

A Mind for Holiness

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I want to go to 1 John for our text here this evening. It's a text that will help you grow spiritually if you are a Christian. It will help you make progress in your sanctification. It is a much more powerful text than you might realize when you first read it. It's found in 1 John 2:1 and 2. There is so much help here for the believing Christian.

Let's look at that text to begin. 1 John 2:1 and 2,

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

This passage speaks to a broad spectrum of believers in a way that few passages could make such a great claim to do, speaking to so many of such different backgrounds all at the same time.

This passage speaks to a complacent believer who has not taken seriously the command found in 2 Peter 3:18, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, there are many claiming to be Christians, perhaps some of you, who if they stopped to examine themselves and stopped to examine their lives, they would see that they are not that much different today than they were a year ago, three years ago, five years ago. They've just kind of been in a circle pattern over the airport and have never come in for a landing to get serious about spiritual growth and their life shows it. They're stale. They're stagnant. They're dealing with the same issues either in thought or action, in behavior or belief. They're struggling with the same issues that they were dealing with a long time ago. This text speaks to them and calls them to repentance and calls them to spiritual growth. This text also speaks to those who are introspective by nature and continually, repeatedly, often find themselves in a downward spiritual spiral. They're concerned about spiritual life so much so that they get preoccupied with the defects in their inner man and they just seem to get stuck into quicksand and continually sink. They are in a discouraging hole. They keep digging and the hole only gets bigger and gets worse. That's not a good place to be. Still others are consciously seeking for growth but they yearn for more consistency; they want to be more faithful to Christ.

Well, our passage helps you no matter where you may be on that spectrum, deeply introspective, complacent, earnestly seeking to grow. This passage is helpful for believers like that, it's even helpful for people that have not come to Christ at all, that have never learned to abandon their trust in their own works and their own religious rituals, and to put their faith in Christ alone. All of us benefit from this text. All of us come under its authority. All of us have something to glean from what this text says and I thought that it was a good text for a standalone message tonight.

Look at verse 1 with me again. We see that as John is writing here, he states very plainly what his purpose in writing is. He says in chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He expresses his purpose plainly. You can't miss it. John is writing to believers whom he loved, he addresses them with the fatherly phrase, "you little children," which writing as a man who was nearly 90 years old at the time, he was certainly entitled to call anyone a little child that he wanted to do so; you earn certain prerogatives with the advance of age and in spiritual growth. And the tone here that I would not want you to miss, especially those of you that have come out of legalistic backgrounds in the past or places where, you know, you weren't used to church leadership that showed actual spiritual care for you, what I want you to see here is that this is a tone of pastoral love, of pastoral concern. He is looking to help these believers with what he says. It's a wonderful spirit in which he writes saying, "I'm writing to help you. I'm writing to help you spiritually. I'm writing to help you so that you may not sin."

What he's doing here when he says, "I am writing these things to you," he's pointing back now to what he had said earlier in the letter; he's pointing backwards, "I'm writing these things." What things? "The things that I've been saying. What else could I be talking about?" He's pointing back to what he had just said and as we look back and as we look at this text, beloved, you're going to find that there are four principles that will provide a great balance for your walk with Christ. Balance is the key to spiritual growth and sometimes spiritual growth is like walking on beams in gymnastics, the little narrow beam that they do flips on and all of that, so easy to fall off of one side or the other if you're not maintaining balance. Well, this text gives you balance to seek in your spiritual life and what I want to say and I'll probably repeat myself in the times to come tonight in this message, is that it's important for you to, one, hold all of these things together in your mind, to give equal weight to all of these four principles of spiritual growth, and also I want you to see this, that what John is giving us here are deep profound spiritual truths that we are meant to meditate on repeatedly; that we are meant to have sink deep and to grow deep roots.

