

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
July 11, 2021
“The Bottom Line”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

A New Building! Get excited and get involved.

Camp is Coming! Be present, have fun, and enjoy each other’s company.

330 N. Somers Rd. (Mail: PO Box 10626) Kalispell, MT 59904~ (406) 755-1776

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Loving others is the proof of genuine faith.

While our physical reality can be described as a place where every relationship is dysfunctional, the God of the Bible is the opposite. He can be defined as a Being of right relationships.

Rightly relating, across the board, can be a measure of Christianity (John 13:34&35).

How can we rightly relate? Only through the enablement of _____.

Complete honesty with yourself and about yourself is perfectly humble because...

It’s risky. However, any person in your life who would reject you because...

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

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⁴The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

Propitiation is Greek ἱλασμός (hē-lās-mōs)...

Two questions... Right relationship with whom, and to whom do we confess our sins? (James 5:16, I Peter 4:8).

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

*Welcome
Friends*



1 John

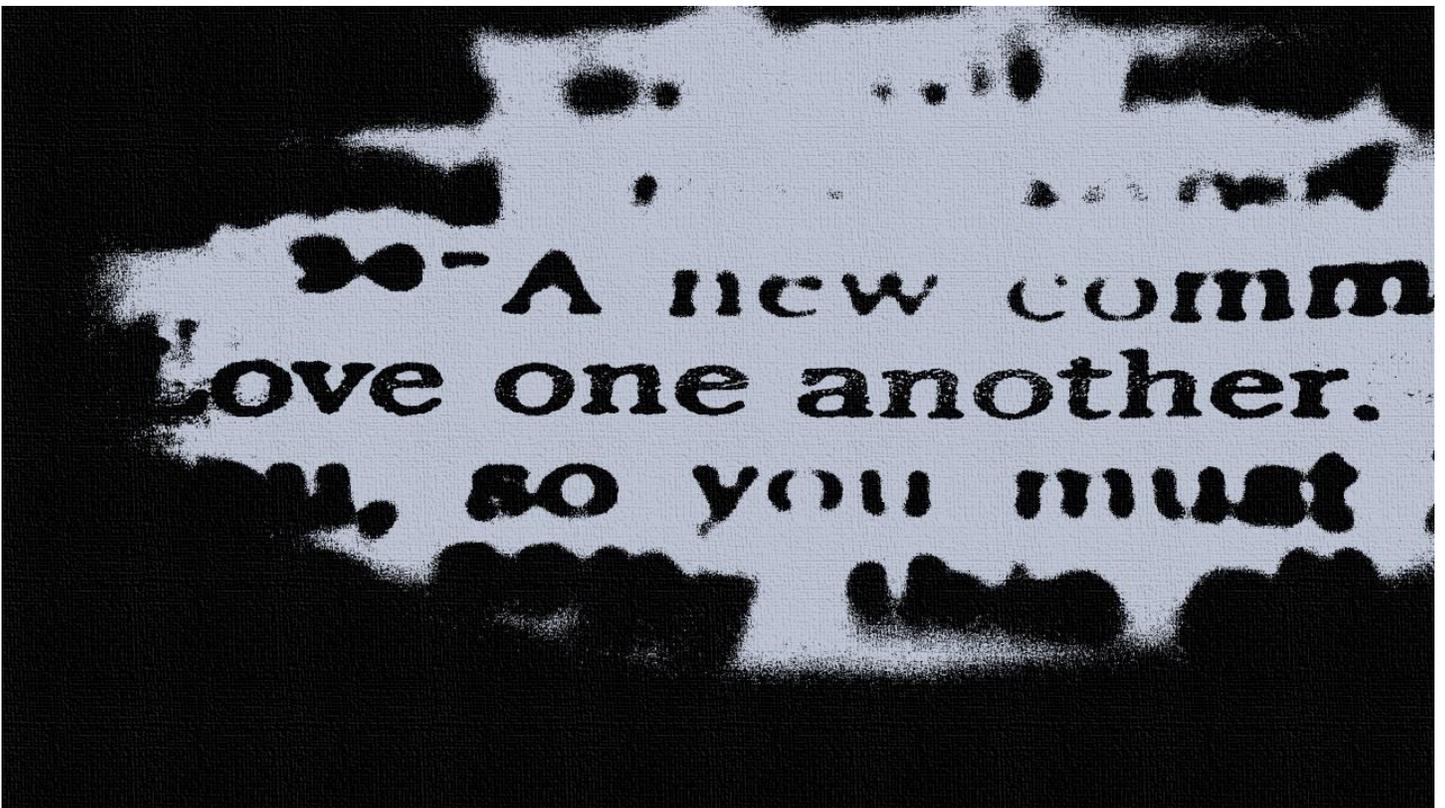
Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

1) APPROACH THE TEXT APPROPRIATELY.

