

How Do You Deal With Sin?
Sermon based on 1 John 1:8 – 2:2
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther
September 7, 2008

Along with King David, we say: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Amen.*

God's Word for our consideration today is First John, chapter one, verse eight, through chapter two, verse two:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive 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 purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Part One: Non-Christians Ignore Sin, Deny It, Celebrate It, or Minimize It

Dear fellow penitent sinners:

How do you deal with sin?

That's an interesting question – isn't it? – and very applicable! But first, let's realize that nobody these days seems to be asking that question....

Turn on the tv. Turn on the radio. You'll listen in vain to hear the word "sin"—except maybe on religious stations, and even then you'll hear precious little concern over "sin". Check out today's newspapers. You won't read the word "sin"—except maybe in the Daily Times, because to their credit they realize that religion is very important to many people in Watertown. And then, getting more personal, when was the last time you yourself spoke the word "sin"?—except maybe while confessing it in church.

So, how do you deal with sin?

Well, if we take our cue from the world around us, and from our own sinful flesh, we'll do one of four things. We'll ignore sin. We'll deny sin. We'll celebrate sin. Or we will minimize sin. Let's take a look at each of those.

You and I tend to ignore sin, just like everybody else. I mean: we ought to wince when we hear bad language. Do we? It ought to grieve us deeply when somebody doesn't get to church regularly. Does it? We ought to hang our heads and shake them when somebody doesn't trust Jesus. Do we do that? Or do we just ignore such sin?

Sometimes though, when sin is very obvious, it requires a more forceful response. We can't ignore it, so we simply deny it. We want to feel safe. So, we deny that this world is a very sinful place. We deny the danger that our society's sins pose to us. And we deny our own sins, if we think we can get away with that.

We're so perverse that sometimes we don't ignore or deny sin, we actually celebrate it. That certainly happens on tv or on the radio, doesn't it? On television awards shows, the most greedy and arrogant are celebrated the most. On reality tv, the meanest and most slanderous people are featured. On the radio, almost every popular song glorifies sex outside of marriage. And sometimes we ourselves brag how little difference there is between us Christians and others.

Finally, if we cannot ignore or deny or celebrate sin, at least we'll minimize it. "I'm not perfect," we say, "but I'm certainly better than most of those freaks on tv"—which, by the way, is a large reason that television is popular these days. "I'm not perfect, but my sins are only little ones," we think—and then we'll supply the name of somebody we perceive to be worse than we are. Or we'll say to ourselves, "I'm not perfect, but sin is no big deal anymore, is it?"

Well, God's Word to us today had something to say about that, didn't it? ***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*** When we ignore or deny or celebrate or minimize our sins, we are absolute idiots. We're tricking ourselves, and we're making ourselves out to be fools. How stupid!

Furthermore: ***If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*** We say, "My sins are no big deal." But God says – Colossians one, twenty-one – "Once you were alienated from me and were enemies in your minds, because of your evil behavior." We think, "God is even a little amused by my sins." But God says – Psalm five, five – "I hate all who do wrong." And God doesn't like to be called a liar like this. He says – Revelation twenty-one, eight – "All liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Part Two: Christians Confess Sin and Find It Forgiven

Owww! Maybe we'd better acknowledge, at least to ourselves, that we are sinners, and that our sin is a genuine problem for us. The trouble is: that makes us feel hopeless, and helpless—and we don't like feeling that way!

But this spiritual disease, sin—it's sort of like having a physical disease. Ignoring that, denying it, celebrating it, minimizing it—none of that helps. The disease is still there, it gets worse, it pains us, and it kills us—unless we face up to it and look for help from someone skilled to fight our disease.

And that's exactly what we've got to do with sin. ***If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***

See, there is help for sin. If we own up to it and confess it, there is a surgeon skilled to fight it. *God* is our great doctor for sin. He is *faithful*, it says here. That's literally "worthy of our trust". God's failure rate is zero! He is *just*, it says here. That's literally "right". He's always got the right diagnosis, and he's always got the right prescription. He *forgives us our sins*. He literally "sends away" the disease. Isn't that great?! And he *purifies us*. He cleans up our soul.