So often, so often people will try to deal with a sin in their life by dealing with a remedy that is directed to that one particular sin, and so they're looking for three steps to overcoming lust in their lives, or six principles to overcome gluttony, which you can talk about around a meal, I guess. I don't know. That's not what John does here. The way that Scripture helps us grow spiritually and the way that Scripture helps us deal with sin is far different than what the common approach is often done. John is not dealing with sin superficially here, he's not giving us external principles to try to implement, rather, my friend, he's doing this, he is laying out great principles that undergird the entire way that

you think and the entire way that you approach life. John is teaching us in a way that is designed to transform our mind.

In fact, look at Romans 12 for just a moment. Romans 12. Rather than with dealing with external matters of superficial behavior modification, Scripture tells us how it is that we can be transformed and he says in Romans 12:1, this is the Apostle Paul, of course, he says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren," notice the pastoral tone again, brethren, beloved, little children, "I urge you by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And," verse 2, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed." How am I to be transformed? I have been struggling with this sin, with this bad attitude, I've been struggling with these thoughts for so long and it seems like transformation is still a million miles away. How am I to be transformed? Paul says, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The key to a spiritual transformation is to have a transformed mind, to have settled spiritual principles of first order that are in your mind and that govern the way that you view all of life and you view all of your expectations and that shape your desires. There are certain things, beloved, that must be settled in your Christian mind that are never open for discussion, never open for compromise. What I mean by open for discussion is that there is no possibility that these things could be contradicted and sometimes people are just, like to just keep all of their options open, they don't want to come to settled final conclusions about any particular truth, they don't want to lay an anchor down in certain things, and therefore it's no wonder that the waves come and toss them to and fro, Ephesians 4. What we're seeing here tonight are the things that we must settle in our minds that will help us grow spiritually and help us to avoid sin and grow in holiness.

Let's look at the first one here which I have called settled reverence. Settled reverence. Settled reverence for God, you could say. Beloved, here's the deal: the battle with sin in your life does not start with your efforts to overcome that particular sin. I know that that's where everybody wants to go, "I really want to be out from under this dominating habit and how can I stop this habit? How can I break this habit?" I understand everybody wants to start there but we have to think differently. This is not where Scripture would tell us to start in our thinking, to start with a preoccupation of the place where we are falling short as though we were supposed to start on a horizontal level. Beloved, you should know by now if you're a regular part of our church, that all of our thinking has to start vertically. We start with a Christ-centered thinking. We start with theocentric, that is, God-centered thinking and that that starts our thinking and everything revolves around that. The nature of God, the character of Christ, the redemption, the atonement of Christ, is the hub around which everything else in our mind is designed to operate. That's the way that you are to think as a Christian, is always going back to who God is, and so I say again, the battle with sin does not start with your efforts to overcome sin, it starts further back. John is writing these things, what he had been saying, where does your battle with sin truly start? Friend, here you go, it starts with a conviction about the holiness of God. It starts with a conviction about the holiness of God.

Look at verse 5 of chapter 1 with me. After his introductory remarks, he gets into the essence of what he is writing to them about and he says in verse 5, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that," here's the content of the message, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is light. It's a metaphor for stating that God is holy. God is perfect in every dimension. He is morally perfect. He is without sin. He is full of majestic glory which no man can look upon with his sinful human eyes and live. He is great. He is grand. He is awesome. And in all of these things, beloved, God is holy and deserves our full attention. God is holy and we realize that God is a God who by nature hates sin. As Habakkuk 1:13 says, "[His] eyes are too pure to approve evil." That's who God is. That's who the King of the universe is. That is who the sovereign is. That is the one who if you are in Christ has redeemed you. God is light. He is holy. He is perfect.

And his light has consequences for us, then, as believers. His holiness means that you as a believer aim your life after holiness as well, not simply starting with how do I overcome this particular sin, but you have this settled conviction about what Scripture says about the nature of God. He's great. He's holy. He's perfect. He's separate. That's who God is and you bring all of your thinking and all of your desires in principle under that great theme, God is holy, God is majestic, and that has consequences for the way that you think about life and the way that you aim your life. His holiness means that you aim your life after holiness as a believer.

