Walk Faithfully with God
May 3, 2015
1 John 1:5-2:2
Mario Russo

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. - 1 John 1:5-2:2

Introduction

What would you do if you knew you could fail at something, and yet still ultimately succeed? What would you pursue if you knew that you would fail along the way in pursuit of something, but you were guaranteed success in the end? Would we pursue a college education knowing we might fail some classes, but ultimately be awarded a college degree? Would we ask out that girl or guy that we had a crush on, knowing that he or she might say no once or twice, but ultimately we will end up married to them?

Would we start a business, knowing that it would go bankrupt several times before eventually becoming a multi-billion dollar international corporation? Would you buy 100 lottery tickets knowing that 99 of them are incorrect tickets, but one of them is a guaranteed 500 million dollar jackpot?

For most of us, the thought of failure along the way is not enough to deter us from pursuing something if we have absolute certainty of success in the end.

In Matthew 5 Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Here in our passage in 1 John we read: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” The message we have been entrusted with is this, we are dark, and there is no light in us, but God is light and there is no darkness in him. We have been given a task, to be a light to others, like God is light. We may fail along the way, but God gives us grace when we fail, and has guaranteed our ultimate success.

In Matthew 28, Jesus tells his disciples to go make disciples of all nations “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Again, shortly after that, in Acts 1:8 Jesus tells them “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

All followers of Jesus have a purpose. We are called to make disciples, and call them to follow Jesus and his teaching, just as we are following Jesus and his teaching. We may fail along the
way in our walk with God. We will fail along the way in our walk with God, but we are guaranteed success in the end. There is grace for us when we fail. In the midst of our failure we never lose our hope. In the midst of our failure we never lose the guarantee of our future; it is certain and secure. That leads us to our main idea this morning.

Main idea: Walk Faithfully with God, Knowing There is Grace When We Fail

I believe there are three areas that we will see what this means from our text.

1. Walking faithfully with God means we walk in the light.
2. Walking faithfully with God means we acknowledge and confess our sin.
3. Walking faithfully with God means we have grace when we fail.

1. We Walk in the Light

[1:6-7] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

In this passage, John is saying that it is impossible to live a life characterized by sin, and still have fellowship with God. Why? Because our sin separates us from God. If our life is characterized by sin, and we say we have fellowship with God, we are lying, because our sin actually separates us from God.

Moreover, if there is a disconnection between what we say and how we live we are not living as God has called us to live. We cannot say that we are Christians and yet let our lives be defined by sin. The children of God ought to live like God is their Father.

Could you imagine if were working for a company and you had to hire a graphic designer. So you interviewed several and finally hired one. However, it became very obvious very quickly that though the person you hired called herself a graphic designer she did not have the ability to do graphic design. Her claim to be a graphic designer and her ability to do graphic design were not in line with each other. She had trouble meeting deadlines, and she often broke the basic rules of graphic design. Imagine that it was apparent that while she thought she was a graphic designer, even knew the lingo, and could talk like a graphic designer, the reality was she didn’t produce the work of a graphic designer. There was a disconnection between what she claimed and what she did.

In a similar way, if we claim to be children of God our lives ought to reflect such a claim. Our lives should bear the fruit of having fellowship with God. We cannot say that we are Christians and love God and let our lives be defined by sin. If that is the case, we are just spiritually fake graphic designers, failing to produce the fruit in our life of what we claim with our mouth.

Jesus said in John 14, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments… If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” If we claim to be followers of Jesus, our lives should show that we follow Jesus.

Now, John does not here define specifically what he means when he says “walk in light” and “walk in darkness.” But he does explain a little more what this means in the third chapter of his gospel. He writes: And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked
things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

This suggests that walking in the light involves living in a way that reflects the character and image of God. While walking in the darkness means a refusal to let our lives be defined by and publicly reflect the image and glory of God. In short, to “walk in the light” means to walk in godliness. Or to say it another way, to “walk in the light” means to walk in god-likeness.

Are there areas in our life that we are consistently walking in godliness? I don't want you to say them out loud but bring them to mind. If we are living in holiness in an area of our life or if there's any area of our life that we are allowing to be defined by godliness, John says we are practicing the truth.

If we claim to be Christians and let our lives be defined by Godlike-ness then, John says, we have fellowship with one another. In other words if we claim to be Christians and our lives are defined by holiness and by following Jesus then even when we do sin the blood of Jesus covers us and makes us clean.

