

We started last week on a new series. At the end of the day, it's a series on progressive sanctification, the fact that as believers there should be progress, we should be growing more and more and more like Christ. And so we started that last week by just talking about the role of Scripture in that and that if you want to grow, you don't get step outside of Scripture and create your own god, create your own rules and create your own standards outside of the Scriptures. The Scriptures bear weight on us and are going to engage us in places we don't want to be engaged, they're going to push on places we don't want them to push and it's our role, as God has disclosed Himself to us, to submit to that. And so we're going to move on this week, and I've got to try to redeem some things here or take some words back that have been hijacked, primarily the words "repentance" and "confession." Those two ideas conjure up one of two ideas, both of which are wrong. If I say the word repentance, for some of us that are still a little bit shell shocked from our fundamentalist upbringing, we immediately picture some guy at the front of a building talking to us about rated-R movies and beer and demanding that we repent. And so we hear that and go, "Oh, that again! No, I love God, Matt. I want to follow Him, but I'm done with all that. You've taught us the gospel here, we believe the gospel, and we're not going back there." And that's one of the ways we go with it.

And then the second way we go with it that is equally as wrong, although it's right in its context, is that repentance and confession occur at conversion. So when the Holy Spirit convicts our lives, opens up our heart to the reality of Jesus Christ, we confess that we are sinners and we repent of our sins and then we're done. Like somehow it's leaked into the Evangelical intellect that the longer we're Christians, the less we're going to need to repent and confess. You're going to hear me say this a lot here. The problem with that is the Bible that's just not going to teach that.

Let me test you. What is October 31st? You're wrong. You failed miserably. On October 31st, 1517, a monk by the name of Martin Luther was greatly disturbed by what he was seeing in Catholicism. At the time, in 14th century Catholicism, they were selling indulgences. They wanted to build in Rome, they didn't have enough money to do it, so they would go into these little towns and say stuff like this, "If you'll give this amount of money to this project in Rome, the Pope will let your brother out of Purgatory." Now, no one had the Bible. Remember how we talked last week about how one of the reasons we don't really feel the weight of the Scriptures is because in our lifetime, we've always had it, we've always been able to reference it and we've always been able to look it up? Well in Luther's day, this simply isn't the truth. So the Catholic Church was doing this, Peter's bones were in Rome, but they were also in Geneva. And if you went and touched them, then you got even more blessing. So Luther saw that the Catholic Church was deceiving people, so he wrote out 95 statements against the Catholic Church and for what he believed was biblical Christianity. And he took a hammer and nails and went to the cathedral in Wittenberg and he nailed them to the door and started the Great Reformation, which was the Catholic Church and Protestantism splitting. And really you're holding a Bible in your lap right now because Luther did that. The reason you've got a Bible in your lap, the reason you're able to reference it is because of Luther. Now there were a lot of other men involved and it did go bad. Like a pendulum, it just swung to crazy. And then it swings back to crazy. We're in the middle of that somewhere ourselves. It did go bad a little bit, but this is what he did. He nailed them to the cathedral. And his first thesis, his first sentence says this, "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. . .willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance." There's two ways to look at this. Either Luther is saying that we're never going to make much progress and we're always just going to go, "Oh, I did it again. I'm sorry. . .Uh oh, I did it again. I'm sorry. . .Oh, I know I just finished apologizing for this, but as soon as I finished apologizing, it made me think of it again and I went and did it. I apologize again. . ." So either that's what Luther is saying or he's saying that repentance is

the means by which we continue to grow. So we never actually do less and less repentance; it actually is the mark of a mature believer to do more and more and more and more repentance and confession.

And so I want to try to redeem these words back because I think a bulk of us honestly don't think that we really need to repent or that we need to confess. We think that's for really messed up people, not for us. So the guy that's got all of this going on in his life and he's just having trouble, that guy needs to repent, but not us. We've kind of divided it up. So what I want to try to do is redeem these ideas because it's necessary that we do.

So let's turn to 1 John 1, we're going to pick it up in verse 5. We're going to read through this text twice. The first time, I pray be life giving, and the second time is going to sting. "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Okay, I want to stop and start to unpack the first reading through this text. First of all, let me define what it means by walking in the light. We're converted to Christ and we begin to follow Him in obedience. How does that go? If we're honest, sometimes it's very easy to be obedient to the Lord, isn't it? Sometimes it is not difficult, it is not weighty, we do not have to debate over whether or not we want to do it. But then there are times that that's not true, correct? It is true. There are times that the Scripture bears weight on us, somebody points out to us, "Hey, this is what God says," and there's something immediately in us that goes, "Oh gosh, I don't want to do that." Now let me explain the text. He's saying that we walk in the light so that obedience then serves to reveal what is actually going on in our hearts. So walking in the light means that as we're walking and we become aware of what God would have us do but we don't want to do it, God is, in that moment, bidding you maturity and repentance.

