

Significance of Sin

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[0:00] 1 John 1-4 1 John 1-4 1 John 1-4 1 John 1-4 1 John 1-5 through 2-2

And to counter the false teachers who deny the existence or importance of sin, John affirms its reality. And this affirmation of sin's reality constitutes the second test of true fellowship.

So let's read the verses now. Again, that's 1.5 through 2.2. John says, This is the message which we have heard from him and declare to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[2:53] If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 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. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but for the whole world.

So we are going to look at the verses in three sections tonight. And in honor of Don, it is illiterative tonight. Also, that is protection for me too, because maybe in a few months you will think Don did this, and if you do not like it, you will blame it on him instead.

I know that, that was intentional by the way. So in verse five, we see the first section tonight, and that is Jesus' proclamation. So Jesus' proclamation, for those of you filling in the blanks.

And we see that proclamation, like I said, in verse five. It says, this is the message which we have heard from him and declared to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. So remember, in the prologue, the first four verses that we read for review, John asserted that he was writing about things he had heard, seen, and touched.

[4:07] So he began with something that he had heard. He said, this is the message that we have heard from him and declared to you. So by the words from him, he obviously means from the Lord Jesus Christ, because he just talked about Jesus in the first couple of verses.

The content of this message, then, is that God is light, and in him, is no darkness at all. And that precise statement is not found anywhere in the recorded words of Jesus, but remember that John heard much more than what was written down.

Plus, John clearly has already established that Jesus is God, and we know that Jesus often referred to himself as light. And just to remind you of that, here are a few examples of that.

John 8, 12 has one of the major I am statements. That's where the verse says, Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

Then later in John's Gospel, we see these words in John 12, 35 and 36. It says, Then Jesus said to them, A little while longer, the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.

[5:17] He who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. These things Jesus spoke and departed and was hidden from them.

Then just one more reference, a few verses down in John 12. Listen to John 12, 44 through 46. It says, Then Jesus cried out and said, He who believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And he who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness. So if Jesus is light, and he is, and if by seeing Jesus

we see God, then we have a lot of confirmation that God is also light.

So that can give us more confidence that what John quoted from Jesus was really something that he said. And in scripture, you know that light and darkness are very familiar symbols, because intellectually, light refers to biblical truth, while darkness refers to error or falsehood.

Morally, light also refers to holiness or purity, while darkness refers to sin or wrongdoing. And the heretics claim to be the only truly enlightened walking in the real life, but John denied that because they do not recognize their sin.

[6 : 32] So about that basic reality, they were unenlightened. And we'll see that as we go along in these verses tonight. Remember that as light, God both exposes man's sin and condemns it.

And if anyone walks in darkness, he's hiding from the truth which the light reveals. So we've talked about God being light. How much darkness does John say is in God?

John says, In him is no darkness at all. So with this phrase, John forcefully affirms that God is absolutely perfect, and nothing exists in God's character that intinges upon his truth and holiness. And John's assessment matches what James taught us in James 1.17. That's the familiar verse that says, So with that image of God as light in mind, we're going to move to the second section of the study.

And in the second section, we'll see John's pronouncements. So John's pronouncements is the second piece. And that comes in verses 6 through 10. And verses 6 through 10 contain three contrasts between words and works, or saying one thing and doing another.

[7 : 53] And following each contrast, then, is the result of the action. And we can pick those three out because each of the three contrasts begins with the words, If we say. And that first contrast comes in verse 6.

Verse 6 says, If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. So the first false claim is to have fellowship with God while failing to reflect his moral character.

So once again, that claim is to have fellowship with God while failing to reflect his moral character. And we know that definitely is a false claim. And as we know, that walk refers to a way of life or daily practice.

So to walk in darkness, then, means to live contrary to the moral character of God, or to live a sinful life. And if you claim fellowship with God without living a moral life or practicing the truth, you actually live a lie, then, because God cannot compromise his holiness to accommodate sin.

And John knew that Christians sometimes fake spirituality while engaging in acts of disobedience. Just think about what the Apostle Paul had to deal with in the Corinthian assembly, because there, David had a case of incest, and then Paul also laid down a list of sins for which church members should come under church discipline.

