

“A True Believer Confesses His Sins”
(1 John 1:8-10)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. In the last few texts we have considered, John has been pointing out what will be true of us with respect to God’s Word, if we are true believers:
 - a. If we are in a personal and saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, then we will listen to God’s Word and submit to it: “We are from God; *he who knows God listens to us*” (4:6; italics added).
 - b. We will also do our best to remember what it says and continue to let it guide and shape our lives: “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (2:24).
 - c. If this is true of the Word in general – which contains facts to believe, promises to hope in, and threats to tremble at – it will especially be true with respect to God’s commandments: “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (2:3).
 - d. We will keep them, not under duress, but out of love: “Whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him” (2:5).
 - e. And we will keep them because we want to be like Jesus Christ, whose image we have been predestined to become conformed to (Rom. 8:29): “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (2:6).
2. On the other hand, if we are not true believers:
 - a. We will not listen to God’s Word and submit to it: “He who is not from God does not listen to us” (4:6).
 - b. We will not remember to keep what we have heard: obviously, if we don’t listen and submit to it to begin with, unless we repent, we’ll continue to do the same.
 - c. More specifically, we will not keep God’s commandments: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (2:4).
 - d. We will not keep them because we do not love Jesus Christ or want to be conformed to His image.
 - e. And though we can’t know for certain until our lives are at an end, this may be due to the fact that we were never predestined to become conformed to His image – in other words, because we are not God’s elect.

B. Preview.

1. Having considered the believer’s relationship to the Word in general and the Commandments in particular, John tells us further what our response will be when we fail to keep those commandments: we will confess our sins and repent of them.
 - a. The believer, because of the grace of God in his soul, loves righteousness across the board and hates sin, also across the board.

- b. But he still commits sin, he still does what he hates, because he has remaining sin in his heart (Rom. 7:15; Gal. 5:17).
 - c. This shouldn't surprise us especially because of our condition coming into the world.
 - (i) A. A. Hodge comments, "Original sin is purely moral, being the innate proneness of the will to evil. . . . Having its seat in the will averse to the holy law of God, it biasses [sic] the understanding, and thus deceives the conscience, leads to erroneous moral judgments, to blindness of mind, to deficient and perverted sensibility in relation to moral objects, to the inordinate action of the sensuous nature, and thus to corruption of the entire soul" (*Outlines of Theology*, 325).
 - (ii) The sad reality is that this sin is not entirely removed at conversion: Chapter 13, section 2, of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "On Sanctification", reminds us, "This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."
 - (iii) Of course, this wouldn't mean anything if just the Confession said it. The reason why we should pay attention to what it says is because this is what Scripture says (Cf. Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:16-21).
2. Seeing that both the believer and unbeliever have this corruption/sin in their souls, how can you tell them apart? The answer to this question gives us another mark of grace. It can be seen in their response to their sin. Tonight we'll look at two things:
- a. The believer confesses his sin and seeks to purify himself from every sin.
 - b. The unbeliever, on the other hand, denies his sin.

II. Sermon.

- A. With respect to sin, John tells us the Christian will do two things: He will confess his sins when he fails to live according to God's holy will, and he will seek to purify himself from all sin.
 - 1. First, he will confess his sins. John writes in 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - a. To confess our sins means to admit we have done them, that we are guilty.
 - (i) It means to confess them to God, and, if we have injured our neighbor, to confess them to him as well.
 - (ii) This is part of what John meant by walking in the light (1:7):
 - (a) Walking in the light means to live according to God's commandments.
 - (b) Confessing and repenting of my sins means the same thing: repentance includes both confession (you can't truly repent of something you're unwilling to admit) and obedience (to repent means to stop sinning and to begin obeying).
 - b. If we confess our sins, we are true believers.
 - (i) John tells us it's only those who confess and forsake their sins that find forgiveness.
 - (ii) But it's only those who are forgiven that are true believers/Christians.
 - (iii) Therefore it's only those who confess their sins who are true believers.
 - c. This is again something that only love for God can produce.

