

# Habits of Faith

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, our reading this evening, the passage that we're going to be looking at is from the letter of 1 John, we're going to look at chapter one into the beginning of chapter two.

And I think it's helpful to say beforehand that this is a difficult passage, or at least I find it to be a difficult passage, not because it's hard to understand, but because it is so searching.

This passage makes really simple statements about the difference between true faith and false faith. And even though ultimately John's goal is to convince his listeners that they really do have eternal life, he can't do that without also admitting this other truth, this painful truth, that not everyone who calls themselves a Christian truly knows Christ.

So there are hard words in this passage tonight. But here's what I think makes these hard words easier to receive. It's remembering the person who wrote them and watching the way that he talks to his audience.

This is the apostle John who's writing, and we're fairly certain that he's writing this as a very old man. And as we read this passage, what I want you to notice is just in addition to how hard some of these truths are that he says, also listen to how clear it is that he loves the people that he's writing to so much.

[ 1 : 39 ] I think that'll be obvious when I read it. And it's out of his deep love for the church and the people in that church that he's talking to that he's able to say hard things.

And so I'm going to read this passage, but before I read, let's pray one more time that the Lord would eliminate our hearts. Heavenly Father, we are coming before Your Word, and we trust Your Word, and we believe in Your Word, and we believe that it is true.

When we ask that as we read it, we would allow you to search our hearts and that Your Holy Spirit would work in us. And also that we would see the great love that You have shown us in Jesus Christ.

So would You quiet our hearts, teach us to be students of Your Word, people who love to sit at Your feet and to hear what You have to tell us about eternal life?

And we ask all this in Your Son's name, amen. So I'm going to be reading from 1 John chapter 1, verse 5, until chapter 2, verse 2.

[ 2 : 54 ] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaimed 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.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. 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.

[ 4 : 08 ] Amen. So John loves the people that he's writing to. And you can see that in the way that he calls them little children, which is, it's not derogatory.

He's not talking down to them, but Jesus is speaking as an old man and he must have been something like a grandfather figure to these people that he's writing to. He's writing to a much younger generation and for all we know, he has been watching over these believers for years and decades.

And John is concerned because he sees members of the church that he loves going astray and believing things that aren't true and things that are so far from the gospel truth that you can't even call them Christians anymore.

And John is telling his people, listen to me, if you abandon the truth that I delivered to you in the gospel, you aren't just breaking your fellowship with me, which would break my heart.

You're also breaking your fellowship with God who loves you so much. And what we have in these first few verses of this letter to John is John reminding the church what it means to live as Christians.

[ 5 : 20 ] And so to the extent that the people that John is writing to have somewhat departed from the truths that John taught them, this is John calling them home and to remember what they first believed.

And so John's point in this passage is this, it's that our lives should reflect the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ has changed us. And the way that John argues this is he says that the Christian life has certain habits of faith.

There's things that Christians do simply because they're Christians that don't in and of themselves save us, but that nonetheless serve as evidence that we really do know the gospel and that the gospel has changed us to the core.

And so what I want to do with the rest of our time this evening is talk through three habits of faith that John teaches us this morning. These are things that John says must be true in every Christian's life.

And the first habit of faith is this, walking in the light. That's a phrase that John uses in verse seven. And what John means is our character as Christians should reflect the character of the God that we love and the God that we serve.

[ 6 : 41 ] And in verses five and seven, John gives a really simple metaphor to make this point. He says in verse five, God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

And John saying, you see everything about God is bright and pure and clean. He is God is the highest form of beauty and truth and goodness.

God is beauty and truth and goodness. You could search God forever and you would never find a stain or a shadow or a dimness.

There's nothing bad or evil in God because God is unmixed goodness. He is holy. And John is making this logical deduction.

He's saying if God is light, if God is all those things that I just listed, then it must be the case that anyone who knows him, who loves him, who has fellowship with him is also in the light.

[ 7 : 42 ] In other words, anyone who loves God will want to live in a pattern of love and truth and justice just like God does. And John gets as direct as he could be here.

He says in verse six, if we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Wow. So apparently, and we have to make certain inferences here, apparently John has in mind a group of people in the church or people who have left the church who claimed to have a relationship with God and who claimed to love God.

And yet they cared very little for anything God would have to say about the way they should live their lives, little to nothing at all. And John is saying, no, it is impossible to walk in darkness and to have a relationship with God.

And you know, I said just a moment ago that John is using a metaphor here, but that's really my way of saying I can't think of a better word to use because this is more than a metaphor.

[ 8 : 46 ] I mean, when you read the Bible, there are certain moments in history where God isn't just compared to light. He actually appears as light.