Look at 1 Peter. Turn to your left in your Bible a book or two, 1 Peter 1:14. In fact, let's go back to verse 13 because you see the different apostles making the same emphasis in what they say. Verse 13 of 1 Peter 1, "Therefore, prepare your minds." Do you see it? Prepare your minds. Guard how you think. Think about how you think, in other words. "Prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance." Do you see it, your ignorance, your mind is at play here? What is it, then, that is supposed to occupy our minds? Verse 15, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" And your holiness, beloved, your spiritual growth, your sanctification, is a consequence of who your God is. Your God is holy and that is to be a driving force of thought and motivation in your heart, and because God is holy, because he is separate, you dwell on that, you meditate on that and it cultivates a sense of reverence for him, of fear, of worship, of obedient response to him that recognizes his great holiness, sobers you and calls you to think about life not in terms of the passing pleasures of sin but aiming your life to be set apart for the God who saved you.

This is the way that we are to think. Spiritual growth starts with a settled reverence for God. You say, "Whatever else I do in my life, I cannot take God lightly. I cannot treat Him as someone who is inconsequential or I cannot treat His commands as something that are optional for me, that are a matter of indifference to me." As this love for the holiness of God develops in your heart, as his holiness starts to consume your thinking, then you come to grips with the fact that your mind and your heart and your affections

are designed, I say to you, your mind and heart are designed to respond to that with a sense of reverence that says, "I must follow and I must obey and I must love this God who is holy." The holiness of God draws that out of your heart. So what we want to do is put away all distractions as we're thinking about these things and pay attention to God's word and what it says about God's holiness because this is where it all begins.

Now, God's holiness sets the stage for three other indispensable convictions that set your mind for holiness, three other convictions that set your mind and help you cultivate a mindset for holiness, and I've put them in this way: settled reverence leads you to three other convictions. I'll explain these: no denial, no compromise, no despair. No denial. No compromise. No despair. What do I mean by that? Well, first of all, God's holiness means that you allow no denial of sin in your life. No denial of sin. No compromise with sin. No despair over sin. When you have a settled conviction of the holiness of God, it generates these three consequent responses in your understanding over time.

No denial of sin. When you see the holiness of God for what it really is, you cannot deny that you have sin yourself; that there is corruption inside you; that you are prone to wander, as the hymn writer says. You can't deny that. You won't deny that if you have a settled reverence for God. No denial of sin. Secondly, no compromise with sin. God's holiness means that I cannot accept and tolerate sin in my life. I may still stumble, we all stumble in many ways Scripture says, but I don't accept that. I don't allow that. I don't want that. I resist that. There's no compromise with sin. The final thing that we see in this passage is no despair over sin. For the Christian, there is no room for despair because we recognize that Christ has come to be the propitiation for our sins. Christ died to take away our sins. The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. Not water, water could never, water on the body could never cleanse anyone from sin. Baptism can't save anyone. We must be bathed in a spiritual way with the blood of Christ. So the settled reverence for God leads us to no denial, no compromise, no despair.

Let's go through these one by one and see where the text leads us to these things. So point 1, settled reverence. Point 2, no denial. A settled confession of sin. No denial, a settled confession of sin. Now if you want to overcome sin, you need to acknowledge that you have a sin problem to overcome, right? We're not going to fight against a foe that we do not believe exists in our hearts. We're not going to fight against someone that we do not think is an enemy. Notice the context of these two verses in chapter 2. Look at verse 8 with me here, 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." Here's what I want you to see, beloved, John started this section saying God is light and in him there is no darkness at all, a proper meditation on the holiness of God awakens us to the fact that we're not like that, that there is darkness in us, that there is sin in us, so much so that John says that if we say that we don't have sin, we're lying, we're kidding ourselves, in fact, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us, for a man in light of the holiness of God to say that he has not sinned, verse 10, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. Scripture teaches us that we have remaining corruption even as Christians. We sin in our attitudes. We sin in our

actions. We don't love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. We don't love our neighbor as ourselves as God's law requires. We realize that there is this dark remaining principle of corruption that is in us that still stimulates us to sin even as Christians. We have to battle against that. A true Christian, in other words, has a settled sense of his own spiritual bankruptcy. He realizes that he has not arrived. He does not go with the teaching that says that spiritual perfection can be attained in this life. He realizes that that's not true in his experience, it's not true to Scripture, and he also realizes with a measure of sympathy and concern that even those who claim spiritual perfection, it's not true in their lives either. There is this fallen nature that we have not yet been completely delivered from while we live on this earth.

