

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part five
Sunday, January 31st, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2072
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HOW TO AVOID BOTH COMPROMISE AND DESPAIR

1 John 2:1-2 - "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

These two verses are extremely valuable for sound Christian thinking. John is dealing with an issue that still pounds in the minds of those who want to follow Jesus. We constantly are in need of **two ingredients** as we continue in our growth in Jesus Christ. We need both these things like an airplane needs two wings. Either one by itself is useless, and possibly even dangerous. But the two ingredients John offers in our text, taken **together**, will help our hearts remain sound and spiritually airborne.

Thankfully, John has these two key ingredients locked together in these two opening verses of the second chapter in a simple, direct fashion. First, there's **warning** - "**I write these things to you so that you may not sin**"(1), and secondly, there's **hope** - "**If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**"(2).

That all sounds so simple in our text, but in practice the church usually divides over which of those two truths she will defend:

- a) There are those for whom the greatest fear is that the church will somehow **compromise her stand on basic principles of holiness.**

"If you start preaching grace like it grows on trees people won't care about pleasing God. More worldliness will creep into the church. People will think they can follow Jesus and live as they please. **Make sure people know that 'these things are written so that you will not sin!'"**

- b) Then there are those who fear that **people who just hear the warning will eventually become discouraged and frustrated with their own sense of guilt and shame.**

"Make sure people understand that the gospel really gives a new beginning. Don't leave Christians crying over the spilled milk of their lives. Because spilled milk stains and stinks. And there are multitudes of believers who never once experience the joy of the Lord. Church makes

them feel lousy, unclean, and hopeless. ***Make sure they hear that 'If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.'***"

This is more than some cold, academic theological issue. ***It directly affects how you hear the Word of God.*** It affects what happens in your heart when you go to church. It affects what kind of attitude grows in your heart when you encounter Christians who have in their past things of which you disapprove. ***We are dealing with one of the central issues in the New Testament Christian experience.***

Let's look at what John has to say:

1) **THE ONLY EVIDENCE OF NEW BIRTH IS A WILL TO INSTANTLY STOP SINNING**

1 John 2:1 - "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin...."

Notice the words "***so that.***" John says that this is the ***purpose*** of all that is written in the Scriptures. This is the relationship between doctrine and life - between the Bible and real living - between going to church and you. The end result of everything God does in my heart and mind is simple. ***It's to lead me to stop sinning.*** If that isn't happening everything is phoney, wasted, and empty. Whatever I've experienced, it has nothing to do with New Testament Christianity or Jesus Christ if my heart isn't increasingly turned against its own sin.

Break down this idea from John and here's what you will find:

A) ***I AM RESPONSIBLE TO STOP SINNING*** - "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin...."

This is not something that's done ***to*** me or ***for*** me. ***I*** have to stop. Sin is not something God takes out of my life while I'm pondering something else. It requires a steadfast will and mind to stop sinning. You don't ***grow*** out of sinning. You ***stop*** sinning.

That last sentence needs to be explained. It ***is*** blessedly true that as I grow in Jesus Christ and deepen my life in His Word and Spirit He will increasingly reveal more and

more things He wants brought under His Lordship. That's a never ending process until Jesus comes again. And the sins He reveals are sins of a different **type** the longer I follow Him. They move from **outward actions** to **inward disposition and motives**.

But even though this is joyfully true, it will **always** be the case that I am the one who will still have to **stop** and **yield** and **obey** whatever it is the Lord reveals. In other words, the Bible **never** teaches, at **any** point in my walk with the Lord, that if I just pledge myself to Jesus I will automatically be brought to some sin-free position in Christ.

Ephesians 4:22 - "....put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires...."

Colossians 3:5 - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Have you ever actually **put something to death**? I can remember the first time a group of us boys **killed a gopher**. I can remember the first time I **shot a crow with a 22**. Say whatever you want, it's no small thing to personally stomp the life out of something else. Creatures don't die that easily. Killing them isn't for the timid. And we need to think about this. You can't follow Jesus without being a **ruthless hunter** of indwelling sin.

B) **IF THESE WORDS FROM JOHN ARE TRUE I NEED TO CONSTANTLY RE-FIX IN MY UNDERSTANDING WHAT SIN IS**

Let's just reaffirm some basics on the Biblical doctrine of sin:

i) ***Sin is anything that violates the clear commands of Scripture.***

It doesn't matter what the subject is, if the Bible says I must not do it then I must not do it.

"You shall not steal", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not covet", "You shall not have any other God's before me", etc. You never get to live so spiritually

that you're on a different, more advanced level and no longer have to think about those commands.

ii) ***Sin is violating the still, small voice of conscience***

Romans 14:23 - "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

The sin Paul is describing isn't something in the meat. It's in the violation of the conscience. Our circumstances are worlds removed from those of this text in one sense, but in a deeper sense, not removed at all:

"You know, I really don't feel right about this, but...." Or, "After all, there's no verse in the Bible that **says** you can't do such and such." No. There probably isn't. That's why God very tenderly put a living standard right inside your own skin. ***God has given each person a conscience to fill out all of the specifics that are covered in principle rather than detail in His Word.***

iii) ***Sin is allowing my desires to overrule the voice of God's Spirit.***

Later on in this very letter John will give a **name** to those fallen desires. In **1 John 2:15-17** he calls them ***"the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions."***

John means sin is as simple and common a practice as allowing the immediate visible realm to press into silence the voice of the invisible, eternal God. TV and movie and computer and fashion directed Christians can never love and hear the Spirit of God. That's what John is saying.

