

Transforming Grace: Grace That Cleanses

Part 2 of 5 - 1 John 1:5-2:2

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to remember that Christians still struggle with sin, and how does this keep us from both spiritual pride and despair?
2. Holiness is about becoming like Jesus, not just following rules. In what area of your character (like patience, forgiveness, or self-control) do you need to grow right now?
3. What does "walking in the light" look like in your daily habits, and what helps you stay on track when you are tempted?
4. When you mess up, do you tend to blame others, make excuses, minimize it, or hide? What makes it hard to simply admit you were wrong?
5. Confession means agreeing with God about our sin. How does calling your sin by its real name (like "lying" or "pride") change your perspective?
6. How often do you confess your sins when you pray, and what is one step you can take to make confession a regular habit?
7. How can you tell the difference between the Holy Spirit gently showing you where you failed versus the enemy filling you with shame and guilt?
8. First John says Jesus is our Advocate who speaks on our behalf. How does knowing Jesus defends you change how you handle guilt when you stumble?
9. Because Jesus already paid the full penalty for your sin, why can you run to God instead of running away and hiding when you fail?
10. How does experiencing God's free forgiveness make you want to live a holy life rather than take His grace for granted?

Summary

When we look back at the foundation of the Christian faith, we are reminded of the miraculous message of salvation. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are given a stark, sobering picture of what our lives looked like apart from Jesus Christ. We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins, following the corrupt ways of the world, obeying the desires of our flesh, and standing as children of wrath.

Yet, the narrative turns dramatically in Ephesians 2:4 with two life-changing words: "*But God...*" Being rich in mercy and driven by His great love, God made us alive together with Christ even while we were dead in our sins. Salvation is entirely by grace through faith, completely unearned by human effort. It is not a system of "*do and do some more, and maybe God will accept you.*" Instead, it is *done*—fully accomplished through the finished life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Grace That Saves.

However, receiving salvation raises a vital, practical question for daily life: **What happens after you are saved and you sin?**

The Tension: What Do You Do When You Miss the Mark?

Becoming a follower of Jesus does not mean you instantly become sinless. In biblical terms, the word "sin" originates as an archery term that means "missing the mark." When you pull back the bowstring, release the arrow, and miss the bullseye, you have missed the target. Prior to knowing Christ, we missed the mark continuously; after coming to faith, we still stumble and miss the mark.

While a believer is saved from the ultimate penalty of sin, the earthly journey involves an ongoing battle. The world's influence remains, and fleshly, sinful desires do not simply disappear overnight. Every Christian occasionally stumbles. So, what should you do when you realize you have sinned? The First Letter of John provides the answer.

Understanding 1 John: A Father's Heart for God's Children

The letter of 1 John was penned by the apostle John—one of Jesus' original twelve disciples, an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ, and an apostle sent to preach the gospel. Beyond those titles, John wrote with the deeply loving, caring heart of a seasoned pastor.

John wrote specifically to believers to encourage them in their ongoing walk and fellowship with God. To understand his message, it helps to view our relationship with God through the lens of a family. When we put our trust in Jesus, God becomes our Heavenly Father, and we become His children. Our position in His family is secure; our adoption isn't revoked every time we make a mistake.

However, just as a child's disobedience in an earthly family creates relational tension and distance without severing the bloodline, sin in a believer's life disrupts intimate fellowship with

God. John wrote to instruct believers on how to maintain a vibrant, growing relationship with their Heavenly Father by pursuing holiness, confessing sin when they fall, and resting in the comfort of Jesus Christ.

1. Pursue Holiness: Walking in the Light

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. 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." — 1 John 1:5–7

John begins by describing God's foundational character: **God is light**. In Him, there is no trace or hint of darkness whatsoever. This imagery highlights God's absolute purity, holiness, and righteousness. Because God is light, anyone claiming to share fellowship with Him must reflect His character by walking in the light rather than remaining in darkness.

This call to align our lives with God's character is reiterated throughout Scripture. As the apostle Peter—John's close friend and fellow disciple—wrote in 1 Peter 1:15–16: *"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"*

Holiness Is More Than a Rulebook

Often, holiness is misconstrued as nothing more than a strict list of external prohibitions—"don't watch this," "don't go there," or "don't listen to that." (Many who grew up in 1990s youth groups might remember throwing secular music CDs into big bonfires!) While external boundaries certainly matter—there are indeed places, forms of entertainment, and influences Christians ought to avoid—holiness is fundamentally far bigger than external rules.

Holiness is about **becoming more like Jesus** from the inside out. It encompasses both internal transformation and external behavior. Pursuing holiness means asking probing personal questions:

- Are you growing in your love for God?
- Are you becoming more patient and forgiving toward others?
- Is self-control taking root in your daily life?
- Are you maturing in how you handle life's difficult circumstances?
- Are your thoughts, words, and actions increasingly reflecting Christ?

Because we will not execute this pursuit perfectly in our earthly lives, John addresses the precise step believers must take when they inevitably stumble.

