

Authentic Love

Listening to Apostle of Love

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Bible Text: 1 John 1:5-2:2

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We are off to a great fall. I'm really thankful for the kickoff of our Faith Community Institute last Wednesday night and our Wednesday Night Kids of Faith. We had a marvelous time with a couple hundred men yesterday and we are excited about what is going on over on the west side at Faith West. My wife Chris and I were over at Faith West on Friday night for their first Purdue Bible Fellowship of the year. Wow, what a great place to do campus ministry and we're so excited. Then, as was mentioned, this neighborhood picnic on Thursday nights. You might say, "What's that all about?" Well, think about what we're trying to create over there. I was also at a funeral up in Northwest Indiana this week for my uncle and I had several people from the church there thank me for Faith West, just thanking us that they have a safe place to send their kids when they come to Purdue, a place that will help them mature in their faith which is true. But it's very important to understand that we did not build a covenant student housing ministry there alone. That was not the programming goal of Faith West. That is a community center. That first floor was developed as a result of neighborhood input as we asked those who live around that property, "What are the needs that you see in this part of the town that we might be able to meet together?"

So that is a community center with three floors of covenant student housing on top intended to be a living laboratory of community service. We're trying to help the college students think about life through the lens of, "What are the ministry opportunities all around me each and every day? Not when I eventually graduate from college but right now?" So we're having a neighborhood picnic. We've invited all the neighbors around Faith West and they'll be able to interact with our students who live at Faith West, with those who are part of Purdue Bible Fellowship that might live in other places or who attend the two worship services over there and they are going to be hanging out with their neighbors because then when one of those neighbors has a need, it's more likely that they're going to contact us and give us an opportunity to shovel a sidewalk of snow or to help them with a landscaping project. Just any way that we might be able to serve them as college students. That's part of all that.

By the way, don't worry about that, "Oh, poor Pastor Viars has to be in the dunk tank." Seriously? I have looked at those people over at Faith West. I don't want to throw down the gauntlet because that's not my way but they don't have the accuracy to be able to

knock me into the dunk tank. They do not have the strength of arm to knock me into that dunk tank which is why I will be wearing an outfit that assumes I will never go in the water. I will probably have my laptop there just to do some work while they are errantly throwing those balls all over the place. Thursday night is coming, maybe Jesus will come first, huh?

Let me meet begin our time this morning by telling you four short stories all of which are true that hopefully illustrate the importance of this passage we're about to study together. First of all, from the world of sports: a California community sponsored a footrace as part of a summer festival. To show off a body builder entered the race with a refrigerator strapped to his back. Not surprisingly, he was injured during the course of the event. Story number two, also from the world of sports: two men who owned a hot air balloon got it wet during a rainstorm. They decided they wanted to dry it quickly so they took it to a local laundromat, stuffed it in a commercial sized dryer which exploded due to overloading, injuring the two men in the process. Now, story number three from the world of sports to the world of pranks: six mischievous youngsters doused a toad with gasoline and set it on fire. Some of the youngsters were burned during the course of that incident. Fourthly, from the world of lawn care: an obese man with a history of coronary artery disease was having trouble starting his pull start lawnmower. In the course of trying to start it, he suffered a heart attack.

Now, in the four cases that I've just related to you, there are several commonalities. Did you notice that? Each person mentioned suffered some sort of an injury and each person mentioned was doing something unwise that either contributed to or in some cases directly caused the injury. Thirdly, each one of them should have learned a lesson, right? that would have caused them to change their behavior in the future and had made them liable for their injuries in the present. Like the bodybuilder, he should have learned a lesson: don't show off. Or if you're going to show off, do it with one of those dorm room sized miniature refrigerators, not a full-sized Frigidaire, for crying out loud. Or the guys in the hot air balloon: I think you would agree they should have had to pay for that man's dryer and they should have learned not to misuse equipment that someone else has purchased to do business. Or for the kids and the toad: they should have learned that you shouldn't play with gasoline or you shouldn't mistreat part of God's creation if you put toads in that category and I guess we should. Or the man and the mower: perhaps he should have given more attention to his health or bought a key start lawnmower.

