

1 John 1:5-2:2

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[0:00] Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto you. Amen.! Please have a seat. Good morning. My name is Ryan and I have the privilege of serving here as a curate in this season, which is kind of like a pastoral apprentice.

And I feel like each of you should get some kind of participation award today. You didn't do the marathon, but you participated in the marathon of figuring out how to get to church on Marathon Sunday.

So congratulations. I'm really looking forward to unpacking 1 John with you this morning as we go through a series here at St. John in the letters, the epistles of John.

And our passage this morning shines a light on three things. John loves light. If you've read his letters before, read his gospel, you'll see he uses language of light everywhere.

And the light he shines for us this morning is in three areas. The deception of sin, the clarity of confession, and the radiance of grace.

[1:09] Deception of sin, clarity of confession, and the radiance of grace. Now you see, to belong is one of our deepest desires. In fact, this morning there was a New York Times article about a new series the New York Times is doing on belief.

And the author of that series was reflecting on what an overflowing amount of feedback she received on the deep desire all of the readers had to find a sense of belonging.

And here, John is illuminating how we can find belonging. And we find it through seeing Jesus clearly and seeing ourselves clearly. That's where we find true belonging.

Now I'm going to make two brief notes as we head into our passage. So first of all, John wrote this letter to his beloved leaders, his beloved readers. You'll see this throughout his letter.

My little children, my beloved. He loves them dearly. And when you love someone dearly, you care about them dearly. And he wants to assure them of their identity in Jesus and what it means to be in fellowship with him, to belong.

[2:19] Because there's a hostile group among them casting doubt on who Jesus is. And John knows that when you don't see Jesus clearly, you don't see sin clearly.

So that's his first desire, to give them assurance and to shine a light on who Jesus is. So secondly, I want to talk a little bit about the shape of this passage. John, this letter is more like a poetic sermon than a letter with clear instructions and step-by-step.

So after laying a foundation for us in his introductory verse, verse 5, saying, God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

He builds on this by establishing a pattern. You probably heard it. It goes like this. There's a claim and a consequence. And there's a contrast and a comfort.

He does this three times. A claim, a consequence, a contrast, and a comfort. And he marks each of these with the if we say comments. Verses 6, 8, and 10.

[3:26] This is really important because he uses this pattern to draw out the three things we're going to highlight today. The deception of sin, the clarity of confession, and the radiance of grace. He's drawing them out in this poetic form as he pulls us in to what true belonging looks like.

So first of all, let's look at the deception of sin. It is hard to be honest with ourselves about sin. Now, deception can take a lot of forms, but two of the forms it can take are hiding and rationalizing.

Hiding and rationalizing our sin. Now, unfortunately, this runs in the family, doesn't it? It takes us all the way back to our greatest of grandparents, Adam and Eve, in the garden.

Now, you remember what they first did when they were confronted with their nakedness, with their sin? They sought to hide it, didn't they? To cover themselves.

To hide it from themselves and hide it from others. That's not all they did, but when they heard God walking in the garden, they physically tried to hide. But when confronted, when God sought them out, Adam turned to the second strategy.

[4 : 41] Away from hiding to rationalizing, he played the blame game. Notice in his statement, he blames God and Eve in the same sentence. The woman you gave me, Adam says, before he continues.

Their fellowship with God and one another is broken. Hiding and rationalizing sin. This is what John is getting at in his three, if we say, comments in 6, 8, and 10.

So, if we say we have fellowship while we walk in darkness. If we say we have no sin. If we say we have not sinned. These are the claims that attempt to hide or rationalize sin away.

But there's consequences to these claims. Consequences for John here are threefold. We lie and do not practice the truth. We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

And we make God a liar and his word is not in us. All together, this tells us that the darkness John is talking about when he says walk in darkness is this walking in deception of claiming to be without sin.

[5 : 52] So, this is what he means. And he means this very, he's very concerned about this because ideas have legs. He says we lie and we do not practice the truth.

It's not just about having some wrong ideas or wrong opinions. It's an entire way of life that will lead us into danger. So, this isn't like trying to walk across your living room in the dark hoping you don't stub your toe.

The consequences of these deceptions are significant. It's a lying life. There's no truth in us. And we don't have true belonging.

So, to be in fellowship with God and one another, we must be clear-eyed about sin. So, that's the bad news. That's the state of being in deception of trying to hide and rationalize away sin that John is drawing his reader's attention to.

But the good news is that clarity awaits. This is the second half of this pattern John establishes. It gives us the good news and the contrast and the comfort. So, secondly, after the deception of sin, we find the clarity of confession.