2) BE A POSSESSOR OF IDEAS RATHER THAN BEING POSSESSED BY THEM.

3) RELATIONSHIPS ARE EITHER DYSFUNCTIONAL, OR THEY ARE RIGHT.

Last week we spent the whole time delving deeper into the concepts prevalent in this Book. While we didn't get to any new verses, we did talk about 1) the way to approach the text. We talked about 2) ideas as ideas and how important it is to possess your ideas rather than being possessed by them. Finally, we talked about 3) the reality of relationships and how the common, universal and we can say non-holy, or even unholy standard is dysfunction. Dysfunctional relationships of all kinds right across the board is the norm. What's unique, special and we can say holy is right relationships. That's where I want to start today.

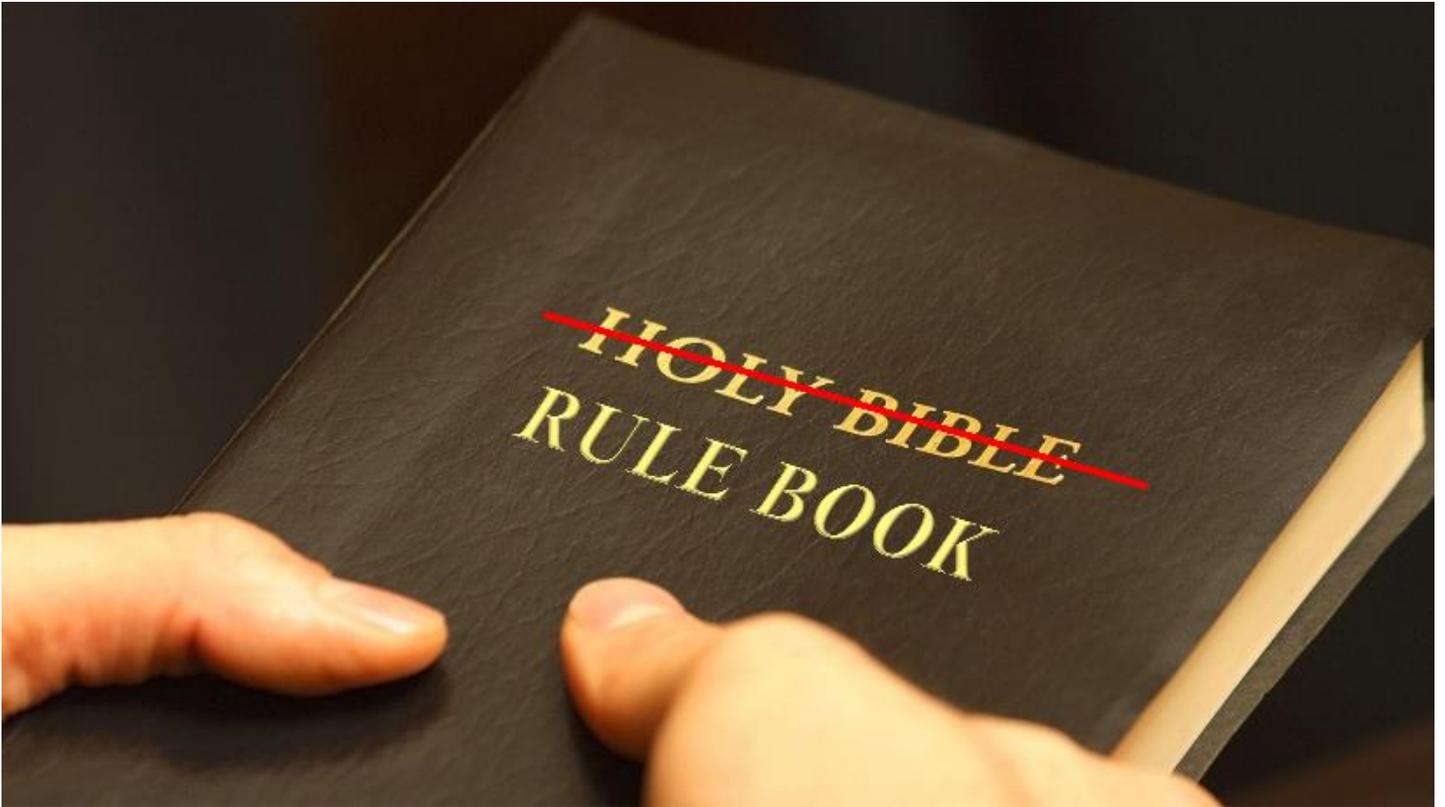


I've told the story many times - it's one of my favorites from the Early Church. In the late 90s A.D., the Apostle John, also in his 90's at the time, was released from exile on Patmos and returned to the city of Ephesus on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. There Polycarp and Papias among other students of the Apostle would help him into their weekly church services where John would repeat over and over, "Little children, love one another." Before long, his students became a bit annoyed and one of them, thought to be Polycarp, finally asked, "Master, why do you always say this?" To which the Beloved Apostle, the Disciple whom Jesus loved, the man who had personally "Heard... seen... and touched," the Lord replied, "Because, it is the Lord's command and if only this is done, it is enough."

The full gist is that loving others is the proof of genuine faith. We see that clearly and repeatedly declared in the Bible - this reality that if you don't love others as Christ commands, not only are you a disobedient, wrongly relating sinner, you are not actually a true disciple of Jesus and further, you don't truly know God at all.

Again, God's words, not mine. That's God's take on the situation. Even so, we make Christianity about everything else. What's interesting is that John's students were no different... They became weary of hearing him go on and on about loving one another. Today, we likewise grow weary when some preacher goes on and on about sacrificially loving others... Why? Why do Christians, saved by love and filled with love, eagerly desire to focus on everything other than love?

Partly because we don't really understand what love is and partly because it's hard. As G.K. Chesterton said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried." What is the Christian ideal? We could say that it is to be loving, or holy, or merciful, etcetera, but I hope that you can readily see that whatever description we give it, the Christian ideal can be boiled down to rightly relating. Right relationship with God, with others, with yourself, and with creation itself is the Christian ideal in action - it is therefore a measure of Christianity.



