

The passage we're looking at today has the potential to be a very uncomfortable one, both for the speaker and the congregation, so maybe I'll start by telling you about counterfeit money. It can be one of the more interesting parts of banking work, but not quite in the way you would expect.

The bankers who are the experts on counterfeit money don't spend all their time studying different kinds of counterfeit money: rather, they become very familiar with the real thing: banknotes as they are supposed to be, coins as they are supposed to be, and by that familiarity, they recognise counterfeit money: the fake fivers or dodgy pound coins because they are not as they should be.

There are many different kinds of counterfeit, but only one genuine article.

And of course: the same is true of our faith: there are lots of counterfeit faiths, but only one genuine faith.

We may well know it, but the world doesn't. We should be called children of God, because that is what we are! The world doesn't know us because the world doesn't know God. That's what we can see in verse 1.

The passage we have before us today splits into three pieces, and the themes I see are that

- God the Father loves us
- God the Son died for us
- God the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

First, God the Father loves us. We can see that straight away by John calling us children of God. That's a term that

we have come to be familiar with, and as a result we miss how important it is: up to the time of Jesus, the only ones described as children of God were Adam and the angels. Then, Jesus was recognised as son of God, and now, we discover that through Christ and through the Father's love, we can be called his children, because that's what we are.

In the first chapter of John's gospel, v 11, we read "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God".

Now, it's important to realise that John's epistle is not an evangelistic textbook. Unlike John's gospel, it is written to those who are already believers. The world won't understand what it's saying: it's a challenge to Christians, let alone the world.

Verse 2 says "now we are the children of God: we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is." That is: we see him as he really is: not as a photograph or a line drawing, or as a character in a drama or a film, but as he really is!

And what kind of love is this? This is the love that sent a son to die for us while we were still sinners - while we still God's enemies.

That brings us on to the next part: God the Son died for us.

Verse 5 says "he appeared that he might take away our sins" in response to verse 4, which says "everyone who sins breaks the law: in fact, sin is lawlessness".

Now, there's a problem: we know that we all sin, and since we knew Christ, we still sin! And when we sin, we deny Christ. So what does the passage mean?

Let's not forget that all of the patriarchs have been recorded as sinning:

Abraham lied about his wife being his sister in Genesis 12. And then he did it again in Genesis 20...

Moses lost his temper and whacked the rock instead of just touching it (Numbers 20) and that was after he had committed murder, as described in Exodus 2.

King David: now, he was a murderer and an adulterer, neither of which tend to be seen in a favourable light.

Peter denied Christ three times, which certainly wasn't the best of behaviours either: and yet each of these men: Abraham, Moses, David, Peter: they are remembered as great men of God.

So what does it all mean? They are all men who admitted that what they had done was wrong: they repented: they asked for forgiveness.

This was not the normal behaviour in their lives: they were not habitual sinners, keeping on and on doing what they knew was wrong.

This is what John is talking about, I suggest. He is saying that the believer will not be habitually sinning by keeping on doing what he knows is wrong. If this is you, NOW is the time to acknowledge that what you are doing is wrong,

to repent from whatever it is and to ask forgiveness of God and of whoever it is that needs to forgive you too.

That's what we read in verse 6: no-one who lives in him **keeps on sinning**. No-one **who continues to sin** has ever seen him or known him.

And as believers we need to recognise this, and recognise the forgiveness that can be ours. By contrast, the unbeliever has no such resources to draw on.

That is the difference between those who are involved with Christ and those who are committed. That's what we're talking about here, and it's the difference between the true Christian and the counterfeit Christian:

By now you've probably all heard the story that illustrates the difference between the two: the pig and the hen giving a bacon and egg breakfast: the hen is involved but the pig is committed.

I want you to be sure to understand that we are not talking about any particular sin, but about sin in general.

As children of God we are not under the bondage of the law : rather, we have freedom through Christ. Even so, that doesn't mean that we should be lawless. Why not? It's simply because asserting our will against God's will is rebellion - and rebellion is at the root of sin.

