

## Three Big Lies

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The Seven Deadly Sins for Today Series

1 John 1:5-2:2

This evening [morning] I am going to begin a new series, a series that really flows out of a series that I was doing before Easter regarding becoming disciples. I have a continual concern as the church grows numerically about whether we are producing really good people. Not only is it enough in my mind for a church to have many more people, but are the people that we have coming here, are you becoming gooder? Are you nicer? Are you more loving? Are you kinder? Are you becoming more patient? Are you less likely to lie? I can think of nothing worse than having as a legacy of the ministry of this church or my own ministry and legacy than that we had a large crowd, but the people as they went out into the community were hypocritical, self-righteous, involved in every kind of sin and wickedness.

So the approach that I want to use in talking about becoming people of virtue, becoming gooder, better than we are now, is to look back in the ancient church at what used to be called The Seven Deadly Sins, sins that many, many people are utterly unfamiliar with. Now, there are two reasons that I am engaging in this series. Number 1, because I think apart from a deep understanding of the nature and extent of sin, we really have no self-understanding whatever. We can't figure ourselves out. We remain mysteries to ourselves. Unless you have a firm grip on the biblical teaching of sin, you are going to remain throughout your life utterly confused as you look at yourself through the mirror. Or watch the way you function in your family. Or the way other people in your family function or the way people in the church function. Or what is going on at your job. We need to do a series like this on sin to gain some self understanding and understanding of the world around us.

And I need to do a series like this on the Seven Deadly Sins because unless we have a deep understanding of sin, we will forever be opting for superficial solutions to what ails us and makes us miserable and keeps us from being the kinds of people we want to be, but aren't. We human beings are, indeed, a puzzle and a paradox. The reason why there are so many philosophies, so many religious approaches to the self understanding of humanity is because we human beings are, indeed, a puzzle and a paradox.

We are capable of so much good, extraordinary feats of creativity. One only has to look at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel or read Lincoln's words from his Gettysburg Address or his Second Inaugural, or read the writings of CS Lewis. Or look at the architecture of a Frank Lloyd Wright or something as beautiful as the Golden Gate Bridge. Walk through an English garden. Human beings are capable of such incredible creativity.

Consider, also, the incredible scientific breakthroughs of the last hundred years, now engaged in mapping out the entire sequence of human genes. Or the breakthroughs in healthcare.

Listen to an incredible musician. Listen to a beautiful voice. Listen to Lewis Armstrong play the trumpet.

At our best, we are capable of so much. And often we see incredible acts of selflessness and devotion. And our intentions are often so right and clean and pure.

And yet, we are capable of so much that is wrong and ugly and dark. One would only need to read Amnesty International's document about torture in the last decade. It is a 263 page document and it absolutely stuns your mind when you compare the extraordinary advances technologically, the sharing of information, the wealth that has been created against Amnesty International's report on torture in the world.

The report reveals that torture is state policy in 49 countries in the world. Among the forms of torture that are mentioned are starvation, electric shock, electric shock to people's genitals, suspension by a prisoner's arms, isolation without light, air or medical attention, submersion in water to the point of suffocation, sexual abuse, chemicals that cause mental disorientation, mock execution, sulfuric acid poured on people's skin, cigarette burns, being hung upside down, blinding, amputation, and the usual run of brutality in floggings. Human beings cannot be said to act like animals, because animals never do things like this.

We are a paradox, a puzzle, capable of such extreme nobility and also such extreme perversity. Everyone who seriously looks at the world throughout history has seen that something has gone terribly wrong. Our courts are jammed; our jails are overcrowded. Our schools are continually disrupted by daily bomb threats. Our police forces are overworked and overwhelmed. Our families have disintegrated. Pick up a newspaper and look closely at your own family. Your own family of origin, your own life, and you realize something has gone awry. Something is amiss. And the closer we examine things the more we see flaws. There is an old saying that no man is a hero to his valet. In other words, when you get up really close to people, you see flaws.

Now, the modern world has adopted a whole set of words to describe what's wrong, what's gone amiss. Many of the words that we hear in describing what's wrong with the world come from a medical model. We hear that people are unhealthy, or people are sick. Or they are neurotic. Or they are maladaptive or dysfunctional or narcissistic. For the last hundred years, psychiatry and psychology has pretty much blanketed the field in providing a model of human beings self understanding, in explaining this odd paradox that we see, this nobility and perversity.