I'll give you just a real easy picture of what this would look like. We'll start on what we taught on for 50 minutes last week. When there's something in you that you know that the Bible is the Word of God and how you learn about the nature and character of God is His Word, that it is God's way of reproofing, correcting, encouraging, and empowering and yet you avoid it, refuse to get into it, find a billion other things to do, make up excuses about how you don't have time and you can't read well, your heart just got exposed. It just got exposed that you do not, in the end, seek out God almighty as your joy and as your purpose. So, the whole life of the believer will look like this. "I don't want to be in the Word today. That reveals something about my heart." So I don't just pretend that that didn't happen, but I get on my knees, I ask God to search my heart, I repent of it and I even call my boys and go, "My heart today is just divided and I don't know why. Will you pray for me?" And then I go get into the Word. When you look across the street and see your neighbor and you know that you are a minister of reconciliation and you have been placed in your neighborhood, at your work place and at your hobby places as a minister of reconciliation, which means you are a missionary to this culture, no different than our crew that left for Guatemala this week, no different than our crew that leaves for Africa this week, you are a missionary in the context, and yet you don't want to do, what's happening in your heart? Well let's be honest. You still care way too much about what people think about you. You don't want to be embarrassed, you don't want to look like the religious guy. That's revealing something about your heart, is it not? It is. So the whole life of the believer is catching these little moments where we're rebelling.

I can tell you one that's happened to me twice. I'm what you would call tight. I just don't like to spend money. So on two separate occasions, we were saving up for something that we wanted to do and in both of those occasions, I just started feeling that the Lord wanted me to give that to something else. So I wasn't sure yet. I hadn't felt like I really heard that yet, but I felt like the Lord was leading me that way. And do you know what my first inclination was? "Let's hurry up and spend this." Is this a safe place for me to admit that? If it gets to be safe for you, it has to be safe for me. So here we have

a good bit of cash and we were saving up to do the floors in our house forever. We were almost there and here it comes, the Lord just starts bearing weight on my heart. But it wasn't clear yet, and my first response was, "I know we're not there yet, but we've got to call those flooring people and get them in here and get this thing started. I've got to get rid of this money before Lord makes it clear." How wicked is my heart? So you can all laugh because it's silly, but it's wicked. Is my heart not wicked? Am I not saying, "Oh no, I know that that has gospel implications, kingdom implications and I know that the gospel will go out far more powerfully and far more effectively if I gave. . .but man, I want these floors. Look at this carpet. The kids have spilled juice all over this carpet and there are stains everywhere." I mean, how wicked is my heart? We actually eventually got the floors. I'm just saying that in that moment, I felt like the Lord was bearing weight on me and my first thought was, "I've got to call them right now. We've got to get this thing moving." Okay, so I need to repent of that.

We'll get into this a little bit more, but do you know what some of you have done because you grew up in churches that didn't teach you the character and nature of God and the holiness of God but they taught you morality? You set the bar way down here and said, "Don't get drunk, don't sleep with people who aren't your spouse, try to watch your mouth as best you can and don't watch rated-R movies." And so now you get to pat yourself on the back and go, "What's wrong with the rest of you fools? Look how easy that is. You need to repent, is what you need to do. Me? I don't need to repent. I'm a good man. I love my wife well, I love my kids, I tithe, I go to church every Sunday." I mean, you set a bar that a three year old could jump over. And then there's this weird sense that you have no need to stare into your heart anymore. And you're going to lead yourself into a great deal of self-deceit and prove in the end that you knew a lot about Him but you did not know Him.

So we walk in the light, which means that every time our heart wants to rebel against a command of God or does not want to conform to an image of God, we stop, we take stock of our hearts, we see the idolatry and the wickedness that is there, we confess and we repent. And you'll do this till you die.

The other thing he said in verse 7 was that we not only walk in the light but walking in the light enables us to have rich relationships with one another. Let me explain why. If you're hiding, if you've got secret struggles, secret wrestles, if you're hiding, then it will always be impossible for you to receive love. Because anyone who actually tries to love you, you will discredit their love in your spirit by saying, "They don't know who I am." One of the reasons the Christian community should be a vibrant, open community is that as we confess and repent, there's nothing to hide and Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness and the saints encourage us and walk with us. But that can't happen if you're a liar.

