

## **FIRST JOHN PART 2 "Christians Aren't Perfect, Just Forgiven"**

### **1 John 2:1-6**

It's good to be back with you all this morning. Two weeks ago we began looking at the letter of First John (not the Gospel) and we covered Chapter 1. The Apostle John, one of Jesus' original 12 disciples, is now the elder statesman of the church. In this letter (written to believers) he says that he was an eyewitness to the life and teachings of Jesus. What John now proclaims is not a new truth (there were many so-called "new truths" which were actually heresies being taught in John's day). But what John preaches is the same truth that Jesus had taught him some 60 years before. This truth John now passes on to a whole new generation of disciples. That's really what this letter we call "First John" is all about – John re-stating basic principles that Jesus taught His disciples (see the 4 Gospels and the first chapter of Acts). It's nothing new. But it was important that the 1<sup>st</sup> C believers to be reminded of it. In our day with our Christian faith under attack, we need to be reminded of it as well.

Just like he did in his Gospel, John emphasizes that Jesus Christ is eternal; that He is the Son of God; that He came into the world and took on human flesh; that He is the word of life; that He is the source of eternal life. For those of us who embrace this truth, who believe it by faith, John says that we have fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." There is a partnership with, a common bond that we share with each other as believers in Jesus and with all three Persons of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:9 and Phil 2:1). John says that as believers we "walk in the light." While the world stumbles blindly in a state of spiritual darkness, we Christians have been given the bright light of God's truth. And that truth illuminates our path. We are said to be walking in the light when we are obedient to do what God's word tells us to do.

All of this should produce joy in us, right? It should. But the reality is that most Christians don't experience the joy of their salvation. To bring it

home personally, there's something that robs me of my joy. There is something that puts a barrier between me and God. There is something that adversely impacts my fellowship with Him. That something is sin. This is the whole focus of the last part of Chapter 1 and the first part of Chapter 2. I referred to it last time as "the elephant in the room." It's there. We can't deny it. Now we must do something about it. We have to deal with the problem of sin in our lives.

The bad news is that even we Christians are prone to sin. We still wrestle with our old sin nature. We are sinners saved by grace. John says in v 8 that "if we say we have no sin (remember, he's talking to Christians), we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The good news is that God has provided a way for us to deal with the sin in our life. It's a two-step process. First, we must be honest with ourselves about our sin. We need to be aware of it. We need to recognize that it is wrong. We need to quit denying it. We need to stop justifying it. Then second, we must confess our sin (specific sin or sins) to God.

I love First John 1:9. [Show slide and READ it]. It says here that if I confess my sins to God that He is faithful and just to forgive me of those sins. And then John goes one step further. He says not only am I forgiven, but I am cleansed from all unrighteousness. It's as though I never sinned – well, at least from God's perspective. Now I still have to deal with the consequences of my sin as it relates to my fellow man (broken laws, broken relationships, etc). But when I confess my sins to God He forgives me and cleanses me.

I left off last time with a two-part question for us to think about and then to come back and share our answers. So, let's do that now.

[Show Q9 slide from the last lesson] What does it mean to be forgiven? How does this change my life?

Story I heard years ago that resonated with me. It helped me understand how I – a Christian, a child of God, saved by grace – how I am

to live now that I have experienced forgiveness (how it impacts my relationship with Jesus and others). Here it is...

There once was a young single man who was a member of a small country church in the South. On one particular sunny summer Sunday afternoon after church everybody was invited to a picnic on the grounds. It was basically bring your own food and enjoy fellowship with each other. The young man was in college at the time and so he did not have much money nor did he possess great cooking skills. So he brought a meager lunch comprised of a bologna sandwich, a bag of chips and a bottle of water. At the picnic was a well-established family, the Robinson's, who brought a huge picnic basket filled with heavenly home cooking. This included fried chicken, corn on the cob, potato salad, baked beans, and homemade rolls....mmmm!! Seeing the young man sitting nearby eating his sandwich alone, Mrs. Robinson invited him to join their family, to come and help himself to whatever he wanted. She told him, "We brought more than enough for us. Come help yourself." The young man looked over the incredible food that she had spread out on the table near him. His mouth watered. He started to get up and head over that direction. But, alas, he shied away and declined her offer. "No thank you," he said. "I'll just stay over here and eat my bologna sandwich." In the same way our heavenly Father offers us the delicacies of heaven. Many we can enjoy today. They are offered freely by His love and grace. It begins with forgiveness and the pardon of our sins but it doesn't stop there. Sadly, far too often we withdraw from Him, clinging to our bologna sandwiches. As a result we miss out on so many things that are far better that God intends for us to enjoy today.

