

# Unmasking Asking

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm quite fed up with people who tell me that Christmas is such a difficult time for them, and for that sin there is no forgiveness. It might help you to look at the passage in the NIV.

You look at it in your Bible, which is on the page that was read to you. I'm almost there. It would be on page 224 in your Bible. You look at the words there, beginning at chapter 5, verse 7, and then just to begin to open the passage, let me read to you the passage from the New International Version so that you'll see that there's at least a little leeway here that we can think of. 1 John, chapter 5, verse 14. This is the confidence... Sorry, that's your version. This is the NIV. This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of Him. If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.

[ 1 : 50 ] I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I'm not saying that he should pray about that.

I didn't know there was a problem with this passage until David told me.

And now I'm beginning to wonder what it is. So, you can ask questions at the end. I'd like you to accept this story based on this text as a wonderful mystery story.

The kind of totally absorbing story which totally captivates your attention so that the hours of the night roll by without notice, so captured are you by the continuing unfolding of the story.

I would like you to be, in this instance, the central character in the story, the mystery that is involved here.

[ 3 : 07 ] It's told of one person. It singles an individual out so that there's a way in which it's addressed to you as a Christian.

If you're not a Christian, then look at it from the point of view of what is being said to Christians, because this is not of universal application.

This is very much a text, a kind of in-house text, for people who belong to the Christian community. First, I would like to suggest to you that you are enjoying three meals a day, the security of a home and the general well-being of the community.

And then the tranquility of your life is suddenly interrupted. In the full possession of all your faculties, at high noon, you see unmistakably a fellow Christian commit a sin.

That's what it says there, you see. That's the central sort of, that's the blood on the floor or the shot rings out part of the story.

[ 4 : 32 ] The mystery is there. You are the witness to, and unmistakably you see, a fellow Christian commit a sin.

You see that there in the text. Now, you are familiar with the fact that, generally speaking, people do commit things.

They commit murder, they commit suicide, they commit burglary, they commit trespass, and they commit adultery. But in this instance, none of the details are given, just that, a sin is committed, and you see it.

You are the key witness to what has taken place. Now, you might conclude that you might even speculate as you read the story, well, what is the particular nature of the sin of which I am the witness?

But you will find this story very unsatisfying because it doesn't give you any lurid details. You can't gossip about it. You can't exercise your curiosity about it.

[ 5 : 55 ] All you know is that a sin has been committed, and you are the witness to it. It's gloriously free of having to go into the details, the sordid details of what particular sin it might be.

And that's because, I think, sin is so desperately commonplace. It's not really that intriguing. Mind you, without it, the province would have to close down. But, it's, it's, you know, if you didn't forget and realize that you're fed this stuff all the time, you would perhaps be able to recall as you think about this mystery that these things in themselves are, sin is commonplace, repeatable, uncreative, and endless progression of the dreary and shame and guilt-producing process which is inspired by the story.

It derives from the lust of our hungry eyes, our sinful craving, the unlimited appetite we have for our own things and our own way.

Well, none of the details are given. If you want that, look at 1 John 3.16 if you want to know where the description of what sin looks like is in the way that I've just described it to you.

[ 7 : 36 ] Well, you as an eyewitness of a fellow Christian committing a sin, the particular detail of it is only incidental.

It is the consequence of it which you need to consider. sin, no matter what particular form it takes, is to be seen as a major disruption of God's order.

sin is a major disruption of God's order in the life of somebody whom you regard as a brother or sister in Christ and you have seen this major disruption take place.

That's Eugene Peterson's description of what it says in 1 John, that sin is lawlessness, a major disruption of God's order.

The fact that a Christian brother or sister has committed the sin means you are talking about someone in whose life there has been this major, you're talking about somebody in whose life there has already been a major disruption.

[ 8 : 57 ] not the major disruption of God's order, but the major disruption of death's order. And that is the moment at which they accepted the witness of God the Father to God the Son confirmed by their own hearts in which God the Holy Spirit spoke to them, anointing them into the truth of the gospel.

So, what you have here is somebody who has experienced in becoming a Christian a major disruption of death's purpose in their life.

And now, as that major disruption has taken place, another major disruption takes place which is their committing a sin which would tend to put them back under the control of the process of death.

So, you have witnessed that. And as a first-hand immediate witness of this, as I look at you, I'm reminded that John must have known us because he knows that we're much more aware of our brother committing a sin than we are of our own.

So, in order to get our attention, he says what he means. Remember that as you read it. As a witness, you are required to take immediate action to dial 999, so to speak, to set off a blue code alert, if that's the right term, to inform the authorities.