Freud said that the perversity is a result of traumatic childhood experiences that have been repressed in the unconscious. These childhood traumas result in neurotic responses. BF Skinner said that the problem is poor conditioning. That society hands

out rewards and punishments in an illogical way. And he suggested that we engineer the environment better. For the last ten or fifteen years, what you read in all the popular literature, Time Magazine does this every other issue, Psychology Today, Newsweek, the press – the current understanding of what is wrong is almost entirely evolutionary and genetic. Every bad behavior right now is rooted in some theorized gene. Last year the press was reporting some assertion from some researcher that there is a so-called rape gene that was hotly debated. Another gene is responsible for being selfless, an altruistic gene. But more and more attention is going toward a genetic or biological or evolutionary or chemical understanding of what is broken.

See what we again recognize is that something is wrong. We have what some folk have called the “here to there” problem. The “here to there” problem means that we look at a six month old little baby, sweet, innocent, laughing, gurgling, playing in their crib and then we roll the tape forward 20 years and that sweet little baby has become an armed robber or a chronic liar or a chronic user of pornography or drug abuser or perpetual cheater and plagiarizer at school. They gossip. And we ask what’s wrong? There are other voices that have been sounded in the last forty years in the psychiatric community that have protested the exclusive use of the medical model in describing what is wrong.

Karl Menninger wrote a very provocatively titled book about forty years ago called “Whatever Became of Sin?” Not only did this world famous psychiatrist attempt to restore sin as a viable category for explaining personal matters and matters of national life. He wanted to reintroduce it to psychologists and psychiatrists. Here is what Menninger wrote in “Whatever Became of Sin?” “I believe there is ‘sin’ which is expressed in ways that cannot be subsumed under verbal artifacts such as crime, disease, delinquency, deviancy. There is immorality. There is unethical behavior. There is wrongdoing. And I hope to show there is usefulness in retaining the concept and, indeed, the sin, which now shows some sign of returning to public acceptance. I want to help this trend along.”

Another psychiatrist, Hobart Mowrer, wrote a book called “The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion.” His third chapter was titled, “Some Constructive Features of the Concept of Sin.” The fourth chapter he calls, “Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils.” Here is one of his sentences: “So long as we deny the reality of sin, we cut ourselves off it seems from the possibility of radical redemption that is recovery.”

Which is precisely the point of this series. Until we really grasp what is actually wrong with us, we are always going to be opting for false or superficial answers.

Another psychiatrist, Stampton Samenow, wrote a very important book called “Inside the Criminal Mind.” He described his complete change of mind regarding the nature of criminals, in which he discovered that criminals are not totally pawns or victims. Instead, they are very responsible people. A family configuration does not make a person a criminal, Samenow said, for other wise siblings in the same configuration all should become criminals. Many criminals come from homes with very conscientious

parents. Nor does powerful peer pressure make a person a criminal. Because there is a prior decision to associate with a given set of friends. Nor do drugs or alcohol make a criminal, for the criminal intent is already there. Drugs and alcohol help the criminal commit the crime that he already wants to do. Nor do wretched social conditions – barrios, ghettos – create the criminal. For well over 90% or more of people who live in such places abide by the law. Many criminals spend most of their time daydreaming about crimes. How to do it. How to escape. His point is that while there are all these powerful external forces, but there is something inside of us that determines how we respond to all the external forces. Something that these psychiatrists like Menninger and Mowrer, and the Bible thousands of years before them, called sin.

Now, sin is not a simple concept. It is a huge almost inexhaustible mystery. In fact, sin is such a big concept that the Bible uses dozens of words to try to get at this thing. One of the words that the Bible uses for sin is a word meaning bent or crooked. There is something bent inside of people. There is something distorted about the way we think. We think we think straight. We think we see straight. We think our understanding is straight. We think our feelings are good gages of reality. But in fact, our perceptions, our reasoning, everything is bent. It is distorted.