Let's keep going. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Now skip over to 1 John 2, starting in verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Now, my 40 years with you, if God gives it to me, will be spent with me pleading with you to walk away from cold, dead religion and put your hope in the cross of Christ alone. Because religious repentance is slavery. Religious repentance is, "I'm going to do these things because, by doing these things, I will put God into my debt. I will do these things and God will give me this, God will give me this, God will give me this. . ." You hear this all the time in Christian language when things go bad for people and they say things like, "I knew this was going to happen because I lied to my wife." As if God's going to go, "Oh, I'm going to pounce on you now." So we get this idea that if we behave, God will do what we want Him to do. There is no quicker way to grow bitter and angry than to believe things about God that God has never said about Himself.

It is also why I will continually and ruthlessly attack those prosperity gospel clowns. Because what they are preaching isn't in the Bible. You've got absolute self-indulged, self-exalting clowns standing up and telling people that if you'll just do this, then God will bless you, and He wants you wealthy and happy and never sick. And so I want to go, "Um, didn't Jeremiah go into exile with everybody else?" "Well, I really don't want to talk about that. That's Old Testament." "Oh okay, Old Testament. Um, didn't every one of the disciples die horribly? So apparently the prosperity thing kicks in later? Did it kick in after Stephen got stoned and all our brothers and sisters were fed to the lions? Had it kicked in in the 2nd and 3rd centuries when things grew really dark after the Roman Empire fell? Not then either? So what about the Reformation when guys were getting burned alive for trying to put the Bible in the hands of the people? . . ." And we can track history right up into today. On Saturday morning at 10:00AM, one of the godliest men and one of the godliest women I know, ferociously missional, open-handed in giving, put their 4 year old boy in the ground, and it is not God's punishment. It's a fallen, broken world that God is reconciling.

So that's unbiblical repentance. What I want to do is push you to gospel repentance, and 1 John just lined up how gospel repentance works. "But if we sin. . ." If? Okay, "But when we sin. . ." So our hearts have been exposed. It doesn't necessarily have to be an action; it can simply be that your heart has been exposed, you don't want to be obedient, you don't want to live open-handedly. Whatever it is, our hearts are exposed, we sin against the Lord. We have an advocate in that moment who is our propitiation. He covers it. He takes our sin and throws it away. So then, in this text, we have an advocate who is our propitiation and takes our sin and throws it away so that we grow in the fullness of Christ and walk into obedience. So I'll just paint the picture for you. I fall short, and I hate that I keep falling short. So I then tap into the joy of my union with Christ, which means there is no condemnation for me in Jesus Christ. I do not feel like I have to pretend that I am more righteous than I am, and I do not have to put on a show for you because I am a pastor. Because my hope is not in my moral progression but the cross of Jesus Christ alone, I can say, "I have failed. Help me," and there is expiation, there is propitiation, He takes my sin, throws it away and allows me to continue to walk in righteousness because I don't have to hide within myself, I don't have to hide from my brothers and I get to continue to press into Him. And this is how godly repentance works. It's not a white-knuckling of behavior; it's continuing to tap into the joy of our union with Christ so that we're able to walk in His power and the things of this earth grow repugnant to us. This is how it works, this is godly repentance and we should be marked by it.

Okay, now let's read it again. Back to 1 John 1:5, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Verse 6 is going to be a difficult verse. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." So let this bear its weight on you as uncomfortable as it may be. If you with your mouth say, "I have fellowship with Him," but in the end you have no relationship with Him, you are a liar. And I'm just reading the Bible to you. So at some level, we have to do something with this very Southern thing of so many of you attending church but then outside of church having no real relationship with the Lord or having any intention of submitting the rest of your life to Him. Do you hear what the Bible just said? You're a liar. Are you tracking with this? God says, "You are a liar, and I am not fooled."

He's going to keep going. "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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." So if we believe that we have no need to confess, we have no sin that needs to be brought out before the Lord, if we're not a sinner and other people are sinners, or if we're a sinner but it's kind of that ambiguous, airy way that we're a sinner and there's nothing specific in our life that you can point to, if you say there is no sin in you, what does He say? You're deceiving yourself. You have an exalted version of yourself in your head that's not reality. And this is what we do. We love to put big sins over here, we define small sins over here as if these sins really upset God, but He's just okay with these small ones. So God doesn't like this and this and this, but the fact that you're still embarrassed of Him doesn't bother Him or the fact that you're unbelievably lazy in your pursuit of your relationship with Him doesn't bother Him

at all. We divide it into good sin and bad sin, God really struggles with these people, but He's glad we're on His team. The Bible says you're self deceived, and it probably explains why you're stagnant in your faith and maybe your faith has begun to retard.

