

A Study of 1 John
“How do we REALLY know that we are Walking in the Light?”

II. Correct Perspective of Sin

It is in our walk with Jesus that we can know that we are in fellowship with Him and that we are continually cleaned from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7). In the last lesson we covered the first of the “Lightmus” tests which John covered to determine whether someone is walking in the light or not. The walk is not necessarily defined in terms of moving the feet, but in the progression, direction and destination of the goal in our functional relationship with Christ. The first “Lightmus” test is to hold a correct perspective of Jesus. We must understand that Jesus came in the flesh, is the Son of God, is the Christ and is our propitiation for our sins.

In this lesson we will show that one must also hold a correct view of sin in order to know that they are walking in the light. Sin is a complicated issue in the lives of the Christian. Let us see what John has to say about this.

A) We must be in AGREEMENT with God about our sin.

1John 1:8-10, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

Being in true form, John takes on both sides of the Gnostic fence. To the propagators of antinomianism, he said what he did in verse 8. If there are people who teach they have no sin left in their lives, they are self-deceived and have not the truth of God in them.

To the monastic, he says in verse 10, “*If you think that you have reached a point in your life that you have beaten sin and no longer do it, then you are calling Jesus a liar and His word is not in us.*” How do they make Jesus a liar? This is because Jesus had to come and die for their sins for all the evil that they have done. For us to say that we have reached self-perfection is to proclaim a message that we no longer need the mercies of Jesus. He did have to die for us, but the monastic said, “No, you don’t need Jesus to pay for my sins anymore, for I have improved my life to such a degree that I am fully walking in the light. This is a lie to Jesus. We better not pretend for a moment that we will reach the point of never sinning again, for we know that we will always struggle. *1 John 2:1, My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins...*” We are present-tense strugglers with sin, for that is the reality.

The word that John used for “confess” does not mean to inform or ask for forgiveness. It is the word *ὁμολογῶμεν*, meaning to have the *same* (homo) *word* (logos). Simply and contextually put, it means to have the “same word” about our Christian sins that God has about our Christian sins. Well, what does God say about the sins of the Christian so that we know whether or not we are in agreement with God?

The words for forgive (*ἀφῆ*) and cleanse (*καθαρίζω*) are both aorist, meaning past punctiliar action. In other words when we are in honest and humble agreement about our sins with God, He goes back in time to the point of our sin to forgive and cleanse it from our past. This is what happens when you are in fellowship with the One who stands outside of time. As long as you are willing to walk in the light with Jesus, the cleansing and forgiveness are erased from the presence of God. That has always been the

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message of the God for the New Testament. When you came up out of the water of baptism, our sins were taken care through Jesus Christ.

- Colossians 2:13-14, “...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”
- Jeremiah 31:34, “...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (quoted in Hebrews 10:17)
- Ezekiel 36:26, “...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...”
- Psalm 103:12, As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
- Micah 7:19, Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.
- Isaiah 1:18, Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.
- Isaiah 43:25, “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions...”
- John 8:36, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”
- Romans 6:18, “...and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”
- Romans 11:27, “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”
- Romans 8:1, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- 1 Peter 2:24, “...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature...”

That is what God is saying about the sins of the Christian and part of the “Lightmus” test is to be saying the same word that God concerning sin that God is saying. We are not to be like the Gnostics who said they are beyond sinning or are incapable of sinning, but that we are recovering sinners, thankfully cleansed by the blood of Jesus. That is what God is saying about our sins. Brothers and sisters, we will never have our joy full (1:4) if we are not in agreement with God about this.

Modern-day Gnostics

There are many good-hearted, well-intentioned, “walking in the light” religious souls who have adopted modern-day Gnostic practices, not understanding their origins. There are the liberal religious zealots who teach that they can never lose their salvation, teaching *once saved, always saved*. They actually believe that they can convert and no matter how they live, God keeps forgiving. This is modern-day Gnosticism and must be shunned.

On the other side of the spectrum are the modern-day, conservative Gnostics. In attempts to demonstrate humility, something that is required of Jesus, they really do not live like they have been forgiven. They abuse their minds, going through ritualistic behaviors like repetitive and continual requests for forgiveness, bringing up that which God has already forgiven. They even quote 1 John 1:9 in an attempt to prove this and even their plan of salvation. “*I have made a confession to Jesus that I am sinner and now I am forgiven.*” A true member of the kingdom would never fall for this logic. But does that mean walking Christians cannot know they are

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continually cleansed by Jesus? Do some of our ritualistic verbal incantations of forgiveness end up draining Christians of the confidence?

In the same way that “Once saved, Always saved” is false doctrine, “Once saved, Not knowing saved” is equally wrong. Christians of the first century, the very ones who struggled just like those in the twenty-first century, were able to be marched into an arena and fed to wild animals. They refused to deny Jesus because they knew what He had done and was doing for them concerning their sins. We must fight Gnostic teachings today just like they did in the early church. If God said He has forgiven all your sins, then that is how it is. Use that as your strength to walk in the light!