In fact, we might go so far as to say that the whole work of the cross is denied when you practice deliberate sin. So don't allow sin to be a continuing thing. Don't let it have power over you, but remember instead that through his

death and resurrection, Christ broke the power of sin.

But that's the whole point! By ourselves, left to ourselves, we do sin, but through Christ, the whole power of sin is broken. Through Christ, we can have all our sin forgiven, leaving us feeling completely pure again.

That's how we turn from the dark thoughts of sin to the bright thoughts of forgiveness. Who is in charge? He died for you but looks to each of us to offer our lives for him, in the form of commitment to Christ and the church.

So we need to surrender, to yield: fully surrender, fully yield. When we do that, sin doesn't have any more power or dominion over us. We will still stumble; we will still make mistakes; we will still be in the flesh but won't be living or continuing there: rather, we will recognise when we have sinned, will repent, will seek and receive forgiveness, and then will move forward in our Christian lives.

That's the ideal: it's easy to say, but hard to do. So I'll remind you of verse 8: the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the Devil's work.

That brings me to the next part: this is that God the Holy Spirit dwells in us. I've already said that nobody who is born in God practices sin. The idea that is repeated in this passage of scripture relates to keeping on sinning, and how that is contrasted with forgiveness of sins in the past, the present and the future.

That's good news for Christians: an assurance of forgiveness of sin through time:

- the **past** tense - forgiveness from the **penalty** of sin,

- called **justification**, as we see in Ephesians 2
- the **present** tense - forgiveness from the **power** of sin, called **sanctification**, as we see in Romans 6
 - the **future** tense - forgiveness from the **presence** of sin, called **redemption**, as we see in Romans 8.

The promise of forgiveness from the penalty, power and presence of sin.

We have heard in the first sermons in this series from chapter one and verse nine that the key that we HAVE sinned. Yet if we admit it, He forgives and purifies us from all unrighteousness. By contrast, as we can see in the prophet Jeremiah, especially verses 13 and 22 of chapter 3, we find that unconfessed sin is the first part of backsliding.

James chapter 1, verses 13 to 15 deals with this: people pleading that God is tempting them, and the downward spiral of desire, sin and death... but for more on that you need to listen to the series going on at the moment in our evening services.

It's very difficult to stand at the front and talk about sin and not sound judgemental: that's because sin results in judgement. I don't want to sound judgemental, because I know I am not perfect, and I know that people here also know that I am not perfect, but I will carry on anyway.

But if we go back to the first thought I gave you: how can we tell who are the Christians? By looking at the fruit. The real money is what it should be. You will find Christians who are not sinless, but who won't be practising sin. Will they be professing one thing and doing something else? Will they have lives characterised by love for each other?

I never cease to be amazed by those outside the church who really do recognise Christians by the love we have for each other, just as Jesus promised in John 13:35.

Here is another promise, and one we should all take hold of with both hands: Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.

But that doesn't mean that we should let ourselves continue to be tempted. By God's Holy Spirit, we are protected, and don't need to sin. But if we are: fix it early - nip it in the bud. Leave it too long and you can't get back.

These words in 1 John are not written for us to check others, and indeed the second half of the chapter will speak about loving other Christians, which is so important, and I would be very happy to talk more about Christian love, but that will be covered by our speaker next week. But here are some questions...

- Do I nurture a divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?
- Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man?
- If so, am I willing to confess and forsake it?
- Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me?

In fact, we can be sure that both natures are there? Which one is in charge?

- When temptation comes, do I “play” with it or do I flee

from it?

- Do I immediately yield to the divine nature that is within me?

As we turn away from sin, and turn towards a growing, healthy and genuine relationship with our loving God, let's remember the three things we have learnt that lead us to that relationship:

- God the Father loves us
- God the Son died for us
- God the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Help us not to continue sinning, but to realise that we need to turn quickly from sin to repentance, and accept your forgiveness as we remember God the Father loving us, God the Son dying for us and God the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Amen.