Humans in general, and Americans in particular love practical application. We are a pragmatic lot who desire boundaries with rules and regulations, and clearly defined procedures, or practices. We want that so that we can assess our own performance, standing and direction, as well as that of others.

It's why Christianity immediately devolves into dos and don'ts. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy are the easiest examples simply because they've been around so long. Within those religions we see a near total focus on performance. Rules, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and rites. As man-made garbage is piled

upon man-made garbage ad infinitum, we have so much extraneous religiosity that the kernel of Truth buried beneath is largely ignored as the average practitioner is left with nothing more than a legalistic requirement that they cannot keep. This was precisely what Jesus said was going on in the Judaism of His day. What's most important, is that the very same thing is happening right here at Alêtheia. It's just far more subtle.

Most of you can think of a Christian who inspired you. Maybe it's a Grandparent or parent, maybe someone who mentored you when you were a new Christian. Do you have such a person, such an example in your life - someone you think most exemplified what it means to be a Christian? Now, what made them that for you?

I've heard from a lot of folks over the years who tell me about just such a person in their experience and inevitably the things they point to that were so inspiring was how that Christian performed. It's stories about how they never cussed, never missed a Sunday service, never used tobacco, or alcohol, or never said an unkind word. It's about how they gave generously, or helped the poor, or were constantly in prayer, always

reading their Bible, or a hundred other things that all have to do with performance that can be seen, quantified, and evaluated quickly and accurately... That's what we default to my friends - that's our default setting.

God talks in different terms. God talks about sweeping principles, values, and beliefs. He talks about ideas, ideals, and ethics. He talks about love, and joy, and hope. All of that is far too esoteric, or mysterious and far too ethereal, or otherworldly to easily grasp, let alone to accurately measure.



Last week we saw that our physical reality can be described as a place where every relationship is dysfunctional. Further, we saw that absent the God of the Bible there's no way out. Fortunately, there is the God of the Bible. He can be defined as a being of right relationships, which is other than common, which is holy.

Better yet for us, He wants to share. In His sharing of all that goes with right relationship with Him we are enabled towards rightly relating elsewhere.