Well, that's what should have happened in those cases but that's not even close to what actually occurred. The bodybuilder with the fridge on his back: he sued the manufacturer of the strap and won. The men and the hot air balloon: they sued the American dryer manufacturing industries and collected \$885,000 in that case. The kids and the toad: you say, "What did they do? Sue the toad?" No, the toad did not have deep pockets. The toad had no pockets which is why the parents of those children got together and filed a class action lawsuit against Eagle Manufacturing Company, the company that made the gas can. Yeah. And the man and the mower? He's sued Sears and Roebuck and the jury awarded him \$1.7 million in that case.

Now the point is: in this day and age the average person wants to assign a great weight of responsibility to everybody else in the equation, huh? While accepting very little responsibility for himself and his use of the item that the manufacturer made. I could tell stories like that all day long. I was just in Montana with Pastor Green and his family and some others and we were talking to a physician. This man was out hiking. They love to hike in Montana so he and a couple of his buddies were out hiking and they were attacked by a bear. This bear actually injured one of his friends pretty badly and so this man decided really as a public service more than anything else to manufacture a better kind of bear spray. So they made it as kind of like mace but on steroids. I mean, you have to stop a bear so they made it very, very strong. But there's also the issue of hitting the bear before the bear is close to you. You understand, we're not really talking about a spritz here. At some point, the bear is so close to you and they say, by the way, they really stink. At some point that bear is so close to you that you're not thinking about spritzing, you're thinking about fainting and so he manufactured a high-powered bear spray that actually would propel out 30 feet which is about the right distance to knock the bear down. Well, put clear instructions on the can, on the label and all that sort of thing. A dear mom was going to take her children hiking so she decided before she took her children hiking to prevent them from being attacked by a bear that she would spray all of her kids with the bear spray. Yeah, you can imagine that was a really bad day and, of course, she sued the guy who manufactured the bear spray. Another group of guys decided they were going to go camping and they wanted to protect their tent from bears that night so they took a bunch of the bear spray and sprayed it around their tent not realizing that because it has a rather distinct odor, if you do it like that it will actually attract bears which it did in that particular situation which resulted in a chomp for them and they sued the man.

I could just tell stories all day long where the average person wants to assign a great weight of responsibility to everybody else in the equation while accepting very little responsibility for himself. I'm sure you would agree with that premise. That is the world in which we live, right? Well, is this also true? That if we're not careful, the tendencies of the world have a way of rubbing off on us, the church of Jesus Christ. And this tendency that I'm trying to illustrate will greatly hinder a person's ability to have a vibrant, growing relationship with the Lord. It will greatly hinder a man's ability to have a growing relationship with his wife. Or a wife's ability to have a growing relationship with her husband. It will hinder parents trying to raise their children. It will hinder young people trying to get along with their parents. It will hinder the kind of ministry and impact God wants friends to have on one another and it will certainly hinder our ability as a church to accomplish this annual theme of "Loving Our Neighbors."

Friends, this morning I'd like us to look at a passage of Scripture that can help us identify and avoid and overcome this tendency I'm trying to illustrate. Open your Bible now if you would, to 1 John 1. That's on page 185 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. This fall, we are studying the epistle of 1 John verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter. We're calling this "Listening to the Apostle of Love" because that is what the Apostle John is known for and by as the apostle of love. Now, we began the series last Sunday by looking at what is really some

of the most challenging material in the entire book because it's actually, the first four verses are one long sentence and it's a fairly nuanced argument which is a compliment to you. If you were made in the image of a dog, God would have given you his word in a tweet but because you were made in the image of God, he gave you his word in a book and he trusts you to be able to think, to be able to concentrate, to be able to reason and to want to. So you want your pastor who's going to unpack the word to you, right? Even if it takes some study. Even if it takes some concentration. Even if it takes some time.

