

**Sermon preached by Rev. Chris Popadich at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 7, 2021**

**BUT WHAT IF I GIVE IN?
1 John 1:5-2:2**

1 John 1:5-2:2:

⁵ This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ 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, purifies us from all^[a] sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us.

² My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

But what if I give in?

YEA! It is everyone's favorite topic. SIN! Come on, we all sin, we just don't particularly like to talk about it. I don't even like to talk about it, particularly if someone wants to talk about MY SIN.

Friends let's be honest here. I can give you a nice long dialogue about other people's sin...and that would just be starting with the front row. I could also grab one of my big theological books and read pages upon pages about sin, its effects, the Fall, Satan and the works and not talk a LICK about my sin. In fact, as a seminary graduate and now ordained I hope you know that I am a bit of an expert at turning the conversation away from my sin and directing it towards someone else.

As the oldest of three boys I can tell you for sure that disobedience, sin, and the consequences were a daily occurrence. Had I been witty enough I might have come up with the same idea as Bill Watterson for his beloved characters Calvin and Hobbes. Love the sinner hate the sin? Oh do I despise the consequence of sin! It hurts, it STINGS. It involves pain. I am not saying physical pain of being spanked, although that was a short time of my young childhood. It was worse, the emotional pain, the mental pain of losing privileges, not getting dessert or candy or toys that I really cherished or going to bed early!

One of the worst was the punishment for not putting our bikes away at the end of the day. My dad would put our bikes into the old boat we had in the garage. It was terrible! I was little and not strong enough to lift it out and back onto the pavement. I loved to ride my bike. I probably

rode my bike with my brothers every day when it was warm. To have it taken away was terrible.

I hate the consequence of sin!

But if I am honest, I love the sin. When the Bible gives the description of a person's heart as being vile and wretched, if I am honest, I can only agree. As it says in Romans 1: For although I knew God, I neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but my thinking became futile and my foolish heart was darkened. Although I claimed to be wise, I became a fool and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for other mortal images I exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who should be praised. (My own paraphrase personalized)

I love the sin. It is attractive, pleasurable, enjoyable. It often seems like a shortcut to the things I really want and care about. It relieves or distracts me from pain. It makes me look good and makes me feel important. It gives me the affirmation that I crave or solves the problems that just never seem to go away. Sin is easy, the faster way, the smoother road, the more crafty, the greater bang for your buck.

Give me a desire and I can show you a sin that promises you everything you ever wanted.

It is everything you want it to be, and everywhere you want it to be without the need to look for it! It is truly a master of disguise that deceives you into believing that you can spend without limit or cost.

Of course, it would not be so easy to be deceived by sin if it was, say, marked with the color neon-green.

"Oh darling, we better not watch that home improvement show. That house is covered with neon green and we'll covet."

Or "Honey, we better not go to that movie, I heard the woman wears a neon green swimsuit."

Or "Kids, we better not go to that store, they have neon green toys you will just put underneath your winter jacket and steal!"

Oh would it be so easy if everything sin was neon green!

But you might say, wait a minute pastor, I thought the Bible was clear about sin: "Don't drink and chew or go with those who do!" (2 Hesitations 5:3)

Oh if it were that easy!

Or maybe it is. Yea. I mean come on pastor, put up a list of the Ten Commandments. I am sure I score at least %70, a passing grade.

No other gods before me

No graven images

No use of God's name in vain

Keet the Sabbath Holy

Honor your father and mother

No adultery

No murdering

No stealing

No false testimony

No coveting (Wanting what someone else has)

WOW, man I think I do pretty good!

I might believe the same, that is, until Jesus shows up and begins talking about the heart!

Let me candid with you. Over time God shows me that I break these commandments and commit these sins again and again and again.

In the still moments when God, by his light, reveals the darkness of my heart I can honestly say there is not a one of these in my heart that I have not broken...

And here's the deal, there are no percentages for God's standards. There are no passing grades below 100% perfect. As it says in verse 5: "God is light, in him there is no darkness at all." That is the standard. No darkness. No sin. Complete holiness and perfect holiness.

We don't measure up, we miss the mark, we do what we ought not to do and don't do what we ought to do. And that is just our actions let alone our minds that dwell on frivolous things or lust upon what we cannot have, or desire what we wish was in our possession. And when we don't get it, we get angry and murder those who get in our way of what our minds are fixated upon.

Friends, church, we are in a heap of trouble.

