

A Mind for Holiness

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We come back to our study of 1 John this morning. We saw last time that the holiness of God has an affect on our lives. If we are genuine Christians it will break our pattern of sin and it will produce in us a confession of sin that acknowledges our internal corruption and also prompts us to confess those lingering sins in our lives even as Christians, and as we continue on in the text now, we come to chapter 2 and John clarifies and expands his purpose in writing as he does. We saw in 1 John 1:4 he said, "These things we write in order to make our joy complete," yours and mine; that we would know to the fullest expression that glad contentment and praise of God in our hearts and that we would be satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ, thoroughly and completely satisfied in him.

Well, after this discussion of holiness where he said "God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all," and he makes these alternating statements between if we say that we have no sin, we lie and do not tell the truth; if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous; and he's gone back and forth on the nature of sin. Now he clarifies and expands even further on the purposes of his writing as we come to the first two verses of chapter 2. Let's look at them again together.

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.

You see, John is writing not simply to promote joy but to promote holiness in us. He couldn't be more plain about that purpose than what he said there in verse 1, "little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."

Now a couple of preliminary comments here that I want to emphasize from the start. We sin in part because we think it's going to bring us some measure of happiness or satisfaction, and that it's going to promote what we want in our well-being or our sense of getting what we want, you know, a part of the allure of the temptation to sin, but what we find inevitably is that giving in to sin does not bring us any satisfaction as believers, rather it troubles us, it convicts us, sometimes it brings disastrous consequences to our lives. Sin always is a false promise of happiness or contentment and we need to understand that and to see through it. That's on kind of the negative side, on the positive

side what I want you to see is this, is to understand that John is viewing the purpose of his letter as an integrated whole and that when he speaks about his purpose of joy and his purpose of promoting holiness in our lives, that those two purposes are joined together. The exhortation to holiness is for your joy. The call of the Bible to holiness promotes joy in the Christian. It is not an unwelcome restraint on our lives that keeps us from the things that we would otherwise enjoy and have fun at. No, it's not like that at all. John has our spiritual good in mind. His overriding purpose is to see his readers know joy in their lives and to know joy, you must walk in holiness. That's the sense of the passage here. "I write these things so that our joy might be made complete," chapter 2, verse 1, "I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." It is a fundamental principle, a very simple one, but of an order of magnitude of importance for you to understand that holiness is for your joy and that holiness and joy are inseparably linked in the Christian life. The Christian who is weak and stumbles in sin is not going to be a joyful Christian. The one who walks in holiness will know joy even if his outward circumstances are very much difficult for him. The history of the church testifies to this over and over again.

So in chapter 2, verse 1, John says, "I am writing these things so that you may not sin," and so what we want to do is unpack that here today, and if you're taking notes you can title today's message "A Mind for Holiness." A mind for holiness is the title that I've given to today's message. John wants to keep us from sin and when he says, "My little children," once again he is addressing his readers with affection, with tender kindness. He says, "I have your best interest in heart, my little ones, my beloved," he calls them at other points in the letter, "my beloved, my little children." You can just see that this is dripping with a paternal love and care and kindness in everything that he says. He is earnestly dealing with them, writing to help them, give them direction that is for their own ultimate good. And what I always want to remember personally and what I always want to remind you of is that as we're reading these things from the Apostle John, that we're reading the very word of God; that this is God's attitude toward his children; that the same God who sent Christ to die for our sins and did that in love because he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, from the same heart of love that sent Christ to be our propitiation, it's that same heart of love from God saying, "My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Rebellion against God never comes out well. It's not good for your spiritual life, and so God through John writes to us to promote our holiness.

So here's what I want you to see, I want you to see the connection between chapter 1 and chapter 2 as we begin. Everything about chapter 1 had led into this exhortation not to sin in the opening words of chapter 2, verse 1, and so John opened by saying in chapter 1, verse 5, he says, "God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all," and what we're going to find is that as we work through the text and work through the first half of this first verse in chapter 2, we are going to find four principles for lasting spiritual growth in your life. And what we're doing here is this: I'm not going to give you a series of practical steps to deal with your most besetting sin, maybe there's a place for messages like that somewhere down the road, this is far more foundational, this is about cultivating a Christian mind, a biblical way to think, and these are the fundamental principles that apply across all Christian people, that apply across all areas of Christian life, this informs

everything that we do not simply one particular sin that we may especially struggle with in our lives. So what we're doing here, we are cultivating a Christian mind, a Christian way to think. It is very fundamental for everything else in life to understand these principles that undergird our entire approach to life.