Well, what we gained in part last week was that John, like any good author, tells us exactly why he writes the book. Two of the purposes are found at the beginning in the verses we read last week, one at the end. Let me just remind you of those purposes. One was so that we would have greater fellowship with God and with others and we saw that in verse 3, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." By the way, many times look for the purpose clause "so that," hannaclause in Greeks, "so that you might have fellowship." The second purpose is that we would have greater joy. You see that in verse four, "These things we write, so that," another purpose clause, you came to concentrate, right? That book that you have on your lap is from God. "So that our joy may be made complete." Then if you're from our church, you know that this is one of my favorite verses in the Bible but the third reason that John writes this book is in the back, it's that we would have greater assurance of our salvation. 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

So why did John by his own testimony write this book? So we would have greater fellowship and greater joy and greater assurance of our salvation. I would suggest to you that if there's a book that can really fulfill those promises, can help us achieve those goals, that is a book that is worthy of our careful attention and study. Now, of those three, I don't know if you would say this as well but I would say that the one that I find especially attractive, they're all marvelous but the one I find especially attractive is the first one: the possibility of having greater fellowship, especially fellowship with God. The word John uses there is *koinonia* and that word is never used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to describe a person's relationship with the Lord but in the New Testament, things are different. Jesus even said to his disciples, "I no longer just call you my servants, I now call you my friends." Which means that if you've had a definite time in your life where you've repented of your sin and trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, I hope you have. I hope you have decided to become a Christian. What the Scripture says is that there is the distinct possibility for you to have *koinonia*, to have fellowship with God. Now, the reason that's especially attractive, I think, is because I don't know about you, but I talk to a lot of folks who say something like this to me, "I don't feel as close to the Lord as I would like to." Maybe we could quibble about that terminology a bit but what they're saying is, "My *koinonia* is not what I'd like it to be." Or, "My fellowship with God is not what I would like it to be." In fact you might say that this morning as well.

Well, please remember another observation that we made specifically about this book that we're studying. I mentioned this last week. This is one of the last New Testament books to be written which means by now the readers are one maybe even two generations removed from the actual events of the life of Christ. You say, "You lost me there." Well, think about this: the relationship between the date that this book was written and fellowship with God on their part is obvious: the newness is gone and the excitement may be wearing off. You see, they are seeing diminished fellowship. Do you agree with me? Fellowship with God has a shelf life. You either cultivate it or it becomes stale. You don't have to be a Christian long to realize that can happen to any one of us and the insidious thing is that you can be very, very busy even, in part, busy in the so-called things of God all the while losing your koinonia, all the while losing your fellowship.

When I was trying to work my way through Bible college like most Bible college students, I had a bunch of jobs. A bunch of them. It was good for me. It was good for me to have to work. One of my jobs was cleaning toilets in the local public school. That has a way of grounding you. You study Greek and Hebrew during the day in Bible college and then go to the public school and stick your head in the toilet all night. It was good for me as a Bible college student just to learn all sorts of different tasks. I stocked shelves at the grocery store which is why every so often I kind of rearrange things on the shelf.

So I had all kinds of jobs and one of my more memorable jobs was working at a place called Gress Farms in downtown Scranton Pennsylvania. Gress Farms was a factory that produced boneless chicken breast and so the way it worked, the chickens had already been killed and dressed out and they were shipped to our factory and our responsibility was to take them from that point to a boneless chicken breast. So I was hired in as a Bible college student at Gress Farms. It was a fascinating place. When you were first hired in, they trusted you with nothing and frankly the more I got to know some of my dear coworkers, I understood why that was the case but they trusted you with nothing except, here's what you did for eight hours: the chickens would come bouncing down this conveyor belt and you would pull one off and rip the skin off and put it back down on the conveyor belt. So for eight hours all you're doing is picking that cold chicken up and they stunk like crazy, freezing cold, rip the skin off and put it back down. Rip the skin off and put it back down. We came up with all sorts of creative things to do with that cold wet chicken skin, by the way, anyway that's what you did when you were first hired in.

Now, if they trusted you and frankly many they didn't, but if they really trusted you, you eventually got a promotion where you went further down the line to the boning line and that's where for eight hours you took that chicken that just had the skin ripped off of it and you turned it over and you cracked the backbone and took the big backbone out. So for eight hours, crack, pull, crack, pull, crack, pull.

Now the climax of your career at that place and honestly, many people never attained this, was when you actually got a knife. You could understand why especially as I got to know some of the folks that I was working with and where they had been, you would never want them to have any kind of a weapon but when you got your knife and that's when you fileted out the final bones and made that into a boneless chicken breast.