[9 : 13] So false claims to fellowship with God have been a tragic reality throughout the life of the church. I put this quote from John Calvin in your handout. He said, That they are alienated from God who walked in darkness.

This doctrine, however, depends on a higher principle, that God sanctifies all who are his. For it is not a naked precept that he gives, which requires that our lives should be holy, but he rather shows that the grace of Christ serves for this end to dissipate darkness, and to kindle in us the light of God, as though he had said, So in other words, God does more than just tell us to walk in the light.

Through the sanctification process, God works with us and in us to make us more like Christ. And this probably reminds you of Paul's words in Philippians 1.6. Remember the part of that verse that says, He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

So building on the fact that God is faithful to sanctify those who are his, look at 1 John 1.7. John's been talking about those who falsely claim to have fellowship with Christ.

And now in verse 7 he 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.

[10 : 38] So let's pick apart some of the key phrases. Then we'll consider the verse as a whole to put it all together. So first of all, let's think about what it means to walk in the light.

And this is another quote that's in your handout. And it says, Those that so walk show that they know God, that they are received of the Spirit of God, and that the divine impress or image is stamped upon their souls.

So if we walk according to the light, we give proof that we know God. And walking in the light means to reflect God's perfection in the human sphere, and it includes both correct doctrine, which is a synonym for truth, and also moral purity, which can be a synonym for holiness.

So if the phrase, Walk in the light means to reflect God's perfection, does that mean that the genuine Christian has to be perfect like God? Amen. Well, we'll talk about that a little bit, and see how John addressed that.

John talked of walking in the light, rather than according to the light. So to walk according to the light would require sinless perfection, and would make fellowship with God impossible for sinful humans.

[11 : 52] But to walk in the light, however, suggests openness and responsiveness to the light. So there's a little bit of difference there, even between walking in the light and walking according to the light.

So a genuine Christian walks habitually in the light, which, of course, is truth and holiness, not in darkness, which we've already said is falsehood and sin. So listen to that last sentence again. A genuine Christian walks habitually in the light, not in darkness. And the word habitually is key there. Walk then means direction rather than perfection.

So once again, walk means direction rather than perfection. And here's another John Calvin quote. I put most of those in your handout because sometimes you need to think about them a little bit more.

And John Calvin put it this way. He said, He who in sincerity of heart spends his life, yea, every part of it, in the fear and service of God, and faithfully worships him, walks in the light.

[12 : 54] For he keeps the right way, though he may in many things offend, and sigh under the burden of the flesh. So you can see, even John Calvin acknowledges that we can walk in the light even though we struggle with the burden of the flesh at times.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, the next phrase of verse 7 gives us the result. It says, We have fellowship with one another. And the key to understanding this phrase is identifying to whom the one another refers.

We'll take the easy part first. One part of that fellowship, obviously, is the person who walks in the light. Now we'll talk a little bit about the more difficult part. And that's what they mean by one another.

So there are a couple of possible interpretations for that. We'll talk about both. And then we'll look at the context to consider what John really means here. So when a Christian's conduct reflects God's moral character, then real fellowship is possible with other Christians.

So one possibility is that one another means other Christians. But it may also be that one another refers to fellowship with God rather than fellowship with other believers. And based upon this context, the second case, fellowship with God, is what John has in mind there.

[14 : 16] John's point is that if Christians live in the light where God is, then there is mutual fellowship between God and them. So that is that they have fellowship with God and he has fellowship with them.

And the light itself is the fundamental reality which they share. True communion with God, then, is living in the sphere where our experience is illumined by the truth of what God is.

So it's to live open to the revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. So that might bring to mind the possible problem, though, because verse 5 said that God is light and has no darkness at all. Yet we just acknowledge that Christians, even the best Christians, are imperfect. So how can imperfect humans have fellowship with God? Well, if you look at the remainder of verse 7, you see the answer for that.

The rest of verse 7 says, The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. So let those words sink in as though you're hearing them for the first time because it's easy to just pass over them when we know that already.

[15 : 23] John said, The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. So our fellowship with God is dependent upon walking in God's light where sin is revealed, but the revelation enables us to stay clean before him, and only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from all sin, making it possible for imperfect believers to have fellowship with the Holy God.