As 1 John 1:8 says: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves." I don't think there is any question about our condition. We are broken people who sin and are sinned upon in regular terrible ways. And that is just upon each other, let alone how we offend God.

There are lots of things that scare me about the Scriptures. Lots of things that don't make sense. But there is one that for the longest time terrified me.

It comes out of a combination of Romans 2 and Revelation 20. I was terrified that when I am judged before God all my sins would be laid bare. Not just before God, but everyone!

From my first to my last... I imagined God will show everyone what a wretched person I am before the entire world. No secret thoughts, no secret actions, all would be laid out.

There were times when I literally stopped myself from possibly sinning because I thought, "If I do this, everyone will know!" Literally everyone in the entire world. I lived in fear of being

found out. But why was I so afraid of having my sins laid out for all to see? What was underneath that fear? Guilt and shame. Guilt can be defined as I did something bad. Shame can be defined as I am something bad.

They are often intertwined. They are often intermixed. You might say cruel words to someone and later feel guilty for doing so. But you also may see yourself as a cruel person, and thereby experience shame for being a cruel person.

When I think about my sins laid out before everyone, it is the emotional anguish of feeling the shame and guilt of the world looking at me with disgust. And this is the same reason I never confessed any sin to anyone for so long. I was afraid. Oh I was so afraid. I was so afraid that if I ever told anyone any of my sins secret or public I would drown in the shame and guilt. For I thought the only solution was to heap condemnation upon a sinner until he stops sinning. Not to say it worked but it seemed to me as the only solution I saw the Christians exercise when it came to sin.

That was until I heard Dr. Rosaria Butterfield, one of my professors, share deeply at a chapel service in front of all the students and professors the life that she once lived. It was a life that rejected God and she was blatant about the ways she lived that out.

When she finished I watched as she was loved and embraced as a professor and beloved individual. She was not shunned, scolded, embarrassed, harassed, ousted, banished, reprimanded for sharing her sin....she was loved. I was very confused and I found myself wanting.

You see, the scholars are not in agreement on that judgement day what will happen to the believer. Some say that because Jesus has washed away all our sins there will be nothing to read. The slate of sin will be wiped clean, there will be no judgements read. Others believe the opposite, our sins will be read just like everyone else.

Let's say, for today, that it is true, all our sins are laid out. But instead of feelings of guilt and shame we are set free.

We are set free because everything that was once in the darkness has come into the light. And God, keeping to His word, says "Jesus will forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Because, instead of shame in guilt from God our father, it will be LOVE. Love that He scoops us up and embraces us. "I know you did that, I know what you thought, and I still abundantly love you as my own. You are my child and I have removed any barrier that would have kept us from a beautiful and deep relationship for all eternity.

Won't that be amazing!

And we can experience that now too.

Verse 8. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us"

I am going to end with two ways I think we can experience the relief of anguish and burdens. or sins we have committed. Both of them have been incredibly transformative in my life.

The first is maybe the more difficult of the two but is abundantly powerful. The first is to confess our sins to one another. As John writes here to confess our sins, in the book of James is even more clear. He says we need to confess our sins to one another...so that we might receive healing.

That could mean physical healing but I also believe that is healing of our desire to sin and keep sinning. It is healing when we speak our sin out loud and receive not what we expect. It is healing when we expect the hammer of condemnation and receive the words of the Gospel from friends.

There is a powerful, freeing moment when our community looks us in the eye and says, "You are forgiven. Christ's blood has wash away your sin. We and God love you deeply!"

This has happened with close friends and in my marriage and each time has brought healing to my life in deep ways.

The second is that we need to be confessional to God. The words we speak, the things we think, the things we didn't do. The way we have thought poorly about ourselves... everything. Confess it before God and receive His forgiveness and assurance of pardon.

We are sinful forgetful people just like all the stories of the Israelites we read in the Scriptures. We need to be reminded, sometimes daily, of the good news of the Gospel Jesus offers to those who come across the sin in their life.

I asked the question in the beginning, "But what if we give in? But what if we give into sin?"

The answer is confession. We drag it into the light. We speak it out loud for our ears to hear it and in doing so, we kill the power of sin over us and let the love of God and His grace wash over us "purifying us from all sin."

Is it not His "kindness that leads us to redemption?"

To that, I say amen and amen.

As we come to the table this morning let me again remind you of the words of our passage:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Let us pray a prayer of confession.

Lord, we confess we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us that we may seek your way and walk in your will. In the name of the Lord Christ Jesus. Amen.