

1John was written by an aged Apostle to complacent churches in late 1st century Asia minor. False teachers had confused them, so John wrote to clarify the gospel message he learned directly from Jesus--to re-draw the lines so to speak, which would restore their assurance of salvation.

- I suppose most of us have taken a test, right? Good tests measure quality or competency. If you apply to the military, you'll take a fitness test. The test won't turn you into Schwarzenegger or The Rock, it determines if you have marks of fitness. John wrote to churches that were being confused by a cloud of relativism and offered a few "tests" to help them determine if they were children of God. Isn't that interesting? People claim, "*There's no way to tell,*" (it's all relative) but the Bible says, "*There are ways to tell.*" People claim, "*We're all children of God*", yet the Bible says not every creation of God is a child of God--not everyone is in God's family. 1John 3:10 states, "*It is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*" So, how do we know if we're in? John proposed two tests in chapter 1... Test #1: What are your thoughts and actions towards Jesus? Test #2: What are your thoughts and actions towards sin? Today, we'll consider this...

BIG IDEA: Christians agree with God concerning sin and its solution.

Let's consider some key ideas and applications in our text.

8 If we say we (currently) have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 10 If we say we have not (ever) sinned, we make him a liar (defame God's character), and his word is not in us. Unsaved people deny their sin. (1:8, 10)

- John calls this *self-deception* and *blasphemy*, yet we've all done it. We want to feel less guilt, shame, or responsibility, so we use subjective terms to *deny* God's objective assessment of the human condition. Consider a few ways we deny *sin*... 1) Downplaying: "That's wasn't me", "It's not that bad", "I made a mistake"; 2) Contesting: "I don't/I'd never do things like that", "It's my right or personal choice"; 3) Psychologizing: Hiding behind a disorder, claiming deprivation, playing victim/martyr. 4) Normalizing: "It's just how I am, and you'll just have to accept that"; 5) Blaming: "The devil/others made me do it." Our stories may include stuff I just mentioned, but none of these allow us to *deny* responsibility for our *sin* nature. That's what our ancient parents, Adam and Eve did--they tried to cover their shame, lie, and blame-shift before

an all-knowing God who knew better. Redefining sin didn't help them, it only proved they didn't know their loving Creator as well as they should have after ample time in His presence.

- How much time do you spend getting to know your God? Do you *agree* with Him that without exception, “*We all fall short of the glory of God*” (cf. **Ecclesiastes 7:20**; Romans 3:10-12, 23; Ephesians 2:1-3)? **A right relationship** with God is impossible until we acknowledge all saved and unsaved people have an indwelling *sin* nature. If you're breathing, you *sin*. If you're alive, you “*do things like that*”, even if you wish you didn't (cf. Romans 7:15-25). That's how *sin* works; it's an equal-opportunity destroyer. Our world constantly misdiagnoses the problem, but Christians understand the problem is always *sin* (either Adam's *sin* or our *sin*, often both) and everything else (e.g. behavior, circumstances, psychological issues) is a symptom.
- This raises the issue of how *sin* gets handled. Right up there with *denying sin* is the delusion that we can cover or manage *sin* through human means. That's called “self-atonement”, and it *denies* that Jesus is the only atonement God accepts for *sin*. People often fail to see how *sin* is more like cancer than a fever. Dealing with symptoms like a fever (the fruit) might give you temporary relief, but the cancer (the root) must still be treated. Isn't that why people undergo radiation, chemo, and even operations? *Sin*, like cancer, is not a thing you can manage, hide, or make go away. Furthermore, the *sin*-sickness inside you will inevitably become known and impact people you care about. You cannot control that! **Proverbs** 10:9 states, “*He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out*” (cf. Numbers 32:23). You are never the only one affected by your *sin*, regardless of what you tell yourself. If you're curious about *sin's* reach, look up an Old Testament guy named Achan. *Sin* always takes you farther than you wanted to go, and costs more than you ever wanted to pay. Now that we've clarified the problem and how NOT to handle it, let's consider John's remedy in verse...

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Christians confess their sin. (1:9)

- Redefining *sin* always makes matters worse, because to claim God is wrong about *sin* implies God is wrong about the solution. Alternatively, John says *confessing sin* is a positive sign of true belief and gospel understanding. That's a scary-dangerous thought in a “*cancel culture*”; yet Proverbs 28:13 states, “*He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoever confesses*

and forsakes them shall have mercy.” You’ll only **confess** if you believe God is merciful, and God says you’ll never truly prosper, spiritually or otherwise, unless you develop a habit of **confessing sin**. Now, John didn’t mean, “walk around with a scarlet letter or unpack all your dirty details to everyone you meet.” He meant, “The general direction of your life--the way you typically walk--is like you believe you have a **sin** nature and Christ’s cross is the solution.”