So a true Christian sees he has not arrived. A man for God, a man of God, sees sin inside himself even as he's seeking to grow spiritually. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7, he said, "I find in the principle that evil is within me, the one who wishes to do good." So what we're saying here when we say that there is no denial, what we mean is that the Christian needs to have it settled in his mind that he will not deny the presence of sin in his life. Oh, his sin has been forgiven, the power of sin has been broken by the indwelling Holy Spirit, it's not that he's without resources but he has not yet been made perfect. You have not yet been made perfect and therefore in light of the holiness of God, you could take no other posture than to say, "God, even as a believer, I find myself falling short of Your glory. I find myself in need of the cleansing blood of Christ. I find myself in need of spiritual help from the indwelling Holy Spirit."

So beloved, if you want to make spiritual progress, you need to have a settled reverence for God that leads to a position of no denial, you have a settled confession of sin. I stand before you and I acknowledge the ongoing sinfulness of my corruption. I make no pretense of perfection before you. I make no pretense of having it all together, and none of you should have any kind of pretense like that either. Scripture tells us the truth about ourselves. Look at it again, chapter 1, verse 8 with me, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." So that needs to be a settled part of recognition. We abandon all pretense of a self-righteousness. We abandon all pretense of spiritual perfection. We reject the theology that would teach us that and we come humbly before Scripture, we come humbly before God and say, "O, my great and holy God, You are exalted and I fall short of that glory. That's who I am, Lord, and how grateful I am, therefore, for the Lord Jesus Christ who clothes me in His Holiness, who clothes me in His righteousness because I certainly have none of my own that would be acceptable to You." No denial. A settled confession of sin.

Well, that leads us to a third principle this evening that we can call no compromise. No compromise by which we mean a settled resistance to sin. A settled resistance to sin. So we have a settled reverence for God, we hold that clearly in our minds, we have a settled confession of sin as a result of that, and then that leads us to a position of no compromise, a settled resistance to sin. Now think with me, beloved, although we fall short of the glory of God and we're still dealing with these remnants of corruption in our lives that have a way of manifesting themselves at the most inconvenient times, right? In light of the holiness of God, we can't accept that state of affairs as being the place where we stop

and we just accept that. We don't accept sin in our lives even though we acknowledge its ongoing presence, its ongoing corruption in who we are, and John is writing to help his readers avoid sin. So in chapter 2, verse 1, look at it with me here as we look at the idea of no compromise, a settled resistance to sin, he says in chapter 2, verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." The language of the original Greek has this idea, he wants us to avoid each act of sin that might creep into life. In other words, "I'm writing these things to you so that you would successfully overcome sin in your life, and each time when you are presented with temptation, you would successfully resist it." He says, "That's why I am writing." So he's writing to produce in you as a believer in Christ, he is writing to produce in you a settled resistance to sin. He's saying, "Don't accept it." Even though we can't deny that we have it, that doesn't mean that we accept its presence in our lives as though we're going to accommodate it and let it go.