[ 10 : 48 ] You can't just stand there. You have been a witness. Now you've got to do something. You must immediately assess the fact that what you have witnessed is not a manifestation of the inevitability of failure leading to a recapitulation to death, nor is it a sign that death is in control.

it is only a sign that God's purpose in that person's life has been interrupted, and so must immediately be restored.

Sin comes along and interrupts the God's order in your life, and so the results of that must be dealt with immediately, and you are the person on hand who has to deal with it.

Well, if you read the passage carefully, you will discover that you are wonderfully equipped to deal with it. The equipment that you have is described in verse 14.

It's a wonderful verse. Let me remind you of what it says. this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

[ 12 : 22 ] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the request made of him. So, you have this tremendous resource to deal with this situation because you have access, a bold access, to the father, and you know what the father's will is concerning that person so that you know when you ask for that person, that which is according to the will of God, that it will be done.

So, that's how you are wonderfully prepared to help that person. The fellow Christian that has committed the sin, what he needs most, you know, and in part you know how easy it would be for

you to be in exactly the same situation that he or she is in because you know the will of God. The will of God is described in the first epistle of John as light and not darkness. It is truth and not the lie.

It is life and not death. It is fellowship and not fragmentation. It is continuity and not disruption. That's the will of God and you know it. And you effectively have access to the father on behalf of that brother who has lost touch with the father through this in order that you might claim what you may know to be the father's will in that person's life.

[14:12] The one who has committed the sin is insensitive to the fact that he has done it perhaps or she has done it perhaps. But you are very sensitive to that fact and you know what the father's will is for that person.

So you are to act with professional competence with skill and an unbroken confidence and the certain knowledge that you by prayer break the continuity of sin.

You isolate the diseased area in that person's life. You disclose the grace of confession to that person. The certainty of forgiveness and the ample provision of the atoning sacrifice which is to deal with sin finally and completely.

Your prayer is the catalyst by which is effected a major disruption of the process of death in that person's life.

I wonder if in fact these verses don't describe the heart of the ministry we are to have to one another.

[15:40] It's not, as it turns out, to counsel one another. It's not to gossip about one another. It's to pray for one another in the will of God that the grace of God may be restored through confession and forgiveness and propitiation in that person's life.

And that is probably the most important ministry that we have one to another. Last week we talked about the heart of living faith, which is the confession that Jesus is Lord.

And that in contrast to the stone-dead heart of the person who calls God a liar. Prayer. This week you see the active demonstration that God's will and our prayer moves not with the world from life to death, but from death to life.

Death in the in this letter of John has primarily to do not with the end of the physical biological process that we're involved in, but death has to do with separation from God.

That's what death is meant. That's what's meant by death in this letter. It's separation from God. And sin is that activity by which we continue in the process of death.

[17:37] God disrupts that process when we by his grace come to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. After we have done that we still have the capacity to sin but sin then is no longer just an indication that we are hopelessly bound to the process of death.

Sin then is a glorious contradiction of the reality of God's grace at work in our lives.

Well that's what's to happen. That's the ministry that we're to have one to another.

And the world around us which is locked into the reality of the process of death and doesn't even conceive of the possibility of there being any major disruption of that process.

That's the process the world is locked into. But here you have something else happening. You see a Christian who commits a sin and you say what makes him any different from the rest of us.

[19:06] Well, what this passage suggests is that for him sin is a disruption of the process of life which has been initiated through faith and trust in Jesus Christ which is sacramentally initiated in the service of baptism.

Sin then becomes a disruption of that process and so has to be dealt with right away so that by looking at the Christian community at work in its ministry one to another within the community the world can see a living demonstration that the power of death has been formidably challenged by the breaking into our world of the grace of God and it's that that you need to be a minister of as you having witnessed your brother commit a sin enter in as this passage says to the very presence of God and with the authority of the known will of God you claim the grace of

God to be applied in that person's life they may not even know you're doing it this is prayer to God you don't have to have the skills of a counselor you don't have to be able to unravel all that's involved in that sin what you need to do is claim the grace of God for the restoring of that person to the process of the love of God to correct the disruption which has been made by the sin in that person's life and put them back on the path and that of course is what Christmas is about that's what that's the ministry we're to have to one another Christmas is a time when we feel powerless

guilty inadequate despairing when we look for lots of liquor and lots of strangers because we can't get along with without some spirit and we can't get along with the people we know but difficult as that may be the wonder here is the process of life which brings confession and healing and forgiveness and restoration to the life-giving and loving purpose of God in a fellow Christian to demonstrate to all the world the triumph of God's love which is initiated the demonstration of which is initiated in the birth of Jesus Christ into our world Amen Let us pray The angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds in the fields Do not be afraid shepherds Listen I bring you glorious news of great joy which is for all people a savior has been born for you he is Christ the Lord Thank you father for the ministry of the angels to the shepherds stilling their fear announcing to them the good news Christ Jesus the savior born for all people father we thank you for your word this morning helping us to look straight on and to be aware of the mystery of your working father for some christmas is not the happiest time of the year many know losses and setbacks of all kinds family health and business unemployment good news has been faint father in your mercy we pray for your grace and your comfort to surround us all may it be that with [ 24 : 35 ] Mary and Joseph we may journey in rekindled faith to Bethlehem lord in your mercy hear our prayer lord we pray this morning for our world it is all very bewildering for all those who take responsibility of government father be to them your word to them help them guide beyond their own capacity it's that mystery again that gives to them the integrity of all their dealings and a resolve father to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness for all humankind father we especially pray for the

