

“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.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

There are some things we just don't want to have to face or admit in our lives. I still remember the day about 20 years ago when I went to get my haircut, and when the girl was finished, she picked up the mirror to show me how it looked at the back. But she kept moving the mirror very quickly, and angled it in a strange way. She was trying to keep me from seeing something I hadn't seen before, and something I really didn't want to face. Like it or not, the mirror made it abundantly clear that there was more head and less hair than I had ever seen before.

As we grow older, we all have that experience of looking in the mirror and having to face the truth of things we don't like, such as wrinkles, gray hair or age spots. For teens, looking in the mirror means seeing the acne that suddenly plagues them. Since we don't like what we see, we go to great lengths to try to cover these things up, so we don't have to face what they mean for us. We colour our hair; we put clearasil on the acne; we might even go so far as to consider plastic surgery or a toupee. We just don't want to face the fact that our bodies are aging. It can be hard to face the facts! Maybe that's why many people, men especially, seem reluctant to go to the doctor when they feel those questionable aches and pains. We think, no news is good news, and if we don't acknowledge the problems in our bodies, they will go away. We feel that we are overweight, but we don't want to get on a scale, because then we would have to acknowledge what it says. What we don't know won't change how much we weigh, but at least it doesn't bother us as much.

Sooner or later, like it or not, we have to face the facts. We can't avoid the truth forever, whether it is the fact that we are aging, or the fact that our grades aren't what they should be, or the fact that we have been procrastinating over things that should have been done last year. You have to face it and deal with it. But there is also another, greater, more important truth that John would have us come to terms with in our text today. John wants us to look into the mirror of God's law and see what it shows us about our lives. And the truth is, the holy law of God shows that we are sinners. We have to come to terms with that truth. But when we do, John assures us of some wonderful news, the news that Easter declares so clearly: that there is forgiveness for all sinners, in the wonderful love of Jesus, who is the atoning sacrifice for all sin; and the life of all who live in Him by faith.

We've already spoken the words of John in our worship today, but they are not very popular in our world today: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*** This is the one thing we try to deny more than anything else. Someone once made the observation that prisons are filled with people who claim they have all been falsely accused. People don't think of themselves as sinners today; they are victims of their circumstances, who have no control over the way they act. Even if we don't think of ourselves as victims, we are quick to rationalize or minimize what we do. The commandments say, ***“Honor your father and your mother.”*** (Exodus 20:12, ESV) But many excuse their actions because their parents don't understand them. They are living in a different era; they are out of touch with the world today. God tells us that we are to do nothing to hurt or harm others, but if we do hurt them, it's only because they deserve it, because of what they have done to us. If we have an affair or become involved in some inappropriate sexual relationship God has forbidden, we tell ourselves that it's because our spouse doesn't show us any affection or understand our needs. We can do what we want sexually, because the world is different today, and we don't need all those old stereotype institutions like marriage and monogamy and even gender any more. We don't gossip—we are simply telling it like it is. The clerk at the store gives us too much change, and we keep it, because they are charging too much for their products, anyway. Yes, we should go to church, but we work so hard all week, and we only have Sunday to relax; and besides, I can worship God just as well on the golf course. Yes, I know I should be helping out those less fortunate than myself but it's their own fault that they have gotten themselves in the mess they are in, and besides, no one ever did anything to help me. God is very clear in His Word about those things He would have us do and those things we are not to do. Yet we continue to rationalize our actions. We don't think of ourselves as sinning. We just have a better understanding of the world and real life than did the people in those older Bible times.

But it's time to face the facts! Again and again God, in His Word, reminds us of the reality of the sin that is so much a part of our lives. Look into the mirror of God's law, and it will make it very clear that you are a sinner. I am a sinner. Every single person on the face of the earth is a sinner. It is the one thing that is common to each and every one of us. We can't rationalize or minimize what God has said so clearly time and time again: ***"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*** (Romans 3:10–12, ESV) The proof of this is all around us. It is so much a part of our lives that we can't cover it all up. You don't have to be a rocket scientist or even the greatest biblical scholar to see that our lives fall far short of God's standard of holiness. It really isn't hard to see that we show by our actions, by our words and by our deeds that we are sinners. Is it any wonder, then that John tells us so plainly in our text: ***"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."***? John goes on to add: ***If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*** We need to be honest with ourselves, and with God—and remember, we're not fooling Him, anyway. We need to face the facts. We may not like to admit it, but what Paul said of Himself is true of all of us: ***"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."*** (Romans 7:18–19, ESV)

Here are the facts: we are sinners. We cannot do anything to save ourselves. We deserve the full punishment of death and hell because of our sin. But here is another fact, a wonderful, glorious truth: ***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.*** The fact is, God does not want us to suffer the eternal torment of hell. And so, in His great mercy, He has rescued us from sin, death and hell through the covering, cleansing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have the One who speaks on our behalf before the judgment seat of God. He defends us, not by rationalizing our actions, or by trying to make light of them, but by paying the full penalty of those sins through His own life, death and resurrection for us. He atoned for our sins by giving His life in our place on the cross, and He conquered death for us through His resurrection. The fact is we were dead in our trespasses and sin, without hope. But in Christ, things are different. In Christ, we have hope. John says: ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*** If we face the facts of our sin, we will acknowledge that we are not the people God has called us to be. We must say, as Paul did, "I am the chief of sinners." But let us also rejoice that if we confess our sins to Him, turning to Him with humble, faithful hearts, He will forgive us and purify us. His mercy sets things right, as He restores us that we might live as His people.

The facts are simple, if we will face them. We are sinners. But we are forgiven in Christ. This is the central teaching of the entire Christian faith. This is the most basic lesson of faith, and the one we need to learn the most. John tells us why this is such an important lesson: ***My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*** When we see sin for what it is, we won't want any part of it in our lives. But when we minimize sin's power and influence in our lives or when we delude ourselves into thinking that we don't sin, that is what pleases the devil the most, for when we don't face the facts of our sin, then we are most susceptible to its damning control over us.

Thankfully, God gives us the help and strength we need to resist the temptation of the devil and to deal with sin. His forgiveness sets us free. In the wonderful supper we partake of today, He gives Himself to us to bring us the forgiveness and life we have through His death and resurrection. He feeds us and strengthens us in our faith so that we can stand firm against the devil. He gives us the Spirit that we might die to sin and live in righteousness, as He Himself is righteous.

In the old Dragnet series, Detective Joe Friday had one line that came up again and again as he interviewed witnesses: Just the facts, ma'am. Well, the fact is we are sinners. But the fact is that our God forgives those who face the facts, turn to Him with repentant hearts and seek His grace. He is our life and salvation. That is one fact we can be absolutely sure of, for in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are guaranteed that this is God's truth for us. Amen.