

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Coming Clean

Dr. Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Scripture: 1 John 1:5-2:2

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But 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, purifies us from all sin.

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Transcript:

Amen, and thank you, worship team. The scripture this morning is from the book of first John. And just a reminder to the parents, as I said at the beginning, some of this sermon has some mature content, so you maybe can make your decisions around whether your kids can be there or not. And now you're all wondering, what is it, and this is really interesting. It's not as exciting as it sounds, trust me.

First John chapter one, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the father and with his son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out 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, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. So Holy Spirit use these next few minutes, my words, the thoughts of our hearts to help us understand

your great love for us, how that makes a difference in our lives, how that changes how we live. And Lord help us to live this forgiving people closer to you. We pray this in your name Jesus, amen.

Well, there's a new term going around that gets used a lot lately that I find fascinating, virtue signaling. Here's a definition, virtue signaling, sharing one's point of view on a social or political issue in order to garner praise for one's righteousness, that's a Bible word, from other people who share that point of view. It's a pejorative term and both sides accused the other of doing it. Posting, posturing, look at me, I believe all the right things, tell me I'm righteous. Tell me I'm good. As a lot of people have pointed out, a lot of commentators have pointed out, having gotten rid of God in our culture, we're turning to politics increasingly for the things that people use to turn to faith for, things like meaning and belonging in a community and our sense of righteousness. I am a good person because I believe the good things.

But it's not just politics we turn to, I think we turn to a lot of stuff to get our sense of worth, to feel like we are righteous and worthwhile, achievements of various kinds, grades, sports, success, popularity, all ways of saying, tell me I'm a good person. Now, there are exceptions to that. So for instance, my youngest daughter, she doesn't look to achievements to win praise at all. In fact, she says her life's ambition is to become a hippie and live on the beach. And then I point out to her that she likes nice things and that requires money. And she says, "Well, I'll be a rich hippie." Okay, there's no such thing. Executive hippie is not a thing. That's not a thing. But other than her and my wife, most of us, virtue signal in one way or another.

But I don't think politics or achievement, I don't think it does for us what we are looking for. The passage I just read gives us a different way. And it says, greater things are possible when we turn to Jesus, not those other things, for our sense of rightness and our sense of worth. It says, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the father and with his son, Jesus Christ, rewrite this to make our joy complete. So it says that there are several greater things that happen when Jesus is our righteousness. First, fellowship with each other, that is greater community. Second, fellowship with God, that is greater connection to God. Third, greater joy, fourth, freedom from the pressure to virtue signal.

And this passage says that the way we experience God's greater things, those greater things, the way we experience those greater things is to realize what wretched sinners we are. You heard me right, greater things come when we recognize what miserable wretched sinners we are so that we can understand the magnitude of the gift that God has given us in Jesus. Pastor Tim Keller puts it this way. He says, the gospel, gospel just means good news. The gospel of Jesus is that you are more sinful than you ever dared believe and at the same time, more loved and accepted in Jesus than you ever dared to hope. In other words, the gospel is bad news before it's good news.

So, let's talk about sin and don't you dare turn the computer off right now because I promise you, this is good news. This is going to be good news. The good news about sin. Because see,

here's the thing, I think it's ironic that we are the culture that got stopped talking about sin because that makes people feel guilty, right? We're the culture that got rid of sin, and yet we are more obsessed with virtue signaling, more obsessed, more anxious to be seen as good people than ever before. Tell me I'm good. Tell me I'm a good person. Having gotten rid of sin, we're more anxious about feeling good than we were before. It's not working. That philosophy isn't taking us anywhere.

This passage offers a different way. It says if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth isn't in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us from all unrighteousness. So instead of denying sin, which our culture is doing, we go the opposite direction and we experience God's greater things when we embrace our sin and confess our sin and admit to it, which nobody likes to do, right? That's why people say things like, I'm not addicted, I can quit any time. I don't have a toxic anger problem. I'm not passive aggressive. All those broken relationships in my life, that's because those other people were bad, even though I'm the common denominator, right? I must attract unhealthy people. We maximize other people's sin and we minimize our own. Other people have toxic anger, I'm just passionate.

When my kids were little and I'd see someone yelling at their kids, I'd think, well that's because they can't control their temper. But when I would yell at my kids, it's because they misbehave so badly that even Mr. Rogers would lose it. But you can't get well unless you admit that you're sick. Do you admit you sin? Not charming little foibles, deep, ugly sin that hurts others and hurts yourselves and hurts our culture and all kinds of stuff. Because lots of people don't, lots of Christians don't. They think God accepts them because of their good works, because they are good people. But that creates all kinds of anxiety and stress and striving because how good is good enough for God?