He's going to keep going. "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." 1 John 2:1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." So are you picking up on the idea that John is trying to get a point across here? I mean, he's being pretty surly to be honest here. If you have no intention of submitting your life to Christ but want to believe that you're a Christian because when you were 7 at your RA camp, someone told you that you were going to hell if you didn't pray a prayer, you are deceived and you are a liar. Now I am not talking about perfection. We have already gone through this text and clearly pointed out that we are going to stumble and fall for the rest of our lives. I am not talking about perfection, I'm talking about intent. If you have no intention of submitting your life to Christ but somehow think that your attendance here is currying you favor with God, you're self-deceived and you're lying both to yourself and trying to make a liar out of God.

So here's why I'm grateful for a hard text like this that is so clear. Like a lot times you get into Paul and it's just like this idea up here that we look at and it kind of creates this wonder and awe in the person and work of God and who He is and what He's done in Christ. But John is a very practical brother, man. Like this isn't complex. If I had a white board, I could go, "Is this you or is this you?" And there's not a "Hmm, I think I would be over here." You either walk in the light, you confess your sins, you're being cleansed from all unrighteousness and you're learning to walk in greater and greater ways into the commands of Christ or you're pretending that you know Him when you don't know Him, you aren't growing in His commands and at the end of the day, you don't have much of an intention of ever obeying His commands but somehow church is in your DNA and so you keep coming here because you think this is what God wants from you. I don't know if anyone has ever said this to you, but God far more ruthless than wanting your once a week attendance. He'll take all of it and won't stop until He has all of it. You see, that's the thing I felt bamboozled by when I first heard the gospel. Like I was like, "I do, I need Jesus." But nobody told me He was going to ruthlessly hunt me down for the rest of my life. Nobody told me how ruthless He was. Nobody told me He would haunt me with His Holy Spirit.

So let's talk. Are you a liar? Some of you are. We're in the Bible Belt, Dallas, Texas. Some of you are liars. You are church going, morally upright liars who need to repent. Have you gotten away from confessing? Have you gotten confused? Because we really believe in the sovereignty of God here. We really believe that God governs all things. So one of the things that happens when you teach that is people get really confused about what obedience looks like if God is sovereign. So anytime you say, "This is what God wants you to do," they're like, "Hmm, that's legalism!" No, the Law was given to us so that, as we walked in it, we would realize how broken our hearts are. And so following after the Lord in obedience in all things is going to repeatedly reveal in us where we need to confess and repent. Have you made a habit of this? Or are you good? Walking in the light means staying in tune with what's going on in your heart. It will always be uglier than you think. And that's good news. Because the more wicked we see our hearts, the more electric and glorious we see His grace. And the more electric and glorious we see His grace, the more prone we are to not walk in self-denial and hide.

So are you a liar? Have you stalled out in some obediences? Are there things that you just simply don't want to do that you know the Lord's asked you to do. Maybe that's loving your wife a certain way, maybe that's loving your children a certain way, maybe that's living a certain way with your money. I don't know. There are too many of us. Okay, what does that delay, what does that stall reveal about your heart? These are very serious things that we're talking about here.

What does it reveal about the state of your heart when it comes to God? Are you walking in the light? Is confession and repentance a part of your life? Is it a continuing ethic in your life? Or have you just kind of grown cold to the Lord? Questions like this need to bear on us in a heavy way, because we're talking about eternal things. So if there's two paths, one of confession and repentance being a continuing ethic or you pretending that there's nothing to confess and repent, which leads to self-deceit, where are you? And so if you're on that second path, the one that's going to lead to death, then you confess and repent to get out of that path. God help us.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I thank You for just an opportunity to let the Word bear some weight on us today, to push and expose and chisel. For those of us that have wandered off into lies, I pray that You would reveal it very clearly to us so that we might confess and repent. I pray that You would give us a clear view of our heart where we have delayed obedience, where we have refused obedience and where we have had no intent of really lining up our lives under Your grace. I thank You that we will find mercy in confession, both among the saints and especially, because of the blood of Your Son, with You. Help us now. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

© 2009 The Village Church