

The Apostle John's letters, the first of which our sermon text is taken from, are written to the church in Ephesus, a location that the Apostle Paul had spent three years preaching at. John also spent time there, and now he's learned of some false teachers arising among them who proclaim that Jesus isn't really who He said He was. And John doesn't want the Christians in Ephesus to be carried away by these ideas, so he writes to them. And he's not communicating anything to these people that they don't already know; they're not *new* Christians. They've been instructed and know the truth. And so, John's goal is simply to remind these people of the truth and to persuade them to stay true to what they say they believe.

Well, I thought that was a fitting backdrop for us today. Landon, Lauren, Jon—you're all in eighth grade; you all are looking forward to high school next year; and there will come a day soon when you all have a lot more freedom—when you get to college and then out into the "real" world. In the coming days, there will be a lot of pressures from people that say that Jesus isn't who He said He was. There will be immense pressure to give up on your faith, much like the people in Ephesus faced. And so, I want to encourage you today, not with anything new. I just want to remind you of what you already know, like the Apostle John was doing here in our text.

1 John 1:5-2:2

Confirmation, May 26, 2024
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

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. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 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. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Have you ever thought about what the most difficult words to say might be? I know from my time spent with our three Confirmands (and having had them read many Bible passages to me in class) that they seem to find a whole lot of words to be difficult to say! Difficult to spell too, I might add! But that's ok, you're not getting confirmed for your reading or spelling abilities. Thankfully. And I'm really not talking about pronunciation when I ask what the most difficult words to say might be.

No, what are the most difficult words to *say*? Speaking from experience, in spite of many years of practice, I still find the most difficult words to be: "I was wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry."

Those are hard words to say. They're hard words for a young person to admit to their parents. They're hard words for a husband to speak to his wife. Hard words for a mom to speak to her children. Hard words for a pastor to say to a congregational member. "I was wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry." Aren't those hard words to get yourself to say? We just don't like it. We don't want to say that we were wrong. We don't want to tell another person that they were right. "I was wrong. I'm sorry." That's hard to say. What is it about those particular words that they are *so difficult* for us to admit?

I think those words are so hard to say because they lay me bare, totally exposed as weak and broken and frail and all the things I strive *not* to be, and all the things I *pretend* not to be. We meticulously formulate and touch-up the picture-perfect self-portrait of ourselves and of our lives, and if we have to admit *those* words, “I was wrong, I’m sorry”—it spoils the whole picture.

But maybe even more difficult than saying those words, “I’ve sinned, I’m sorry,” is to actually name the sin. “I’m sorry, I was wrong. I lost my temper.” “I’m sorry, I was wrong. I gossiped behind your back.” “I’m sorry. I lied to you.” We don’t like to get that detailed about our sin, do we? It’s not that we don’t understand what the Scriptures say regarding sin, it’s just that it’s so *tempting* to generalize it all, to deny it, to excuse it, to trivialize it, or to blame it on someone else. Frankly, when hounded by our sin, rather than actually naming it before one another or confessing it before God, we’d rather just be left alone. Alone with our sin.

I’ve found in my seven years of pastoral experience, that it’s so, so very common—the prevailing philosophy around sin goes like this: “Don’t tell the pastor.” What does that do? What does that accomplish? The #1 methodology for the treatment of sin is to pretend it didn’t happen. To think, “So long as no one else finds out, I should be ok.” What does that do? What does that accomplish? I’ll tell you what this accomplishes, it’s spelled out for us in verse 6: ***“If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”*** And in verse 8: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*** And in verse 10: ***“If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.”***

You confirmands, you’re going to find that as you get older, there will be a lot more temptation, a lot more opportunities for sin, and a lot more guilt weighing you down. And you will be tempted when feeling that guilt to just bury it way down deep and never address it. And so, I just want to remind you today of some things that you already know—some things that you’ve already confessed this morning: the way to deal with sin is to take it to God in repentance and to be forgiven of it.