Point 1 here this morning will be this, we could call it settled reverence. Settled reverence. The Bible says repeatedly in Proverbs that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A proper reverence for God is necessary to live a wise life and an effective life. It is the fear of God that leads one to repentance, even, as well as the kindness of God. There is a proper apprehension of God that informs the way that we respond to everything else in life. You must start your thinking about living in a vertical sense that starts with the very essence of God, the very nature of God and who he is or otherwise you're going to be on a bad trajectory that leads you far away from the purposes of God in your life.

Well, the cornerstone of Christian living is a settled reverence for God. You see, the pursuit of holiness does not start with your efforts to overcome a particular sin. You know, someone is concerned about smoking, you know, they smoke cigarettes or whatever and they just focus on trying to stop smoking. Well, it's probably good to stop smoking but that's not the core of the pursuit of holiness. John MacArthur said about smoking, he said smoking won't send you to hell, it'll only make you smell like you've been there. The point of that is to have a proper perspective on the individual sins on our lives, is that there is something even more fundamental than overcoming an individual sin, it's cultivating an entire mindset that informs the way that you pursue all of life, all of your pursuit of righteousness and that informs everything about the way that you resist every manner of sin in your life. So I'm encouraging you here this morning at the start to take a broad perspective on what we're talking about because that broad perspective will inform the individual details that tend to trouble you in your individual lives and in the individual aspects of your life, more accurately stated.

So holiness doesn't start with an effort to overcome a particular sin, it starts further back. It starts where John started after his introduction in chapter 1, verse 5, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." My friends, what you'll see as we go through the exposition of this book over the next three or four weeks is that the entire book of 1 John is an exposition of that basic principle. It is an outworking of the holiness of God. And your sanctification starts with your conviction on the holiness of God. God is holy, as we saw last night. He is someone separate from all of creation. He is alone in grandeur and excellence and he is morally perfect. He is pure. His eyes are too pure to approve of evil. He cannot be tempted by sin. That's who God is. He is holy, holy, holy. He is not just holy, he is holy to the exponential geometric meaning of that term, far beyond any human comprehension of it, so much so that the holy angels veil their sight as they worship him in heaven, so great is his majesty. And perhaps in a future message we'll look at a passage in Acts that describes the glory of God when the Apostle Paul was confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus, he was literally floored by the glory that he saw. The glory of Christ was greater than the brightness of the sun to him. This is impossible for us to

imagine but, you know, we all understand that we can't look at the sun for a moment without it burning our eyes and causing great damage to our eyes if we veil that glory with our naked eyes. Well, contemplate this, then, the intrinsic Shekinah glory of God is greater than the glory of the sun. It dwarfs the sun. In the new heavens and new earth, there will be no need for sun because the glory of God will illumine that realm in which we will all be as believers in Christ. So the greatness of the brightness of the glory of the sun makes us turn away in pain and the burning sensation that it brings to our eyes, well, somehow, beloved, contemplate the glory of God and realize that it exceeds that burning brightness of the sun by exponential measures and it makes the sun look pale by comparison. That's how great the glory of God is.

Now as we contemplate that and we realize what the ethical implications of that are, it's this: God is holy. God hates sin. He judges sin. And if the greatness of the glory of God has ethical implications for us, then it is a searching reality that searches every dark corner of our lives and exposes it as unfit for his presence. Well, when God is like that and you and I are not, then that should produce a sense of humble repentant reverence for him, to honor him and to give glory to him for his surpassing excellence what we ourselves are like. Now in 1 Peter 1, what Scripture tells us in Leviticus and in other places is this: God commands us that you and I, we are to be holy for he is holy.

So the God who saved us as believers is infinitely perfectly holy in majestic glory that's far beyond our ability to comprehend. That has implications for us. Our reverence for his holiness brings us to a heart affection, a heart inclination, a heart commitment to pursue holiness in our lives; to as the Puritans used to say, to mortify sin, to put it to death, to have in our mind a commitment to turn away from temptation, to repent of sin when it rears its ugly head in our Christian lives, and to manifest a humble desire and pursuit that our lives would be conformed to the image of the one who shed his blood to save our souls. That is the fundamental core of a mind for holiness. It starts with a recognition of the great glory of God.