Now here's my question for you: why does John say that at this point in the letter? Why is he saying, "I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin"? Why is he saying that here in his letter? Well, remember the context. John had just made it plain in verse 8, 9 and 10, that sin is a pervasive reality. Look at it with me again because I want you to get the context here. "If we say that we have no sin," verse 8, "we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," contemplating an ongoing confession of sin. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." Now when you look at that, you can't deny that you've got sin, you say that you've not sinned, you're calling God a liar, you need to be confessing your sins in order to receive ongoing cleansing, that's what he has just said in this letter. Well, a casual reader might conclude that sin is therefore inevitable in the Christian life. Why should I even bother fighting against sin if those things are true? If I must have a settled confession of sin, then why even bother fighting against it since it's going to be with me anyway? And so it's a pervasive reality. Not only that, John has assured us of God's forgiveness. Look at the end of verse 7, he says, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." And verse 9, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So there's this presence of sin, there's this promise of the forgiveness of sin that belongs to us in Christ, and so we're left with this question: if its reality is settled and if forgiveness is real, then how bad can sin actually be? If it's present in us and God has forgiven us and Christ's blood has washed it away, then how bad can sin be? There's a certain logic to the argument, isn't there? Sin is real. Sin is forgiven. You might think, "Well, what makes the difference, then? Why worry about this? Why trouble ourselves? Why struggle against sin? Why exert our effort toward growing in sanctification?" Well, beloved, the text has already given you the answer to that. The text has already answered that. The reason that we don't accept sin, that we don't tolerate it, is because verse 5, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." The holiness of God forbids us from treating sin lightly, from accepting sin and just letting it go in our lives. Beloved, here's the deal for us and this really drives your pursuit of holiness in a healthy way: if God cannot approve evil of any kind, including in your own life, then you can't accept it

either. You can't compromise with sin in your life if God is like that. If God is holy, that means that sin has to go, sins of thought, sins of attitude, sins of disposition, sins of words, sins of deeds. There is no room for compromising with sin.

Now you can see this illustrated in a physical healing that Jesus did back in John 5. Turn back to the Gospel of John with me, John 5, beginning in verse 5. A man was beside a pool in Bethesda and in verse 5, "A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years." Verse 6, "When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, 'Do you wish to get well?' The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.' Jesus said to him," in verse 8, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.' Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk." Now afterwards it says in verse 14, "Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.'" This man had been delivered from his physical affliction and Jesus gives him a spiritual lesson that is consequent upon that healing. He says to him, "Don't sin anymore." Well, beloved, apply that in a spiritual realm. Those of you that are in Christ, those of you that have been forgiven, if God has delivered you from sin and you have become well, then the command to you is, "Sin no more." No compromise. You have been delivered from sin, its power has been broken, the penalty has been paid, you have been lifted up from the realm of sin and Satan and delivered over to a realm over which Christ rules and where you have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit to aid you in your pursuit of righteousness. Then if those things are true, it means that you cannot compromise with sin. You can't accept it. You can't have a closet in your life where you store sin and leave it to stay and rot and smell. No compromise. Sin has become your sworn enemy. "I have been saved by Christ," you say to yourself, "I have been saved from sin and, therefore, I do battle against sin in my life. I don't simply castigate others for the sins that they commit, my priority is holiness in my own life. I'm concerned with dealing with sin myself in my own heart." That is where a settled reverence for God will lead you. The light shines upon you and you see darkness, remaining darkness in your soul so that there's no denial, there's a settled confession of sin, and yet the nature of God's holiness has a further impact on you that says, "I can't compromise with sin. I can't make room for it in my life." There's no compromise.

So there's a settled reverence for God, a settled confession of sin, and a settled resistance to sin, okay? Settled reverence leads to settled confession, and also leads to settled resistance. We never accept sin in our lives as Christians and yet what do we do with the fact that we still fall short, then? What do we do when we stumble? What do we do when our corruption rears its ugly head in us yet again? Well, John helps us when we fall short also. We never accept sin and yet John helps us when we fall short and that brings us to our fourth point for this evening: no despair, settled trust in Christ. No despair, settled trust in Christ, and this is where the help for the introspective is found; this is where the help for the one dealing with a besetting sin, where help for him is found; this is where the one with the loose and sarcastic tongue that rears its self again and again, you dislike it but it comes out, this is where your hope is found. No despair, a settled trust in Christ.

Now my brothers and sisters in Christ, those of you that are earnest about knowing God, earnest about holiness, I realize that anyone who deals seriously with sin, anyone who takes spiritual life seriously knows something about temptation coming and welling up within you. You know about temptation coming up and you know about falling short. The hymn writer said, "Tempted, tried and sometimes failing, He my strength, my victory wins." I'm tempted, I'm tried, and sometimes I fail, and the earnest Christian, at that point, is tempted to a spiritual despair over having fallen short and failed the Lord in his life. What do you do, then? You remember the holiness of God and you feel the weight of your sin, you're not denying it and yet you don't want to give into it, there's a settled resistance to it, and yet here you are, you've stumbled again and your nose and face are in the dirt because you've tripped and fallen yet again. What then, beloved? What then?

