maybe it doesn't seem to make any sense to you either. But, you know, there's a sense in which it's always been true. I remember hearing a frustrated Free Church elder in prayer saying, Lord, what is it about our people?

If they're told a lie, they'll happily believe it. But if they're told the truth, they'll run you out of town.

Truth is that no one's ever been, no one's ever welcomed being confronted by their sinful behavior.

No one enjoys being told you're wrong. I don't. Maybe post-modernism isn't so new after all. Maybe people have always been in the business of changing the truth to suit them.

Just as long as they don't have to admit the wrong. Well, what's our response as Christians to be to this? Is it to stop talking about sin at all?

[3 : 53] Talk about idolatry instead. Don't talk about sin. But then without sin, the cross of Jesus makes no sense other than it becoming a therapeutic tool for making us happy.

Our response must be to go back to the Bible and point out that despite the changing patterns of philosophical thought, the truth will always remain the truth and that there has always been and will always be and is today, despite what we read in the news or on social media, absolute right and absolute wrong.

In 1 John 1 verse 7, the apostle John, who in other parts of the New Testament calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, coins a phrase, the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

How wonderful the truth that though we have sinned and sinned in all kinds of dark ways, the blood of Jesus cleanses deeper than our sin can ever stain us.

And this morning, I want us to look at this incredible phrase from the beloved disciple John at four levels. Controversial, contradictory, costly, and complete.

[5 : 25] Hundreds of years ago, John Don, the famous poet, wrote these words, Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. In the same way, don't ask to whom this passage speaks. Speaks to you.

Controversial, first of all, controversial. A ministerial friend of mine, a senior ministerial friend of mine, recently told me a story.

He had been asked to speak at a large British Christian conference. After he had spoken, the conference organizers approached him and complained, you spoke a lot about sin today.

That's yesterday's news. No one wants to hear about sin in our conference. To use biblical language, my senior ministerial friend was so amazed, especially since the complaint was not coming from non-Christians, but mature Christians.

[6 : 38] The topic of sin has never been popular among those who don't know Christ as Lord, but it's a worrying trend that among those who do, sin is a yesterday subject which no one wants to hear about.

But the Apostle John wants to speak about it because it provides the backdrop and forms the meaning of how and why Jesus died and publicly demonstrates the greatest victory ever won, the triumph of the cross and the empty tomb.

And so we might ask ourselves the question, why did Jesus die? Of course we can respond, well, because God loved us. But why the need for death?

Could God not have shown us how much he loved us another way? Let's ask the question again, why did Jesus die? To which John, Jesus' dearest friend, wants us to respond, he died to purify me from all my sin.

You see, if you remove the word sin from the vocabulary of the Christian, you rob the cross of its meaning and you empty the love of God, it becomes abstract and not real.

[7 : 56] And that's why it's so important that though others, even in the church, may consider sin to be yesterday's subject and that which postmodern philosophy has destroyed, we must assert, maintain, and defend the biblical view of sin.

But what of sin? What's so serious about it? After all, in society today, sin is a social faux pas or an unfortunate addiction, but it's hardly wrong.

Someone might say, well, I have a sinful desire for chocolate, but that doesn't mean their desire is wrong. So what's so serious and controversial about sin?

It is that we commit sin against God. It is not the impact, it's not the impact that what we do wrong has upon us that makes it serious.

It is not the unhappiness and the problems and the misery of our sin that is the ultimate issue. It is the impact our sin has upon a righteous, loving God.

[9 : 11] He cannot and will not and must not turn a blind eye to our sin lest he himself becomes unrighteous and unloving. To be true to himself, he must deal with our sin and punish it.

There is the seriousness of our sin. It is not its impact upon us as individuals or as society. It is not our brokenness. It is not our problems.

It is upon the holiness of a God who created us to love and worship him and in whose holiness we find our happiness.

Let me illustrate this. The Tower of London is a fearful place given that it has witnessed the execution of thousands of people over the centuries.

Now there was a rich man in the 17th century whose execution was set for the next day. He was treated royally the night before. He was given the best of accommodation and the best of food.