- We need more people to model (live like) this, but to live openly and honestly about our **sin**-condition requires a proper grasp of **verse 9**. It’s not a conditional statement meaning, “**IF we confess our sins**, THEN God will begin **forgiving** and **cleansing**.” Good listeners last week heard me say this section is “describing”, not “prescribing.” People wrongly believe the **sins** of a CHRISTIAN remain **unforgiven** until **confessed**. That view hinders enjoyment of salvation and **forgiving** others. IF it were true that a believer has “**forgiven**” and “**un-forgiven**” **sins**, then our lives should be spent taking inventory and our group times should be spent critiquing each other, so we don’t miss **confessing** 1 or 2 **sins** that could keep us out of heaven. When John said Christians **confess**, he simply meant we “*agree with*” or “*say the same thing as*” God.
- So, if we’re already **forgiven and cleansed**, then why **confess**? We don’t **confess** to get God to do something, we **confess** because of what we have in Christ. **Confession** testifies we agree with God! You’re either an agreer or a non-agreer--there’s no middle ground. Do you realize no one **agrees** with God unless His Spirit is in them, which would make them a...**forgiven** Christian! Paul, in **1Corinthians 12:2-3**, drew clear lines like John writing, “When you were pagans you were led astray...no one speaking in God’s Spirit ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.” If you haven’t read Psalm 51, you should bookmark and memorize it. David asked God to restore the joy of his salvation. You can’t possibly enjoy your salvation unless you realize **forgiveness** is an objective state, not a subjective state! Ever wonder why our weekly liturgy includes pastors boldly speaking an “*assurance of pardon*” over believers? It’s to help you remember this truth, so you can enjoy your salvation, become more **forgiving**, and get more mission focused.
- Allow me to put this in perspective, because undoubtedly, some of you think what I’m saying could not possibly be true. If that’s you, I would suggest you don’t understand the gospel like you think you do or like Paul did in **Philippians 3:9** and **Galatians 3:1-3**.

I'll conclude with 3 practical takeaways.

1) Confess, but don't fret what you miss. I appreciate folks being sensitive to *sin* and worrying some *unconfessed sin* may bar them from heaven. Concern over *sin* is evidence you are saved! The question usually sounds like this, “*Hey pastor, if I get in a wreck, say a bad word, hate the guy who hit me, and die before confessing it, will I go to Hell?*” According to John, there's no such thing as an *unforgiven* believer with *uncleansed sin*. Do you know what God had to do before He came to live inside you and began slowly transforming you? He had to *forgive* you once and for all based on what Jesus did in life and death! Being saved means you've been supernaturally reborn into an unbreakable faith-union with Jesus. *Sin* can no longer break our objective fellowship with God. Ongoing *confession* is vital and proves you have a relationship with God, but it cannot be a pre-requisite for God to keep *forgiving* and *cleansing* because salvation is not dependent on you; it's based on God being *faithful* and *just*. In fact, you and I had better hope God's got us covered for the millions of sins we've forgotten, aren't currently seeing, or won't realize in the future. *Confessing sin* is agreeing with God that we're unable to see or fix *aspects of our sin-sickness*, and faith in God's promises is how we're sure God constantly, continually, and completely *forgives* and *cleanses us from ALL* (not some) *unrighteousness* (cf. 1Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 1:7; Galatians 3:1-3). I urge Christians to regularly *confess sin* to God and each other (cf. James 5:16) for the same reason we pray, go to church, get baptized, take communion, or do any “Christian” activity...it's who we are now! Don't confuse evidences of salvation with conditions for keeping yourself saved. Furthermore, let's not misrepresent the truth that sets the gospel apart in a world where no one measures up to anyone's conditions...our relationship or fellowship with God is secured by a life we did not live and a death we did not die--the life and death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

2) Keep your focus on the solution, not the sin. The world gets “stuck” on and has a sickening fascination with *sin*...uncovering, gossiping, solving, punishing, etc. Christians take *sin* seriously, but we think and act differently because *sin* doesn't surprise us and we trust God has fully handled *sin* in 1 of 2 ways...Jesus paid for the *sins* of those with faith in Him, and eternal Hell is the wage of the unrepentant. As this truth becomes more satisfying to us, we'll become more solution-focused and mission-focused. Trusting that God has sin handled frees us invite all kinds of people into the incredible life-changing fellowship we have with God and others

through the almost unbelievable gospel that declares God *forgives* and *cleanses sinners through the blood of* His crucified and resurrected Son, *Jesus Christ*.