Frankly, and I hope this isn't bragging but I remember it with pride the day that I was promoted to the line where I actually was trusted with a knife. The challenge was, the other people who worked at that part of the factory, I mean, they had been there like forever. They were all women and they were really, really good and fast. In fact, they could do their work and they could do it well and they could jabber 100 miles an hour. It was fascinating just to watch them. They were the pros. I mean, they with the experts. Then they put this squeaky clean Bible college student into that hot mess and so I go down there and I remember my first shift. I'm just thinking, "Okay listen, I want to be a good testimony. I want to carry my weight." That was really the key thing because the way it worked, the chickens came bouncing down the line and you had to pull out your share, then filet them and put them back down and everybody was kind of watching to see did you do your share. So I was nervous as all get out. Can I really do this? Am I going to work hard enough?

So they turned on the line, sure enough the chickens come down the belt. I'm stacking them up and I'm filleting them as fast as I can and I found that I could keep up with these other ladies as long as I didn't jabber, as long as I paid attention to what I was doing. So I was being a good testimony. The problem was that my supervisor was coming down the line and he was stopping each one of the employees and taking their knife and sharpening it. I'm getting nervous about that because I'm thinking, "If I give that guy my knife, I'm going to get behind, chickens are going to get stacked up. I'm going to be a poor testimony. Blah blah blah." So finally he gets down to me and he taps me on the shoulder and he says, "Give me your knife." I said, "Listen, it's not dull." He said, "Give me your knife." I said, "Listen, I'm afraid I'm going to get behind. Can you catch me the next time?" Finally he says, "Give me your knife." So reluctantly I handed him my knife and I'm getting all nervous, stacking up my chickens. He hits it on a steel a couple of times and I grab it from him and I go through that first chicken and right into my hand. Yeah, thankfully they made us wear these protective gloves so at least I can still do that for you. But here's the point I'm making: I had no idea that knife was getting duller until I compared it to one that was sharp. You see, that exact same thing can happen to our koinonia. You can be busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, doing, doing, doing. Even Christian things and in the process lose your koinonia. Your fellowship with God is becoming duller and duller and duller and duller.

The great news is there is a principle in 1 John 1 that can help us keep our fellowship with the Lord sharp. Don't you want that? And fresh and vibrant and growing. Let's see if you can find the principal as we study beginning in 1 John 1:5.

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. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but 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 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.

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.

We're talking this morning about authentic love. I think it's very instructive that after last week's verses where John held out the distinct possibility that we could have greater fellowship with God and others that he immediately moves into instruction about a path to that great goal that is extremely challenging for many of us to follow. You see, you can't manufacture koinonia. We have to understand that you cannot manufacture fellowship. There aren't any shortcuts and you cannot skip crucial steps. In fact, that is a big part of the problem many times, we want to get to the goal of fellowship or reconciliation or restoration without doing the hard work required actually to achieve the goal. Sometimes even all along saying, "Well, I love you though. I love you." Where your unwillingness to follow this principle suggests the polar opposite. Friends, whatever that is, if you're not willing to do what this text says, whatever you think it is, it's not authentic love.

But thankfully John tells us not just the destination but also the path to getting there and a principle that is very easy to understand. Let's just face it right now, it is harder than all get out to apply because it goes so strongly against our grain. So in the time we have remaining, let's divide this text into these four ideas. First of all, the principle stated. Then the principal explained. Then the principle in action. Lastly, the principle made attainable. So the principle stated; the principal explained; the principle in action; and then the principle made attainable. First of all, the principle stated. Here is what it is in a nutshell: fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. You probably knew that, especially if you've studied this book before. But let me ask you this: what does that mean? If I asked you, have you been walking in the light this week, how would you answer and what evidence would you give to back up your answer? Or if I asked you, have you been walking in the light this year, how would you answer it and what evidence? You see, we have this tendency to use Christian phrases, Christianese, walking in the light without always carefully thinking through what does that even mean? And how do you think the way you would answer those questions impacts your fellowship with God? Whether or not you've been walking in the light? Or impacts your fellowship with other people? And how does the way that you would answer those questions or even the way we would answer those questions as a church, are walking in the light, how would that impact our ability to truly love our neighbors?