[10 : 19] He had nothing to complain about and outwardly he seemed very happy. the next day he was dead. And there was a poor man in the Tower of London at the same time whose execution was also set for the next day.

He was treated like scum. He was forced to lie in his own dirt and he was fed with gruel. He had everything to complain about and outwardly he seemed very upset indeed.

the next day he was dead too. And the question we want to ask is who cares how much that rich man enjoyed his time at the Tower or how little that poor man enjoyed his time at the Tower.

Their ultimate problem lay the next day. the justice of the British legal system and the gallows in the forecourt. Who cares whether a man lives in plenty or in want in happiness or in misery in comfort or in squalor when his ultimate problem lies before him the wrath of a righteous God against his sin.

That's the seriousness of the problem of sin. Not its impact upon us but its impact upon God. And it's not part of the seriousness of sin because I can hear my own mind never mind anyone else's say you're just taking this too seriously Colin.

[11:55] Is this not part of the seriousness of sin that it blinds us to its seriousness? Are there sins which we've committed in the past or are committing now which it's easy to rationalize from the view that they make us happy?

And after all doesn't God want us to be happy? Are there sins that you've never thought of as being serious because well they've got no impact upon me really?

They don't make me unhappy. They don't break me. And yet even though society tells us that they are no sins at all perhaps your conscience is inwardly screaming at you because you know that ultimately God is angry with them.

In the self reflection of sober self control perhaps you've come to realize that your hands are stained deeply by the sins of youth or by the sinful choices you have made.

And they're dirty with a dirt you can't rid yourself of. A dirt which is but a foretaste of the burning desert of hell where unforgiven sin is eternally punished in the unforgiven sinner by a righteous God.

[13:15] That is the controversy of sin. Second, contradictory, contradictory.

Come secondly to consider a problem in John's logic. He says in verse 7 the blood of Jesus' son purifies us from all sin. Now that word purifies of course is another word for cleanse, to make clean. If I have dirty hands from perhaps working in the garden or I'm working on my bike I use soap and water perhaps even swarfega to get rid of the oil and the dirt. The last thing I would think of doing would be to take my knife, fill the sink with my blood and then try and wash my hands in the blood. Blood doesn't clean. Blood stains. To use an old Scottish word blood clarts. It doesn't cleanse. And it would seem therefore that John is contradicting himself for how can blood cleanse?

If you go to the cleaning aisle in Asda you will not find blood in a bottle. Surely then John's not speaking literally because blood clarts.

[14:34] It doesn't cleanse. Yes there may be medical situations in which a haematologist will purify one person's blood by using the blood of another but scientific advancements were not in John's mind when he wrote about the blood of Jesus purifying us from all sin.

He is using the striking contradictory image of blood cleansing. So in what sense is the hymn writer speaking when he says there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

In what sense is that true? Well these stains obviously aren't physical like dirt in our hands they are stains on our hearts and on our souls they are stains on our relationship with God.

A few years ago our kitchen sink began to overflow. It was blocked it looked fine on the outside to me but deep down in the guttering in the pipes years of accumulated gunk had blocked it so that the dirty water could not run away.

Our sin has blocked the channel of relationship between us and God suffocating us with the dirt of our own unrighteousness and stopping the flow of God's cleansing forgiveness from purifying our hearts.

[16:16] That's where the blood of Jesus comes in. It clears the blockage it takes the gunk away the obstacle between us and God which is our sin.

That blood shed by Jesus on the cross restores our relationship with God. That blood cleanses by removing the clart. The guilty stains the blood of Jesus removes are the hate filled symbols of our rejection of God.

The sins of flesh and mind the obstacles to his forgiveness of us. This is the contradiction of the blood of Jesus which cleanses but doesn't clart.

The third aspect of forgiveness here is that it's costly costly. You know it's so easy to read these words in verse 7 quickly without much thought but stop hover for a minute over the precise wording but the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin.