2. Confess Your Sin: Rejecting Denial and Embracing Agreement with God

"If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness. If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." —
1 John 1:8–10

When confronted with our own sin, human nature defaults to denial. We frequently attempt to dodge personal accountability through common self-defense mechanisms:

- **Blaming others:** *"If they hadn't acted that way, I wouldn't have lost my temper."*
- **Making excuses:** *"I was just tired, stressed out, or having a bad day."*
- **Minimizing the act:** *"It wasn't that big of a deal; everybody does it."*
- **Renaming the sin:** *"I wasn't lying, I just wasn't completely honest," or "I wasn't angry, I was just passionate."*
- **Hiding:** Suppressing our wrongdoing out of shame, fear, or pride.

John warns that denying our sin only deceives ourselves and calls God a liar. The alternative is confession.

What Does It Mean to Confess?

The word *confess* literally means **"to say the same thing."** Confession means agreeing with God about our sin and calling it exactly what He calls it. When the Holy Spirit brings conviction to your heart, you do not defend, minimize, or blame. Instead, you speak honestly to God:

- If you lied, say: *"Lord, I lied."*
- If you acted in pride, say: *"Lord, I was prideful."*
- If you gossiped, say: *"Lord, I gossiped."*
- If you harbored lust, say: *"Lord, I lusted."*

Confession as an Ongoing Practice

John is writing to established believers. He is not describing the initial confession made at salvation, but the ongoing habit of confession that maintains intimate fellowship with God. A practical tool for structuring daily prayer is the **ACTS** model (or **CATS if you want to confess first** 😊):

- **Adoration:** Praising God for His character, power, and glory.
- **Confession:** Bringing specific, known sins before God in complete honesty.
- **Thanksgiving:** Thanking God for His blessings, protection, and faithfulness.
- **Supplication:** Bringing personal needs and intercessions for others before the Lord.

Confession is not a miserable burden or an exercise in shame; it is a profound blessing. Just as stepping into a warm shower washes away physical dirt and grime, coming to God in confession washes away spiritual grime, refreshing our souls and restoring uninterrupted

fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

3. Take Comfort in Jesus: Our Advocate and Sacrifice

"My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world." — **1 John 2:1–2**

Moving into chapter 2, John speaks with tender warmth (*"My little children"*), deeply aware of the internal guilt and doubts believers face after they sin. His goal is to encourage holiness so that we do not sin, yet he offers immediate comfort for the moments we do: **We have an Advocate.**

The Role of an Advocate

An advocate is someone who comes alongside you, stands by your side, and speaks on your behalf.

Many people have experienced harsh, relentless critics in their lives—a co-worker, acquaintance, or family member who constantly highlights every flaw. (For instance, during college, a fraternity brother was a persistent critic, constantly making negative comments). Critical voices leave us feeling like failures, repeating: *"You messed up again. You always do this. You're a mistake."*

In spiritual reality, we face an accuser. Scripture identifies Satan (meaning "adversary") and the Devil (meaning "accuser") as the enemy of believers. Rather than the medieval caricature of a red creature with horns and a pitchfork, Scripture exposes him as a spiritual accuser who points at our failures and sneers before God: *"Look at what they did! A Christian? Really? Look at how many times they've fallen. Are You really going to call them Your child?"*

Furthermore, believers often accuse themselves. After falling into a familiar temptation—even after 20, 30, or 50 years of walking with the Lord—we despair: *"I did it again. I'm sick of myself, so God must be sick of me too. Maybe I was never truly saved."*

Into this darkness steps our Advocate, Jesus Christ. When the accuser points at your sin, Jesus points to His finished work on the cross. When the enemy claims, *"That one isn't Yours!"*, Jesus declares, *"That one is Mine."*

Understanding Propitiation: Satisfaction Rendered

Jesus is qualified to be our Advocate because He is the *righteous one* and the **atoning sacrifice** (or *propitiation*) for our sins.

Propitiation means **satisfaction**. It signifies that Jesus satisfied the holy requirements of God's righteous justice and anger against sin.

Unlike human anger, which is often selfish, hot-tempered, and destructive, God's righteous anger stems from His absolute holiness. God hates sin because sin destroys His creation, inflicts immense pain, and brings brokenness into the world. His holy justice demands that sin

be judged.

Instead of pouring out that judgment on us, God in His vast mercy provided His Son. On the cross, Jesus bore the penalty for our sin, fully satisfying God's justice once and for all.

Therefore, when you stumble, you do not need to run, hide, minimize your failure, or listen to accusations. You can run directly to your Advocate and take comfort in Him.

Grace That Drives Us to Light

Understanding the depth of God's cleansing grace never leads to a flippant attitude toward sin. It does not cause a believer to say, *"Jesus paid for it, so I can live however I want."*

On the contrary, when you truly grasp the immense mercy, love, and sacrifice of the Father and the Son, grace does not motivate licentiousness—it ignites a deep desire to walk in the light. It moves us to pursue holiness, resist the flesh, grieve over our stumbles, and rush to confess our sins so that we may enjoy rich, unbroken fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

Take time today to pause, sit in silence, and bring any hidden or unconfessed sin into the open before God. Name it specifically, take full responsibility, and rely on the unwavering promise of His Word: **He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness**—because Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, stands as your Advocate forever.