[7 : 05] And when we confess, we see clearly and we walk in the light. Think of this as the light switch moment. So, imagine with me that this room is completely dark.

And obviously, you could do this simply by shutting your eyes. But the point is that these contrasts here is like John is suddenly flipping a switch. The whole room becomes illuminated.

We see things for the way they really are. And he signals this, this flipping of the light switch with these expressions. But, if, and if statements in verses 7, 9, and the beginning of chapter 2.

So, imagine with me. But if we walk in the light, click, the light goes on. But if we confess our sins, click, the light goes on.

But if anyone does sin, click, the light goes on. So, the clarity of confession shines a light on the reality of what we're facing.

[8 : 08] And to understand what confession is, one way to think of it is this idea of like admitting the way things are. You can also phrase that a little bit differently. You could say confession is to no longer deny sin.

To stop the denial. It's to no longer deny the sins committed in thought, word, and deed. And what we have left undone. And what we have done. And we need ongoing confession.

It's a gift to us. Because while we have been justified once and for all. And forgiven once and for all. When we first respond to Jesus. We're a work in progress.

When it comes to being formed in his likeness. An ongoing confession is vital to this ongoing transformation. Now, confession can take many forms.

It can be in private prayer. It can be when we gather this morning. It can be to one another. But in all of these ways, the clarity that confession gives us is turning a light onto sin.

[9 : 14] But here's the thing. When we turn the light on, it's who we see when the light comes on. That's most important. This takes us to our third reflection.

The radiance of grace. So imagine now that the lights have come on. But we find ourselves in a courtroom. In our third sweep through this poem, we see a repetition.

Of he is and we have. When the light turns on, we find ourselves in a courtroom. And suddenly, we see Jesus there. And we learn about what he is.

And what we have in him. Verse 7 tells us he is in the light. Verse 9 tells us he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Beginning of chapter 2 tells us he is the propitiation for our sins. So that's what we see that he is when the light turns on. And then we recognize what we have in that clarity.

[10:25] John tells his readers, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. And we have an advocate with the Father.

Jesus Christ the righteous. So when we are confronted with sin. Hiding it or denying it can be expressions of pride or shame.

But pride is kind of like trying to be your own attorney in court. Like the light turns on. We see Jesus and we say, no thanks. I will try to represent myself. I think I can make my own case pretty well.

But shame tries to do something a little bit different. It says, I don't think I even want to go into court. I don't even want to face it. I want to keep trying to hide it.

But notice a key feature of our verses. All of this is in the present tense. Forgive, cleanse, advocate.

[11:30] All present tense. All available now. All ongoing. This is because, as the beginning of chapter 2 tells us, Jesus' work with us is in the present tense this morning.

We have an advocate. He continues in this role even now, even tomorrow. He's in the court before we even get there.

And this word advocate is the same word, paraclete, that John uses to talk about the Holy Spirit. So imagine we have our advocate in heaven right now, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He gives us our advocate, our helper here, through the Holy Spirit, which helps illuminate and see ourselves and God for what God really is.

But we have to get to court. And how we get there is on our knees. And when we do get there on our knees, we see that he is the propitiation.

[12:29] Now this is a big word. You don't hear it used every single day. We rarely hear it used. You probably only hear it used in church. This is a way of saying that Jesus isn't just arguing our case as our advocate, as a lawyer on our behalf.

He is our case. This is why it says in verse 9 of chapter 1 that he is faithful and just.

So propitiation is the offering of something. It's the evidence of something. It's like a sacrifice that sets things right. It restores a broken relationship.

Now many of us struggle to understand the relationship between God's love and God's justice. It's difficult to understand at times. But I found it helpful, as one commentator put it, to explain it this way.

The case here is not that of love pleading with justice. Rather, it's justice pleading with love for our release. Justice pleading with love for our release.

[13:35] And the justice was served by Jesus on the cross by his blood. And as we close, when we confess our sins, when we kneel, when we confront the reality of our situation, we find forgiveness waiting.

The deception of sin is driven out by the clarity of confession, and we find true belonging in the radiance of God's grace. This is why we can find comfort in the comfortable words.

So when we kneel for confession, it's like a light has been turned on, and we find ourselves in a courtroom, and as our eyes adjust to the radiance of God's grace, we see we're not alone.

We see Jesus, our faithful and just advocate. And instead of evidence to condemn us, he is our evidence.

He is our propitiation. And his blood continually cleanses us from all sin, and we find true belonging. Amen.