



Unit 3: Return the Favor
Sermon Series Title: The Necessity of Forgiveness
Sermon 1: Got Sin?
Bible Passage: 1 John 5:1-10

Background/Context

"Nothing changes until it is what it is." I have often heard counselors use those words to express a fundamental truth about new beginnings: Until a person is honest about the condition of his life, he can't change for the better. A patient won't seek treatment until she believes that she is sick. The journey to sobriety often begins with the words, "I am an alcoholic."

Facing the truth about ourselves is also necessary in our relationship to God. Through His Word, and the convicting presence of the Holy Spirit, God confronts every person with the truth that we have sinned. How we respond to the charge that we are sinners makes all the difference in the condition of our hearts and the direction of our lives.

We can deny our sin and face the consequences of a widening separation from God and others. We can choose a better way; the way of honesty, the way of confession that leads to forgiveness and restored intimacy with God and His people. Those who are ready to say, "I am a sinner" open their hearts to the grace of God and His promise to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

A. We Can Deny Our Sin, Deceive Ourselves, and Defame God (1 John 1:8,10)

When I served as a hospital chaplain, I visited a patient who had been diagnosed with cancer. His doctors wanted to begin treatment immediately, but he wouldn't agree. He decided that all that he needed to get better was a few days of rest and some home cooking. He returned to the hospital a couple of months later, not for treatment, but to be kept comfortable until he died. His denial of how sick he really was cost him his only chance to save his life.

When God delivers His diagnosis to us—when He confronts us with the reality of our sin—we can choose to deny the truth of what He has said. We can choose to believe that all that we need for our lives to be fine is a little bit of moral reform and better habits. But choosing to deny our sin brings some terrible consequences.

When we deny our sin, we deceive ourselves. When our relationship with God is built upon this lie, we are not living in the light of God's revealed truth. When we refuse to see the reality of our sin, we lose our only chance for salvation.

Denial of sin is a rejection of the gospel. We cannot understand and place our trust in the good news of God's saving love if we do not agree that we need it. Claiming that we have not sinned, when God says clearly that we have, accuses God of being a liar, something He cannot possibly be (see Rom. 3:4). Denial of sin leads to spiritual death.

Application Point: How have you reacted to God's diagnosis of your spiritual condition? Have you denied that you're a sinner, rejected your need of the gospel, and called God a

liar? Has denying your sin brought you the inner peace and joy you crave? Where do you believe that this attitude will lead you?

B. We Can Confess Our Sins and Find Forgiveness and Fellowship (1 John 1:9)

A few years ago, I suffered from terrible back pain. A specialist wanted to do surgery immediately, but I resisted, wanting to try other options first. He smiled and said, “Come back when you know that you need me.” Weeks later, I returned to him, still in great pain and said, “I need surgery.” Admitting my need was the first step toward healing my pain.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. We can try many ways to alleviate the pain that unforgiven sin brings into our lives, but none of them will work. We must realize how much we need the spiritual healing that only God can give. We must come to him and admit, “I am a sinner. I need to be forgiven.” Admitting our need is the first step toward our spiritual healing.

When we confess our sin, forgiveness is not just a possibility; it is a promise. God is “faithful and righteous;” we can trust Him to do what He has said and make our broken relationship with Him whole again.

God not only forgives our sin, He promises “to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Sin is a stain that we cannot remove. When we confess our sins to God, trusting in the saving love that sent Christ into the world to die for us, “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). When we confess our sins, God washes us clean.

The same grace that restores our relationship with God restores our fellowship with other Christians (1 John 1:7). Only people who are at peace with God can live and serve at peace with one another. When the love we share is deep and genuine, we show the world that we belong to Jesus (John 13:35).

Application Point: Do you see how much is to be gained by honestly admitting your sin to God? Spend some private time with God today, taking inventory of your life and confessing specific sins that are poisoning your life, distancing you from God, and isolating you from other Christians. Claim His promise to forgive and cleanse you.