

Breaking Free from the Bondage of Sin and Addiction¹

1 John 1:5-10

Opening: Have you ever fought the devil? In the late fourth century AD, a young intellectual named Evagrius Ponticus went into the desert of Egypt to fight the devil. Which is what you do. He read the story of Jesus going out into the desert to face the devil head on and intended to follow Jesus' example. Word spread that there was a monk out in the middle of nowhere at war with the devil. The rumor was that he was winning. He became a sought-after spiritual guide and people from all over would brave the dangers of the elements in an attempt to locate him and learn his ways. Before he died, one of his followers, asked him to write down his strategy for overcoming the devil. So, he wrote a short book called, *"Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons."* In his book, his best strategy for fighting demonic temptation was to fight with "thoughts" or "beliefs." You have to fight evil thoughts with godly truth. The premise of the book is that *"our fight with the devil is first and foremost a fight to take back control of our minds from their captivity to lies and liberate them with the weapon of truth."*² If we are going to break free from the bondage of sin we must fight with truth.

Context: The purpose of 1 John is so that believers would have joy. (1:4). *Joy comes from having a right relationship with God through Jesus.* The thief of joy is sin. The most miserable person is not the unbeliever, but the believer who is not in a right relationship with God. John says he is writing this book so that you can learn not to live in the bondage of sin (2:1) because Jesus came to this earth to destroy the works of the devil and the power of sin over our lives (3:18). **John teaches us that our fight for joy comes by breaking free from the deception of darkness and by walking in the light of truth.**

I. The Deception of Darkness

- **VS. 6,8,10:** John says that when we sin against God we are walking in darkness and living in deception: *we lie, do not practice the truth, deceive ourselves, make (call) God a liar:* this deception is what causes us to choose the pleasures of sin over the joy of Jesus and the result is that we live miserable lives. **Moore:** *A stronghold is anything that exalts itself in our minds, pretending to be bigger or more powerful than God.*
- **What we believe matters and what we believe, deep in our hearts, about what makes us happy really matters:** we do what we most want to do based on what we believe: every sin is a manifestation of something we believe. Every sin is born out of the belief that disobeying God or going our way will produce a happier outcome than obeying God.
- **Jon Bloom:** *The root of sin is not a battle of self-control but happiness...If given the choice, we choose what we believe will make us happier than we are or less miserable even if the knowledge in our heads tells us that our choice is wrong. We are enslaved as we believe that to give up sin is to embrace living with less happiness and more misery.*³
- **We sin because we believe a lie about what will make us happy:** **Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits:** *Sin is the unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness. Satan's lies are, "You can't trust God, but you can trust yourself, your own wisdom, and desires. Follow your heart."*
- **When we trust in what we have been programmed to think by the world and Satan, then the thing that we once desired, we now believe is a need and once we have named it as a need, we can become addicted.**
- *I need to escape, so I must take this substance. I need to have sex, so I will sleep with them or look at that. I need to feel loved and approved, so I must post this on social media or be in a toxic relationship. I need to be entertained, so I must watch that or play that. I need to have this, so I must buy it. I need to look good, so I have to work out more. I need to succeed, so I have to work longer hours. I need to be satisfied, so I must eat or drink that.*
- **Welch, Addiction: A banquet in the Grave:** *Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God.*⁴
- **Starts spiritual and becomes biochemical. Yale Med:** *Addiction changes the brains' structure and how it functions. The brain has a natural reward system. The reward pathway's function in the brain is to reinforce sets of behaviors. Actions that help us do good or feel good are rewarded through a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine is a satisfying jolt that encourages you to repeat the same action. Addiction hijacks our natural reward system. All addictions produce*

¹ **Works Consulted:** John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*. Craig Groeschel. *Winning the War in your Mind*.

² From Comer, Pg. 5-6; Evagrius Ponticus, *Talking Back*. PDF: [9780879073299 \(litpress.org\)](https://www.litpress.org/9780879073299)

³ Jon Bloom. [The Secret to Breaking Free from Habitual Sin | Desiring God](https://www.jonbloom.com/the-secret-to-breaking-free-from-habitual-sin-desiring-god)

⁴ Ed Welch. *Addictions: Banquet in the Grave*, Pg. 35.

a pleasure surge of dopamine and cause us to become dependent on these behaviors or substances. The problem is that we become tolerant to these addictive things, and we need to do more and more to get a better high.⁵