I want to tell you something, this is a little bit of a tangent, that it is precisely at this point that a legalistic approach to religion, a legalistic approach to Christianity offers absolutely no hope. It is precisely at this point where legalism is exhausted and its bankruptcy is exposed because there is no forgiveness to be found in the law. The law can condemn you and the law can expose your sin but if that's all that you know, when you realize that you've sinned, you come back to the law and it just has its arms crossed against you and says, "I don't know why you're here, guilty one," and it can crush you. Beloved, it is precisely at that point that you must remember Christ and you must remember who he is and what he has done and why he did it, and that is exactly what our brother John did when he wrote this letter.

You must remember Christ. Look at the middle of verse 1 with me. "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Oh, but John, I have. God, I have. I have sinned, now what? I haven't carried out the purpose that he was writing for. I know that the power was given to me but I've stumbled again, now what? Is there anything to say? Is there any hope for me? And Scripture sweetly speaks to us and says, "And if anyone sins," oh, that's me. You mean, that's not the end of the story? The letter did not end at the first half of chapter 2, verse 1? No, it didn't end there. "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father." We have one to help us. We have one alongside us. "Jesus Christ the righteous; and," verse 2, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." John says, he says, "I've written these things so that you may not sin, said that you can avoid sin," but he's enough of a pastor to know that we sin and he offers us a helping hand, he offers us a blessed assistance, he gives comfort to the soul of the one who has stumbled and says, "If you've stumbled, it's not over. The game is not over for you. Remember Christ. We have an Advocate with the Father. We have One who loves us and gave Himself up for us. We have One who shed His blood to wash away our sins. We have this loving Brother in heaven who died to represent us before God and to turn away His wrath from us." He says, beloved, when you have sinned and you feel the weight and the guilt of that sin, he says, "I want you to remember who Christ is and what he did, and that He did this out of love for you, He did this because He's your Shepherd, He did this because He cares for your soul, He did this because He wanted you to be in God's family with Him, He did this because He wanted you to be forgiven and to be free." And that's who Christ is, he died to be that advocate for us. He died to deal with sin and to take it away from us. When

John says he is the propitiation, he means that Christ is the sacrifice that turned away the wrath of God from us.

Beloved brother in Christ, beloved sister in Christ, you who have fallen again and again, Scripture tells you to turn to Christ afresh, Scripture tells you that he came for such a one is you. He came to bless you. He came to forgive you. He came to remove wrath so that you would be able to live without fear of the condemnation of God, and to live in a sense that God has still accepted you and loved you in the Beloved. He has loved you in Christ and if you are in Christ, your sin is covered and it is forgiven.

Look over at 1 John 4:9. Because we've all been there, we've stumbled and it seems as though God is a million miles away. We're alone in our sense of conviction and guilt and our accusing conscience, and the law lashes us, and all you want is some relief for your burdened heart, right? And Scripture comes and speaks words like this to us, 1 John 4:9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." It was while you were still in sin that God loved you. When Christ went to the cross, your entire life of sin was still future. He knew all about it and gladly went to Calvary on your behalf. Why did he do that? Because he's a loving Savior. That's what a Savior does, he saves his people. He is gracious to his people. He loves his people and despite your sin, he loved you. In full recognition of your sin, he loved you and was gracious to you. In a full recognition of your prior rebellion, God sends his Spirit to awaken your mind to the Gospel, to awaken you to the one who suffered and died at the cross for sinners just like you in order that you might be forgiven, in order that you might be spiritually healed, in order that you might be reconciled to a holy God. That's the whole point of the Gospel is the love of God for your sinful soul. So John reminds us of that when he says, "Beloved, I'm writing these things so that you may not sin, but when you sin, remember your Advocate, remember your Christ, remember your Savior, remember the love that shed its blood for you on the cross and realized that there is forgiveness and cleansing, an ever flowing eternal fountain of forgiveness that you can come to again and again and find that it is sufficient to pay for your guilt in such a way that the barrier with God has been removed, in such a way that your sin is no longer held against you."