Think like at the transfiguration in the book of Matthew. When Jesus is transfigured so that the disciples can finally see his true divinity shining through, Matthew says his face shown like the sun. Or do you remember Moses? When Moses is coming down Mount Sinai after having been with God, the scriptures say Moses's face, because Moses drew close to God, when he came back down, his face actually glowed because he had been in God's presence.

It radiated light so bright that he had to wear a veil when he walked among the people. And I think there's actually a connection here because John is saying, if you really love God, if you know him, as you draw near to him, you cannot help but be changed by God.

You cannot help but walk in the light. And I hope you hear me say this correctly. John is not saying that if you want to become a Christian, you need to make sure that you're holy so that God will love you.

[10:04] This is a letter to people who are already Christians. And John is saying, my little children, if you have believed in the truth of the gospel, the gospel will transform you.

If the Holy Spirit is living and active in your souls, you will want to walk in the light. That's not a command, that's a promise.

And the reason that I can say it, like I did at the beginning of this sermon, that walking in the light is a habit of faith is because walking in the light flows from faith.

We can walk in the light only because we have been changed. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul actually picks up on that metaphor of Moses' shining face.

And our paraphrase, what he essentially says is, we, like Moses, draw near to God. And when we draw near to God, God transforms us.

[11:02] That is how we walk in the light. We cannot help but be changed when we come face to face with the God of the universe. And so walking in the light is not some rigid system of do's and don'ts so that we can make sure that we get into heaven.

Walking in the light and obeying God's commandments is just a natural response to believing in the gospel and seeing what the gospel has done in us.

And that's why when you read all of 1 John, and even when you see in our passage, the word fellowship comes up over and over again because what John really wants for his people is for them to be in fellowship with God, to be in a relationship with God.

And that places the whole context of this conversation in love. John is saying, if you love God, why would you not want to do the things that God loves and the things that please God?

If you love the God of light, why would you walk in darkness? And this kind of faithfulness is something that should be pretty familiar to us in human relationships, even though all of us oftentimes fall short of loving our loved ones like we should.

[12:18] You will never hear a statement like this in a healthy marriage. I wonder what's the least amount of love I can show this person and still technically be in a relationship with them.

If you ever heard someone say something like that, you would say something is dangerously wrong here. You might even say, if that's your idea of love, you do not know what love is.

And yet so often, people, and sometimes we do this ourselves, we come to God wanting to know what's the least amount of affection, the least amount of love and obedience that I have to show you for me to still technically be in a relationship with you.

How many steps can I take into the darkness and still have fellowship with the light? And those kinds of questions would make no sense to John because John is saying, if you love God, wouldn't you want to pursue righteousness because God is righteous?

Wouldn't you want to love your neighbor if you love the God of love? And so all that to say to summarize this point, I think it would be a tragic error for us to read John as an angry old man who's trying to catch people making mistakes and show how much better he is than everyone else.

[13:39] I don't think John stayed awake at night wondering whether Christians were sinning and he didn't know about it. What I think might have kept John awake at night was wondering this.

Does my flock, do these people that I have loved for so long, do they know how much God loves them? Do they know how much he gave to save them from their sins?

Because if they did, they wouldn't want to walk in darkness. They would run to the light and they would rejoice in the light. They would love. They would love as God loves.

So walking in the light does not save us from our sins. And John isn't saying, this is what you must do to become a Christian. What it is, is evidence that we have seen for ourselves the love of Jesus Christ and that that has changed us.

So that's one habit of faith that John gives us, walking in the light. And then in verses 8 to 10, John gives us a second habit of faith, walking in repentance.

[14:42] And this follows naturally from what John said before. John has told us it makes absolutely no sense for a Christian to walk in darkness. It makes no sense for a Christian to sin.

And John has, if you read this whole letter, John has pretty strong words where he'll essentially say, listen, Christians do not and should not sin. And you immediately want to qualify that.

It's so tempting to just jump in and immediately qualify it. But I think it's helpful to just let that sit for a moment and remember just how reasonable it is that God would ask us not to sin.

Because when God asks us not to sin and when God asks us to pursue righteousness, all he's really asking us is to do things like this. Be who I made you to be.

Choose light and not darkness and choose life and not death. And yet so often we portray God's commandments as unreasonable when all he's ever saying is everything that I have asked of you has only ever been for your good.

[15:48] But there is a qualification that John gives. He says, you're called to walk in light, but we all know from experience and we know from Scripture that all of us, even as we try to walk in light, we stumble and we fall and we sin.

And John recognizes that. Becoming a Christian doesn't make us perfect people.

And what John says is part of the Christian life is actually admitting that we are sinners regularly.

And you see this in verse eight. John essentially says, anyone who says that they don't sin is a liar.

Again, hard words. And when John says anyone who says they don't sin is a liar, there's several people he could have in mind. What kind of person would say I don't sin?