Now, are there areas in our life that we are consistently living in sin? I don't want you to say them out loud, but bring them to mind. If we are living in sin in any area of our life, or any area of our life we are allowing to be defined by sin, John says we're liars and God's truth is not in us. If that is true this morning John calls us to confess our sin to God and one another and let the blood of Jesus cleanse us from all sin. That is what it says in verse 7, “and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

It is important to note here that we are not talking about people who sin every day. We all sin every day; sin is unavoidable. But what we are talking about is letting sinful habits and sinful patterns define our life. And so there is a real gospel hope that we have from John. If we are following Jesus our lives are defined by godliness, then when we do sin everyday we have this hope: that Jesus’ blood will cleanse us and make us clean. Do not despair if you sin everyday. If we confess our sin, then Jesus’ blood will cleanse us from our sin. But be careful to walk in the truth by letting your life be defined by godliness.

Now it says here in verse 7 that we will have “fellowship with one another.” One of the fruits of walking in godliness is having fellowship with one another. So let's ask ourselves are we making fellowship with one another a priority? Is this an area in our life that we can say we are not habitually sinning by avoiding fellowship with one another?

There are two primary expressions of fellowship that we have as a church. The first is our gathering together on Sunday mornings. Are we as individuals committed to faithfully and consistently meet together on Sunday mornings week in and week out for the purpose of worshiping God and fellowshipping with each other? Are we committed to singing together gospel-centered songs for the praise and adoration of our God?

Are we committed to listening to and applying God's Word to our hearts through the sermon every week? I know there are so many good preachers besides Matt and Aaron. And we have instant access to hundreds of other sermons most of them for free. But it is important for us to realize that other preachers are not our pastors. God has called us to this church, to listen to these pastors. Let's be faithful in listening to God's Word as it is preached through them. Are we committed to faithfully and consistently meeting together on Sunday mornings for the purpose of
fellowship with one another through worship and preaching?

The second expression of fellowship that we have as a church and as individuals is to gather in the middle of the week for care groups. Are we as individuals committed to faithfully and consistently meet together throughout the week, week in and week out, for the purpose of edifying, encouraging, and building up each other? I know it can be difficult to be consistent and faithful in our attendance and participation in care group. Some of us have crazy schedules that just don't allow for us to be faithful. Some of us have kids that are difficult and it makes it hard to be faithful in our participation in care group.

But we need to take a serious look at our hearts and ask the question are we as committed to fellowship with one another in the context of care groups, as we ought to be? Are we intentionally avoiding going to care group simply because it's inconvenient? Or because we think it's boring? I believe John, if he were here right now, would ask us this question: Are we committed to faithfully and consistently meeting for care group to fellowship with one another?

We realize that CGs are not a biblically mandated thing, that is why they aren't mandatory and it's not a sin if you don't attend one. But this is the designated means for our church by which we are able to have care for and fellowship with one another outside of Sunday morning. Let's not be spiritual fake graphic designers. Let's not say one thing, and live another. Let us give priority to fellowship with one another.

One of the primary ways we can enjoy fellowship with one another, and faithfully walk in the light in the context of our CGs is through confession of sin. Confessing our sin to God is necessary, but John is saying that there is something distinctive about confessing our sins with one another that is an expression of godliness and walking in the light. Are we taking full advantage of this? Are we using our CG as a safe context to confess our sins to one another? God often gives grace to overcome sin through confession. Is there a sin that you have only confessed to God, that God may be calling you to confess to others? Let us seek accountability and humility through confessing our sins to one another.

Walking faithfully with God means we walk in the light. It means we walk in godliness; we have fellowship with one another, knowing that when we fail, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

2. We Acknowledge and Confess Our Sin

[1:8-9] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In this church that John is writing to the false teachers were telling people that they were not guilty of sinning. This phrase “we have no sin,” seems to reflect an assertion on the part of the false teachers that Christians do not sin. That it is possible to reach such a state of Christian-ness so as to be free from sinning. It is as if they are saying that there was no such thing as sin. There is simply a categorical rejection of the concept of sin.