At what cost were you purified of your sin? At what cost are the guilty cleansed and our relationship to God restored? In the Old Testament you know that if a person sinned they went to the priests in the temple they took an animal with them and an animal was sacrificed for their sin.

[17:57] The blood of that animal paid the price of their sin. And so over the centuries hundreds of thousands of sheep and goats and bulls and birds were sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem.

the channel of the temple's drains ran red with the blood of Israel's animals. That was the cost of a man's sin.

The lifeblood of an animal. A practice we hate as much now as those Jewish people hated then.

How inhuman that an innocent animal should bear the cost of our sin.

The more inhuman of things was not the death of the animal. It was the sin committed against God which prompted the sacrifice in the first place.

Perhaps it's that sin which is the most horrifying aspect of the blood which ran red in the temple's courtyards. The whole scale massacre of hundreds of thousands of innocent beasts.

[19 : 03] St. Anselm said ah but you've not considered sufficiently the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Nevertheless was it not better that the animal should die and not the human?

Let's face it the blood of an animal can never take away sins. In Hebrews 10 verse 4 we read it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The sacrifice of these animals in the Old Testament was designed to point to the greatest sacrifice ever made. The divine father sacrificed his divine son.

A divine son sacrificed himself. Jesus was no animal. He was not beneath us.

rather as high as the heavens and above the earth so much greater the dignity of the son of God above our own. And yet the divine father gave his beloved son to the brutality of the cross and the divine son sacrificed himself.

[20 : 26] His blood running like a river from his body down the cross. He was subjected to a greater torture than any beast. He was betrayed and despised and rejected not just by us but by his divine father.

That's the cost of our purification. That a divine father should punish his beloved son on our account and the divine son should willingly give himself for us on the cross.

In Lamentations chapter 1 verse 12 the writer asks the question is it nothing to you all you who pass by?

You pass by the cross in which Jesus is dying. Is it nothing that the divine father who loved his son with an infinite eternal and unchangeable intimacy and love is giving his own son for us?

Is it nothing to us that the divine father should turn his face away from his own boy on the cross and punish him in our place?

[21 : 45] Is it nothing to us that the divine son took all our clart and was tortured and sacrificed on our behalf? Is the cost of our cleansing so little?

Does it mean so little to us? So little that it has no impact upon us at all? Are we so apathetic that we cannot understand the God whose love and righteousness we have rebelled against gave his only beloved son to take our sins away?

To go back to the beginning of this passage, ask not to whom this passage may speak today. It speaks very much to you.

Lastly, the forgiveness of sin, the blood of Jesus, is complete. It's complete. What drew me in the first instance of this text was its emphasis on the completeness of the cleansing work of the blood of Jesus.

Listen again to John. The blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin. All sin. It's that word all which first gripped me.

[23 : 04] Cleansed from all sin. The cleansing work is purifying blood is complete in two senses. Not just that every sin is covered, but that every sin is completely covered.

And we'll deal with both of these in turn, but that's what I want to leave you with this morning. This sense of the all sufficiency of the cross of Jesus and the all encompassing nature of the gospel and its grace.

Suppose we want to polish the floor. We buy floor polish, but we wouldn't use floor polish for cleaning the windows, and we most certainly wouldn't use it to wash our dirty dishes.

Horses for courses, as we say, each substance is its own cleaning agent. But the blood of Jesus is complete in this. It purifies us from every type of sin.

On the cross, he was suffering and dying for all kinds of sin. Sins of thought, sins of words, sins of deed, the sins of our mouth, the sins of our mind, the sins of our bodies, the sins of our hearts.

[24 : 10] His blood purifies us from all kinds of sin. So it doesn't take very long surfing the internet to discover all kinds of weird and sick ways in which human beings sin against God.

I've got no idea of what they call the dark web and how many more ways there are on these disgusting sites. And sometimes all it takes is a quick glance at the internet to fill us with disgust at all the sick ways in which we as human beings are screwed up and how desperately short of God's perfect standards we fall.

I guess it's fairly depressing for most of us. But there is not one sin of which we read on the internet which the blood of Jesus cannot purify us from.