Rightly relating can be a measure of Christianity - Jesus said so Himself. John 13:34&35, 34“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” So how we relate to God, to others, to ourselves, to the rest of creation is a litmus test to assess our own performance, standing and direction, as well as that of others. In that we have something that satisfies our human need to get a handle on things without allowing a legalism to take hold. It's hard to be legalistic about rightly relating, but we will find a way if we're not

careful... Always be on guard against any form of legalism.

So, if we're careful, our litmus test for Christianity can be right relationships. Modern psychologists will tell you that it must start with self, modern virtue ethicists will tell you that it must start with others, and modern environmentalists will tell you that it must start with the ecosystem.

Biblical Christianity makes it crystal clear that the only place to start is at the root of all human dysfunction... Any other approach is doomed to failure because it never addresses the cause. The only hope is to restore right relationship with the Creator of all, with our Heavenly Father through Jesus His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

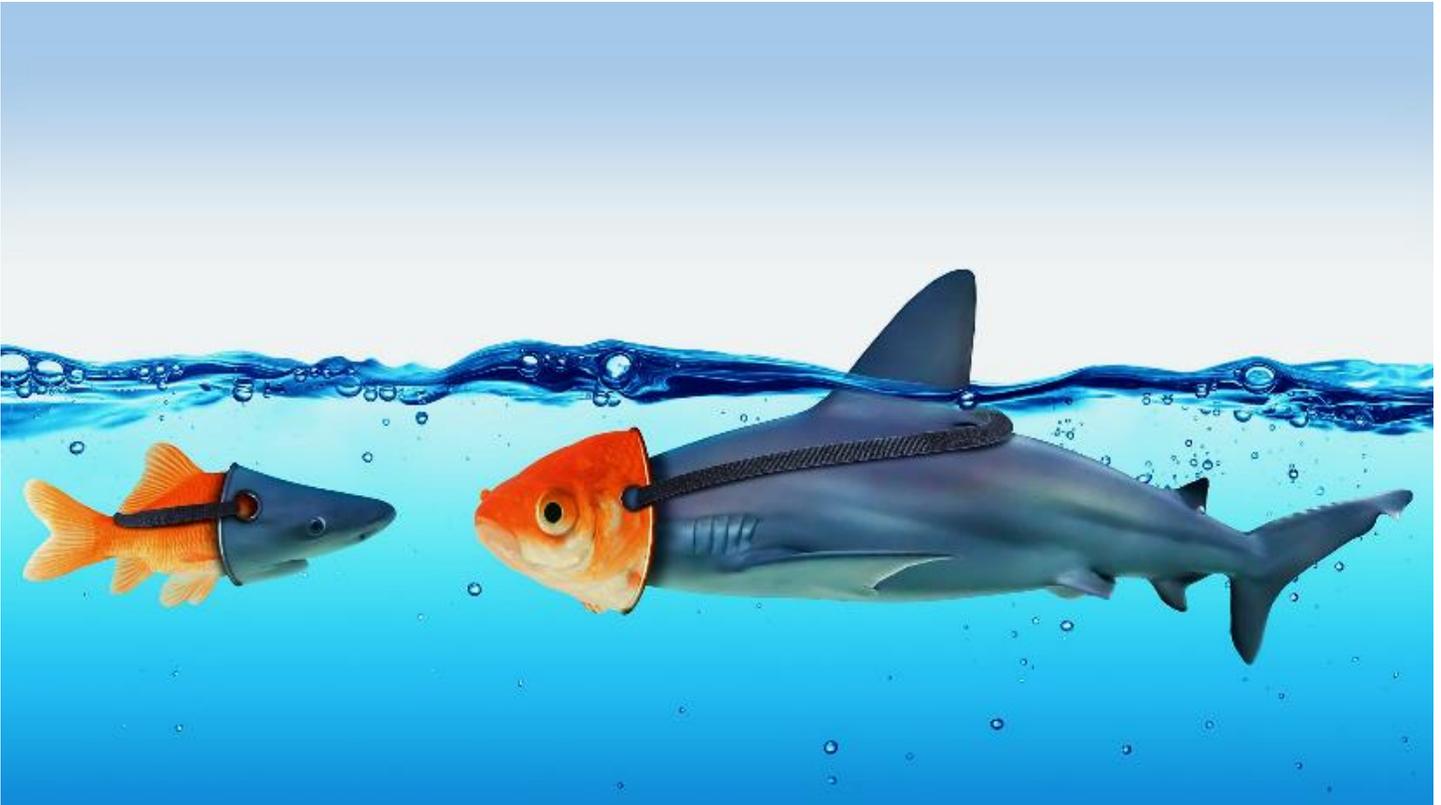
How is that accomplished exactly? Through the enablement of the Holy Spirit, we come to know and accept Jesus as the Word of God made flesh Who took upon Himself the root cause of relational dysfunction and destroyed its power. Entering into that right relationship allows all other relationships to be made right as well. It must be in His love and through His