You see, it is a lie, a damnable lie to pretend: ***“I have no sin.”*** It is the lie of Satan which tells us that it would be better to hold some sin back only for ourselves to preserve the perfect image of ourselves that we have crafted. But in so doing, we may preserve our image, we may maintain some surface-level friendships, but we will destroy the fellowship with God which Christ died to establish. Make no mistake—sin separates. It separated our first parents from God and from each other. Even two brothers, their sons, couldn’t get along. Sin separated. Pride overwhelmed one, the other lay dead in a pool of blood, and the first just wants to be left alone. ***“Am I my brother’s keeper?”*** (Genesis 4:9) Sin draws each sinner into their own dark corner where they can be left alone, alone with their sin.

And that’s just so opposite of God’s desire for you. What God wants for your Christian life is fellowship. Fellowship with one another established upon our fellowship with God. God does not want us to be left alone with our sin and its consequences. So, He comes to find us in our dark corners, exposing our sin for what it is, so that we might deal with our sin the way that God does. With a word! “I’m sorry.” A word that exposes us, a word that confesses. And God’s response is a word that forgives, a word that restores. This is the way to handle sin. And those words that are so hard to say may be spoken with the utter certainty that Christ has already answered for all of our sins.

So, “I was wrong. I’ve sinned. I’m sorry.” Those words may be spoken freely by you, difficult as they are, because you have no less than Christ Himself standing at your side. He is, as John says, **“our advocate.”** He is the one who has answered for all sin in His atoning death. And He pleads on our behalf not only with His words, but also with His blood which **“cleanses us from all sin.”**

The only sin, then, that can damn us is the sin that we would hold outside of His forgiveness, that we would grab away from Him. And it’s very tempting to do this with our sin, keeping certain ones hidden in the dark recesses within our hearts, because the Prince of Darkness lies to convince us: **“You cannot be forgiven.”** And it’s a convincing lie. I just makes logical sense.

When you get to high school, you’ll probably take Geometry at some point. And Geometry seems like a math class, but it’s not really math. It’s about proofs and theorems, using logic to work through different premises to arrive at a reasonable conclusion. So, here’s an example: premise A might be, “If it were raining outside, the sidewalk would be wet.” Premise B could be, “It’s currently raining outside.” And therefore, the obvious logical conclusion is that the sidewalk is wet. In Geometry, we call that a proof.

Well, we have a proof in our text which I’d like to walk you through. The first premise is found in verse 5, **“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”** So, the first premise is that God is perfect. He is holy, and He doesn’t have anything to do with sin. All of Scripture testifies to this truth. The second premise is in verse 8, **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** The second premise is that we are darkness, entirely sinful. And so, the logical *conclusion* is that God would have nothing to do with us. No fellowship, no nearness, no forgiveness—none of it. And Satan’s goal is for us to arrive at this conclusion. He doesn’t just want us to sin, he wants us to sin and then to despair because of it. To imagine that *certain* sins are unforgiveable, and therefore should be buried deep in the dark corners of our hearts with the hope that they’ll never come back to haunt us. And thus, fellowship with God is shattered.

But there’s a third premise, in verse 9, which you all know: **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** We may dig up that sin from our guilty consciences, and hand it over to God, for He alone has the answer for it. When that word of confession is spoken, sin is named. And then when forgiveness is proclaimed, when forgiveness is worded out in response—it is valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself. Forgiveness in hand, fellowship is restored, and joy reigns. Joy that my sin cannot haunt me any longer, joy that I have peace with God, joy that God declares fellowship with me, and joy that what God has joined together, my sin can no longer separate.

“I was wrong. I’ve sinned. I’m sorry.” Those are difficult words to speak, for me. For you too. Difficult words, but they’re not *the* most difficult words to speak. The *most* difficult words have already been spoken from a cross. For you. For me. For joy today on your confirmation and for all eternity. For Christ is risen which means we are forgiven—entirely, absolutely forgiven. So my prayer is that you do not keep back any sin for yourselves but hand it all over to God and be forgiven of all of it. Let us together run from sin, and even when you do sin, no matter how strong that sin may be, our prayer is that your trust in Christ is even stronger, trust in Him who is the victor over sin, death, and the world.