And it could be that he's talking about people who are, think that they have become so righteous that it's actually almost no longer possible for them to sin. Or he could be talking about people who their idea of sin is really bad, what they would consider to be really bad things like maybe theft and murder.

[16:58] And they would say, well, I don't, I don't sin because I don't do those kinds of things. Or it could be because what's more common is he could be talking to people who just don't think about sin as a term of their daily lives.

They don't describe themselves as sinners. And in that sense, they just, they just wouldn't acknowledge the idea that they sin. And what John is saying could apply to all these categories.

And here's what John says to all of them in verse eight. He says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

But that means that the Christian life is lived in this kind of tension, isn't it? You know, on the one hand, we want so desperately to walk in the light and we're called to walk in the light.

And yet sometimes, oftentimes we stumble and we hate the things we do. You know, so often we sin against the God that we love so much.

[17:59] And John recognizes that pain. He recognizes that tension and he doesn't leave us there with the tension. He tells us what to do. He says in verse nine, he says, when you sin, verse nine, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And what I want you to notice is there's actually, there's two aspects of confession here. There's a human aspect and there's a divine response, a human act and a divine response. The human act is we confess our sins to God.

And it's clear from the context that John isn't just saying confession is just saying your sins out loud. What John has in mind here is something that you might call true repentance.

God wants us to acknowledge our sins to him so that we might turn away from them. You know, we bring our sins to God and we say, God, this is what I have done. I am so sorry and I never want to do this again.

And that's what repentance is. It's an active turning away from our sins and turning to God. And as you read all of scripture, that's what the Bible calls us to do with every sin that we find in our lives.

[19:14] I'd argue that maybe there's only, there should really only ever be two kinds of sin in the life of a Christian. Sins that we have put to death and sins that we are putting to death.

And maybe you could add a category for sins that we're just blind to right now and we hope that God will reveal to us our own errors and that God will search our hearts. But what you don't find in the Christian life is a category for acceptable sins or respectable sins.

We handle all of our sins by confessing them to God and by putting them to death. A couple years ago, I was on a road trip and my wife called me as panicked as I have ever heard her and she explained her situation to me, which was that while she was at home eating lunch with my one year old daughter, a snake had slid under the kitchen table.

And so from what I can understand, they had both crawled on top of the table and she was calling me trying to figure out what do we do now? And you know what I didn't say to her was, Carly, I wish

you would stop overreacting.

And I didn't say to her, Carly, this is not that big of a deal. What I did was I immediately got on the phone and called all of our neighbors trying to find someone who could come over and help.

[ 20 : 34 ] And the reason is because my wife and I were working under the same assumption, which is that there's no acceptable level of snakes in our house.

And yet how much more dangerous does the Bible say that our sin is than something like a snake is? Remember in Genesis chapter four, when Cain got so angry and God comes to him to warn him about his anger.

And one of the things that God says to Cain is Cain, sin is crouching at your door and its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

So right at the beginning of all of the scriptures, God is coming to Cain and warning him and he's comparing sin to a lion and he says, sin is like a lion and it wants to devour you and you must kill it. And I wonder if that's where the old Puritan John Owen got his famous phrase, be killing sin or sin will be killing you. But the point is the normal healthy Christian life is covered with repentance.

[ 21 : 42 ] It's not that we say we have no sin, it's that we say that we do have sin and we are constantly bringing it to God and confessing it to God and turning from it. And look at the promise that John gives us.

Look at the divine response to our confession. He doesn't say if we confess our sins, maybe God will forgive us or if we confess our sins, maybe God will give us one more chance.

What he says is if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You see, God promises to forgive us of our sins when we confess them to him, but he doesn't stop there. He says he will also cleanse us. And this picks up a line that I jumped over and I skipped in verse seven where he also says where John says the blood of Jesus, his son cleanses us from all sin.

God doesn't just forgive us of our sins. When we repent, he is actively cleaning our hearts. He is working in our repentance.

[ 22 : 50 ] There's real change there. And I think we need this promise because I wonder if you've ever found yourself confessing a sin to God and even as you were confessing it, you had this sense of hopelessness and you were wondering how could I ever defeat this sin?

How could I ever keep this sin from coming back? And in those moments, it's so good to remember where the emphasis in verse nine is. John says confess your sins to God and watch what he will do. In our battles against sin, John says we are never alone. God is working and he is cleansing our hearts. And just as one last aside before I move on to our final point, he doesn't quite say it explicitly, but there's a truth here.

There's a warning that if we are Christians and we're not confessing our sins with some frequency, that's a sign of danger. And based on the logic of what John says here, I think there's two reasons why a Christian might fall into a pattern of not confessing their sins.

One reason could be because we begin to lose the gravity of our sins and we don't take them very seriously. And so we stop confessing them and essentially without even realizing it, we're denying that we have sin.

