Title: Backslidden Believers and God’s Forgiveness

Text: 1 John 1:5-10

Point 1: God is LIGHT and God gives LIFE

Point 2: When we sin God is FAITHFUL and JUST to forgive

Open:

Before we start I want us to enter a time of reflection. And here’s what I want you to think about. I want you to think about ways that you are hiding from God.

There may be sin your life that you’re afraid to let go of, so you’re hiding from or ignoring God out of fear. It may be because you think your situation or your problems are too great for God to forgive.

Or maybe it’s the opposite, and you think that parts of your life are too boring or trivial to include God in on. You may be hiding from God in that way.

Whatever it is, take a moment now to think about those things as we prepare our hearts to hear from God’s Word.

(Pray)

Good morning! My name is Joel and I’m a pastor here at City Church.

This is a unique morning because when we normally have our prayer services we don’t have a sermon. But because this sermon series is butting up against Easter we’re going to attempt to have both … and continue our apostles creed series with what I call a mini sermon. What is a mini sermon you may ask? A mini sermon is half the length of a normal sermon and 1/8 the length of a Trevor sermon. So, I hope that helps clarifies it a bit.

So let’s once again read this creed together before we dive in.

(ON SCREEN: Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty …

(ON SCREEN: Sermon Title

**Backslidden Believers and God’s Forgiveness**

**1 John 1:5-10**)

This morning we come to the second to last section in the apostles creed — “I believe in … the forgiveness of sins”.

So let’s get in our time machine and go back to the origin of the apostles creed. The line about “the forgiveness of sins” was a relatively late addition. The earlier confessions actually left it out.

The addition happened after a 4th century debate among believers.

(JOKE) The debate was whether or not the church should have a clown ministry. No ...

The debate was whether or not to let Christians back into the church that had previously renounced their faith.

See, Christians in those days were still subject to persecution under the Roman emperors. In, 303 the emperor Diocletian ordered that the property of Christians was to be seized and burned. And their places of worship destroyed. Some Christians were even killed. Only those who sacrificed to the Roman gods would be released.

So countless “scared for their life” Christians, including many clergy did just that and made sacrifices to the Roman gods and renounced their faith.

But before long things returned to normal and Christianity was again tolerated in the Roman empire. And so those who once renounced their faith just started showing back up to church. Dressed in their Sunday best, as if nothing had ever happened.

Can you imagine what the Christians who DIDN’T renounce their faith were thinking--those who sacrificed so much?

So the church had a lot of questions to answer:

What should they do with these individuals?

Should they be permanently excluded from the christian community?

Should they be baptized a second time?

What about the clergy who renounced their faith?

If you got baptized by that minister would you yourself have to be baptized a second time?

SO many questions surrounded this event in the church’s history.

But these were important questions to get right, because it ultimately allowed the church to understand what it is that makes one a follower of Christ, and what someone can do if they have strayed away from the path Christ has laid out for believers.

Christian leaders eventually argued that the church should welcome these individuals back into the church--those whom had previously confessed Jesus and had received baptism. And this decision was all based upon what they understood about “the forgiveness of sins”. Hence the addition of the line.

So I want to come back to this story, but first I want to open up Scripture together. And I hope, as we see for ourselves how God’s Word talks about issues of sin and confession and forgiveness, that you might open YOUR heart to see the beauty of God’s forgiveness, through the blood of Jesus Christ, for your own life.

OK, let’s get at it. Open your Bibles to 1 John 1:5-10. If you don’t have a Bible, you can pick one up in the back and that’s a gift from us to keep and to read. For the time being the words will be up on the screen for you to follow along.

Ready? Let’s go

(ON SCREEN:

**1 John 1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. **6** If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. **7** If we walk in the light as he himself 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 are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous 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.

There’s so much in this passage, but with the time that we have I want to show you a couple of things that God laid on my heart as I studied through these words from John.