3) *Never modify God's message.* Today, I've presented many ways we attempt to modify God's distinct message to accommodate the world. Landmark does not agree with churches that compromise the message for the sake of inclusion. While we mercifully welcome sinners, we do so in agreement with God. We never *deny* that *sin* is "*sin*" by implying, "*Sure, you can be a Christian while denying that God calls your lifestyle or personal choice sin.*" To say that, according to John, proves His *Word*--His *truth*--is not in us; and *truth* is the foundation of a healthy relationship with God and others. God says that a Christian will *confess* or agree with Him that their thinking and behavior is wrong and allow Him to slowly transform them into the person He created them to be, not the disaster that sin caused.

Let's pray...God thank you for your objective gospel. May we learn to appreciate it and experience the freedom and transformation of living in it. Amen.

Now let's proclaim in song that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our "All in All."

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Standing before God:** "It's all very well for him to say, in his wonderful opening paragraph, that we have fellowship with God himself, with the father and the son. But what if we have already spoiled the wonderful gift that we've been given? What if we have already ruined our lives by carelessness, stupidity or downright wickedness? If we don't have something of that reaction, it may be because we haven't really appreciated what the word 'God' means. Think back to some of the famous God-moments in the Bible. Moses sees God in the burning bush, and does all he can to escape, to avoid being caught up in God's great new project. Isaiah sees God in the Temple, and is scared for his life. Peter meets Jesus on the boat and tells him to go away because he, Peter, is a sinner. John sees the risen Jesus in glory and falls at his feet as though dead. That is the proper reaction to being told that we are being welcomed into fellowship with the father and the son." Professor NT Wright
- **Denying sin:** "People today minimize and redefine sin, often alleging that the "failures" of their lives and certain "disorders" exist because of how others have treated them. The victim mentality reigns supreme as popular culture comforts itself in affirming that people are basically good and whatever may be wrong is not really wrong, but merely a preference of personal freedom. Instead of accepting responsibility for their behavior, people demand to be accepted as they are." Pastor John MacArthur

- **Confessing sin:** “The term translated “confess” is *homologeō*, a compound word that literally means “to say the same thing.” To confess our sins is to “concede that something is factual or true.” We agree with what God says about our sinfulness, not what we would prefer to be true or what the world says. When we sin, we must take responsibility for it. We don’t blame others, our family history, our genes, our environment, or our circumstances. We don’t blame the devil or God. We admit that we are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and restoration.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Repentance:** “Repentance is a work of God done in the heart necessary to salvation and equally sustained unto sanctification. It is not only God’s work in the heart leading to salvation, it is the continual pattern of the heart producing sanctification. Repentance, confession of sin is a constant way of life for one who comes to the Lord. To say it another way, true Christians are by nature repenters...They don’t talk about being born again, they don’t talk about being saved, they don’t talk about being converted, they talk about repenting... the true believer, repentance is a way of life. Confessing sin is habitual. Covering sin, denying sin, trivializing sin, diminishing sin characterizes non-Christians, and that really is the message of this section of the first chapter, verses 5 through 10.” Pastor John MacArthur
- **God’s faithfulness:** Why does John say at this point (1.9) that God is ‘faithful and just’? Because God is faithful to his promises, the promises to forgive. And because, in the death of Jesus, he has shown himself to be ‘just’, to be in the right. This is the way he is putting the whole world to rights, and us with it...You can tell when the true message of the gospel has got across, because someone will always draw that wrong conclusion from it...this is not a reason to go on sinning...all who know themselves to be forgiven through Jesus’ death must look, not at their own privilege, but at the wider task. God intends to call more and more people into this ‘fellowship’.” Professor NT Wright
- **God’s promise:** “He is true to his word and faithful to his covenant. Since the new covenant includes the pledge, ‘I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’ (Jer. 31:34), it is not difficult to see why God is said to be ‘faithful’ in forgiving our sins...He is faithful to forgive because he has promised to do so, and just because his Son died for our sins.” Professor John Stott
- **Not an invitation to sin:** “God’s promise to forgive us when we confess our sins should never be interpreted as an invitation to an all-you-can-sin smorgasbord for which Jesus paid the check...The God who is Light wants us to walk in the Light, not in darkness. He wants us to have constant closeness with Him. In our intimate relationship with Him and with fellow believers, God wants us to be aware of our sinfulness, to speak the truth about our condition, to walk in the light of His Word, and to strive for righteousness by His Spirit.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **God’s Holiness:** “God is holy, and that means he will not ever get used to sin. We live in this world and get used to people cheating on us and such...When the light shows up, it reveals our creatureliness or our inadequacy. Instead of cursing the light we should be embracing the lesson it’s revealing for us.” Pastor Tim Keller
- **A pure walk:** “The way to have fellowship with a God who is light is not to deny the fact or effects of sin, but to confess our sins and thankfully appropriate God’s provision for our cleansing... ‘Walking in the light’ describes ‘absolute sincerity... to be, so to speak, all of a piece, to have nothing to conceal, and to make no attempt to conceal anything’...The verb