Now if you would say, "Well, maybe we need then a better understanding of what it really means to walk in the light if there is truly this much at stake." Well, good. Let's move from the principle stated to the principal explained. You see, walking in the light means having an open attitude toward admitting your sinfulness, toward admitting the way that you were wrong, to admitting the ways that you need to change. You say, "How

do we know that?" Well, the principle is light what? Light exposes. Walking in the light. So fellowship with God comes from walking in the light, well what does light do? It exposes. That was John's point in the gospel of John 3:20, "Everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be," what? "Exposed." That's what light does. Ladies, does your home appear to be cleaner at 9 o'clock at night or at high noon? I didn't ask you was it cleaner, I'm asking you does it appear to be cleaner at 9 o'clock at night or at high noon? We all know the answer to that, right? It appears cleaner at 9 o'clock at night but then you can go to that same house and it's not like some dust storm hit between then and the next day at noon but you go to the same house at noon when the light is shining through the windows and exposing all the dust, what's going on? It's that light exposes.

So fellowship with God comes from walking in the light and walking in the light means you have an open attitude toward admitting your sinfulness. It's the polar opposite of being a Genesis 3 kind of person. There's the contrast: a 1 John 1 kind of man or a Genesis 3 kind of man. What did Adam and Eve do when they sinned? Did they walk in the light? Did they have an open attitude toward admitting their sinfulness? Nope. They did the polar opposite, didn't they? They ran. They hid. They covered it up and they tried to blame it on someone else. I would repeat our questions now that we've got a little bit more biblical data on the table. How are you doing at this matter of walking in the light? If that's the continuum, 1 John 1 kind of person or a Genesis 3 kind of person, where are you on that continuum? And what would happen if we brought the people who know you the best into this discussion? What would happen if you asked your spouse this afternoon, "Honey, do you see me as a person who walks in the light? Do I have an open attitude toward admitting my own sinfulness?" If you brought some friends in, if we brought other family members in and you asked them sincerely to help evaluate you on that issue, how well are you doing at this matter of walking in the light?

Now here's a critical point: the question isn't the fact whether or not you and I sin. The question is your attitude toward the fact, right? I mean, John made that clear twice in this text. Verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we," what? "We deceive ourselves." Verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar." You see, the question isn't did I sin last week? The question isn't did you sin last week? The question is did you walk in the light by having an open attitude toward admitting your side of the problem quickly? Interesting biblical aside by the way, is in 2 Samuel 16. This is from the life of King David who is a fascinating character in the Bible. He had some real failures, no question about that, yet the New Testament remembers him as a man after God's own heart. How could that be? This example, I think, helps us understand it. It's in 2 Samuel 16 and David is with his mighty band of men. You've got to love those guys. And they are fleeing from David's rebellious son, Absalom, because David doesn't want to kill his own son. So David is on the run from his rebellious son Absalom. Think about how painful that would be as a king. 2 Samuel 16 tells us as they are going through this pass, there's this guy up on a cliff name Shimei. Do you remember what Shimei did? Shimei is cussing the king. Shimei is throwing rocks and dust down on the king. Shimei is pronouncing judgment on the king. Well, there's a third guy in the story. It's one of David's mighty men of men. His name was Abishai, kind of his right hand man. Do you

remember what Abishai said about Shimei, the guy who is cussing the king? Here's exactly what he said, he said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the King? Let me go over and take off his head." What would you have done if you were David? This guy is cussing the fire out of you and your best friend offers to go and take off his head? "Go for it Deacon So-and-so. I'll pray for you." It's amazing what David said. He said, "No, leave him alone. Leave him alone. Perhaps the Lord has bidden him." That's walking in the light. That's having an open attitude toward admitting my sin.

Now, another interesting part of this discussion is that following this principle will have a tremendous impact not just on your koinonia with God but also your koinonia with other people. You see, what do you do when you have a problem with another person? By the way, it's not like you're going to have to work hard to think about the last time that happened. For some of you, that happened on the way over to the church house. We have your car bugged. For some of you, it hasn't been that long ago so don't give me the innocent, "That never happens," look. Come on, you're in the church house. This is the Lord's day. So what happens when you have a problem with another person? And here's the question: what do you choose to focus on, your sin or the sins of others? Jesus said it this way, "When you're having a problem with another person, before you try to get the speck out of somebody else's eye, first," what? "Get the log out of your own." Does that come naturally for you? It don't come natural for none of us, huh? No.