Another word that is used actually communicates betrayal. Sin is more than just violating a law. Although there is a word for sin which literally means to disobey a standard or violate a law. But sin is more than that. It is a violation of a relationship. It is betrayal. It is like adultery. You are committing adultery not against some abstract rule which says do not commit adultery. You commit adultery against someone you are supposed to love and be faithful to. You commit adultery against God, against your wife or husband, against your kids.

Another word for sin means to cross a boundary line. Here is the line. And you just perpetually not only get really close to the line, but keep stepping over it.

The word that is most often used for sin in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is a word that means missing the mark, or missing the point. Sometimes people will describe sin as being like an archer who has a really bad aim. There is the bullseye on the wall that God wants you to hit, but your arrow always goes off. It misses the mark.

But when the Bible talks about missing the mark or missing the point, it actually means something a little more profound than just not hitting the target. The Greek word is “hamartia”. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament is “chatha.” The deeper idea is missing the whole point or missing the God-given intention for something. You sin, in other words, when you use something or approach something in a way that it was never intended to be used or approached.

So we could say, for example, that a basketball player who approaches a pro basketball game with one singular goal in mind – to personally score as many points as possible. That the basketball player sins against the game of basketball because he has failed to

perceive that the point of playing is to win the game, not to individually score as much as possible and take 40 shots a game, making 12. But to play the kind of game that enhances the overall possibility of your team winning.

Sin is missing the point, missing the goal, missing the objective. So we would say to someone whose marriage was breaking down: perhaps the problem is that you have missed the whole point of marriage. Your sin goes deeper than your failure to communicate. Or your angry word, or your claming up, or your lack of affection, or your terrible spending habits. Your sin is that you have absolutely missed the whole reason why God invented marriage in the first place. You approach marriage as something that is there to simply meet your needs and you want to get out of it when it doesn't meet your needs. Have you ever considered that you don't even understand the very basic reason why God invented marriage? That marriage may be there to train you in love? To make you a better human being? To cause you to reflect something of the nature of God?

Sin is missing the point. You have completely failed to understand the point and proper objective of sex. Or the point and proper objective of money. The God-given intention for something. Do you get it?

Now, in many ways I should hardly have to make a case for the extensiveness and usefulness of us understanding sin in understanding who we are and what our problems are and what the solutions could be. But I feel like it would be helpful in this introductory talk to give at least some initial evidence for sin in the world.

I already mentioned Amnesty International's report. Bernard Ram in his marvelous book called "Offense to Reason: The Theology of Sin" sites as an evidence for sin the infinite subtlety of sin. On the other side of the brutal grossness of sin that you see in Amnesty International's report on torture and murder in official government agencies, one of the great evidences for the extensiveness of sin is how subtle it can be.

But sin is so subtle. You can sin against someone else in a conversation by just choosing one word instead of another. Or by casting a certain look or glance or phrasing something or using a different intonation of your voice. There are so many ways we can sinfully harm each other, manipulate, cover the truth, shade things by a shake of our heads to just the slightest shading of a word. If you want to explore how extensive sin is, just think about how it infects every single profession in their own characteristic ways.

Doctors have their own typical besetting sins. Not all doctors, but as a profession, you might say there is this often exaggerated sense of self-importance, the sense that the world owes the physician something. Sometimes there is an arrogance, an impatience, a condescension to patients, and a lack of personal empathy and warmth.

Attorneys are known for their characteristic besetting sins: manipulating the system for personal advantage, scheming, using law as a cover for doing wrong. Attorneys are,

after all, the chief perpetrators of insurance fraud and tax fraud. It is estimated that one-third of the cost of insurance is due to inflated costs from schemes devised by lawyers.

Government workers have their own characteristic set of besetting sins, not the least of which is sloth, a lack of initiative, a bureaucratization that is maddening if you actually have to get something done and you've been ground up in the wheels of some bureaucracy.

Artists have their own characteristic besetting sins. There is this hypersensitivity to criticism, this mindset of the artiste. No one among the rabble, the unwashed masses, could possibly understand the brilliance of the work of the artiste. And so there is this condescension, this arrogance, this self-absorption this hypersensitivity, that is characteristic of many artists and musicians.

And even pastors and churches have our own set of characteristic sins: going through the motions of religion without any change for the good, believing that we are better persons because we spend more time in religious activities even though on any measurable standard of patience, truth telling or virtue, or self-sacrifice we aren't getting better. Characteristic religious sins, of course, involve hypocrisy, self-righteousness, using religion for the purpose of making money.

