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Good morning. Our young people may be dismissed to children's church. And let's open with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love, for Your mercy, for Your grace, for Your faithfulness towards each one of us. May I ask now, God, that as we come before You to try and learn from You, that You will please, as we sing, change our hearts, God. Change our hearts to reflect Your love, to shine Your light into this world. Make us more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as we learn from Your Scripture. Please open up our understanding. In His name, Amen. Okay. I don't often have to do this, but I need to start with some clarification about last week. I know a lot of you weren't here, but there's a few more copies of the CD back there if you want to know what I'm talking about. But I gave a sermon, and some of you got exactly what I was saying, and some of you didn't get what I was saying. And I think enough people didn't get it that I'll take the blame for my miscommunication. So I'm going to start with just clearing up what I was talking about last week. If you are a Baptist or a Methodist or a Quaker or a Catholic, whoever you are, if your faith is in Jesus, you are welcome here. You are welcome to come worship with us, to eat at monthly meal, to come to the Bible study, to come to the game night. You're welcome here. Last week I gave a history of Quakerism and of Quaker beliefs, and I pointed out how in the past, the Quakers have had a very high standard, very strict set of rules that you had to live by. And if you didn't live by those, you would be put out of the church. And actually I was reading, I don't know if you can trust Wikipedia, but it said that Betsy Ross was a Quaker who was put out of the church for supporting the war. And that's the kind of stuff they did back then. But we don't do that. In fact, if we did that, we wouldn't really have anybody left. So we don't do that anymore. And we just say, "Faith in Jesus, okay, yeah, come on, welcome here." Or even seeking, trying to learn about Jesus, you haven't really decided. You're welcome here. But the problem that I was trying to address and get at is that we have people in this church who practice one kind of religion at home, and then feel like they have to come here and hide it. And I don't think that's healthy. And I think that we as a body need to begin discussions about, I mean, if we're going to be the kind of church and the kind of Quakers who have that really high standard, like I said, we're going to lose a lot of people. But on the other hand, we don't really know if that's who we are or we're not that. And so people come in here and they say, "Well, when I'm at home or in private, I enjoy the occasional glass of wine, but I don't talk about that at church." Or, "When I was on vacation, I played the penny slots, but I don't talk about that at church." And my goal, my challenge last week was, let's figure out who we are and what we believe instead of having to do this kind of two-faced religion thing. This one religion we practice in our private lives and this one face that we come to church and put on. Because that's not healthy. And I think people who are going to come to this church are going to see that and be turned off by that two-faced nature of it. So, yeah, but let's begin that discussion. And I think that's all I want to say about that. I also want to say, if you think I say something really offensive or controversial or just wrong, you're free to come to me and talk to me about it. Because in case you're not aware, I am not a seminary student. I am not a professional pastor. I'm just a guy with a Bible. And I can make mistakes and I can miscommunicate and say something wrong. So if you don't understand me or you think I'm wrong, just come talk to me about it. Don't be angry about it. Because I'm still reading and learning and growing. But I'm a real nice guy. And you can come just ask, "What did you mean by that?" And in the Quaker church, I don't have the authority to shun you or banish you or whatever. Because they don't give me that kind of power. All right, let's talk about this week. And let me go ahead and start by saying, this week I'm going to start by talking about some stuff that sounds really controversial. So wait till the end and before you pass any kind of judgment because you'll see. All right. We talked about the Quaker hardline approach to holiness last week. We talked about Betsy Ross. So there are people who hunger for that really high standard of personal living. They want to be the no-gambling, teetotaling. They want that really fine line walk with their lives. And there's nothing wrong if that's the life you want to live. I think there might be a problem if you try to say, "Everyone must do that." So I started asking myself, "Where does this hunger come from of this fine line?" And I started looking through Scripture and I realized that there's a lot of Scriptures that when you read them, it makes it sound like you just can't... if there's even the tiniest drop of sin in your life, that you are just in huge amounts of trouble. And so I have some Scriptures today that I'm going to be reading and they're kind of out of context. And that's why I was giving you that warning. So we're going to go through and read them and you'll see what I'm saying. 1 Corinthians 6, 9 and 10. Galatians 5, 19-21. "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in times past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." 