So think of it this way. If what we're all headed for is a renewed heaven and a renewed earth where there's no more sorrow, pain or suffering, then can God let an unrepentant me into his heaven? Because after all I'm good in a general, hey, I was a pastor, and at least I'm not Hitler sort of a way good. No, if God lets an unrepentant me into his heaven, there will be pain. There will be sorrow. There will be suffering because I hurt people. I've hurt some of you. I hurt my wife, I hurt my kids. I hurt my friends. Nobody wants a world that is 51% set right. Do you want to spend eternity in a place that is only 49% bad?

I recently saw some of the FDA standards for food purity, which is alarming because of how much impurity they actually allow in our food. So for instance, if you ever eat apple butter, the FDA says that if it has an average of four or more rodent hairs per 100 grams, the FDA will pull it. Otherwise, it just goes on your toast with three or fewer rodent hairs. Mushrooms can't be sold if there's an average of 20 or more maggots per 15 grams. 19 maggots though, that's just fine, go ahead, eat it. Hot dogs? You don't even want to know. A little bit of impurity means it ain't pure. Our little bit of unrighteous anger damages people's self-worth. Our teeny little bit of gossip, wrecks reputations that take a lifetime to build. If we all took just one teeny little sin into heaven, it's not heaven anymore.

And the only way to get cured of all of that is to admit that we are sick with this disease called sin. Now, I said last week, we never get completely over sin until heaven, but we do get better. I think we can get completely free of some sins, completely, others start to control us less and we make progress. And it starts with confession. The word confess just means to agree together. It's you and Jesus agreeing on the truth about you. So this is what you pray, you say, Jesus, here's the raw unvarnished truth about me. And because we're all blind to our own sin, you also pray, and Jesus show me my sin. If you're having trouble knowing what your sin is, ask your spouse, ask your siblings, ask your kids, ask your coworkers, ask a friend.

The text says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, because we certainly aren't fooling anybody else. It is all out there for everyone to see. And be specific. Don't confess sin the way I do laundry, which is to pack so many clothes in the machine so tightly together that not even water can get between them and clean them and cleanse them, right? That's a metaphor. Confess sins one at a time, because naming them and owning them is the first step toward getting free from them and experiencing God's greater things.

And this is individual, but it's also corporate, right? We read the Bible through our individualistic lens because we're an individualistic culture, but the Bible is communal culture. And the text we read says, if we say we have no sin, we sin. So confess corporate sins that maybe you're a part of, maybe unfairness or injustice that you may be a part of in your workplace or your school or in our culture or in your neighborhood. It's appropriate for us to confess things corporately that we might be doing as a church or as a culture, even sins from the past like slavery.

In the Bible, Nehemiah prays a long prayer of confession, confessing the sins of his ancestors as though they were his sins. Many of the Psalms do the same thing. It's also helpful, in fact, it's necessary to confess to at least one other person, because once you get it out there, it starts to break the power of shame, once it's out in the open. And if someone confesses their sin to you, receive it well, okay? Don't say, "Oh, that, that's nothing. I do that all the time, no big deal." Don't minimize it, but also don't go, "Oh yuck. You're disgusting." Right, not helpful, right? Receive it well.

And when we confess, then what? Well, it says, God is faithful and just, and will what? Forgive us all unrighteousness. I think this is key and this is the fundamentals of Christianity, but the implications are enormous. I think part of the reason our culture is obsessed with virtue signaling is that we deny we have sin, so we never get free from it. So we're always a little suspicious, maybe I'm not a good person after all, instead of just going in the opposite direction, put your weight on the downhill ski. Confession is what unlocks our experience of God's love and grace and forgiveness.

See religion as opposed to a genuine relationship with Christ, religion says only the good get into heaven and the bad people stay out. Jesus says, no, no, no, no, only the humble people who can admit their sin get into heaven and the proud stay out. The only thing that can keep you from the renewed life in Jesus is your illusion that you are good enough for God on your own. Okay, this is not the sound of music where they sing that wretched song, I must've had a

wicked childhood. I must've had a miserable youth, but somewhere in my wicked miserable path, there must have been a moment of truth. For here you are standing there loving me whether or not you should. So somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done, everybody, something good. No you didn't. No, you didn't. Worst theology ever, terrible theology, right? Good people don't go to heaven, only bad people go to heaven. And that's such good news because it is so very, very easy to be bad, isn't it?

The ticket for admission into the renewed life isn't our goodness, it's our admission that we are not good on our own. When I get to heaven, if Jesus were to ask me, "Why should I let you in Dudley?" And if I were to say, "Well, I went to church, I gave some money, I prayed, I was the senior pastor of Bellevue Presbyterian Church. Very big church Jesus, very big church." Jesus would say, "You don't get it, do you?" But that's not what I would say. If Jesus asks, why should I let you into heaven? I'm going to say, "You shouldn't. I don't recommend it Jesus, I'll just mess it up. But you said that if I trusted that your death on the cross paid the price for my sins, you said that was enough. So I put all my chips double down on you, Jesus. So if that's not the way it is, I'm in trouble because that was my plan A, and Jesus, I have no plan B."