So we looked at verse 7 phrase by phrase. Let's think about it in its entirety because it affirms two things that are true about believers who walk in the light. The first is that they are in fellowship with

God and the second is that they are being cleansed from every sin.

As long as there is true openness to the light of divine truth, then our failures are under the cleansing power of the shed blood of Christ. So only by virtue of the Savior's work on the cross can there be any fellowship between imperfect creatures and an infinitely perfect God.

So that's the first contrast that John gives us. The second contrast comes in verse 8. And verse 8 says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

So the second false claim is to say that we have no sin. And the idea here is that our sin nature is completely gone. In other words, we're not even capable of sinning even more, or anymore.

[16:48] And to say this is to deceive ourselves. The fact that we're not conscious of our sins doesn't mean that we're without sin. And when you think about it, if we really understand that God's word teaches us about the depravity of the human heart, then we know that just because we're unaware of our failures, that doesn't mean that we're free from the failures.

So whether someone claims to be without sin for a brief period of time, or claims it permanently, the claim is still false. So whom does the verse say we deceive if we say we have no sin?

It says we deceive ourselves. So just think about that a little bit. If somebody who knew you really well heard you say that you were without sin, what do you think that person would probably tell you?

In my case, they'd probably start reciting a long list. But others can usually see us really clearly. Our problem is not seeing ourselves for who we really are.

And when you think about it, David is a perfect example of a Christian who committed great sin but failed to see his sinfulness. Just think about the case with Bathsheba.

[18:00] After that sin, David tried to carry on as the Lord's anointed one without the Lord's blessing. And then when Nathan, the prophet, confronted him, David was indignant at the man who took and killed the other man's sheep.

He didn't realize at the time that Nathan was talking about him. But the truth is God's revelation which says just the opposite. To have no sin is to have no need of a Savior which would make the coming of Jesus unnecessary.

So Genesis 6-5 is a strong statement about man's sinful nature without God's intervention. And Genesis 6-5 says, Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Fortunately, though, God in his mercy gives us a way out. Because look at verse 9. It's probably the most well-known verse of this section. It says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation. The false teachers wouldn't admit their sin, but the genuine Christians admitted their sin and forsook it.

[19:13] So the term confess there means to say the same thing about sin as God does. So for those of you filling in the blanks, the term confess means to say the same thing about sin as God does or to acknowledge God's perspective about sin.

So verse 7 is from God's perspective. Verse 9 is from the Christian's perspective. Confession of sin characterizes genuine Christians and God continually cleanses those who are confessing.

But rather than focus on the need for confession of every single sin, John has especially in mind here a settled recognition and acknowledgement that we are sinners and in need of a cleansing forgiveness.

So what does God promise to do if we confess our sins? It says He will forgive us of the sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

So we've touched on it briefly already, but does that mean we need to be aware of every sin that we do? Should we agonize over every sin and be concerned that we might not know some of the sins that we've done?

[20:22] Let's talk about that a little bit. We'll spend quite a bit of time on that and I put most of these quotes in your handout. The key is that the believer need not agonize over every sin of which he's not aware because forgiveness and cleansing are guaranteed because God is faithful to His promises and those promises are legitimate because God is just.

God can still maintain His perfect character and yet forgive us because of the perfect and righteous sacrifice of Jesus. So our salvation costs us nothing.

It's a gift from God. But salvation is costly. It costs God the death of His Son. We know John is speaking to believers here. Because John is speaking to believers, the forgiveness here is not for their initial justification or salvation.

His concern is for their sanctification. So Christ accomplished the first portion of the salvation on the cross while He was on earth. The second portion of our salvation is before the throne of God where Christ continues to make intercession for us.

And if you want more proof of that, we just need to look at the original text itself because the original text proves that we need not be aware of every sin to be cleansed. Because the Greek text does not really say the second, our sins, as indicated by the italics in the English text.

[21:41] Literally, the text reads, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us these sins. So you can paraphrase John's thought like this, if we confess our sins, He will forgive the sins we confess, and moreover, will even cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So listen again to that paraphrase, if we confess our sins, He will forgive these sins we confess, and moreover, will even cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So if we confess what we are aware of, God takes care of the rest.