The first thing is this …

(ON SCREEN:

**1. God is LIGHT and God gives LIFE**

(ON SCREEN: 1 John 1:5)

From the very beginning of verse 5 we see that we have been given a gospel, a “good news” message that we and the world so desperately need.

Another translation actually uses this word and says,  “This is the gospel message we have heard from him.”

This is the same gospel we ask you to “go and remember” at the end of each service.

What is the basis of this gospel message? It’s that “ God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.”

God, who IS light and GIVES life has come to us as the light of the world in His Son Jesus Christ. The apostles saw this and they proclaimed it for all the world to hear.

(ON SCREEN: all 4 if they fit. We’ll talk Sunday morning if they don’t. John 1:9, John 8:12, John 12:35, and John 12:46. Please BOLD the words “light” and “darkness”)

This metaphor is all over scripture. It shows up in the Psalms, in Isaiah, in the minor prophets, But most frequently we see this metaphor in John’s writing.

He uses these words “light” and “darkness” all throughout his writings.

And it’s in the song we sing. Right?

(ON SCREEN: Psalm 27:1)

Psalm 27:1 says, “The LORD is my light and my salvation--

Sound familiar?

whom should I fear whom should I be afraid

It’s all over the place. And it’s in other song we sing.

And now here in 1 John we have John, one of the 12 disciples who walked with and was taught by Jesus Himself, trying to set the record straight on who Jesus was. And again, the basis for this entire Gospel message, before he started talking about us, was that “God is light”.

Let’s keep going.

(ON SCREEN: 1 John 1:6)

In verses 6 and 7 John shifts from describing God to addressing us. And I believe he’s specifically addressing Christians.

John here is making an interesting point in verse 6. The person who lies in this way is not only speaking a lie, but is acting a lie.

Watch this. He’s describing this person’s life as a practical falsehood. Walking in darkness is itself a lie, an acted-out untruth. Do you see that?

See, Light (God’s standard) and darkness (sin) are mutually exclusive. They can’t coexist. When light comes on the darkness what happens? Darkness is expelled. Right?

Raise of hands of people who have been spelunking. If you don’t know what that word is then the answer is likely “no”. Caving, right? Exploring caves.

Listen, when I was in college I went caving, like spent the night in a cave. We went so far in that unless you have flashlights or headlamps, which why wouldn’t you, right?, then you would be in absolute darkness.

And this type of darkness is a terrifying and debilitating. It’s imprisonment. Have anyone ever been in this type of extreme darkness?

But the second the light on someone’s watch shines, or a headlamp is turned on, what happens? The darkness dissipates. You can suddenly see the hand in front of your face.

I think darkness is a great metaphor to describe sin. And that’s how John describes it here in verses 5 & 6.

Parents, ever gotten up in the middle of the night, maybe walked to the kitchen? You know the way you should go, the correct path to the kitchen, but because you walked in darkness you ended up getting hurt. For me it would be something like stepping on the jagged edge of a princess crown. For you it may be a lego or a GI Joe. (Do they still have those? I don’t know—I have all girls.).

City Church, walking in darkness will ultimately only bring you pain and disappointment. I promise you.

Scripture is calling us to walk in the light. HOW do we walk in the light? Psalm 119:105 gives us one way.

(ON SCREEN: Psalm 119:105)

It says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” God’s word teaches us how to live day by day in a way that both pleases God and helps us avoid sin. And we say this all the time here, but when you read and study your Bible you’ll begin to discover ways that your life does isn’t aligning with Scripture.

(ON SCREEN: 1 John 1:7

Now look at verse 7. Here we learn what happens when we walk in the light.

Two things are mentioned here.  First “we have fellowship with one another.”

The word fellowship here means more than just association. It’s more than just friendship.

It means more than having a good connection over a cup of coffee.

“Fellowship” is a word that means a deep sharing of things in common. More specifically, our relationship with Jesus.

What is it that binds us all together? Ultimately it comes from Jesus Christ himself, through this mutual love for him and one another.