And he's going to say, "Welcome home. You get it." See, we all sense that a price has to be paid for wrongdoing. When we're wrong, we feel somebody has to pay even the littlest things like traffic, right? Oh, you're driving slow in the left-hand lane, justice needs to be done. You should be punished, let alone the bigger things. All feel that this price has to be paid, and a God who does not ensure that a price is paid is a God who doesn't care about justice, which means that is not a God of love. But the verse we read says that God is faithful and just, and he will forgive our sins, because see the price has already been paid. So it would be unjust for us to have to pay it again, because Jesus already paid it.

And God says in scripture, I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. God, both forgives and forgets, willingly blinds himself to your sin if you know Jesus. As the old hymn says, well may the accuser roar of sins that I have done, I know them all, and thousands more. My God, he knowest none. And when we really get this, we experience greater freedom, and we respond to failure very differently than religious people who base their confidence on their own good deeds and their own goodness. And the problem with that is when, not if, when you fail, when you sin, if you're basing it on your own goodness, you have only two options. The first is to say, oh, that, that ... Deny it. That thing I did, that's not bad. That's not ... Everybody does that. Or collapse in despair. I suck, I'm terrible.

But the genuine Christ follower can confess their sins because their confidence isn't in their performance, it's what Jesus has done for them on the cross. And this is radically unique. Every other religion, every other religion, it's like, if you behave, then God will accept you. But the God revealed in Jesus and only the God revealed in Jesus, says even at your worst, I love you still. Not when we were cleaned up but while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. Radically, unique. See religion creates this fragile sense of self-esteem that depends on constant virtue signaling. Tell me I'm good. Remind me I'm good. I suspect I'm not, so tell me I'm good. And

don't tell me I'm bad or I'm going to get mad, but Jesus gives us industrial strength self image. See how loved I am, even at my worst.

Now, some of you may be thinking, all this is fine, but there are bad people in the world and they do bad things that hurt people. And there are bad ideas and don't we have to do something about that? Yes, people do things that hurt others and we need to confront them. In some cases, protect other people from them, right? And there needs to be accountability, and often recompense for wrongdoing. Injustice must be stopped. But when you really understand your own sin and the magnitude of God's gift to you, our motives then for confronting people is not self-righteous anger, it's concern for that other person, concern for other people. And we do it in love and grace.

Well, second objection. Okay, all this forgiveness stuff is fine, but don't we still have to try to be good? The apostle John is glad you asked that question because the answer is in this text, he says, if anyone obeys God's word, love for God is truly made complete in them. Notice, John didn't say obedient people have God's truth in them. They have God's love in them. So yes, we seek to do good, but again, the motivation is different. It's not, I do good to be loved, it's I am loved, therefore I do good. If God loved me enough to die for me, that must mean that he wants the best for me, which means his commands are meant to help me thrive, not constrain me. And then we experience God's greater things, greater joy, because of gratitude for what Jesus has done. Greater freedom from virtue signaling and striving to try to prove that we're worthy.

It also makes us less sensitive, right? And less fragile about criticism or critique. We don't get offended so easily because it's not like this is a referendum on our soul. My worth is in the fact that I am loved by God. My forgiveness is there. So you can critique me and I'm less defensive when I understand that. We get greater community because when what we gather around is our common need for Jesus forgiveness, and we really get that, which sadly, a lot of church people don't get, they think they're good and everyone else is bad, right? But when we understand that, no, we're all bad. That frees us to be completely honest and transparent because we all got our stuff and no one's going to judge us, so we can be fully known and still fully loved.

There's a man in this church who's had a sex addiction for years that showed up in a lot of different ways, one of which was pornography. And when I asked his permission to tell this story, he wrote it out as an email to me because I've been involved in his journey with this. And I think his word say it better than I could say it, so I'm just going to read you part of what he wrote to me in that email. This is what he wrote. He said, porn has been a struggle for me on and off, mostly on for most of my adult life, for which I made excuses, every man has the same struggle. I'm not hurting anyone, right, and hey, once you get married, the problem will just go away.

Well, because of what I was taught in church growing up, the idea of a simplistic good versus bad model was cemented in my brain, so this addiction must mean that I am bad human being. So I did the only thing I knew how, I'll keep it stuffed down. I won't tell anyone about it and live my life as though this problem doesn't exist. There'd be times when I was too ashamed to look

Jesus in the eye. So, I'd tell him, hey, Jesus, I'll make up for all this bad stuff I'm doing by doubling down on doing good things. Learned the hard way, that doesn't work. This put me in the deep states of depression and made me feel like I am purely evil at times. I still remember the day I was sitting with you, that's me at Tavern Hall telling you about the frequency of my porn watching and asked you, that's okay, right?