This morning, what I am going to do is briefly explore the nature of sin as an introductory talk. I am calling this message: Three Big Lies. Let's ask God's presence.

1 John 1:5-2:2

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by 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 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."

Now, 1 John 1:5-2:2 can be broken up very simply as the expression of three big lies and the solution to each of these lies. If you have a Bible, you can underline the words "If we claim" that are repeated. In v. 6, "If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in darkness, we lie." In v. 8, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves." V. 10, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar." Here are three claims, all of which are lies, in v. 6, 8 and 10. And these claims are directed first to others in v. 6; then to ourselves – we deceive ourselves in v. 8; and finally in v. 10, we

lie to God, if we claim to have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar. After these three lies are mentioned, each of the lies is responded to in v. 7, 9, and chapter 2:1 and 2.

Now, I think there are at least two things that are notable here as John goes into his theology of sin and helps us to get some understanding regarding who we are and the nature of sin. There are two things that run through his discussion: #1 – That sin involves lying. It involves cover-up; whitewashes, deception. I will speak about that in just a moment. But sin, at its root, attacks relationship in community. The lies we tell are to others, to ourselves and to God.

And another way to understand sin (and you can write this down), along with missing the point, missing the object, missing the purpose, another way to understand sin is that sin concerns our failure to reflect the image of God. At the heart of God's intention for each one of us, is this ultimate desire of God in creation to have us reflect his image. Now, one of the things that we Christians have revealed to us about the nature of God, is that God is a Trinity. That God exists in relationship. That God's ultimate being is tri-personal. It is a loving relationship between the Father and the Son; the Father and the Spirit; the Son and the Spirit.

And when we consider what it means to reflect the image of God, there is no better way that we reflect God's image and come up with the ultimate purpose of life than to suggest that we are to live in loving relationships. Relationship is the heart of God's purpose for us here on earth. That is why the two great commandments concern love: loving God and loving each other. That's why divorce and disrespect and gossip and slander and unforgiveness and prayerlessness and hatred and all the other sins we sin against God and each other are so bad. They are more than instances of wrongdoing. They are destructive to the object of life according to God we miss the point.

So here's the deal. What John is pointing out in 1 John 1 is that sin ultimately is that which destroys community. It destroys our relationship with each other. It destroys our relationship with ourselves. It destroys our relationship with God. By sinning, we miss the point and purpose of life. And in particular, we lose the points and purpose of life, which is deep, authentic relationship with each other, ourselves and with God.

Now, let's look at this in more detail. It says, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by 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."

Now, John is drawing a contrast between God, who is light, and people who walk in darkness, yet claim to have a relationship with him. What does it mean that God is light? The Bible regularly says about God, by the way, that he is light. Psalm 27 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Jesus claimed to be "the light of the world" and whoever follows him would not walk in darkness. When the disciples saw Jesus in his original glory, as he was transfigured on a mountain, we are told that his face shone like

the sun and his clothes became white as the light. Light is always a symbol of purity, of cleanness, of holiness. When it says that God is light and him there is no darkness at all, it means that God is absolutely clean. There is nothing imperfect in him. There is nothing just a little bit off.

But here, I don't know if John is using light simply as a metaphor for God being holy. Light is also a metaphor for revelation. When it says that God is light, what we mean is that God is self-revealing. He shines out. He doesn't hide. He has nothing to hide. When it says that someone walks in darkness, certainly a part of that is that they are walking in unholiness. But I think the major thought here is that someone walking in darkness is someone who is living a lie. They are living inconsistently or hypocritically. They are living with a mask on. So a person is saying, I have a close relationship with God, who is self-revealing, who shows himself as he is, who has nothing to hide, while this person all the time is hiding. It is just a big fraud.

Scott Peck, the psychiatrist, wrote a national best seller some years ago called "People of the Lie." Here is what he says about evil people:

"Utterly dedicated to preserving their self-image of perfection, they are unceasingly engaged in the effort to maintain the appearance of moral purity. They worry about this a great deal. They are acutely sensitive to social norms and what others might think of them. They may dress well, go to work on time, pay their taxes. They outwardly seem to live lives above reproach. The words image, appearance and outwardly are crucial to understanding the nature of evil. While this person in their heart does not desire to be good, they intensely desire to appear good. Their goodness is all on the level of pretense."