This thought is not so foreign in our own day. We live in a culture where it is becoming more and more unpopular to talk about sin. There's a whole movement within the field of psychology that says that the idea of sin is actually harmful for people to believe in and therefore we should just do away with the whole concept of sin for our own psychological benefit. The mantra of modern religious psychologists says that the idea of sin is harmful to our psyche and therefore should be
abandoned. There is even a syndrome associated with this idea, it’s called religious trauma syndrome.

Noted psychologist, Marlene Winell, writes: “The doctrines of original sin and eternal damnation cause the most psychological distress... [Christianity claims] you cannot ever stop sinning altogether, so you must continue to confess and be forgiven... For the sincere believer, this results in an unending cycle of shame and relief.” Dr. Winell has dedicated her life to helping people “recover” from a belief in the doctrine of sin. While we may be tempted to dismiss her and others like her, this idea is more prevalent in our society and in our own lives then we think.

There is a real problem with this. Sin is a serious thing. It cost Jesus his life. Listen to what Paul says about sin in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Those whose lives are characterized and defined by sin have no place in the kingdom of God. Is it any wonder, then, that when we look at our sin we are tempted to do as the false teachers did, and deny that we are sinners? Sometimes, we are faced with the full weight and reality of our sin, and we rush to deny it. We see our sin for all its ugliness and filthiness and we say, “That can’t really be me!” So we deny that we are sinful in the hopes that we are just wrong and that we aren’t really as bad as we think we are.

But mostly we take our sin too lightly, and so we deny our sin because we don’t see it for how bad it really is. We don’t have a realistic picture of our own sin. When we don’t see our sin for all its filth, we struggle to see Jesus for all his beauty. We don’t take our sin seriously enough, and so we struggle to take the death and resurrection of Jesus seriously enough. In what ways are we denying our sin? We can do it two ways, we can deny our sin corporately and we can deny it personally.

First, corporately, it is easy for us to think and act like our church is full of perfect people. We can live in denial about the fact that we are all sinners and that we as a corporate church body have real struggles with sin. Let me give you some examples. In a 2014 report, it was found that almost 70% of men and 20% of women look at pornography at least once a week. Now it can be easy to hear that and say, well that is not me. But Jesus said if you lust after a woman it is the same as committing adultery. Lust is simply coveting something that doesn’t belong to you. When was the last time we coveted something that didn’t belong to us? When was the last time we coveted more money, a better job, a different position, a better house, better kids, a better car? Lust manifests itself in many ways. All of them are equally sinful.

When was the last time we were proud, became angry, were unthankful, selfish or discontent? When was the last time we lacked self control, were impatient or irritable, judgmental, or spoke unkind words? When was the last time we loved the world more than God?

Or how about a 2011 survey, which found that between 4-8% of church, attenders identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered? How would we respond to these folks if they walked in to our church? How would we treat those in our midst who struggle in this area? Would we sinfully judge them, ostracize them? Or would we show them love, grace, mercy, and compassion? Scripture is clear (even in our passage in 1 Cor 6), homosexuality is a sin, but we want to be a church that welcomes those who struggle with the LGBT lifestyle. We want to be a
church who attracts members of that community. Why? Because we want to be defined as a community of grace and compassion.

We as a corporate church body have real struggles with sin. John is calling us to acknowledge and confess them. And to let the blood of Jesus cleanse us from them.

Secondly, we can deny our sin personally. When we are confronted by our friends, our family, or our spouse about an area of sin in our life, what is our naturally tendency? Do we deny it? Do we justify it? Do we make excuses for it? Do we deflect the accusation and point out the sin in the other person? When we do that, John says, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Are we deceived this morning? What areas of our lives are we deceiving ourselves into thinking that we are not sinning?

Anselm of Canterbury was a theologian in the 11th century, in his book, *Cur Deus Homo*, he is writing a defense of the deity of Jesus. And he does so through correspondence with another monk named Boso. Boso is struggling to understand the significance and beauty of Jesus’ atoning death. He says to Anselm, *I believe that if a person stops sinning and does what is right, then God will forgive them.* In other words, Boso wasn’t looking to the cross as the basis of his forgiveness, but rather he was looking at his own ability and his own performance to earn God’s forgiveness.

He didn’t think his sin was bad enough for it to need atoning. And so Anselm gives his famous reply to Boso: *Nondum considerati quanti ponderis sit peccatum.* “You have not considered the weightiness of your sin.” Had Boso understood the weightiness and severity of his own sin, he could have appreciated the sobriety and seriousness of Jesus’ atoning death.