- **Once we believe the lie about what makes us happy we then justify our lifestyle by believing more lies to justify our sinful behaviors based on our deceived beliefs:** when you tell one lie, you often have to tell more lies to keep the first lie going. Once we believe the first lie, we keep lying and deceiving ourselves through more lies.
- **"I am not responsible."** **VS. 8:** If we say, **"We have no sin."** **VS. 10:** If we say, **"I have not sinned."** This lie says that *"I am not to blame. It's not my fault. That's not who I really am."* There was a gnostic belief in John's day called "dualism" that distinguished the body from the soul. The body was evil, but the soul was good. So, what the body did was not the real me. There is a difference between what I do and who I am. Deep down, I'm a good person I just make mistakes.
- **When we are stuck in addiction, we justify it by living in denial and shifting the blame:** *we ignore it, diagnose it, explain it, redefine it, rationalize it or relativize it:* but deep down inside of us we know that we are not OK and that we have issues. But we want to minimize or marginalize our sin. We do not want to come to grips with the truth.
- **"I can fake it till I make it."** **VS. 6:** If we say **we are walking with God but are walking in darkness:** We know that we are sinners and have a problem, but we come to church, play the game, like getting beat up a little bit and think we can just cover it up with good deeds, going to church, giving money and try harder with self-control and will power.
- **Being a Christian is NOT about sin management.** Some of you grew up going to church being told that you need to be a good Christian. A good Christian is someone who follows a list of rules. We were told not to drink, smoke, chew or go with girls who do; the problem is in Kentucky a lot of the girls did; April didn't, so I married her. I grew up thinking that being a good Christian was managing your sin, covering up your flaws and being good.
- **Joby Martin: Beach Ball Theology⁶: Sin management is like holding a beach ball under water.** *How long can you hold a beach ball under the water?* Depends on how strong you are, how big the waves are, how much sunscreen you have on your hands and how much patience you have. But eventually, you can't hold it down anymore. When the beach ball comes back up, it explodes up in our face. *That is what sin does, you can only hold it down and fake it for so long.*
- **We are deceived into believing that we can handle or cover up our sin on our own by trying harder, being better, and putting on a show:** eventually the sin we are trying to hide or repress will blow up in our face and destroy our lives. This type of living is exhausting and eventually you will get caught. It is the bondage of deception.

II. The Disinfectant of Light

- **How can I break free from the deception of darkness? John gives us three steps: **Expose your sin to the light:** VS. 5: **God is light and in Him is no darkness at all:** God is absolutely utterly pure and holy. He knows everything and everyone perfectly. **No darkness:** no lies, no deception, and no hiding. (If you have to hide, it is a probably wrong.)**
- **Sin wants to remain hidden:** mutant things grow in the darkness; fungus grows in the dark. **Bonhoeffer: *The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. The sin must be brought into the light.***⁷
- **The pathway to freedom starts when we stop hiding in the darkness and come out into the light.** When we stop hiding in the dark and turn to the light we see the horrible reality of our sin and empty promises that it makes to us and we see the beauty of God's His infinite holiness and grace.
- **How do you expose your sin to the light? You get into God's Word.** The Bible tells us who God is and what God's best is for our lives. What you consume will consume you. What you expose yourself to is important. This is why a lot of people stay out of church. **You pray honest prayers:** One of the hardest prayers *Lord, show me my sin.* **You share your struggles: **James 5:16** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.***
- **VS. 7: When we walk in His light, we have fellowship with one another:** the only way to deal with hidden sin and have a restored relationship with other people that sin and addiction has hurt is to expose our sin to the light. You don't have to tell every sin to every person but admitting to God and others is the first big step. **(Accountability)**
- **Comer: *A raw power and genuine freedom come when you name your sin in the presence of loving community. Just the act of naming your sin out loud to people you know, and trust has the power to break chains.***⁸

⁵ [How an Addicted Brain Works > News > Yale Medicine](#)

⁶ I heard Joby Martin use this multiple times. He is the Pastor of Eleven Twenty-Two church in Jacksonville Florida.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Pg. 112-113.

⁸ Comer. Pg. 182.