So that should be something that really lifts a burden for us without having to worry too much about knowing absolutely everything we've done wrong. Because only God knows at any moment the full extent of a person's unrighteousness.

And each Christian then is responsible for acknowledging whatever the like makes him aware of. And if he doesn't acknowledge that, then that's to have an incomplete understanding of what he's supposed to do.

But when he does acknowledge that, he gets a complete and perfect cleansing granted to him. So that's why there's no need to agonize over the sins that we're not aware of. And that brings us to verse 10.

[22:55] Verse 10 has the third contrast between words and works and the third false claim. Verse 10 says, if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

At first glance, verse 10 looks like a repeat of verse 8. But the verses are really speaking of two different things. We may admit to having a sin nature while still denying any personal sin and therefore any need for confession.

And the Greek verb translated, we have not sinned, indicates a denial in the past that continues to the present. So unlike verse 8, which speaks of the guilt of a sin or sinful nature, this verse is about the denial of any particular sins.

So in other words, the people in verse 8 claim that they're incapable of sinning. The people in verse 10 acknowledge that they can sin, they just claim that they never have sinned.

So knowing that you're capable of sin and admitting that you have sinned are two different things.

And you know, if you want to think about it, maybe the people in verse 10 are even worse than the people in verse 8 because at least the people in verse 8 think they really can't.

[24:02] the people in verse 10 know they can, they just say they haven't. So why do people make God out to be a liar and show that His word is not in them if they claim they've never sinned?

Well, there are several places in Scripture where God has said that all people are sinners. And so to deny that fact is to blaspheme God then and slander and defame His name.

Of course, Romans 3.23 is one of the most famous verses where God said that all people are sinners. And Romans 3.23 says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So how does that refute the people who say that they have never sinned? I guess if you say you've never sinned and then you look at that verse you've sinned in that case because you've just said that God's word is wrong.

But Romans 3.23 is far from being the only verse where God says that all people sin. The same statement is common in both the Old and the New Testaments. So here are just a few verses to remind you of that.

[25:06] And your handout lists the Scripture reference for all of these. So we'll go through them pretty quick. Psalm 14.3 says, they have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt. There is none who does good.

No, not one. And then Psalm 51.5 says, behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. Isaiah 53.6 says, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned every one to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And Paul quotes the psalmist in Romans 3.10-12. Paul says, as it is written, there is none righteous. No, not one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside. They have together become unprofitable. There is none who does good. No, not one. So when you see all of the places where God has said that everyone sins, you can easily see why denying sin makes God out to be a liar. And you can also see why the denial shows that the person making such a statement lacks knowledge of God's word.

[26 : 14] So listen to 1 John 1.10 again, then we'll focus it more directly on the Christian. Again, the verse says, if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

And a number of verses in the Bible also tell us that believers will sin even after their conversion. Just listen to Philippians 3.12. In Philippians 3.12, Paul said these words.

He said, Not that I have already attained or am already perfected, but I press on that I may lay hold of that which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. And then speaking to believers, James said these words in James 3.2.

He said, For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man able also to bridle the whole body. So here's another quote that's in your handout.

And it says, Because a Christian will sin after salvation, he should not deny his sin. If he does, he makes God out to be a liar. When a Christian realizes through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit that he has sinned, he should agree with God about his sin, confess it, and receive the restoration to fellowship that is promised in 1 John 1.9.

[27 : 28] To deny one's personal sin in the face of God's testimony, to the contrary, is to make God out to be a liar. By contradicting his word, a person rejects it and refuses to give it the proper place in his life.

So listen to that last part again. By contradicting his word, a person rejects it and refuses to give his word the proper place in his life. The chapter break then comes at an unfortunate spot because the first two verses of chapter 2 actually belong with chapter 1.

So we've seen Jesus' proclamation, we've seen John's pronouncements, and all of John's pronouncements show the significance of sin. So now we come to the last section for tonight, and in 1 John 2, 1 through 2, we see Jesus' propitiation.

Jesus' propitiation is what goes there. And the word propitiation comes straight out of the text, as you can see. And before we read the verses, let's remember the meaning of the word.

And the word means appeasement or satisfaction. So it means appeasement or satisfaction. So with that meaning in mind, let's read 1 John 2, 1 and 2.