Now you see, my brothers and my sisters, I hope that you can grasp the reality of this, that this is so much different than what maybe some of us heard about the nature of Christian living growing up and there were a long list of rules that you were to keep. You know, your clothing was supposed to be a certain way, and you couldn't do this, you know, you had to do this or you couldn't do that, and it's just a bunch of external regulations trying to control the day-to-day aspects of your life and, you know, and that, you know, is binding and restrictive and there's no power in those rules whatsoever, there's no power to conform you, there's no power to change you, there's nothing to grip your heart in that kind of external compliance to human-made rules. The glory of God, the holiness of God has a completely different effect on us. It stuns us at the deepest part of our being that God is like that and that is the God who knows what's on my tongue even before I say a word about it. That is the God who planned all of my days. This is the God who shaped me, who knows me. When I stand up and when I sit down, he knows me. This God of moral excellence, of august holiness, that God is the God in whose presence I live my life, and if you are a Christian this is the God who saved you and calls you to holiness. Well, that brings a sense of worship, of reverence, of submission before

him, a settled reverence for him, that fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. We live all of our lives in response to the great holiness of God and that is where spiritual growth begins.

Now with that basic principle set and grounding that in the "God is Light" statement in 1 John 1:5, what we're going to find as we continue on to consider the rest of the context of this passage is this, is that God's holiness and the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, that produces three necessary convictions in your heart. Our first point for this morning was settle reverence. Now the last three points are all in response to that settled reverence for the holiness of God and the grace of God shown to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. There are three settled convictions that flow from that and they are this: no denial, no compromise, and no despair. Write those down because these shape the way that you respond to all of life. No denial. No compromise. No despair. What do I mean by that? Well, we're going to spend the rest of the message unpacking it, but just to bring this out a little bit more before we do, we live our Christian life with no denial of sin. No denial of sin, no compromise with sin in our lives, and no despair over sin in our lives. No denial of sin, no compromise with sin, and no despair over sin. So we're going to take that threefold conviction and work out its implications for you here this morning in the time that we have remaining.

So point 2 for this morning, we could put it this way: no denial, which means that we have a settled confession of sin. There's no denial of sin, by which we mean that we have a settled conviction and a settled confession of sin. This is what we talked about last night and, my friends, let's look at it this way, remember that what John is writing, what he's saying here, "I've written these things to you so that you may not sin." Well, what are "these things" of which he has spoken? The holiness of God was one, and secondly this settled confession of sin. My friend, you must acknowledge sin in order to overcome it. You must come to a profound understanding that you do have indwelling sin in you; that you do commit sin; you rebel against God, you sin against your fellow man, some of you sinning against your spouse and your family members. You are like that. Your life is not a life of perfect good, is it? Is it? It's not like that, and if you are to grow in holiness, then you must acknowledge sin as something that God needs to cleanse you from and that you need to pursue sanctification from so that you can grow.

John says, "I'm writing so that you may not sin." Well, what were these things of which he was speaking? Well, look at verses 8 and 10, the immediately prior context to that statement in verse 1. He said,

8 If we say that 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 that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

You see, when John says in chapter 2, verse 1, look at that with me, "My little children, I am writing these things to you," "these things" is what he was just talking about and what he was just talking about is directly connected with the purpose that you might not sin.

You must be a confessor of sin and by that I mean it includes the idea of confessing your individual sins before the Lord, "Lord, You know what? I got soused last night in alcohol and I don't know what I was doing, I don't know what I was thinking but I know that that was sinful rebellion against You and I confess it and I repent of it before You. Lord, I went places on my iPhone last night in pursuit of my lust that I never should have done. I confess that before You, Lord. It grieves me that my heart is so lustful like that." And you confess that before him, and so you're confessing these individual kinds of sins as you go along, and so what we're talking about includes that kind of confession. "Lord, I confess the sharp way that I spoke to my spouse last night or this morning," or whatever it is. Just the whole manner of different kinds of sins that believers across an entire congregation fall into, even if you're not individually guilty of any one of those, you have your own pet sins that you fall into, don't you? Don't you? And so you should be confessing those as an ongoing matter, as an ongoing practice of your life.