Not even one. Whatever sin your mind can imagine, the blood of Jesus can cleanse you from it today. Perhaps your particular sin is kind of off the beaten track.

It's niche. What they used to call in the 80s and 90s before PC language came in, freaky. Jesus can forgive that too.

[25 : 29] There is no sin which you can commit which he cannot cleanse you from. However disgusting, however private, however public, however sordid, however ingrained in us, however much it's affected us and destroyed our relationships with others, no sin can remain uncleansed by the blood of Jesus.

And not only does the blood of Jesus deal with every kind of sin, it deals with every size of sin, if size is a thing at all in the eyes of God. Some of us here, I'm sure, have committed great sins. Sins which if the world around you knew you'd committed them, they'd be disgusted with you. Disgusted. And others among us have never committed these kinds of sin.

Our sins are small, sleek as they say, private. Big sins or small sins, the blood of Jesus can take them all away. He can deal with dirty stains a mile wide.

He can deal with dirty stains a mile deep. He can deal with dirty stains that only he can see. So how's about it then? There is no sin which you have committed until now which the blood of Jesus cannot forgive.

[26 : 47] Perhaps you're saying to me today, but you don't know what I've done. It's so horrible, I can't even admit it to myself. It's too horrible even for Jesus to forgive.

He shouldn't and he can't forgive me for what I've done. I can't forgive myself. How can he forgive me? Think again. Jesus can forgive you and Jesus will forgive you.

But perhaps you're saying today, but I don't have any sins to confess. And if truth, if I did, they wouldn't be very big. Listen, if it's big enough to be a sin, it's big enough to need the blood of Jesus to purify us from.

there is no sin which you've committed until now which the blood of Jesus cannot purify you from. But then, and with this we close, we might question ourselves, how effective is Christ's cleansing blood?

A few years ago, I bought a bucket of car cleaning equipment from Pound Stretcher. I proceeded to try and clean my car with all these cheap cleaning materials.

[27 : 57] Well, the truth is, I would have been far better off using soap and water. My mother-in-law at Christmas time recently taught me a good lesson. She said, buy cheap, buy dear.

In other words, if you buy cheap things, you'll just have to spend more money in the long run because the cheap stuff won't be very good. I should have bought good car cleaning equipment in the first place and it would have saved me the bother of buying it later on.

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and ask him to forgive all your sins, are you buying cheap or are you buying dear? How effective is his purifying blood?

Does it really cleanse us thoroughly? Oh, it does. Ask the blackened heart of the apostle Paul, so guilty of religious hatred and murder.

Does the blood of Jesus clean you, Paul, on the inside? Just ask the blackened heart of the writer of Amazing Grace, John Newton, so guilty of slavery and living to spite God.

[29 : 11] Does the blood of Jesus cleanse you of all your sin, John Newton? sin? And yes, if you ask them all and more beside, they'll say the same thing. The blood of Jesus is all sufficient and hyper effective and why not?

After all, you are not buying cheap when you put your faith in Jesus. You're buying dear. Because the blood of Jesus, God's son, is the most precious thing in the universe.

there will come a day when all the people of God will wear robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

And Jesus shall present us to his father spotless and radiant, entirely without sin. That will be the day when none of us will even care to remember what post-modernism was, but we'll see Jesus

face to face.

And we'll all know it was because of his sacrifice on our behalf, on the cross, that we're pure. Come now.

[30 : 18] Come to Jesus. Ask him to purify you from all your sin. Ask that he would wash you clean of all your dirt by his blood.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls today. tolls for thee. Let us pray. Our Lord, we're not used to hearing these sober messages about sin, guilt, and forgiveness.

Ultimately, Lord, we know that our sin's a problem, not because it causes our ruin and brokenness, but because of the breakage of our relationship with you.

Father, as we come to you, we pray that there wouldn't be one person here today who can leave this place saying, so what? Big deal. But rather, every one of us come to this place, even at the end of the service, where we'd say, yes, Lord Jesus, purify me from my sin.

Wash me clean in your blood. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.