[28 : 42] John says, 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. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

So some of John's readers might have thought that his insistence on the sinfulness of Christians would somehow discourage holiness, but the opposite was John's intention, because with fatherly concern, he addressed his readers affectionately as children.

And children is a word that he uses a lot in his letter here. He uses it seven times in 1 John, and he also used it once in his gospel. And then he uses two similar words elsewhere in his letters too. So John's statement about sin were designed to make believers aware of sin's ever-present danger and to put them on guard against it. Lifeboats on a ship are not there to make the ship sink, but they're there in case it does.

That's an interesting way to look at it. Think about that. Lifeboats on a ship are not to make the ship sink, but they're there in case it does. So look at the first part of the second sentence of verse 1.

[29 : 56] John says, and if anyone sins. So according to Greek grammar there, the if before anyone sins carries the idea of and it's assumed that we all do.

And of course, John has already made the case that everyone is sinning. So he says, if anyone sins and we all do, then we need to know what we need to do next.

But when we sin, what good news does the rest of verse 1 have for us? It says, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

So let's talk about what it means that Jesus is our advocate. And John 16, 7 translates the same word as helper, which literally means one called alongside.

So perhaps a modern concept of the term would be a defense attorney. We can think of Satan prosecuting believers night and day before the Father due to sin, but Christ's high priestly ministry guarantees not only sympathy, but also acquittal.

[30:59] And Hebrews 4, 14 to 16 says this about Jesus' high priestly ministry. Hebrews 4, 14 to 16 says, Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need.

And actually it says, obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So go back to 1 John 2, 2 again. Speaking of Jesus, John says, And he himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

So one key to understanding this verse is to realize what John means when he talks about the whole world. And the whole world is a generic term referring not to every single individual, but mankind in general.

So once again, when he talks about the whole world, that's a generic term referring not to every single individual, but to mankind in general. We know that God's anger against sin must be satisfied.

[32:16] And in coming into the world as a man, God became the receiver of his own wrath and the means to providing escape from that wrath. So just like Romans 3, 26 says, he became the just and the justifier.

And Jesus Christ became the sacrifice in his death and satisfied God's wrath on the cross. And the sacrifice of Jesus' sinless life is so effective that it can supply forgiveness for the whole world. In other words, Christ's death is sufficient for all, but it's efficient only for those who believe in Christ. Not everyone will be saved, but we know that Jesus offers salvation to all.

And the scope of Jesus' atonement can be difficult to grasp, so here's another way to look at what John is telling us. You have this and the next one in your handout as well. Christ's death in itself had unlimited and infinite value because he is holy God.

Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to pay the penalty for all the sins of all whom God brings to faith, but the actual satisfaction and atonement was made only for those who believe. The pardon for sin is offered to the whole world, but received only by those who believe.

[33:23] There is no other way to be reconciled to God. So John's point is to remind his readers of the magnificent scope of Christ's atoning sacrifice to assure them that his advocacy of the righteous one on their behalf is fully consistent with God's holiness.

So that takes us to the end of the verses and we've now seen the second test of true faith. And true faith then requires a proper understanding about sin. So let's briefly consider how a proper understanding of sin applies to us.

From this section John has reminded us of at least four things and these are pretty simple and they come straight out of the text. One, sin is real. So obviously sin is real.

We've established that everyone sins therefore it has to be real. And the second thing then is that everyone sins. So once again sin is real and everyone sins.

And that sin subjects us to God's wrath. And that's the third thing that we need to realize from these verses. Sin subjects us to God's wrath. But finally and most importantly for us repentant sinners have a savior.

[34:38] So repentant sinners have a savior. And that fourth point is just as applicable to long term believers as it is to people who are repenting for the first time. Because of God's mercy repentant sinners all repentant sinners have a savior.

And remember what we discussed just a minute ago. That's the quote that says John's point is to remind his readers of the magnificent scope of Christ's atoning sacrifice in order to assure them that his advocacy as the righteous one on their behalf is fully consistent with God's holiness.

So if any sinning believer wonders on what grounds he might secure God's mercy after he's failed the answer is found in the first verses of 1 John 2 and those say and if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous and he himself is a propitiation for our sins not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Thank you.