The second thing we have when we walk in the light is cleansing from sin. By what? “By the blood of Jesus”

We tend to think about the death of Jesus on the cross as what takes away our sin when we come to him for salvation initially. Right? But many of us never reflect on the ongoing benefits of this Jesus’ death. John writes in the present tense here. The blood of Christ goes on cleansing us day by day from our sin.

And now we’re about to see how.

The second thing I want to draw your attention to is that ...

(ON SCREEN:

**2. When we sin God is FAITHFUL and JUST to forgive**

Let’s look at verse 8 and 10 and then come back to the good news of verse 9.

(ON SCREEN: 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10)

Verse 8 say, “If we say, we have no sin”.

And verse 10 says, “If we say, we have not sinned”.

Wait a minute. It seems unlikely that someone would make such a claim to have no sin.

But listen, rationalizing—making excuses for sin—blame shifting. This is the same as saying you are without sin. And there are a number of other ways we do this.

It may be helpful to consider the Biblical doctrine of sin. Every human being enters this world at birth with a sin nature. What does it mean to have a sin nature? It means we have a bent, a propensity to sin.

In one sense you are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are a sinner.

If you’re a parent you know this already. Right? You don’t have to teach your kids to sin. They’re naturally pretty good at it. From early on you don’t say, “Now Caroline, when Ellie takes your toy, you go over to her and bop her on the head and scream “MINE” and then wrestler her for it until you win.” We don’t have to teach our kids to sin. Why? Because they have a sin nature.

Listen City Church, God hates sin. He hates it with a kind of wrath that is hard to get our heads around. Especially because we read so often about God’s love for us.

The best way that I’ve heard it said before was in comparison to protecting your children.

See, I hate everything that would rob my daughters of the fullness of life and joy and purpose. I hate anything that would try to steal, rob them of innocence, harm them, kill them, destroy them.

And I hate this so very much because I love them so very much.

Because God LOVES so deeply, he HATES so deeply.

He hates your sin. (Run)

That thing that you did last night or this past week.

That thing you're giving yourself to, that’s destroying your life.

He hates it so much because he loves you so much.

That's why this forgiveness that we’re about to see in verse 9 is being extended to you, because He loves you.

Now look at vs 9. This is by far my favorite part of this passage.

(ON SCREEN: 1 John 1:9)

See in the past I would have told you I understood that, because of Christ’s blood shed for me, I am completely forgiven. But I don’t think I fully comprehended the beauty of what that meant.

Sin is a daily occurrence in my life, but there were certainly times in my life that I’d describe as “walking in darkness”. During those times in my life, I would cry out to God and beg His forgiveness. But I couldn’t understand how if I was truly a child of God I could keep falling into a sin that I knew was wrong and so detrimental to my heart and walk with Jesus. (Gentle) Has anyone experienced that same feeling?

Each time I failed, I would pray something to the effect of “God, I’m so sorry, please forgive me, please have mercy on me”.  I would beg for His mercy, hoping against hope that at some point God’s mercy towards me wouldn’t run out.

But here’s the beautiful part: not only is it impossible for God to have a mercy-limit toward His children, but when I failed, I was praying the wrong prayer.

According to verse 9  “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.

Let’s start with the word confess. Confession is the role that *WE* play in regards to God’s forgiveness.  Confession is a word that means to “agree with”.  In other words, when we sin, we AGREE with God that what we have done is wrong, contrary to His Word and falls short of His glorious standard (God is light). So, that’s my part and then God takes it from there.

(ON SCREEN: Put up new verse 9 and **BOLD** the words **Faithful** and **Righteous**)

The next part of the verse is the coolest part of all of this, watch. John states “If we confess our sins, He is 1. *faithful* … and 2. Righteous … or “just” … to forgive us”.

The amazing thing about God is that while we are often unfaithful, He never is. It’s impossible for God to be unfaithful to what He promises.  So when we confess our sins, there will never be a time or a place or an instance where that sin will cause God to be unfaithful in offering His forgiveness to us.