power - that's key. Any human fleshly attempt will fall short.

Great, let's do that, it sounds easy.

As we all know, it's not. The fundamental problem is that even with our new birth, and an indwelling deposit of the Holy Spirit, and the pure perfect love of God poured out into our heart, we still don't get it. We're still stuck in dysfunctional land. If we physically died at the moment of salvation, we would have all the disinformation and distraction of this world stripped away, our eyes would be fully open, and we would enter into perfect harmony with all in Heaven.

Here's a way forward to help us get this... We'll examine what rightly relating in Heaven would be like and then we'll have a standard to apply here. Think about Heaven. In Heaven all is laid completely bare. There is no dishonesty, deception, or misrepresentation at all - so total transparency... Nothing can be hidden and so there is nothing to hide, and that means perfect humility.



How did I jump from nothing to hide to perfect humility? Complete honesty with yourself and about yourself is perfectly humble because when I hide things about myself, I do it to present a better version of myself than is real... That is rooted in pride. That kind of image management pride is itself rooted in fear. We are all guilty of managing our image by exaggerating, by withholding information, by being ambiguous, by bending the truth and even by breaking the truth. We are deceitful in that way in order to enhance our image - pride, and in order to not be rejected - fear.

It hinders right relationship with God, with other Christians, with yourself, with the lost, and with creation.

If you are not fully candid about yourself, over time misconceptions about you grow. While you'll be happy to correct the ones you don't like, you'll be just as happy to allow the others to remain. As those misleading notions about you become fully accepted you must now guard that false persona. You must build walls to protect the true you from being discovered. That's a great start to right relationship! (Sarcasm).

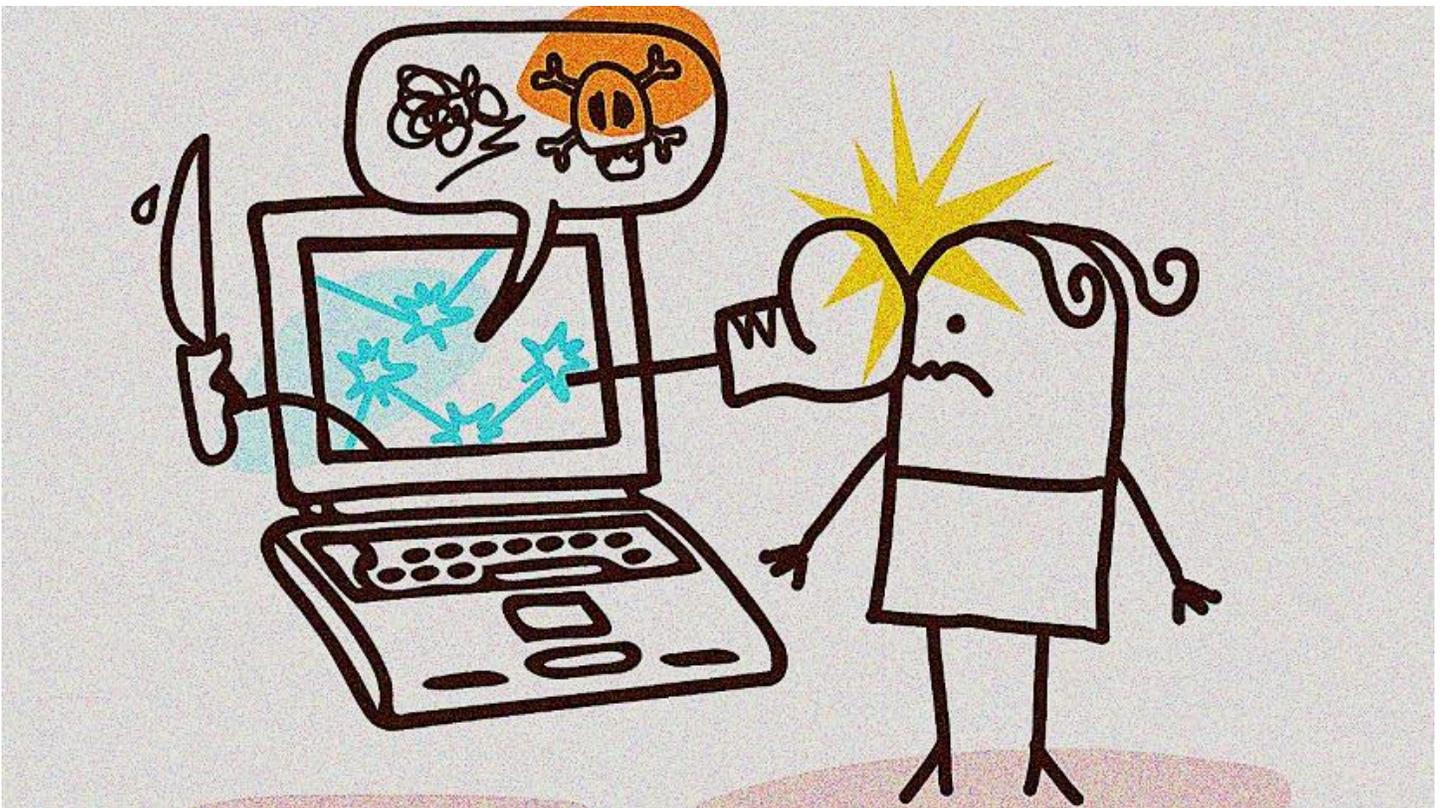
So, in Heaven, nothing hidden and so no lies to protect, therefore open, humble, transparency - what you see is what there is, no more, no less and so no agenda other than harmony... The very foundation of rightly relating.