That's included in what we're talking about, but as we said last night, this is more than just confessing individual sins. It's confessing the nature of who you are; that there is a principle of sin, there is a principle of flesh in you that is hostile to God still and that is the source of your temptation and is the source of your sins. There is something distorted about your very nature that needs to be corrected. You have not yet been made perfect. The perfection of our soul waits for us in heaven, it's not something that we have right now. That's why John says, "If anyone says I have no sin, he's a liar and the truth is not in him," verse 8. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us," verse 10.

So when we say no denial, you must have a settled confession of sin, what we're talking about is this, is that a true Christian understands that he is spiritually bankrupt apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7, "There is nothing good within me. There is no good in me." You see, my friend, and I worry about this, there's a lot of things that I worry about as a pastor and you say, "Oh, you're not supposed to worry. Isn't that a sin?" Well, the Apostle Paul spoke often about the burden that he carried over the churches that he had and he said, "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" And so there's an aspect of spiritual leadership, of pastoral care where you understand the struggles a bit of a congregation, you see things in their lives and it worries you, it concerns you is what I mean. You're burdened by it and you recognize these things. What I'm about to say is one of the things that would concern any biblical pastor whatsoever, that there would be those within a given congregation that while professing the name of Christ still have lingering within them a spirit of self-righteousness, a sense that, "Yeah, okay, I'm, you know, I've sinned but I'm basically a good person." Oh, beloved, that is absolutely contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Jesus said in Matthew 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's those who understand and confess that they are spiritually bankrupt that belong to the kingdom of heaven, that make no claim of righteousness of their own. Instead our common confession about ourselves is that we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God. That is the nature of the confession that we're talking about here, is that we are a people, individually as Christians we understand this, we make no claim to righteousness, we boast of nothing in ourselves. In Philippians 3 Paul spoke about this, that he rejected

all of his prior claims to Jewish righteousness and considered them to be dung in comparison to having the righteousness of Christ.

So you and I have to come to grips with and this isn't... Look, look, I need to slow down just a touch and I need to emphasize this point to make it very very clear. This is not something that we just flip a switch on in our mind and it happens. This is a confession, this is a conviction that comes to us as we meditate seriously on the word of God and we let what God's word says sink into our minds again and again. And as you sin in particular areas again and again, it should be dawning on you that there is something in you that is producing this in you, that there's something wrong, there's something distorted in you that produces this, there's something distorted in you that produces your angry spirit, your selfishness, your gossipy mouth, your lustful heart, and on and on I could go. Do I need to go any further to start listing these things out or have I said enough to make the point? I think I've said enough, but what we need to see and we need to reflect on our lives and examine our hearts and realize this and come to a profound confession of this that says, "I am bankrupt apart from Christ."

So you make this settled confession of sin that refuses to deny the reality of the spiritual distortion and rebellion that remains in your heart. No denial. "God, I'm like that." It's profoundly humbling. It drives out spiritual pride to make a confession like that. And so if you think that you are a basically good person who misses the mark once in a while, you do not understand your true condition. Settled reverence for God and settled reverence for his holiness brings you to confess your indwelling sin. You have not arrived at perfection in your spiritual life and that means that you don't deny it, you make a settled confession of sin. So what does settled reverence do? When we see our lives in light of the holiness of God, we realize this: there's no denying it, "I'm a sinner. I fall short of the glory of God. I accept that. I confess it and I freely make it known. I make no pretensions about being a good, basic, moral person. I realize that there is bankruptcy and spiritual decay in me that I need Christ to cleanse me from."

So settled reverence, you see that decay in yourself in light of the great holiness of God, so settled reverence leads you to a position of no denial of sin. Well, let's go to our third point for this morning and that is this: no compromise. No compromise, by which we mean that we develop a settled resistance to sin. A settled resistance to sin. No denial, a settled confession of sin. No compromise, a settled resistance to sin. And for that let's look again at 1 John 2:1. He says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." The language is expressing this idea: John wants us to avoid every conceivable act of sin in our lives. He sets the standard high and the idea here is this, again we're grappling with the darkest corners of our soul with what we're talking about here. We are not dealing with things superficially. There are remnants of evil in you, there are remnants of sin in you, and there is this corresponding aspect of our existence where we don't want to deal with it, maybe we kind of like our sin and we kind of enjoy it and we want to have little pockets that we accommodate and that we allow for in our lives. Well, what John is saying, he brings a searchlight into the dark closet of our soul and he takes that searchlight and he shines it on every corner of the closet and he brings light to bear on all of it so that the darkness would be dispelled, as it were.