- (i) Only those who love God are grieved by the fact that their sins have offended Him.
 - (ii) Only those who are grieved by their sins out of love can truly turn from them to God.
 - (iii) It's not enough to confess them because we were caught, or because of what it will cost us if we don't. We must confess them because we hate them and because we love God.
- d. This is something we should expect to see in ourselves if we are true believers.
- (i) How do we respond to our own sins?
 - (ii) Do we deny them, cover over them, do nothing about them?
 - (iii) Or do we grieve over them, confess them to God and repent/turn away from them?
 - (iv) If we are true believers, we may not do this immediately or perfectly, but we will do it, as the pattern of our lives.
 - (v) John tells us that it is those who are continually confessing (present tense) their sins who are continually cleansed and forgiven of their sins.
 - (vi) This is not a work we do to be saved, but something that will true of us if we are: We are not saved by confessing our sins, but by confessing our sins we show that we are saved.
2. But the believer will do more than confess his sins: he will also seek to purify himself of his sins, to be rid of them once and for all.
- a. John writes, "And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (3:3).
 - (i) The "hope" John refers to here is the hope of Christ's return, and the expectation that when He comes, all true believers will be transformed into His own glorious likeness (v. 2).
 - (ii) This hope will have a powerful effect on a believer: it will make him want to become now what he will be then: morally pure.
 - (iii) And that for two reasons:
 - (a) Fear: a true believer knows what the Bible says about Judgment Day is true and so wants to be ready.
 - (b) But also love: the believer loves Christ and wants to be more like Him.
 - (c) Marshall writes, "Those who hope to come into the presence of the pure Son of God must themselves be pure. Here, then, we have the moral outworking of the continuing spiritual union with Jesus with which this section of the Epistle began" (173-174).
 - b. How pure will we want to be?
 - (i) Just enough to get by and still make it to heaven? No.
 - (ii) We will want nothing less than perfection.
 - (a) Again John writes, "Everyone who has this hope . . . purifies himself, *just as He is pure*" (italics added).
 - (b) Marshall writes, "Although John has just told us that seeing Jesus will make us like him, it is also true that the condition for seeing Jesus is that we should be morally fit to come into his presence. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Mt. 5:8). John was aware that his readers needed to

achieve this purity of heart, and therefore he encouraged them to seek to be pure, and so to be like Jesus” (173).

- (c) Again, we are not saved by our moral purity, but if we are saved, we will strive after perfect holiness and make progress (Rom. 8:13; Heb. 12:14).
- (d) How holy do you want to be? Perfect holiness is what the Christian wants, to be pure just as He is pure.
- (e) And so the true Christian’s life is marked by confession, repentance, and increasing holiness/purification.

B. But what about the unbeliever? What is his life marked by? The unbeliever denies his sin.

1. Unbelievers practice sin, because that is what is in their heart to do, as we’ve already seen.
2. But this doesn’t mean that they will want their sins to be uncovered.
 - a. Jesus tells us in John 3:20, “For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”
 - (i) The light He refers to is the light of God’s holiness, His standard of morality which is embodied in Jesus Christ.
 - (ii) The unbeliever stays away from that light because of what it reveals about his own heart.
 - (iii) And so instead of coming to confess those sins, he will cover them over, try to hide them, even deny them.
 - b. But John writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1:8).
 - (i) Worse than this, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1:10). We are not only lying to ourselves, but we are calling God a liar.
 - (ii) Obviously, if this is the case, His truth, His Word is not abiding in us (1 John 2:24).
3. The diagnostic question John leaves us with this evening is this: How do we respond to God’s truth, to His commandments, to what they show us about our sins?
 - a. When our sins are clearly revealed by God’s Word, do we confess that He is right, do we repent of our sins, do we seek to overcome our sins and purify ourselves from them?
 - b. Or do we deny our sins, try to justify what we’re doing as acceptable? Do we not repent of them or fight against them and continue to live as we did before, not becoming an effectual doer, but a forgetful hearer (James 1:23-25)?
 - c. The answer to these questions tell us whether or not we are converted, or still lost in our sins.
 - d. The true believer, though very imperfectly, seeks to live his life according to God’s Word and confesses and repents of his sins when he fails; the unbeliever, lives according to his own ways and does not confess or repent of his sins.
 - e. May the Lord grant us all the former. Amen.