When my wife and I first moved here, we lived in Ashley Oaks. To show how old I am, that place was actually brand-new when we moved in there. Ashley Oaks was our first apartment in town and they have electric appliances there and we were trying to save money to buy a house and so we were trying to keep our electric bill low. So I come home one night after counseling, that means I had been here all day telling other people how to live and please God. You would assume that after I spent an entire day bossing other people around from the Bible that I would be spiritual for at least 30 minutes, wouldn't you think? So I come home and my wife Chris is standing there and she's got the electric bill and she announces that it was \$88 which, and this dates the story, was pretty high for us at that time. Here's the first thing that came out of my mouth, I said, "Honey, have you been doing too many loads of wash?" A really smart one there. And before you throw a rotten tomato at me, let me tell you one more thing: I like taking long, hot showers and we had an electric water heater at the time. Why would my wife announce that problem that I not immediately focus on myself? Why didn't I walk in the light? Why didn't I say, "Well, that's my fault. Baby, we've got to hire an electrician to put some sort of a timer in our shower where if I'm not out in a certain period of time, it shocks me and blows me out." You see, it doesn't come natural. What we're talking about this morning doesn't come natural.

Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. Walking in the light means I have an open attitude toward admitting my sin. Now, let's push the pause button on that for a minute and think about this important question: if it's true that we all sin and at that very moment we have a choice to either walk in the light or do something else. What falls under the possible heading of the something else? Let me give you some options. One is just to ignore what you did and act like it wasn't that big of a deal. That especially

happens when someone struggles with explosive anger. Am I talking to anybody here this morning like that? Where you pitch a fit, you have your meltdown and then for you it's over because all the energy has been expended. Well, the problem is that you've said all sorts of hurtful words, you've done all sorts of hurtful things but now you're ready to move on. You feel a whole lot better. You got it off your chest even if in the process you've used all sorts of sinful means in order to get it off your chest. But now you want to ignore the whole thing. You want to go from your sinful explosion to restored fellowship without what? Without walking in the light and without dealing with your sin. Wanting to enjoy fellowship without working at it.

Here's another alternative to walking in the light, it's becoming defensive to minimize your sin, to make excuses for what you said or didn't say or what you did or didn't do. Some of us are incredibly creative at finding ways to make ourselves look as good as possible and every time we move down that road, we're putting another layer of shellac on our fellowship with God, another layer of shellac on our fellowship with other people. Maybe this will help this morning: friends, there is no credible defense to excuse your sin. If you tend to be defensive, there is no credible defense to excuse your sin. Your past didn't make you do it even though you may have had a very difficult past. Your circumstances didn't make you do it even though your circumstances may be trying. Your body didn't make you do it although you may be struggling physically in some way. There is no credible defense to excuse your sin. Here's another way of thinking about this: walking in the light, it helps you move toward restoration. It helps you move toward fellowship. It helps you move toward reconciliation. Failing to walk in the light takes you on the opposite path and when you ignore your sin, when you become defensive, you're going further and further and further and you continue to tell yourself that narrative, you continue to focus on the sins of the other person and here's the problem: for some, by the time you actually turn around and are willing to walk in the light, you have separated yourself an incredible distance from the other person. You have been going the opposite way of what God designed. Defensiveness can kill a relationship stone cold dead.

So you can ignore what you did or you can become defensive. Here's another one: you can go on the attack. Attack the other person. That is the point of decision for many of us. I have a problem with another individual. I can choose to walk in the light or go on the attack. I can either pause, take a deep breath, ask, "Did I sin in any way to create this problem?" or I can focus forcefully and exclusively on what I believe the other person did. I'll tell you, I've been in this counseling world a long time and some people are like a dog with a sweat sock in its mouth on this point. They are absolutely going to grab onto their narrative, they are absolutely going to attack everybody else in their life. They're absolutely going to refuse to admit what they did was wrong and just like a dog with a sweat sock. Do you understand what I'm talking about? Grrrr. And you could lift that dog right off the ground. It will not let go of that sweat sock. Grrrr. Some folks, that's the way they are with their narrative. They are going to continue to attack the other person. They're going to continue to focus exclusively and forcefully on what the other person did an absolutely refuse to walk in the light.

Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. People who have done that are skilled at taking at least these four steps whenever a problem arises. One is to carefully ask what is a sovereign God trying to reveal about my heart? Secondly, to faithfully pray, admitting to the Lord, "I don't like to walk in the light. I need your help to handle this situation well." Then thirdly, to refuse to even consider how the other person may have failed until you first get the log out of your eye. In fact, if I had the ability to do this, I'd do it for every one of us: on the way out I would just close down the valve of you focusing on the failures of others and open wide you focusing first on the way you sinned in a situation. I understand at some point there has to be a balance. There is a place for you to deal with the sin of others but for some of us, that valve is all the way open and focusing on the ways we need to change is absolutely closed. Fourth, to sincerely ask the other person if you sinned against them in some way. I'm going to use the tension of the situation as an opportunity even to leave ask you to help me walk in the light.

Fellowship with God comes from walking in the light. Walking in the light means that I have an open attitude toward admitting my own sin. Well, wouldn't it be great if there were some kind of test. If I told you right now that there is a test that you could take to determine how well you're doing in the matter of walking in the light. Would you want to take that test? Why, I know you would. I know you would which is why we need to go from the principle stated to the principal explained now to the principle in action. This is the best-known verse in the text, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You see, the answer to the question is: how can I know if I'm walking in the light is, a person who is walking in the light is regularly and specifically confessing sin to God and regularly and specifically asking forgiveness of others. That's what confession means, homologeo, to say the same thing about my sin that God does.

Can I now ask you the same questions I posed several times? Have you been walking in the light? When is the last time you confessed anything specifically to God or specifically to others? I'm amazed in counseling how many spouses say to me, "I have never heard my spouse admit he's wrong. I don't ever remember my husband asking my forgiveness or anybody else's ever." I've had teenagers say that to me, "I've never heard my parents ever ask forgiveness. I don't know anything about that." What does that tell you? Either we're dealing with a home filled with perfect people who never have to ask forgiveness or we're dealing with a whole bunch of people who are not walking in the light. Listen, can we just be honest? It's the Lord's day in the Lord's house. None of us do this as often as we should. None of us do this as comprehensively as we should. Is that right?

Well, John concludes with the truth that makes it easier for us. This is a very unfortunate chapter division. You understand the chapter divisions were added later. Think about how this principle is made attainable by what? John tells us about the person and work of Christ in verses 1 and 2. It first says that Jesus Christ is our advocate. What does that mean? That means he's our lawyer. That's exactly what that metaphor means. He is the one who argues our case. The Bible says and I don't fully understand this but it's very clear, the devil is accusing us before the throne of God day and night. Revelation 12:10, "The accuser of our brethren is cast down who accused them before the throne of God

day and night." I don't know about you, but for me, he doesn't necessarily have to lie. I give him plenty of fodder for him to make the case against me every day. The Bible says that Jesus pleads my case. He argues on my behalf but not on the basis of its own merit. Jesus could say, "Heavenly Father, Steve is not that bad or other people are worse or look at all the good he has done." No, do you understand that Jesus could not be our advocate unless he was also our propitiation. What does that mean? He's the satisfaction. And the picture is in heaven of the devil accusing me before the throne of God, he is making some excellent points and then my attorney, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands up and he shows the wounds in his side and the prints in his hands and he says, "That sin has been paid for once and for all." Friends, it's at that point that the heavenly Judge wraps the gavel and he says, "Case dismissed." I'm suggesting to you that when we fail to walk in the light, we're also failing to benefit from his propitiatory work, the blood of Christ on the cross.

If you want fellowship with God, you have to walk in the light. If you want to walk in the light, you have to have an open attitude toward admitting your sin. If you want to know if you have that attitude, ask yourself how often you're confessing your sin both to God and to others and when you struggle with that, remember that he is your advocate and he's your propitiation.

One more idea: think about the way that impacts our ability to love our neighbors. You see, what does this community need? And what does every community need? Is it a church family whose reputation is thinking that we're better than everybody else? Or a church family filled with people who are known for walking in the light?

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we.

Father in heaven, Lord, we think about this passage and we all know that we need to get to a better place but thank you that in the power of Christ we can. Lord, I pray that you would give us increased koinonia, increased fellowship with you and increased fellowship with others because we are determined to walk in the light. Help us not to think that we can get to fellowship or reconciliation or restoration by means of a shortcut but I pray that you would give us the power to do this and to do it well. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.