- **Express your sin to the Lord: VS. 9: If we confess our sins:** to “say the same word”: when we confess, we are saying the “same thing” about our “sin” as God would say about it. It’s having the same attitude towards our sin as God has towards our sin. As we see our sin clearly in the light of God’s Word and truth, we see it for what it is.
- **To deal with sin and addiction in your life you can’t attack it with behavior modification, but you have to get to the root of the issue:** the lie you have believed. You have to see that it is a lie and then you need to confess to God that you have been believing the lie rather than trusting Him and His truth. You have to get to the root.
- **Example:** When I bought my house, there was an ugly tree in the back yard. *Do you know how you get rid of a tree like that?* You don’t run outside and pick out the ugliest branch on the ugly tree, yell at the tree and cut off the branch and then run inside and declare victory. Because the next time you go back there you will see the tree still standing strong. You don’t kill a tree by cutting off a branch, because the branch isn’t the problem, the tree is the problem. The root system of the tree is the problem. To kill the tree, you got to cut off the root. The root of our sin is the lie, and the lie has to be exposed for what it is: a lie that leads to misery, disaster, division, and death.
- **Thomas Watson: Till sin be bitter, Christ will never be sweet⁹:** As long as you believe the lie, you will never let go of your sin. But when your sin is exposed for what it is, then you can break free from seeing it as a need. You see the pain and misery it has caused you and others, but especially God who loves you. Sin is poison!
- **Have you ever eaten anything that gave you food poisoning?** There is one thing that I will never eat again and that is Chef Boyardee Raviolis. I was a teenager and ate a big can of them and got food poisoning and was so sick that I made a vow to the Lord that I would never eat them again. What once tasted good is now nasty to me.
- **Confession is the beginning of repentance and the vomiting of the soul:** to repent is to change your mind: instead of loving the sin, you grow to hate it. **Ignatius of Antioch**, early church father: *It is impossible for a man to be freed from the habit of sin before he hates it, just as it is impossible to receive forgiveness before confessing his trespasses.*¹⁰
- **Experience the Cleansing Power of Jesus: VS. 7: If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin: VS. 9: If we confess, He is faithful to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness:** this is a promise of God that if *we come clean (to God) we get clean (from God)*: why does the Bible refer to being forgiven as being clean? Even in the addiction world, when people get sober and stop using drugs they call it getting or being clean. **Why clean?**
- **Sin makes us feel dirty and filthy:** there is shame (who we are) and guilt (what we have done): if you are caught up in sin or addiction, you feel nasty and gross. Maybe not in the moment of sin, but soon after we feel so dirty and icky. When you feel dirty or filthy, your natural inclination is to want to be clean or cleansed.
- **Have you ever got a huge stain on your clothes before?** The other day I was going somewhere and got out of my truck and next to my truck was a jacked-up Jeep with huge mud tires. I wasn’t paying attention and I turned too close, and my leg hit the tires and it got grease on my nice white khaki shorts. I went to a bathroom to try to use soap and water to get the stain off, but it actually made it worse. I walked around with a huge stain on my shorts and the entire time all I could do was think about it and think about everyone else seeing that stain and then asking questions and how embarrassing it was. I would have given anything for another pair of shorts to wear or a bottle of Shout.
- **Many of us try to cleanse ourselves through self-help, good deeds, behavior modification or even religion, but none of those have the power to get the stain out.** Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from our sin. How does that work? Doesn’t that seem strange because blood is one of the hardest stains to get rid of.
- **Think about VS. 9: If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just:** you would think that he would say, “He is faithful and just to judge us for our sins and send us to hell.” But the promise is that “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us.” He cancels our debt and cleanses us. **How?**
- **Jesus paid for it:** We all love free things and will go places to get free things, but there is no such thing as free. For you to get something free, someone else had to pay. For you to get forgiveness and cleansing, for free, someone had to pay. **Who paid?** Jesus paid our dry cleaning. He gave us his robe of righteous and he wore our dirty, filthy rags.
- **Because Jesus paid for our sins, the only way God can be faithful and just, is to forgive us and cleanse us when we honestly and humbly come to Him for both.** The good news is that the promises still stands to everyone who comes.

Application: The world’s largest religious festival called **Kumbh Mela**¹¹ (Kum-mayla) happens every twelve years along the Ganges River in India. Around 125 million Indians make the journey to go into the water of the Ganges and last 55 days. (Hajj to Mecca is 3 million) The last one was in 2013. Celebrities, politicians, rich and poor all flock to the riverbanks.

⁹ From Puritan Thomas Watson.

¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch was the Bishop of Antioch in the first century AD.

¹¹ [The Kumbh Mela Festival: Showing Bad News of Sin & our need for cleansing – Satya Veda Pusthakan – in English](#)

The people believe that every 3 years the water of the Ganges is stirred up by the gods and if you submerge yourself (dip), it erases your sin and gives you hope for eternal life for 12 years. *“To bathe in the Ganges is to wash away your sins. To die here is to escape the cycle of reincarnation and achieve instant salvation.”*

People travel for days and stay weeks along the river hoping to get their sins forgiven and peace in their lives. But it only lasts 12 years. They must keep coming back to have assurance. It is a picture of the masses of people in the world looking for eternal security and hoping they can find it, but never do. Yet, our cleansing is not found by trusting in dirty water in India, but by trusting in the shed blood of Jesus on the Cross. It's not just for three years, but forever.

There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunge between that blood, lose all their guilty stains! The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in His day, and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away!