So John is writing to help us avoid every act of sin in our lives and what he is saying is that no sin is acceptable, that there's no tiny measures of deceit that you allow and tolerate that you're aware of in your life, for example. No sin is acceptable and you develop a settled resolve to resist it, to confess it, to overcome it, to grow in holiness in those areas of your life. You know, my friend, what would that area in your life be? What would be that particularly dark area of your life that you need to address? That you need to resist sin in your life? What's that look like? Well, understand that John wrote so that you may not sin, that you would not sin like that, and he roots that admonition to godliness in the surpassing holiness of God. "I'm writing to make your joy complete. God's really really holy therefore I'm writing so that you would not sin," that that is the only kind of life that is an acceptable response to a reverent view of the holiness of God.

You see that, don't you? This is not at all unclear in Scripture. In Hebrews 12, that we are to pursue holiness and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. This is serious and this is searching. God's not playing games here in his word. Jesus Christ is not bluffing. The writer of Hebrews was not bluffing when he said that, you know, pursue holiness and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Friends, I don't know, this is part of what weighs on a pastor's heart. I don't know that all of you really thoroughly understand the importance of sanctification in your Christian life, that a desire for sanctification and the pursuit of sanctification is an indispensable mark of a true Christian. If you're not concerned to grow in holiness, my friend, you're not a Christian. You're not a Christian. It doesn't matter that you attend church. It doesn't matter that you've been baptized. It doesn't matter that you show up on Sundays from time-to-time. If there is not an earnest desire to be like Christ, what makes you think that Christ dwells in your heart? I know that's direct and I know that's stark but, beloved, I would just encourage you that there's an element of truth to the saying that says that the one who loves you the most is the one who tells you the most truth, and I would not have any of you deceived thinking in your slumbering spiritual existence, your indifference to God, that things are still well with your soul. The blinding holiness of God should cause you to fear and to cause you to repent of sin and to have a sense that there's no sin in my life that is acceptable, therefore I develop a mindset that says, "I will not compromise with sin. I will be settled in my resistance to it. Yes, I may stumble from time-to-time, I may stumble a lot, but I get up when I stumble and I start walking on the path again."

You know, I understand and I speak with sympathy, you know, I understand that some of you have seriously besetting sins that would just seem to swallow you up. Well, there's mercy for you in the midst of that, the question is what's your attitude toward that. Do you love the sin and not care about it? Or are you harassed by the sin and find yourself hating it even while you see your weakness in it? You see, we're talking about what's in your heart, what's in your heart toward those besetting sins. "Eh, whatever." Where's settled resistance in that? "O God, I've sinned again! I'm confessing this again! God, I don't know why You would love me in light of the way that I am but I come and I trust in Christ and I confess it to You once more! Have mercy on me the sinner," as you beat your breast like the tax gatherer in Luke 18. You see, the heart attitude is what we're talking about here, that settled resistance to sin.

Now here's a question for us as we contemplate the understanding of John's letter: why would John say this here? Why would he say, "I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin," why would he say that here? Why would he say that in response to what he had just been saying in chapter 1? That's the \$1,000 question in interpretation right now. John had just said that sin is a pervasive reality and that if you say that you have no sin, you're deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you. Well, a casual reader, a flippant reader of his letter might conclude this, "Well, if sin is like that, if I can't deny sin without making myself a liar, well, then maybe sin is inevitable then. Maybe it's a necessary part of life and I therefore don't have to make such a big deal about it." Now build on that for a moment. Not only has John said that sin is a pervasive reality, he has spoken freely and graciously about the abundant forgiveness of God for those who believe in Christ. In verse 7 he said the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Verse 9 he said if we are confessing our sins, he is faithful and righteous to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and forgive us of all of our sins. Well, follow me here, if sin and forgiveness are both so real in the Christian life, then you might be tempted to think, "How bad can it be? If it is a reality and God has forgiven me, then what's the big deal about sin? Why not sin more and more so that grace can abound more and more," as Paul refuted the argument in Romans 6. Why not think that way?