1 John 2, 4. "He who says, 'I know Jesus and does not keep His commandments' is a liar and the truth is not in Him." 1 John 3, 4-10. "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous, and he who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." And then finally, the story of the woman caught in adultery and all the guys said, "Jesus, we're supposed to stone her, right?" And he said, "You're right. Let the first one of you who was without sin cast the first stone." And then everybody kind of knew they had sin and they walked away. And then Jesus says to her, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one." And he says, "Well then neither do I. Go and sin no more." Go and sin no more. That sounds like a really tall order. And some of the stuff in here like, "He who sins is of the devil." And if you are in Christ, there is no sin and you do not sin anymore. And there's some really depressing stuff in there. So the first thing I want to do is I want to clarify what is being said in these verses. When it talks about those who sin, it's not talking about those who live a lifelong, willful rebelliousness. It is talking about people who have set sin as their life and do not care about righteousness. A lot of those verses came from 1 John. This verse also comes from 1 John, chapter 2. "My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin." And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Also in 1 John it says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The point John is trying to make here is that there is a difference between spirit regeneration and an unsafe person. When God saves you, when you first put your faith in Him, He puts His spirit in you, He begins working on you, He begins changing you. But it is a lifelong process, He does not instantly make you into a perfect person. You still have a lifetime of bad habits that you live with, and bad thought processes, and He has got to work that stuff out of you. [Silence] So that is what he is talking about. He wants to make it clear that when you are saved, you are not instantly turned into a perfect person. And that even though you may love God now and that you are trying to live a righteous life, you are still going to mess up and commit sins, but God will forgive you. You come, you repent of that sin, which means you turn away from it, you confess it to God, which means you admit that you did it, and God says, "I forgive you." Now let's keep walking on towards righteousness. You see, you were saved past tense. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you are saved in the past tense. But in the present tense, you are still being regenerated. You are still being transformed into the person that God wants you to be. So that in the future, one day, you will be sinless. John 15.5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing." And in the book of 1 John 1.7, it says, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." See, these verses are talking about how once you are saved, there is now a process of staying in Jesus, of walking in the light, walking in Christ, relying on Him as your spiritual source for strength and regeneration. Salvation starts that moment, but then we are brought in and then we abide in Him and we are regenerated. As you walk in the light, God will improve you. People aren't good at making themselves good. Because the Bible says the heart is wicked and deceitful above all things, who can know it? But Jesus is holiness and once we come to Jesus in faith, He puts this new life and His Spirit inside us that begins to regenerate our wicked hearts. And in the same way that you did not give birth to yourself, so also you cannot give spiritual birth to yourself. That's God's job. When Jesus was talking to that woman, who caught an adultery, he said, "Neither do I condemn you, now go and sin no more." I think the interesting thing to note there is first, he says, you are forgiven. Then he says, now live for righteousness. And it's funny to me because all other religions are about, "Do you want to be forgiven? Then make yourself righteous." Other religions flip the two parts of that verse. They say, if you want righteousness, you have to make yourself righteous. Jesus says, "First I forgive you. You are clean, you are set free. Now let's work on making you righteous." If you are worried whether or not you are born of God, that's a good sign. Because the unregenerate, wicked, evil-minded person doesn't care about that. So if you are not sure, if you are nervous, "I don't know if I am going to say this, I want to be righteous, but I don't know." That's a great sign. Because that's the Holy Spirit working inside of you, pointing out to you the areas that are unrighteous. And if he is shining that light there, then that means he wants to work on those areas. If you don't detect your unrighteousness, then you are in trouble. Proverbs 3, 11-12 says, "Do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father, the son he delights in." Now, as we talk about this, the third point is now that we've gotten into the subject of conviction. When the Holy Spirit brings to light your areas of unrighteousness, the things that you are doing wrong. And you probably have one of two feelings on conviction. Number one, if you have come from the mindset that you have to earn salvation, that you have to make yourself just in the eyes of God, then conviction is just rubbing salt in a wound. From your point of view, this is just God pointing out all the ways you fall short. Conviction feels terrible if you think that you have to earn forgiveness and salvation. But if you think that you are forgiven already, that it's a past tense deal, then conviction is just God just trying to keep you on the right track. It's just a coach trying to get you to the goal. "Go and sin no more" sounds awful if you think that Jesus says you need to be there. If that's your location, go and sin no more. If you think sinlessness is supposed to be your location, then you're going to be really depressed. But when you realize that go and sin no more is your destination, then that burden is gone. When you realize you are forgiven and go and sin no more is the destination, you realize that conviction is just God saying, "You've gotten a little off track. Refocus on go and sin no more." And you say, "I'm sorry, God. I did that wrong. Thank you for pointing it out. Help me to keep on the right track." Conviction is not condemnation. It's coaching. Now don't get me wrong, God does hate sin and He demands terrible wrath for sin. But in Christ, all of that wrath was poured out on the cross. The wrath was already dealt