suggests that God does more than forgive; he erases the stain of sin. And the present tense shows that it is a continuous process. But what sin needs to be cleansed if we walk in the light? Alford, aware of this difficulty, insists that here and in verse 9, cleansing indicates ‘sanctification distinct from justification’... ‘to “walk in the light” is, first of all, to confess sin; to walk in the darkness, to ignore or to deny sin’. But if ‘light’ signifies holiness as well as revelation, to walk in it is to live not only in honesty, but, at least to some degree, in purity also... What is clear is that if we walk in the light, God has made provision to purify us from whatever sin would otherwise mar our fellowship with him or each other.” Professor John Stott

- **No point in hiding:** “We are simply deceiving ourselves. We certainly won’t deceive God. In fact, if we tried to say that we were not sinners (verse 10), we would be making matters worse. We would be making God out to be a liar, since he has said, in scripture and in person, that he has come to rescue us, knowing us to be sinners... That doesn’t mean we have to get our act together, morally speaking, before God can do anything. What it means is that when we consciously turn to the light – when we face up to what’s gone wrong in the past and don’t try to hide it, and when we are determined to live that way from now on – two things happen. First, we find ourselves sharing that intimate God-life, not only with God himself but with one another. Second, we find that Jesus’ blood somehow makes us clean, pure and fresh inside. It deals with the nasty stain, the residual dirtiness, the scratchy, ugly feeling that something went badly wrong and we can’t get rid of it. All that is gone when we turn to the light and start to walk in it. All because of Jesus. That’s why John encourages us to face up to the past. No point hiding: he’s going to see, he’s going to know what’s happened. In fact, he’ll see and know more than we allow ourselves to remember.” Professor NT Wright
- **Why we can’t cover Sin:** The practice of concealing sin... covering sin... redefining sin is characteristic of people who don’t know God, who, to borrow the language of John, are not in the fellowship... David said, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.” Here was David, unwilling to confess his sin to God, unwilling to be honest and open to God about his sin, and it was literally tearing him up physically. “Night and day,” he says, “your hand was heavy upon me.” How did it manifest itself? “My vitality, my life juices drained away as with the fever-heat of summer.” ... That’s how David felt because of the weight of his unconfessed sin and the burden of his guilt. “I acknowledge,” on the other hand, he says, “my sin to you, my iniquity I didn’t hide.” Finally, he acquiesced to the screaming conscience, to the pain of his own body, to the agony of his battle with God, and he says, “I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you did forgive the guilt of my sin.” When he did that, the burden was lifted... here John shows us that people who belong to God confess. People who don’t, cover up... PS 51 true confession is not just admitting “I sinned against somebody,” it’s admitting that all sin is primarily against God.

Articles:

Songs/Videos:

- Upon a Life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vQgk2jOESc>

Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run... don’t drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.

Challenge Questions

Review the BIG IDEA: Christians agree with God concerning sin and its solution.

-Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for 1John 1:8-10.

- In what way is “claiming to have no sin” only self-deception? (1:8)
- How can John say that denying sin reveals the truth is not in us? (1:8)
- What does it mean to “confess” and what is required to become a “confessor”? (1:9)
- What does God promise to those who confess sin? (1:9)
- In what way is “claiming we’ve never sinned” blasphemous? (1:10)

Application questions from 1John 1:8-10.

- Why is confession (or prayer, church attendance, etc.) not a condition for salvation?
- What gives Christians the courage and freedom to confess their sin?
- Why does Scripture expect certain things from Christians if they aren’t conditions?
- How does the gospel keep us from getting “stuck” or having a sickening fascination with sin?
- What allows gospel believers to take sin more seriously than the world, while simultaneously offering things like mercy and forgiveness to sinners?
- How might forgiveness and cleansing not necessarily erase all consequences of sin?
- In what ways have you found yourself trying to cover, redefine, or manage sin?
- Why must the church not “lower the standards” for the sake of inclusion or growth?
- How are truth and relationship inextricably connected?

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://tod dengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://tod dengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>