In marriage counseling I often talk about the marital relationship ideally being one in which both parties stand before each other completely naked and unafraid. I'm not talking about clothes. The one person on the planet to whom you should be able to lay all open and bare is your spouse - your life-partner - your same flesh in God's sight. It should be you two together facing the world. It must start with complete candor... Skeletons in the closet will taint the relationship if they are successfully hidden and potentially destroy the relationship if discovered. It's never healthy, never good, never rightly relating.

There's a thought experiment where you probe the outcome of a world in which everyone's thoughts are fully known. Most extrapolate that to a dystopian world where we all murder each other.

I agree, if it happened in the physical world we know, but that's actually what Heaven could be. I'm not saying that's what it is, I'm just saying that it could be that and it would be wonderful in that place because, absent disinformation, absent pride, absent fear, it would be beautiful. No one is having a negative, or hurtful thought ever. Imagine that.



The idea here is to first grasp that right relationship in the here and now is hindered by dishonesty and the pride and fear that spawns it. Try to be more honest with yourself and about yourself. That's easy to say, but not easy to do. What if I'm more open and people think less of me? What if I'm more candid and people reject and vilify me? Get a social media platform, publicly post something totally true about yourself and standby for the onslaught. It is an imperfect world with imperfect people, and no one can be fully trusted.

It's risky. The reason Christians should be able to overcome those fears is because we are supposed to know that God already knows precisely who we are and loves us anyway. We are not only accepted by Him, but we can never be rejected by Him. If He has us, what would it matter if the whole world turned against us? Well, it would hurt and so we continue to allow deceit to flourish even in our homes and our church. We are terrified that people will come to fully know us and will be appalled by who they meet.



Please consider this though... Any person in your life who would reject you because you're actively trying to have a better relationship with them by being more honest about yourself is not a person who loves you anyway... It's just a lie... Just another lie in a sea of lies, and that's what John is on about.

We're going to look at I John 1:6 through 2:4... Since we've been through the first chapter, I'll just read the first 4 verses of chapter 2...



I John 2:1-4, 1My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 3By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;
⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.
⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
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Now let's add the final 5 verses from chapter 1 and take a look at the chiasmic structure. Remember chiasmic is from the Greek letter chi, like our "X" and simply means an in and back out structure... In a chiasm we have a main concept, and we get down to that main idea in stages working deeper and deeper to arrive and then in parallel stages work back out again.

It is a common rhetorical device used extensively in the Bible. It aided in memorization, and it made sure that the main point was well understood.