I want to invite us to stop deceiving ourselves about the corporate and personal aspects of our sin, and consider the weightiness of our sin.

When we look at our sin, are we quick to dismiss it? Do we deceive ourselves and down play how bad our sin really is? Do we let ourselves be overwhelmed by the burden of our sin? Have we yet considered the weightiness of our sin? If none of these sins that we’ve talked about resonate with you, let’s ask ourselves, when was the last time that we loved the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our strength? And loved our neighbor as ourselves?

Walking Faithfully with God Means *We Acknowledge and Confess Our Sin.*

3. We Have Grace When We Fail

In light of all this that we have talked about so far, what would you do if you knew that you would fail by sinning, but ultimately you would succeed? If John is calling us this morning to walk faithfully with God, what about knowing that there is grace when we fail? We have looked at what it means to walk faithfully with God, let’s turn our attention now to knowing that there is grace when we fail.

*[1:9 – 2:2]* “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”
There are two things I want to focus on in these verses, that God is *faithful*, and that God is *just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why does John draw out these two attributes for us? Why the faithfulness and justice of God?

The answer lies in the very nature of sin. In this context John is talking about sin. What is sin? In short, sin is the failure to accurately and properly reflect the character of God. Sin is a failure to comply with the will of God for us to be bearers of his image.

Each and every person is made in the image of God; that is our identity. But every person is also called to actively bear that image in the world. That is our purpose. We are called to live out the character and glory of God in the world. We are called, as humans, and especially as Christians, to reflect godliness in the world. Sin is the failure, or lack of faithfulness, to fulfill that purpose.

But God, John is telling us, is faithful. He is the antithesis to failure. God is radically committed to living out his character and glory in the world. God is passionately committed to making his greatness known among the nations. And what is God, in this passage, seeking to tell us about himself? That he is faithful to forgive us our sins.

Brothers and sisters if you are struggling with guilt this morning, if you are feeling the weightiness of your sin, hear what our faithful God is saying and find hope this morning, because of Jesus Christ he forgives you.

Listen to the last verse from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?... *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*”

Here is the good news this morning. There is grace when we fail. We don’t have to deny our sin. When we are faced with the ugliness and full weightiness of our sin we don’t have to deceive ourselves and deny it. We have grace when we fail. Why? Because God is *faithful* to forgive us our sins. But John says that God is something else. There is a second word, John says that God is *just*.

How so? How is God *just* to forgive us our sins? If we don’t confess our sins and receive by faith the gift of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are condemned and without hope. If we do confess our sins and receive by faith the gift of Jesus’ death and resurrection, then we are forgiven.

Forgiveness is how God remains just. Because *Jesus* has already paid the penalty of our sin, God cannot make us pay the penalty for our sin too. This is called double jeopardy. God has held our sin against Jesus, he cannot hold our sin against us too. That would be unjust.

Imagine for a moment that you are involved in a lawsuit. The judge has ruled against you and you are required to pay a large sum of money. You can’t pay it. So your brother steps in and pays the total amount that the judge has set and the matter, legally, is deemed closed. A month passes and you get a notice in the mail. It’s from the judge. It’s a letter stating that they have received the full payment from your brother and the other party is quite satisfied with their settlement. However, the judge is still demanding that you pay the full amount he had originally ordered you to pay or you will spend the rest of your life in jail. This scenario sounds silly, and that’s because it is.
At the cross, Jesus paid the full penalty for our sin. God cannot again require us to pay for it. That would be unjust. Augustus Toplady wrote a hymn called “Now Why This Fear and Unbelief?” And one of the verses captures this theology for us, it says:

From whence this fear and unbelief?  
Hath not the Father put to grief  
His spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men  
Condemn me for that debt of sin  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

If thou hast my discharge procured,  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath divine;  
**Payment God cannot twice demand,**  
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,  
And then again at mine.

John says we don’t serve an unjust God. We serve a God who is both faithful and just. Are you feeling the weightiness of your sin this morning? Do not despair, we have hope. Having grace when we fail means we don’t have to look over our shoulder for God and wonder when his wrath is going to fall. Having grace when we fail means we don’t have to fear when we sin, because God is faithful and just to forgive us for our sin.

Let us acknowledge and confess our sin. And our God who is both faithful and just, will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

© 2015 Redeeming Grace Church. This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Website. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.