It is in effect, a lie. That's why they are called people of the lie. These people cover up what they know is wrong. They do have a sense inside that what they are doing is illicit, but they whitewash it over. That's what Jesus constantly accused the Pharisees of – religious people whitewashing, covering up, and hiding. This is the nature of sin. Walking in darkness is not just doing something bad. Walking in darkness is doing something bad, and then covering it by the appearance, by the claim that we are doing well. Ever done that? You're doing poorly and totally empty inside, angry, irritable, then you see a friend and put on a happy face. If we claim that we have fellowship with him, to be self-revealing – you see, God, the self-revealing one, who is full of light, calls us into intimate relationship with himself.

I love our marriage & family pastor's definition of intimacy. He often says intimacy means into-me-see. I will show you myself. I will be transparent. But the one who walks in darkness is the very opposite of God who says into me see. The one who walks in darkness says I will not let you see into me.

Scott Peck in his book "People of the Lie," says that those who cover up, those who evade, are often willing to humiliate themselves and look humble. They are often willing to pour themselves out in tears about a particular sin or a particular issue or a particular



problem. But they will never allow people to see their core sin, their root darkness. That root, that dark thing, is protected and guarded at all cost. That is why sometimes people are so surprised when they discover another person in a significant sin. They say, "Well, they have been coming to counseling, or coming to my group. In fact, just a few weeks ago they had this long session of unburdening themselves." Yes, even our counseling sessions, even our times with therapists, or our time with other people, even our times with God can all be carefully orchestrated cover up protecting a cherished sin.

Do you see how deep sin goes? How twisted? That is why John says the solution for sin against others, which is essentially covering up, hiding, walking in the dark, is not just some individualistic decision to straighten up, but the solution is verse 7: "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin."

It is impossible to become a good person on your own. It is impossible to grow spiritually on your own. It is impossible, friend, to deal with a deeply rooted issue in your life alone with God. We must walk in the light with each other. We have to come out of hiding. Come out of shame. Take the mask off. In sum, we as a church cannot produce good people without people's willingness to live in authentic community and relationship with each other. You cannot become a good person alone. Because goodness involves walking in the light, being authentic. Saying to someone else, into me see. So, if you aren't in a relationship, a web of relationships, where you are regularly saying, into me see – in a men's group, in a women's group, in a kinship group, in a prayer meeting – you have no hope of being good, no hope of being a disciple. Because you remain masked and well guarded against the pain of self-revelation.

John goes on and says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Now, here the lie is not to others, but to ourselves. We deceive ourselves. We can get so good at disguising things from others, so good at hiding, so good at whitewashing and covering up, that we actually begin to believe our own lies and deceive ourselves. Again, in Scott Peck's book "People of the Lie" he says that the ultimate essence of evil is not that people deceive others, so much as they begin to deceive themselves. They cannot or will not tolerate the pain of self-reproach. And it is the pain of self-reproach that people constantly flee from. Sinners flee from self-examination, from what AA calls a scrupulously moral inventory.

And notice in contrast with v. 6, not only is the person lying to themselves rather than to others, but here the lie concerns being without sin. Not being without sins, but being without sin. Most commentators believe that John is talking about being without a sin nature, believing that you are not internally corrupt and twisted. That you don't have this bent in you toward what is wrong.

In the early church there were a group of people called Gnostics, who believed they were beyond good and evil. And this teaching that has sometimes been labeled perfectionism has been in the church for the last 20 centuries. There are always groups of people in different camps who somehow say that the Christian life delivers us from

our sin nature. Self-deception – that everything in me is OK. Or a lie that we tell ourselves that says I would never do such and such. I can't understand how that person fell into that sin. I would never do that, as if we have no sin nature.

Now, I have been very puzzled about how someone could ever look into themselves in any authentic way and say, I am not a broken person. There is no wheel off in me. I am not bent or twisted or corrupt. But I think in much of this perfectionist teaching, claiming that we have no sin, typically people define sin in terms of sins and then they define sins in a very narrow external way – usually what they consider worldly sins. They say, "I don't smoke; I don't drink; I don't chew and I don't go with girls who do. I don't go to certain kinds of movies. I never swear."