So with that, let's get into Chapter 2. READ First John 2:1-6

V 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Sin adversely affects our fellowship with God. It robs us of our joy. It is not something that God is pleased with in our lives. We are better off if we don't sin, right? "But, if anyone does sin..." I'll be honest

with you. As I read much of the Bible, especially the O.T., and I see how God feels about sin (He hates it) and knowing that God being just and holy must deal with sin (puts the fear of God in me); I would have expected first time reading this for it to say something like this: "But, if anyone does sin, they are going to pay for it!" Read the imprecatory psalms where God's judgment is being called down upon wicked sinful men. We read words like "But You O God will cast them down into the pit of destruction" (Ps 55:23). We see that in Revelation Ch 6 as the martyrs are crying out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" John himself had been guilty of this. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus he and his brother James asked Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). "Make'em pay God!" But that is NOT what John says here in v 1, is it? "But, if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Whew!! That's a relief! I'm so thankful I DON'T get what I deserve. I'm thankful for grace and mercy.

In v 1 John conjures up a courtroom scene. Let me personalize this. I am a Christian and I sin. I've already pleaded "guilty." I now stand facing God the Father, the Holy Judge. I sure am glad this is not a jury trial of my peers! If it were I'd surely be convicted. On the other side of the room stands the prosecutor, Satan. Rev 12:10 says that he is "the accuser of our brothers...who accuses them day and night before our God." Satan reads the indictment against me and demands divine justice. He makes his appeal to the Judge: "You're a holy and just God. You must punish Mr. Mountain for what he did!" It's a compelling argument. But thankfully standing next to me is my Defense Attorney, my Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the Judge's Son. He represents me and argues my case. And He's never lost a case. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that He (Jesus) "always lives to make intercession for [those He has saved, those who draw near to God thru Him]." Jesus is my Advocate, my Defense Attorney. Better than Perry Mason!

[Show Q1 thru Q4 slides]

Well there really isn't much drama in this case. We already know the outcome. First John 1:9 says that having confessed my sin to God the Father, the Judge, and to God the Son, my Attorney, that I'm forgiven and I'm cleansed. [Show Q5 slide] In essence, the holy gavel falls and the Judge announces, "Case Dismissed. Mr. Mountain is forgiven. He's free to go."

Of course the prosecutor isn't happy about it. How can a just God who is perfectly holy allow a guilty sinner like me to go free? Some theologians in trying to resolve this have wrongly concluded, "Well, God's love, His grace, His mercy and kindness override His justice and holiness. Grace trumps Law." No, that's not it at all! This so-called mystery of grace, how we sinners can be forgiven is unveiled for us in v 2.

READ 1 John 2:2

You see, not only is Jesus my Advocate, but John tells us that He is more than that. "He is the propitiation for our sins..." Do you remember from our class party last month what I said propitiation meant? [Show Q6 slide] It's a big word with a big meaning. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. In other words He satisfied the holy wrath of God against our sin. How did He do that? When did He do that? By His death on the cross. Jesus' death on that Roman cross (Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19) paid for my sin. "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God" (Rom 5:8-9).

Back to the courtroom scene. I said that our Advocate argues our case. This is what Jesus tells His Father, the Judge: "Father, I already paid for Mr. Mountain's sin." To which the Judge replies, "Case dismissed!" [Show Q7 slide]

V 2 points out that Jesus' death on the cross wasn't just for my sins or your sins but for the sins of the whole world. The Universalism movement

suggests that for this reason everyone will be saved. Nobody will go to hell. But that's a false teaching. It ignores the overwhelming teaching of Jesus and the writers of the N.T. of the requirement of faith and obedience for salvation. John was aware of Jesus' teachings because throughout First John he emphasizes this aspect of our salvation. One of the reasons John writes is so that we would KNOW we're saved. As we go thru First John, this will get unpacked more fully for us.

READ 1 John 2:3.