Here we have a classic example of not only Greco-Roman rhetoric, but also the mistakes made in creating chapter and verse many centuries later by people who didn't understand what was going on with the text. The chapter division here is poorly placed. For those of you who don't know, the original Bible books had no chapter and verse divisions at all - these are much later developments to help people find a particular passage.

Let's go through it...

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

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Verse 6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." The parallel to that in verses 3&4, "By this

we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Verse 6 was highly metaphorical and the parallel lays out the same idea plainly. The idea is that true fellowship with God means that a person does what the Lord commands. To disobey is to fail to practice the Truth, which is the same as walking in the darkness... Any such person claiming to know God and be His friend is a liar.

John wants to take that idea a bit deeper and so we have verse 7, “But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” The parallel in verses 1&2, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” Again, the first take is metaphorical and the parallel is plain. The entire point of this Bible Book is to guide Christians on right relationships with God and with all others.



What is disobedience that destroys fellowship? Sin, Sin with a big fat “I” right in the middle. Let’s not sin, but if we do, let’s humbly realize that we did and let’s bring that to the Lord Who is faithful. Metaphorically, we see it in verse 7, if we walk in the light, which is the same as practicing the Truth and the same as obeying the Lord’s commands and the same as not sinning, we have fellowship, which is right relationship with whom? With the church - with one another because it means we are rightly relating to God already and when we fall short and humbly admit that and eagerly seek reconciliation, the blood of Jesus cleanses us completely.

How does the blood of Jesus cleanse us from all sin? Because Jesus Himself the Word of God Who paid with His life stands ever before the Father as a reminder that all sin, past, present and future has been destroyed by Him... He holds the keys.

He was perfectly righteous in reality and so a perfectly innocent substitutionary sacrifice that fully propitiates God. The sins of the whole world are fully paid for - God is propitiated. It is Greek ἱλασμός (hē-lās-mōs), it means that God is satisfied. Specifically, that God's perfect, righteous, honest, holy, justice is satisfied. What that means is that no human being need go into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth... Jesus has done it all and it is finished!

That's God's side of the equation... God's door to right relationship is fully open to all. The other side of the equation has to do with expiation. Will I participate, will I complete the transaction by accepting the priceless incomparably valuable gift of Almighty God propitiated? Will I embrace that, and embrace all that it means?

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Verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." With the parallel verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." The point made from several angles here is that in order to have fellowship with God and then with one another we must be humble and honest. We must endeavor not to sin, but readily admit when we do and get that rectified.

All of that brings us to the pivot point, which is the primary idea that it is all pointing to - verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness.” Again, open, honest, humbleness will see us forgiven and restored to right relationship.

Two questions... Right relationship with whom and to whom do we confess our sins? For both, we are spring-loaded to say God. That’s obvious and is foundationally necessary, but that’s not what the Holy Spirit through John is talking about here.

How many times have we seen where all of Christianity can be boiled down to loving one another with nary a word about God? The Bible can talk that way because it is a given that such fellowship is only possible when our fellowship with God is right. It is a presupposed postulate to the Apostle Paul saying in many places and in many ways that the entire Law of God can be summed up by the statement, “Love your neighbor.”

In chapter 1, verse 4, John said that he was writing to perfect Biblical Joy. In chapter 2, verse 1, he said it was to limit sin. Are they two different things? No, John is still on the same topic. What is the topic - what is his point - what is he on about? It goes back to his opening thesis statement in chapter 1, verses 1 through 5... Three times in those few verses John says that he is

proclaiming or announcing to his audience of fellow Christians. Why? So that they, so that we, might have fellowship with John and his fellow eyewitnesses. So that they and we might have fellowship with one another as indeed we genuinely fellowship with the Father and with Jesus Christ.

The entire point of this letter was to help Christians get the fact that fellowship or right relationship with God can never be divorced from fellowship or right relationship with each other... There cannot be one without the other.

In the center of our big chiastic structure is the idea that we must have right relationship with one another - not with God, because that's a given, but with each other in the church - that's the point.

And how are we going to do that? We are going to confess our sins to each other. Once again not to God, because that's a given, but to one another in the church.

This is precisely the same thing the brother of Jesus was talking about in James 5:16 "Confess your sins to

one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

The word healed there in the middle is poorly understood - it means primarily a spiritual healing, which is always a relational healing. Any healing of the spirit is by definition a forgiveness of sin and therefore a restoration back to right relationship.