Of course, sin goes much deeper than a few activities that you do or don't engage in. Sin has reference to your attitudes in the Bible. We are going to find out in future weeks that sin has reference to your heart, to your internal motivations, to your thought processes. That is why so many of the solutions toward sin are so superficial. They cut the weeds at the surface level. At the same time, this root system of weeds, this root system of sin that goes so deep in the heart that is never touched. It looks good on the surface, but inside there is all this pollution, all this moral filth, this pride, and this judgmentalism. I think one way that people can justify the notion that they are without sin is to just make sin into sins and those external.

And another way, of course, is to compare yourself with other people rather than with God. "I am not such a bad person."

"I have never been divorced."

"I don't use drugs."

"No matter how bad I have ever been, I have never treated my kids that way, like that woman in my kinship."

So much of therapy is a matter of self-appointed OK-ness. You saying to yourself that everything is really all right. People in therapy say, "Well, I just had the attack of the guilties." And then the therapist tells you how to deal with the guilties. But there is no discussion of how you could really be OK, how your heart could really be made whole and well and healthy – not sinless, but is it possible to be healthy. To have some internal integrity.

And John gives the way towards that in v. 9: "But if we confess our sins..." See here is the way out of self-deception, confession. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

The Greek word for confess is an interesting one. It is a compound Greek word – homo logeo. It comes from two Greek words, homo, which means alike – homosexual is having relations with someone who is like you; between two like gendered persons; homo – and logeo, to speak. So, confession literally means to speak alike or better, to agree with God about the nature of your problem. Here is John's answer to self-deception, not merely ruthless moral inventory, that's important, but come into the light

before God. Before he was saying come into the light with other people. Now he is saying come into the light with God. Come to a place of agreement that when God says that you have a moral crisis in your life, you say, "yes, I do." When God says something is twisted in you, you say, "Yes, it is." When God says there is an unaddressed issue in your life that you have been hiding not only from others, but from yourself, you say, "Amen. It is true. I agree."

And it says when we come into agreement with God, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us. We are going to consider in a moment what it means that he is righteous. But he is faithful. The promises of Jesus are always kept. And he made a promise under his new covenant when he at the Last Supper held up a cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." He said here is the promise under the new covenant I will forgive your sins.

There is a great picture of forgiveness in the classic Christian book, "Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyon. Bunyon writes that he watched Christian struggling over a wall called salvation. With this enormous burden on his back, he could hardly walk. And he began walking up hill then toward a place where there was a cross. As he looked to the cross, Bunyon said the burden fell off of his back and began to tumble into the mouth of this tomb that was at the bottom of this hill where he saw the burden no more.

That's what forgiveness is like. It is the load that gets off of us. Confession is getting it off your chest and onto the cross, where it then tumbles down the hill into the tomb where Jesus was buried and your sin is buried with Christ.

Finally, John says, "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."

The ultimate cure for lies that we tell to others, to our selves and to God is Jesus, our advocate who speaks to God in our defense. What a wonderful thing to have a holy and righteous defense attorney defending us before God and before ourselves and before others and before Satan. Would you not be a healthier person if you did not always feel the neurotic need to defend yourself? To make excuses for what someone was accusing you of? To argue your own case with your own conscience? Would you not be better, gooder, if when you saw something wrong, you said, "Jesus, will you defend me on this one before the Father? Before myself?"

It is often said that an attorney who represents himself in court has a fool for a client. Our defenses of ourselves show that we have a fool as a client. But coming to Jesus and letting him represent you, and note that he is the Righteous Advocate, he is not like some attorneys looking for a loophole, making excuses for us, bending the law. He is one who upholds the justice of God, the truth of God. And yet offers us a defense and the defense is that he is the atoning sacrifice. Here is my defense to the world, to God,

to Satan, to my own conscience: the blood of Jesus, it pleads for me. It cries out, "Forgive him."

He is your defense, friend. He is the way to get whole and well. Walk in the light with others. Practice authentic community. Confess. Be honest with God. Agree with him about yourself. And regularly ask Jesus to plead your case. Stop defending yourself. His blood is enough. Let's pray.