How do I know for sure that I'm a Christian, that I'm truly saved and heaven-bound? Some denominations teach that you cannot know for sure, that you really won't know for sure until you die. [Show Q8 slide] Can I really KNOW for sure that I am saved? John says YES, we CAN know. "And by this we know that we have come to know him..." And one of the ways is mentioned here: "...if we keep his commandments." I'm no Greek scholar, but in preparing this lesson I found out that the structure of the Greek here is what is called the perfect tense – past actions with continuing results. A way you could read v 3 is this: "By this (our obedience) we continue to know that at some point in the past we came to know Him." Our present behavior, our obedience to Him, is one indicator that a past saving event (our coming to know Him) took place.

The assurance of our salvation is important to John and to the writers of the N.T. Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..." Generally, there are 3 ways that we can have this full assurance of faith: (1) Based on what the Bible says, we believe, have faith, trust, rely on what God says; (2) The witness of the Holy Spirit in us, what Paul talks about in detail in Romans 8:14-16; (3) By how we live our lives, the manifestation of God in us, in our conduct, our behavior. Peter and others refer to this as a life of holiness. John's says in 1 Jn 1:7 we "walk in the light, as He is in the light." In 1 Jn 2:6 he says that we "ought to walk in the same way in which He walked." Walking, then, is John's term for how we live our life. It starts in our mind, how we think. That

determines what we do and say. What goes on internally gets revealed externally by our actions.

READ 1 John 2:4-6

I guess a person can say anything they want. It doesn't make it so. It's not what you say that matters. In 1 John 1:6 he says, "if we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." You can say you have fellowship (Ch 1, v 6). You can say you've come to know Him (Ch 2, v 4), but if you walk in darkness (you don't keep His commandments, you live in sin), you're a liar. That is strong language! John says there is no real fellowship with God when you walk in darkness, when you are living a sinful life. John says there is no knowledge of God where there's no love for the teaching and commands of Jesus and no desire to obey them. A claim without a life of obedience is a lie.

True believers are described in 1 Peter 1:14 as "obedient children, not conformed to the passions of your former ignorance (before you were saved)." By contrast unbelievers are described in Ephesians 2:2 as "the sons of disobedience" who follow the ways of the world and carry out the desires of the flesh. So a clear indication that we love Jesus, that we are truly Him as Savior, is our obedience to Him.

Does God really expect us to be perfect now that we're saved? Listen carefully. We're no longer under the old covenant. We're not expected to follow the Mosaic Law and keep it perfectly. We are under a new covenant now, a better covenant (pointed out in our study in Hebrews). So what does our obedience look like under this new covenant?

John MacArthur puts it like this: "Under the terms of the new covenant God accepts our obedience, a loving, sincere obedience, though full of defects. How can He do that? Because all the defects have been paid for by the death of His Son. And now, by grace, God looks at the heart. And when Paul or you or me says, 'I don't do the things I want to do, I do the things I don't want to do. Oh, wretched man that I am,' that's reality. We all fall

short of perfection. But God is not asking a perfect legal obedience. He's simply asking that we do, by His grace and under His grace, from the heart, the best of which we, as fallen people, are capable. God looks at the heart." That's encouraging for me. I needed to hear that.

[Show Q9 slide]

Let me close by reminding you of an event that took place in Peter's life. Peter felt terrible, defeated, discouraged after he denied Jesus three times. How could he have let his Lord down like that? After Jesus' resurrection He returned to Galilee and met up with His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. John Ch 21 records the conversation between Jesus and Peter. It is sometimes called the Restoration of Peter. Do you remember that? Jesus asks Peter a simple question three times, one for each time Peter had denied Jesus. The question Jesus asks is "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" The third time Peter answered Jesus, "Lord, You know everything; you know that I love You." To which Jesus replied "Feed My sheep." Jesus doesn't ask you or me "Do you follow My commandments?" He asks us the same thing He asked Peter, which is, "Do you love Me?" Like Peter our response, our words are, "Lord, You know that I love You." To which Jesus says, "Then do what I have told you to do."

I love my wife. I really, really do. The evidence that I truly love her is not merely my words saying, "I love you." I need to do that for sure. I certainly need to tell her that. But the proof that I really love her is that I do what pleases her, what I know she wants me to do. Conversely, I don't do the things that make her angry or bug her. I don't do the things she doesn't want me to do. My words are important. But ultimately my actions speak volumes. As John says in v 6, we "ought to walk in the same way in which He walked." And with that I will leave you with Q10 to ponder – Am I walking in the same way in which Jesus walked? If I'm honest w/ myself, probably NOT. That being said, it's certainly a worthwhile goal to pursue.