with. It was already taken care of. So when God brings up this conviction, He's not reminding you of some wrath you're going to face in the future. He's just saying, "You've gotten off track. I love you and I want good things for you in your future. And I'm just coaching you back on to the right direction." Why would God go to the horrible situation of Jesus on the cross to remove your sin and take it away, but then keep you in misery about guilt? That's not the God of love. The God of love is He not only wants to take away the punishment for your sin, He wants to take away the misery and the load and the weight of your sin as well. He wants you to experience joy and new life. And time and time and time again in the Bible, it talks about how Jesus is new life. That new life does not include the weight of guilt on your shoulders. It's healthy to feel bad about the sins you've done. Because that sin is not supposed to be in your nature, it is wrong. But that misery that you feel about what you've done should also then be followed up with the joy of the truth that God has provided in exit. God has provided a way out of that way, of that misery, of that sin. So I know this sounds crazy, but when you feel conviction for something you've done, delight in it. When you feel bad that I've done something wrong, come to God and say, "God, I did this wrong and I'm sorry and I'm going to try very hard to repair that relationship with that person or to make restitution for any people that I've wronged." But God, I know I can't make restitution to you for what I've done because Jesus has already made that restitution. Thank you, God, for pointing out the shortcoming in my life. And please now give me the strength to walk correctly and to not fall into that trap again. That verse we read out of Proverbs says, "The Lord disciplines those He loves as a father, the son He delights in." If you feel conviction for your sin, it is evidence that God delights in you. God disciplines those He loves as a father does the son He delights in. A father who delights in his son, corrects his son. And when you feel God bringing conviction into your heart for something you've done, that's evidence that He delights in you. You feel bad because what you did was wrong, but you can rejoice because He's giving you a way to get right. He hasn't given you a way to make it right. You can't make it right. Only Jesus could make it right, but He's giving you a way to just be right. I'm going to close by all those verses I read out of context. I stopped reading right before the good part. So I'm going to finish by finishing those verses. 1 Corinthians 6, verse 11, "And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Galatians 5, verse 24 and 25, "And those who are Christs have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." In 1 John 2, 29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." When God reveals to your heart the difference between right and wrong, when He starts to convict you of your sin, remember that this is God's way of saying, "I love you and I want you to set go and sin no more as the goal for your life. You are forgiven, but I'm trying to make you a better person, and I'm only pointing these things out to get you on the right track." That's what God says when He convicts us. So delight in your conviction. We're going to have our time of open worship now, and if you feel the Holy Spirit leading you to stand up and share something, please do so. I will bring over the microphone so the people listening to the CD can hear what you have to say. But otherwise, let's spend this time with God just saying, "God, I'm sorry for being afraid of you. I'm sorry for imagining you as the Father with His hand up about to smack me. I'm sorry for thinking that that was you, that you are not a father of love. So, God, I invite you to point out the places in my life where I'm wrong, and I won't be afraid of that because I know that you love me and that you're not pointing those out to make me feel bad or to make fun of me or to condemn me, but to get me back on the right path.

I'm glad Matt gave us the rest of the story like Paul Harvey said. Too often I think when people are trying to make us feel bad and awful about what we've done, they quote the first part of the scriptures, but they don't go ahead and give us the good news. And hey, if I'm going to hear the bad news, I sure need to hear the good news. And I am so thankful, Matt, that you didn't leave us hanging out to dry and just read us the first part and then let us go home and think, oh my gosh, I am such a horrible, horrible, horrible person. There is no hope for me at all. I don't even know why I try and just fall into a pit. And I'm glad you provided a ladder out of the pit. [ Pause ] The reason we can find joy in the conviction of God is because we are in Jesus, because we have placed our faith in Him. And if anyone here has not placed their faith in Jesus yet, then that conviction is still condemnation. But the very easy solution is just to turn to Jesus, offer Him a prayer that says, all right, I'm going to trust in you to save me. And just like that, all that condemnation just becomes God coaching you on to holiness. Go and sin no more becomes our destination, and conviction is evidence of His delight in us. [ Pause ] Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a Father who delights in us. Thank You that the conviction that You bring into our hearts is for our own good. It is not to rub salt in a wound. It is not to show us that we don't measure up. It is to coach us on to holiness. It is to coach us on to go and sin no more. Thank You that You are a God and a Father of love who walks with us, who guides us by the hand towards this beautiful destination that You have in store for us. Thank You that You don't make us clean ourselves up before we come to You. But You just accept us right where we're at. And first You say, I forgive You. Then You say, now go and sin no more. Thank You, God. Help us to remember that this week. Help us to live by that. Help us to share it with others. In Jesus' name, amen.