iv) ***Sin is knowing what is right but not doing it***

James 4:17 - "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

This is the important contribution James makes on the discussion of sin in the New Testament. **James says I don't have to do anything bad to sin.** I sin when I don't **respond** to the Word and the Spirit of God. I sin when I **ignore**, when I'm **lazy**, when I **procrastinate** in the pursuit of holiness, when I'm **indifferent and cold** to what I know God is calling me to do and become.

c) **IF THESE VERSES FROM JOHN ARE TRUE I NEED TO KEEP ALIVE IN MY HEART
A FRESH SENSE OF WHAT SIN DOES**

i) ***Sin separates me from God.***

The first thing Adam and Eve do after they disobey God is **hide**. The closeness with God is gone. In fact, to this day we call that event of original sin the **Fall** because that term emphasizes the **gap** - the **distance** - that now exists between God and His creation. We are not on the same **level** as we used to be. Everything is **lower** and **more removed** from God. The Bible says God cannot "**look upon sin.**"

ii) ***Continued sin in professing Christians is a denial of the power of the gospel.***

Here is a gospel that announces the coming of power and the beginning of a new creation. My continuing in sin is contrary to everything Jesus died to bring about. It denies the power of the cross before this world.

What an ugly, foul thing sin is. It can undo the power of the cross for those who see more profession than actual transformation in my life.

iii) ***Sin takes the reality and power out of prayer.***

Most of the time Christians think of prayer as being one of the difficult spiritual disciplines to faithfully practice. And I'm not standing here saying prayer is always

an easy venture for finite beings.

But I also know this - many times, when I find it particularly hard to pray, it's a ***sin*** problem more than a ***prayer*** problem. Sin makes you doubt your relationship with God. It causes you to feel you've sold out spiritually. It makes approaching God an embarrassing experience.

A situation arises that you know needs prayer. You feel a desperate need for divine help. But you're forced into a corner because as you approach God you feel the weight of your own carelessness and rebellion in other areas of your Christian walk. It's one thing to approach God when you know you've ***failed***. We've all been there. Fortunately there is the promise of ***"grace to help in our time of need."***

But it's entirely something else - and exactly what John is describing in our text - when you approach God with the request of the day, ***knowing that you've chosen to remain disobedient in another area of life where He's been probing at your heart. How can you get God's help when you feel like a hypocrite?***

John isn't some legalistic prude. He loves these people and knows he'll be off the earthly scene very shortly. And for all of the reasons we've just examined John pleads with his readers - ***"I'm writing all of this to you so that you may not sin!"***

2) **AFTER OFFERING HIS WORDS OF WARNING JOHN BALANCES HIS WORDS WITH GOD'S GRACIOUS OFFER OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

1 John 2:1b-2 - "....But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

John will soon be leaving this world. There will be no more opportunity to speak or teach these people whom he loves so much. ***"My dear children...."***, he says. He cuts to the core issues in these verses - "Your greatest danger isn't the persecution you are facing. Your greatest concern

needn't be your safety or your prosperity. The greatest danger you face is falling into sin. You can actually think it **doesn't matter** whether or not you are holy and pure. There is compromise all around. I'm writing all of this to you so that long after I'm gone you won't sin!"

Pause. And it's as though as he writes he realizes another great danger faces these people...."But if you **do** sin, never let it stop you in your Christian walk. Never let your sin be your **final** condition. You have an advocate before the Father! He's always there on your behalf. You never have to stand on the bankruptcy of your own righteousness. You can always stop. You can always turn around. You have more going for you than you think!"

It's as though John knows there are times when **all you can see is your own unworthiness before God**. It's the blackest place on earth. There are those horrible times when the enemy tells you your life has been nothing but a string of failures and sins - when you start to wonder if you're ever going to be the kind of person you know you ought to be.

There are also times when friends and fellow believers can hold on to your guilt and rub it in your face. But John is concerned that these people know that **there is One who is on their side**. And he reminds us because it's the last person you'd expect to be on your side because He is more sinless than any of our friends or families or loved ones. It's **"Jesus Christ, the righteous."**

Here is truth that is more **necessary** to cling to when I need to repent, but which is also **harder** to cling to when I have to repent. I have no trouble thinking of Jesus as that **"friend who sticks closer than a brother"** most of the time. After all, He came and died. He's gone to prepare a place for me in heaven. He is coming again to take me to be with Him. And most of the time I have no trouble relying on what the Lord Jesus has done for me. Except when I'm feeling the weight of guilt for some sin.

Dear one, we **all** face the smallness of our own approach to God when we sin. We **all** sense the lameness of our own excuses. And the Devil will remind you of all of that when you come to Jesus with your sin. Listen, never forget what John is trying to get across in this little verse. I don't know how wonderful my little prayer is when I sin. I don't know what kind of a mighty man of faith and victory I am when I whimper out some plea for grace.

When those thoughts come, brush the dust off of this text. Remember John's point. My little plea for grace isn't all that's going on when I ask God for forgiveness! Jesus intercedes right before the face of the Father! He enjoys perfect harmony with the Father. He has never sinned in any way. He is in a perfect position to plead. He doesn't pretend. He doesn't argue for my *innocence* or my *pathetic little prayer*. That's *not* what stands behind my forgiveness and restoration.

Something huge stands behind each little cry for grace. Jesus' shed blood, spilled from the purest life ever lived, has unbelievable cleansing potential. In our text John has to set himself groping for big enough words on this subject - **1 John 2:2** - **"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."**

John is trying to do the impossible in these two verses. He's wrestling with what every serious pastor wrestles with every time God's Word is opened before sinful, grace-needing people. We must all wrestle with sin fiercely. And we must all rely on grace passionately.

Remember, *before* you sin guard your soul like eternity depends on the fierceness of your diligence. But *when* you sin never stay in your guilt. Your Judge is also your Redeemer. That's why John uses that judiciary title for our Lord, **"Jesus Christ, the Righteous"**(2:1).