The Catholic church realized right away that if people were open, honest, and humble about their failures immature Christians and unscrupulous people posing as Christians would take advantage... If everyone was striving for complete transparency, we would have the “Everyone can read everyone else’s mind dystopian end of the world” scenario. Enter the unbiblical confessional and associated penance.

Other people over the centuries with far too much idealism tried the totally open and honest confession thing church-wide always to great calamity.

Both tacks miss what the Bible is talking about. It’s really very simple. When we sin, and again, sin means

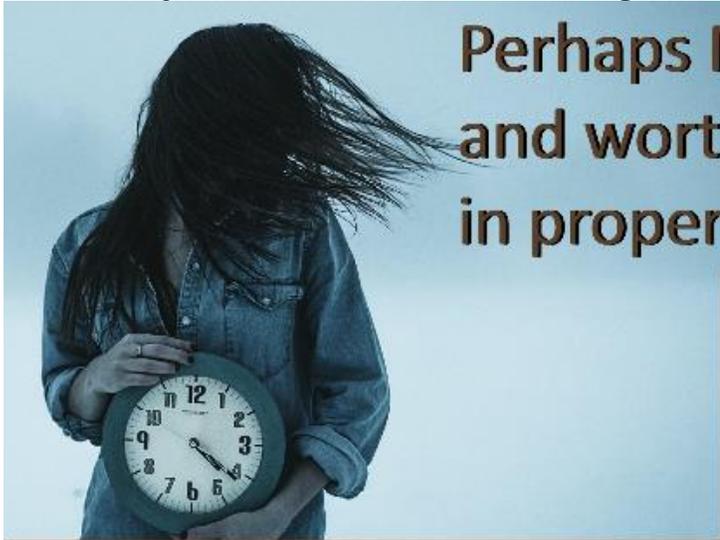
a disobedience to God's principles that has a negative effect on relationship... Sin means disobeying Christ's clear command to love one another, which of course negatively effects relationship with Him and others... When we sin, we must openly, honestly, humbly confess that sin to all those negatively impacted. Contritely, apologetically, repentantly, confess to the injured party or parties.

If the injured person or persons is likewise a Christian who does not want to themselves sin by disobeying Christ's command to love, they will forgive the offender and they will pray for the offender and the offender will be healed just as the relationship is healed.

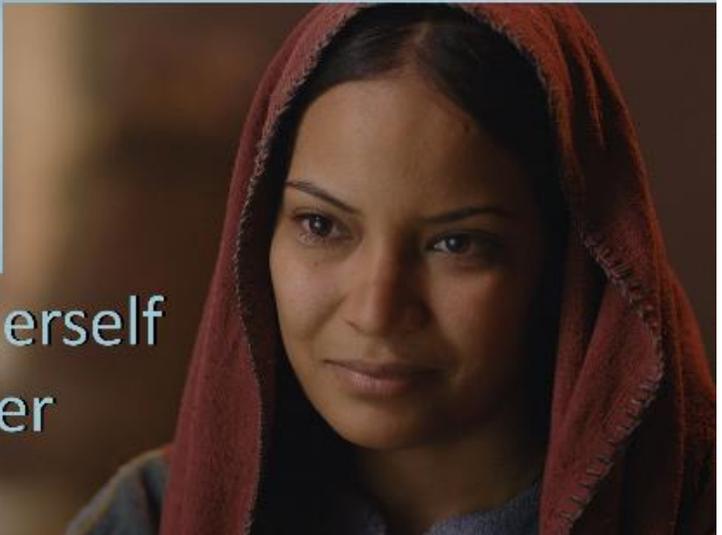
Being honest isn't about perfecting ourselves so people won't reject us, it's about being honest and trusting God. If the one you confess to, acts correctly, they will forgive you and your relationship with them will be restored as will your relationship with God... If they reject you for trying to improve the relationship by being honest and humble then you need to pray for them.

My dear friends, always remember the words of the Apostle Peter, “Above all (above all, above all), keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins (love covers a multitude of sins)” (1 Peter 4:8).

As you prepare your hearts for Holy Communion, I leave you with this thought...



Perhaps Martha's sense of self and worth were all wrapped up in properly performing her role...



While Mary's sense of herself was all wrapped up in her relationship to Jesus.