Irish and British governments this morning as they endeavor to end the strife and battle of many years lord may those who are still resistant come to see fairness for all lord in your mercy hear our prayer now father we commend to you the care of all men and women and children who are suffering anxiety and distress through lack of food and housing strengthen and support them in their need, and grant that we may grow in concern for our neighbors and have a readiness to share our resources.

Father, help us not to disregard those whom we know could use a tangible lift. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Now, Father, we thank you very much for those who are visiting with us today, for the children who have been baptized and welcomed by you and by us.

Be to them all that they need. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen. Father, in our family here at St. John's, we wish to pray for those who are sick and anxious and need to know your arms holding them close to yourself.

[ 27 : 41 ] We pray this morning for Elliot and his family. We pray for Raymond, for Kathy, for Ken and Betty, for Kathleen, for Jay, for Tom and Jackie.

And, Father, we do pray especially today for those who are facing surgery this week. Help them, I pray, to give their bodies over to your care and keeping.

Give skill to the surgeons. Father, we pray for those who are facing surgery this week. We pray in your name. Now, Father, in conclusion, we thank you for more than abundant mercies in the nurture and care we receive here at St. John's.

We pray with thanksgiving for everyone who contributes to the ministry here. Those on staff, those who are volunteers, those who quietly give joy and encouragement.

We pray for our clergy, for the beautiful way that you have brought the Lovell family here, for Bill, Leslie, and their children, Grace, William, and John.

[ 29 : 21 ] Thank you for helping to get the James family from Australia here. So we pray for Richard and Judy, for children, Sarah, Matthew, and Peter.

We pray for them that the transition into a new country and new ways, new customs, that soon they will adjust.

I guess we pray mostly that they will like us. And soon we'll be as though we've always been together.

Father, thank you very much for your mercies to us. In Jesus' name, amen. We continue in prayer. Turn to page 238 in the Green Book of Alternative Services. Page 238.

[ 30 : 34 ] Page 238. Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ says to all who truly turn to him. Come unto me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have eternal life. This is a true saying and worthy of all to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

So let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all people, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty.

We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these, our misdoings. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, our Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, say, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter.

[ 32 : 05 ] Serve and please the Lord. In the honour and glory of our name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Would you stand please? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ¶¶ Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 35 : 20 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Giver of life, your Son has destroyed the power of death for all those who believe in him.

I accept all we offer you this day and strengthen us in faith and hope through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all the living. Amen. Would you turn to page 241 in the green prayer book?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 38 : 00 ] The Lord be with you. And with my spirit. Lift up your hearts. And with my spirit. Lift up your hearts. And with my heart to the Lord. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God. It is being right, so to do.

It is very meet right and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God, Creator and Preserver of all things.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, with all the company of heaven, we lord and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee and singing.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory.

Glory be to thee, O Lord, most high. Blessed is he that guides you in the name of the Lord.

[ 39 : 09 ] Hosanna in the high. Amen. Amen. Please, Neal. Blessing and glory and thanksgiving be unto thee, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our nature upon him and to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who may thereby his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and in institute and in his holy gospel command us to continue a perpetual memorial of that his precious death until his coming again.

Amen. Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee, and grant that we, receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood.

And blood, who in the same night he was betrayed, took bread. When he had given thanks, he'd break it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat.

This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise, after supper, he took the cup. When he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins.

Do this as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me. Therefore, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, we, thy humble servants, with all thy holy Church, remembering the precious death of thy beloved Son, his mighty resurrection and his glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again in glory, do make before thee in this sacrament of the holy bread of eternal life and the cup of everlasting salvation the memorial which he hath commanded.

[ 41 : 32 ] We praise thee, we bless thee, we thank thee, and we pray to thee, Lord our God. We turn to page 245.

And now, as our Saviour Christ hath taught us, we are bold to say, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Forgive us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. Amen. We join together. Amen. We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same, Lord, whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood.

[ 42 : 53 ] Let our dear Lord dwell in him and hear us. Think your joy. Get free. If also, not your bankmore plays in heaven by the live of Tanya spell, fullness of Christ, and hear us.

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