Well, beloved, we're at a crucial point here in developing your Christian mind. That's a wrong way to think and what guards you from thinking such foolish, sinful, disobedient thoughts in your mind is this, it's the holiness of God. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all, and so you must understand that the fountain of everything in this passage is the holiness of God, his absolute separation from his creation and his absolute moral perfection. Because God is like that and it is that God with whom we have fellowship, then we understand that there is no possibility that there is any sin that's acceptable in our lives. Yes, it may be a reality. Yes, Christ may have forgiven us. But that does not give us license to tolerate it, accept it, and practice it in our Christian life. God's holiness forbids it. If God is our Father – stay with me here – if God is our Father and if God is holy and if God therefore approves no evil, then you and I as his children have the same attitude toward sin that he does. Because God does not approve of sin at all, then we don't approve of any of it in our lives at all, so that we have a settled resistance to sin. No compromise.

No compromise with sin and there's this Christological dimension to it as well, understanding this and remembering this and always keeping the Lord Jesus at the center of our thinking as well, is to understand that Christ died for sins once for all; that Christ suffered for us in order to break the power of sin in our lives and to deliver us from its penalty and one day to deliver us from its very presence, and Christ suffered on our behalf because of our sin. Don't you see, my friend, that love for Jesus Christ also informs your settled resistance to sin? How can you and I accept pockets of sin in our lives when Christ died to cleanse us from that? When Christ suffered for those very sins? How can you love him and tolerate sin in your life simultaneously? These things are utterly incompatible in our minds. So reverence for the holiness of God, love for Jesus Christ and what he did for us at Calvary drive us to the conclusion that there is this

deeply rooted conviction in the deepest part of our heart that says, "I will not compromise with sin. I will resist it. And even though I may stumble along the way, it will be against my convictions, it will be against what I want, and it will be something that I do not cultivate as an acceptable pattern in my life." No compromise. A settled resistance to sin.

You see, my friend, salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, it does deliver you from the penalty of sin and we are delivered from that threat of eternal judgment in our Lord Jesus, but you must understand this, that Christ died not only to deliver you from hell, Christ died for you, Christ saved you in order to deliver you from the practice of sin, to break the power of sin in your life. And so we must understand that salvation was not simply about the eternal consequences of our sin but there is a present living reality and dimension to salvation that it changes our whole perspective on sin and it breaks the power of sin over us and puts in us a desire to move away from sin, to repent from sin, to live a life that is blameless before God as we depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to help us and to strengthen us that way. Convictions of the heart flow from an understanding of the holiness of God and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So beloved, settled reverence leads us to an attitude of no denial, it leads us to an attitude of no compromise, and so we never accept sin in our lives, we never find it acceptable, and yet John helps us, he's writing as such a skillful pastor in this letter, John helps us when we fall short, and that brings us to our fourth and final point here this morning: no despair. No despair, by which we mean a settled trust in Christ. A settled trust in Christ. When you and I get serious about dealing with sin in our lives, we find that it's not easy to overcome. It is a battle. That's why Paul said at the end of Romans 7, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" He's weary with the fight against sin in his own heart, in his own life. He details that struggle in a way that every true believer can understand in Romans 7.

So we understand that as we deal seriously with sin, we know that temptation hits us, we understand experientially what James said in James 3, we all stumble in many ways. Well, what about that? How does that fit with a settled confession of sin and a settled resistance to sin? You and I sin and fall short of the glory of God and here's the thing, beloved, for those of you that are tender-hearted, I've spoken directly and bluntly to careless professing Christians but I know that there's a great number of you that have tender hearts. You take spiritual life seriously. You want to be free from sin. You want to glorify Christ with your life. It is the greatest sorrow in your life throughout the course of your existence to realize that you stumble and fall short and your sin grieves you, and it bothers you, and it weighs on your mind. You know what that's like. "Oh, how did I do that?" And, "Oh no, why?" And that stuff. Well, when you see that sin, you are tempted to be cast down, you are tempted to turn into someone very introspective, and you're looking inside and, "What was wrong with me inside? And what's going to be in the future? And why did I do that?" And you're just probing the depths of your sinful heart looking for answers and John writes to help you in what he says here. It's when you are tempted to be cast down, it's when you are tempted to despair that you and I must do this, we must do this, you and I must remember Christ. We must remember why he came. He came to pay a ransom for us. We must remember his love, that it was in love that God

sent him; that he loved us, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. And not only in the past did he love us, but that he is presently exercising a ministry on our behalf to continue his role as our Savior, continuing it even now at this very moment he is acting on our behalf.