How can God do that? I mean: even the best doctor in the world sometimes has to say, "There's no medicine on the planet strong enough to cure this disease."

But that's not true for God. He's got medicine strong enough to cure the worst case of sin. ***If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*** What that means literally is that Jesus is somebody we can call to our side, plead with, and then send him on to the Father to plead with Him on our behalf. And God the Father listens to Jesus.

So: ***Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*** Literally: Jesus is the means by which our sins get forgiven. It's as if Jesus says to his heavenly Father, "Father, this disease is bad, and it's fatal. But you love these patients, as I love these patients. So, suck the disease out of them, and plague me with their sickness. Kill me with this infirmity, and give them back their health."

Well, with a cure like Christ, who wouldn't want to own up to his sin? So, let's be sure to confess our sins!

We need to confess our sins in church, as we did earlier. In fact, that's one excellent reason always to be present in worship. But more: we need to confess our sins, as we commit them, day by day. Cultivate the habit: when you sin, and when you're kicking yourself for your transgression, confess your sin to God, and remind yourself that for the sake of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

And we need to confess our sins to one another. And we need to forgive each other. The next time you've fallen to the temptation to tell a lie, admit it. And insist that your fellow Christian forgive you. The next time you've lost your patience and your temper, confess it. And insist that your fellow Christian forgive you. And the next time you sin really badly, do the same, because it's the only way to get rid of the disease of sin. And when somebody else confesses to you, you say, "I forgive you, and God forgives you, too; after all, that's why Jesus went to the cross for me and for you."

Part Three: Christians Avoid Sin and Announce It Forgiven for Others

Now before we leave the topic – "How do you deal with sin?" – God's Word to us today has two more things to say to us: Christians avoid sin themselves, and they announce sin forgiven for others.

We might think: Christ is the cure for sin; so, sin is no big deal any more—and we needn't worry about committing it.... Wrong!!! If you had a terrible disease, and by the grace of God it got cured, you wouldn't go out and try to contract that disease again!

In the same way, the Apostle John says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.* Our regular confession of sin, and our regular forgiveness for sin—that's going to help us not to sin. When we see what sin does to us, when we see what sin does to others, when we see what sin did to Christ, we don't want anything to do with sin anymore.

So, go and sin no more! Don't be lying or lusting. It only gets you in trouble. Don't be greedy or spiteful anymore. It just hurts everybody around you. Don't think you can go without worship or the Word of the Lord any longer. Satan wants to reinfect you with his fatal disease.

See: Christians avoid sin themselves. And Christians announce sin forgiven for others.

Suppose you had a terrible disease. But you found an excellent doctor and supremely effective medicine, and you got cured. Now your friend comes down with the same sickness. What are you going to do? You're going to pick up your friend, bring him to your doctor, and get him the same medicine that cured you! In fact, you wouldn't do that just for your friends, would you? You'd do it for your worst enemies!

Well, as we read here: *Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* From Jesus, rivers of healing medicine flow—enough for the health of every sin-sick soul.

And that gives you a goal for your life! Get this rescuing medicine of Jesus Christ to others. It's worth all your efforts! It's worth all your resources! And it's worth it all right now. The time is short! People are dying! You've got the cure for every sin-sick soul. Bring them here to Christ's hospital, where Christ can heal them!

Conclusion: How Do You Deal with Sin?

Dear fellow penitent sinners: How do you deal with sin? Well, non-Christians ignore it, deny it, celebrate it, and minimize it. But we Christians confess our sins and find them forgiven. It leads us to avoid sin for ourselves, and to announce sin forgiven for others. And finally, nothing else in all the universe really, really matters. Amen.

Along with King David, we pray: *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.*