[ 24 : 18 ] But another reason why we may stop confessing our sins to God is because we are actually so overwhelmed with our own sinfulness and we think there is no way that God could work in this.

I have asked for forgiveness too many times for him to forgive me now. And the gospel says neither of those opinions are true. The gospel says yes, your sins are real and yes, your sins are so dangerous.

But then the gospel takes our hand and it points us to the God who is faithful to cleanse us and to forgive us of our sins so that we no longer have to walk in fear and shame.

So John is giving us this portrait of a genuine Christian life and he gives us all these different habits of faith. And you see you've got this habit of Christians are called to walk in the light and we're called to walk in forgiveness.

We're called to both reflect God's character and to confess our sins when we go astray. And the last habit of faith that John shows us in this passage is he says Christians are called to walk in grace.

[ 25 : 29 ] And this is the foundation for everything that I've said before, for everything that John has said before, and John is really assuming that this is our foundation as we had read through everything that he had already talked about.

And I want to read again what he says in chapter two verses one and two. He says my little children, 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 one. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

At the heart of the Christian life is this historical fact that Jesus Christ went to the cross and died to save us from our sins.

Now, of course, the main reason why those verses that I just read are so meaningful to me and why I'm sure they would be so meaningful to you is because they're true and because we believe in them.

[ 26 : 36 ] Jesus really is our advocate who suffered what our sins deserved so that we did not have to. But there's another reason why I find these verses particularly moving here in this passage and in this letter.

And it's because I remember who is speaking. These are the words of John the apostle, an eyewitness to the truths that he is writing about.

So much theological doctrine that we know and that we trust in and believe in and rejoice in. John also believed in and rejoiced in.

But John also saw and he heard and he touched those doctrines that we believe in. And when you read, especially at the beginning of the letter in verses one through four, that's the foundation for everything that he says.

He's always telling his people, everything that I am telling you is not just a fact. It's something that I saw with my own eyes. You know, John, John was a witness to the work of Jesus Christ to the very end.

[ 27 : 44 ] He followed Jesus all the way to the cross. And as far as we know, he's the only disciple who stood by Jesus at the crucifixion.

John stood beneath the cross and he saw the nails and he saw Jesus's grief and his anguish. He heard Jesus cry out in agony to his father.

And we know from the gospel of John that Jesus actually spoke to John from the cross. That's how close John must have been physically to the crucified Christ.

And John probably even heard with his own ears, Jesus cry those last words, it is finished. And so this whole letter has to be understood realizing that everything that John is writing here is the product of years and decades of reflection on that one day and that one single event around which his whole life soon revolved.

And you know, I wonder at what point John fully grasped the fact that as he was watching Jesus dying on the cross, he was watching his own sins being atoned for.

[ 29 : 03 ] And that God in this awful, severe mercy was allowing him to literally see with his own eyes the cost of his sins.

I wonder when did John finally realize the weight of his sins? I don't know. But I do know this and I know that John knew this, that the whole time that Jesus was on the cross, Jesus was loving John. At no point did Jesus look down from the cross in condemnation and say, look what your sins have done, John, because that was never the final message of the cross.

The final message of the cross to John and to you and to me is not look what your sins have done. It's Jesus saying, look what I have done with your sins.

I have nailed them to a tree. I have crucified them. And now you are free to walk in the light and to have no fear of condemnation.

[ 30 : 20 ] And that is why John calls Jesus our advocate, because everything he did in life and in death was for us.

He is the one who goes to the throne room of God and he says, these are my people and they can no longer be condemned because I have paid their debt and my blood covers all of their sins.

And what I love about John is that he's not stingy with this love. He doesn't brag about how close he was to Jesus because his whole point is everything that I have found in Jesus Christ is offered to anyone who would receive it.

That's why John says Jesus is not just the propitiation for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. Jesus is saying this hope of the gospel is held out to anyone who would come to believe in Jesus Christ.

And that is the message that John thought it was worth a lifetime proclaiming. So that's the last habit of faith, walking in grace.

[ 31 : 26 ] And ironically it's the first habit of faith, isn't it? The Christian journey begins and it begins each day by looking to Jesus, the one who the book of Hebrew calls the founder and the perfecter of our faith.

And we remember that whatever today holds and whatever Monday holds, we have an advocate. We have a helper and a friend who will never leave us.

And through the power of the gospel and through the power of the Holy Spirit, our advocate, Jesus Christ invites us to walk with him every day in the light as he is in the light.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you showed John things that he could hardly comprehend.

A love so great that he spent the whole rest of his life standing in wonder of it. And we pray that as we go home and consider these words that you would remind us of your great love for us and that your burden is easy and your yoke is light.

[ 32 : 40 ] Heavenly Father, would you teach us to walk in the light, to repent of our sins, and when we fall, to look to Jesus, to remember his great love for us and to live in the grace of Jesus Christ.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.