So when you are tempted to be cast down, you must remember Christ and so when we say no despair, we're talking about a settled trust in Christ. Look at the first two verses of chapter 2 with me one more time. John says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He says that's the purpose but he says, "I understand what the reality is. If and when you do sin, remember this," John says, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." Beloved, you must remember this: it is precisely because of those sins that Christ came and died. It was because he loved you that he came to deliver you from those. It's because he loved you that he paid the price for those sins at Calvary. So in your settled convictions as you develop a mind for holiness, you understand this, you say, "I am a sinner. I confess that as a settle reality and there is no sin in my life that is acceptable. I will resist sin with all of my might. And yet I realize that I need Christ in the midst of this and I know what He has done, I know who He is, and I rest my hope of acceptance with God completely in the Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 7 of chapter 1, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Verse 9, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness." Chapter 2, verse 1, he's now our Advocate in heaven. We have a brother who represents us before God, who stands before God having accomplished everything that is necessary for our redemption. He stands before God on the basis of his accomplished finished work at Calvary and God the Father looks on Christ the Son and sees the fullness of everything that he requires and you, my Christian friend, are in Christ and therefore God accepts you just like he accepts his own beloved Son. Christ is in the heavenly places before the throne of God. Ephesians 2 says that because we are united with him, that we are represented in heaven, we are in the heavenly places with him. God sees us positioned there in his Son, with him in the fullness of righteousness imputed to us even though our practice falls short of it. Settled trust in Christ so that there is no despair. Christ himself is the sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God.

My trembling, discouraged, introspective, Christian friend, let me remind you of the whole purpose, the whole nature, the whole reality of Christian salvation: in Jesus Christ all of your sin is covered. All of your sin is forgiven. Even in the midst of the struggle, God accepts you based on what Christ has done. Christ loves you and he will never send you away. He will never cast you out. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we see this very rounded presentation of the reality of sin in the Christian life from this passage in 1 John. A settled reverence that we have for the holiness of God leads us to a settled confession of sin. We won't deny it. At the same time, that settled reverence for God means that we won't compromise with it. Yes, it's a reality but I don't accept it. I resist it. And yet again as that concluding point, we realize that while sin grieves my heart, that I have a Savior who made a full atonement, a full satisfaction for all of my

sins, and he accepts me and therefore I rest in the forgiveness that he gives to me, that he has accomplished for me, and even though, and that that forgiveness resides simultaneously with my ongoing struggle with sin and I rest in Christ even as I resist sin in my life. That's a mind for holiness, foundationally rooted on the holiness of God. No denial of sin. No compromise with sin. And when you do sin, no despair over it because Christ has paid it all.

So my Christian friend, when you stumble, turn to Christ afresh. He will forgive you absolutely without question. We bring our sins to him and he freely forgives us, he freely cleanses us, he freely restores our joy. Isn't he a wonderful Savior? Isn't he the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the highest, the most majestic one in all of your affections? Listen to this quote from Bishop Ryle from the 19th century and I say these by way of comfort to you and encouragement as we close. "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 is calling you."

Let's pray.

Father, we've directed our words primarily to Your church today and we pray that You would bring great comfort to Your people through the reality of Christ. May Your holiness bring upon us a settled resistance to sin, a settled confession of sin. May the wonder of our Savior keep us from despair and may the recognition of sin in our lives simply be that which casts us more and more upon Christ and we see the wonder of the glory of His love and forgiveness in our lives and it becomes more and more the dominating experience of our Christian life. So Father, bring that comfort to Your people. I pray that somehow in the words that have been spoken here today Your Spirit would work in the hearts of unbelievers as well. Father, perhaps convicting them of Your holiness and causing them to fear You as the first step toward conversion; perhaps convicting them of their careless approach and their indifference to sin and that that would bring a sense of great profound conviction upon them that have been so careless in light of Your holiness, and that through all of these things, Father, You would break the enslaving power of Satan upon their lives and bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ who will receive them, who will receive them as sinners and forgive them and change them and bring them safely to glory. We pray that for all under the sound of my voice, Father, and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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