So many of us simply don’t believe that reality, and we wonder deep down inside if there’s a limit to His forgiveness. But that could not be farther from the truth! He is faithful—every single time—to forgive you, and there is not a type or quota of sin that can shake or change that faithfulness.

The other word is “righteous” … or “*just”* . God’s justice in forgiving sin is another key concept that most of us simply haven’t thought about in regards to God’s forgiveness.

Remember what I prayed when I failed? “God please be merciful to me!”.  But notice that the scripture doesn’t say that “when we confess our sins God is faithful and *merciful* to forgive us”, it says that “God is faithful and *just*” to forgive our sins.  Pay attention here, because this is incredible.

You see, when Christ came to this earth, lived a perfect life, and shed His blood on the cross, that served as a once and for all-time payment for *all* of our sin.  Not *part* of your sin.  Not *most* of your sin.  When Jesus shed His blood, it was the complete and total payment for *every* sin you’ve ever committed and ever will commit. Isn’t that beautiful?

It says here that if we confess our sins to God, that He is “Just” to forgive us of our sins. This means that for God *not* to forgive you, would be unjust.  Why? Because *all* your sin was *already* paid for on the cross.

(ON SCREEN: Quoted verse from hymn)

The famous hymn, “It is Well”, has this line, “My sin, oh the bliss, of this glorious thought.  My sin, *not in part, but the whole*, was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.  Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Oh my soul”. (Pause) That’s it! When Jesus hung on the cross, shed His blood, breathed His last breath and cried out “IT IS FINISHED!”, then your sin was exactly that.  It was finished forever.

So now when I sin, my prayer is much different.  I pray “God, I confess and agree that what I did was wrong and is contrary to your nature, and because you are a faithful and just God, I know that you have forgiven me, so please help me to walk in the light, living my life in light of your amazing love for me”.

You see the difference?  My previous prayer was cloaked in fear and uncertainty.  My new prayer is covered in the confidence of the unshakable, love and faithfulness of my Heavenly Father that loves me beyond my wildest imagination.

CLOSING

(ON SCREEN: back to Title screen

**Backslidden Believers and God’s Forgiveness**

**1 John 1:5-10**

See, in the 4th century when Christian leaders were trying to determined what should happen with backslidden believers who returned to the faith--they decided that these Christians don’t need to be baptized again.

And this was and is important, and here’s why: they determined this to be so because getting baptized a second time would imply that they need to be forgiven more than once.

But see they understood that the forgiveness of sins has taken place once for all in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And so they added this line, “the forgiveness of sins”, to the creed. And by doing so they were communicating to the church, for as long as the church had access to this creed, to understand that this community of believers WASN’T only for the pure and spiritually successful.

I hope that City Church never feels like we need to “have it all together”. That our marriages must be perfect and our kids must be perfect.

Listen, that’s a crazy expectation. This kind of church is never vulnerable and will never be honest about its brokenness.

The people of God loves and forgives others in their brokenness because God loved and forgave us in ours.

That was good news for the 4th century Christian and it’s good news for the 21st century Christian … and really anyone who puts their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

See, it’s good news primarily because when we recite the creed and say “we believe in the forgiveness of sins” we are saying that we stand NOT by our own achievements, but by the achievement of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

So where are you this morning? How do you view your sin? Do you believe that you can be forgiven of all your sin? Or do you see your sin as too great for God to forgive? Listen, I PROMISE you it’s not!

Perhaps you’ve never placed your faith in Christ and you know today is the day to talk with someone about that. I’d encourage you to do that, either by filling out the card in your seat or just talking with someone here in a little bit. Me or any of the pastors or anyone with a red badge.

And the beautiful part about it is that you don’t have to “fix” your sin before coming to God. That's not how this works. You just come ... stained and dirty from all your sin. And reach out and take the forgiveness offered to you in Christ.

Let’s pray.