You looked at me with one of the most concerned looks anyone has ever given me and said, "No, that is not okay. No amount is okay." And you made me promise you to look for help. And just as an aside, when he told me that, what I was feeling was not judgment, it was just deep concern for my friend. He said, you kept me accountable with texts and calls until I actually did find help, which is true, I kept bugging him about it. Counseling opened my eyes to the destructive nature of porn and the destructive nature of the whole sex industry, but the shame was still there. Well, a big part of counseling included a group component. I was like, there's no way I'm telling other guys about what I'm doing.

But then one day I was in a coffee shop and the two guys who just happened to be sitting next to me, just happened to have the workbook that's used in sex addiction counseling. So I felt God nudged me to talk them. And they explained how awkward it is at first, but a group component really is needed for recovery. So the next week I joined a group. I am 100% sure, God made that conversation happen in that coffee shop. Through the years, I've shared the darkest, most shameful things about my addiction in front of a group of other guys, everything I have ever done, sometimes I'd be shaking, crying uncontrollably. God was wrenching out my shame like when you twist a wet towel and the water comes out, and he just kept twisting that and twisting that until all my shame was gone, over and over again.

But that still wasn't enough because I hadn't really involved God in the process. My approach was, I'll fix this and show up to Jesus' doorstep as a purified healed man. But Scott, your preaching kept going through my head, that Jesus is the only God who accepts us just the way we are today. He doesn't want me to come to him perfect. He wants the entire mess and admit our weakness, then he will give me the strength I need. So I started to just lay it all out to God, like all of it in prayer, no pretending, everything. And it has been the most freeing and cleansing thing I have ever done. I brought him in that place of shame and I'm having the most genuine talks with Jesus. I have felt God meet me there in the strongest way I can truly explain as an out of body experience. And it can be really hard, and some days I feel like I'm going to fall on my face, but I have assurance that I'm where God wants me.

I don't hide anything from God. And I haven't made him any promises that I'm going to be a perfect person. Instead, I've made him a promise that I'm going to worship him and walk with him and never let go of his hand. I feel like this has finally taken down this eight headed beast that is a sex addiction. And now I feel like I'm addicted to bringing God everything and say, here, God, I need you to carry this for me. My heart is being transformed and that gives me peace like I have never felt before. I don't need to be perfect. I just need to keep saying to God, here I am, every messed up fiber of me, take me and change my heart.

So, so beautiful. Yes, it is. He confessed to God and to others and discovered God's greater things. He's closer to God, closer to others, healing and recovery from this sin and freedom from trying to prove himself worthwhile all the time. So where do you need to fess up today? We're going to give you a chance to do that right now. In a minute, there's going to be a song and wherever you are, whoever you're with, just use this time to think and to pray and say, Jesus, here is the raw unvarnished truth about me. And you're going to see on the screen behind the band at one point, you're going to see some handwritten prayers of confession, and prayers of confession and healing from people in this church, real prayers that they wrote out from people in this church. And just use those to spur you on in your own prayers of confession to Jesus.

Just say, Jesus, I have sin. And if you have never made Jesus your leader and forgiver, today's the day. And say, Jesus, I know that I am full of sin. I know I need you, please be my leader, please be my forgiver. And if you pray that prayer, please let us know by clicking the request prayer button, that'll connect you to a prayer minister or a pastor so that we can help you take some next steps in your relationship with Jesus. What kept Jesus on that cross that he died on, it wasn't the nails in his hands. He was God, he could have dealt with the nails. What kept him on that cross, was his great love for you and me.

Love so strong, it took hell itself being poured out on him so that you and I could go free. So do you really think, do you really think that your sin, your hard heart, the ways you have hurt yourself or others, do you really think that your sin can wear out the infinite love that Jesus has for you? Not a chance. No matter how great your sin is, God's love and God's grace is greater still. Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future with Jesus. You can focus on the sin or you can focus on the savior and through it all, know that it is well. Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, oh, sinner, come home.

So Jesus, we come to you right now, knowing that you forgive, knowing that you restore, knowing that you even forget our sins when we confess them. Lord, we bring ourselves to you, here is the raw unvarnished truth about us. In your name Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions: Please Read 1 John 1:5-2:2

1. Looking back, how did it go last week?
2. What stood out the most from the sermon this past week?
3. What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
4. What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?
5. According to this passage why is confessing our sins so important? What benefits flow from it?
6. What things get in the way of us identifying and confessing our sins?
7. How are the statements in verses 6, 8, 10 the same?
8. In light of what we've learned (application):
 - How might God want us to apply this to our own life and the lives of the community this week?
 - Who needs to hear this message/good news?