Look at Psalm 32 with me for just a moment. Psalm 32. You might say with tears in your heart if not literal tears streaming down your cheeks, you say, "That's really wonderful! It's really wonderful to be under the love of a God like that," you might say. Yes. That's precisely what Scripture says.

Psalm 32:1, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity," in other words, he doesn't count his sin against him, "And in whose spirit there is no deceit!" David knew about that wasting effect of sin on his mind and his heart. Verse 3, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long." Oh. Oh. You can just hear him saying it, you can hear the groans through his words and he says in verse 4, "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away

as with the fever heat of summer." Verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." You took it away. You no longer hold it against me. There is no barrier to my fellowship with you. That was 1,000 years before the time of Christ. Now on the other side of the cross, we see how God managed to do that, we see what the plan of God was. It wasn't that he simply ignored sin, it's that he took your sin, placed it on Christ in your stead, and punished Christ so that you could be forgiven. In Christ all your sin is covered.

So beloved, let's just review this here for a moment. Settled reverence for God, God is light and in him there is no darkness at all, by contrast when we hold ourselves up against the holiness of God, we see sin and we're settled in our confession of it. We don't deny it. There is no denial of sin. There can't be denial of sin in light of the holiness of God. We freely own that. We freely confess it. And yet we don't accept it. There's no compromise with it. And yet it's like you're on one side of the teeter-totter and you go there and there's another side to balance it out, and then another and another. And so there is this settled reverence, no denial of sin, no compromise with sin, and yet there's no despair. Because of Christ, when you fall short, you can turn to Christ afresh and he'll forgive you. End of story.

J. C. Ryle said this, he said, "Do not doubt that these words are for you as well as for anyone else. Bring all your sins and unbelief, your sense of guilt and unfitness, your doubts and infirmities, bring them all to Christ. This man welcomes sinners and He will welcome you. Rise, He's calling you." In your guilt as you sit here today as an unbeliever, Christ calls you and says, "I'll receive you. I will forgive you." Much more, then, having been born again, belonging to him already, much more, then, does he invite us to come and to be cleansed and to confess our sins before him.

Beloved, you can grow spiritually even if you have failed in the past. You can know peace of mind when you turn to Christ even though you've been plagued with guilt for so long. Settled reverence leads to no denial, no compromise, no despair. Never despair for the one who is in Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, how blessed we are to be under the loving sovereign care of a good Shepherd like our Lord Jesus. Dear Lord, You've said that You give eternal life to us and no one is able to pluck us from Your hand. Your sovereign power guarantees that everyone who comes to Christ will be found in heaven in the end. The true saints persevere. The true saints are eternally secure. You don't give Your love only to withdraw it at a subsequent point. You don't forgive sin and then hold it against us after all at the end. You are not like that. You are good. You are faithful. You love Your people. You love Your sheep. You loved us enough, O Christ, to give Your lifeblood for us, and so, of course, there is no despair. We are filled with hope because of our Christ and yet, Father, we realize that it was our sin that caused the suffering of Christ, it was the occasion for the suffering of Christ, and therefore we don't deny it and we certainly won't compromise with that which

inflicted such great eternal agony upon Christ on the cross. We don't accept sin, then, we never could, for love of Christ we never could accept sin, therefore, O God, we offer ourselves to You afresh. Father, for the self-righteous one with us tonight, we pray that this would humble them before You in light of Your holiness. For the introspective, struggling, hurting believer, Father, may they find a balm in the love of Christ in the wounds incurred for them and find that in Christ they have One who loves their soul and gladly forgives and cleanses them. It's the whole reason You came. For all of these things, Father, give us fresh affections for Christ, a fresh loyalty to Him, and let no one leave this room, Father, without knowing Christ and being safely in His bosom through faith alone, in this great Christ alone. We praise and honor You in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.