B) The Practice of Sin is not permitted.

1 John 3:4-9, Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Having the “same word” about our sins does not give us permission to practice sin in our lives. We were cleansed from our sins not to walk in them.

- Romans 6:1-2, What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Christ saved us from our sins for us to not practice them anymore. We died to ourselves and live to Christ out of great joy of having been forgiven.

- Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

We are in agreement with God about our sins when we are not practicing them. Yes, we will stumble! Yes we will mess up from time to time, much of the time or often, but we are fighting sin every step of the way. That is the difference between the practiced sin and the non-practiced sin, the willingness to fight against it with Christ’s help.

C) There is “sin unto death” and “sin NOT unto death”

1 John 5:16-18, If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death. ¹⁸ We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

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In this passage John provides some advice about how to pray for a brother that is in a tough struggle with his sin. We are introduced to a concept of “*sin not leading to death*” and “*sin leading to death*”. This is one of the more intriguing passages in all the Bible, for it forces the reader to hold to the correct perspective of sin.

John said if we ever see a brother in sin leading not to death, that sin which is not practiced, but fought, we are to pray for them. We are always to be willing to intercede on behalf of these brothers and sisters because they are trying to walk in the light just like we are trying to walk in the light. They are struggling with sin just like we are struggling with sin. We are not perfect just like they are not perfect, but we fight against it and do not give up or give in. It is more of an attitude than altitude, for we all fall short of the glory of God. If we are enlisted in prayer for this individual, not only will we be committed in our heart, but also in our actions.

On the other hand, the brother or sister who is resolved to give up and give in to the sin, this is a sin leading to death. God cannot work with the sinner who refuses to take the path of most resistance to sin. For this individual we are not to pray for in the same way for they are on a different path with a different destination, direction and progression.

Make no mistake, all unrighteousness is sin, but the unrighteousness that is part of a struggling Christian’s path is continually cleansed and not leading to death. No one who is born to God sins “leading to death”, for God will keep them from the evil one.

Walking in the light has to deal with having the correct perspective of Jesus and the correct perspective of sin. By prioritizing these correctly can make a world of difference in the lives of those that believe in the name of the Son of God that they may KNOW that they have eternal life (5:13). All the salvation in the world is not good if you can’t know that you have it.

Closing Story: *Saved at 25, but assured at 74.*

Many years ago, while preaching in a small congregation in the Midwest, this issue became very important. I was teaching a lesson about the grace of God. One of the members in the Sunday morning class asked me, “You seem pretty sure that you have been forgiven of your sins, don’t you?” I replied to the Christian, “Don’t you?” I used that moment to conduct a simple survey of the Bible class. There were 44 participants in the class, all of them baptized believers. Yet, when asked the question, “How many here know absolutely, positively, without a doubt, if you were to die at this moment, that you would be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ?” Amazingly, out of 44 covenant Christians who were there to grow in their walk with Jesus, only four of them actually raised their hands to indicate that they would.

This was incredibly disheartening to me, for I was among the people of God. I quoted them *1 John 5:13*, “*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” I asked them, “What good is salvation if you don’t know that you have it?”

A seventy-two year old man, named Rollin, who had been a Christian for nearly a half-century, made a profound statement. He said, “I ask God to forgive my sins when I am mess up,

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but I just don't know if I have been forgiven.” The following is the remainder of the conversation from the Bible class.

Teacher: “Brother Rollin, how long he has been a Christian.”

Rollin: “Nearly fifty years.”

Teacher: “Have you committed at least one sin a day since becoming a Christian.”

Rollin: “Yes”

Teacher: “Would you say that you have asked God once a day to forgive you of your sins?”

Rollin: “Well, I think so.”

Teacher: “365 days times 50 years, is over 18,000 times. Are you telling me that during the course of your Christian life that you have asked God to forgive you of your sins?”

Rollin: “Maybe”

Teacher: “Would you say that you sinned closer to five times a day than one time a day?”

Rollin: “Likely”

Teacher: “That would be more than 90,000 times that your imperfections have come to light since becoming a Christian. Have you asked God more than 90,000 times to forgive you since becoming a Christian?”

Rollin: “I doubt it.”

Teacher: “What about the sins of ignorance, the ones that you didn't even know that you did wrong in God's eyes? Did you ask God to forgive you of each and every one of them?”

Rollin: “No, there would be no way to do that.”

Teacher: “The Bible does not teach one becomes a Christian when the ask God to forgive them any more than it says to have a practice of doubt for that which God has already done for us. At some point, we are going to have to trust that Jesus has forgiven us and with that thought, we carry out the required life-changing walk of the Christian.”

That was how the class ended. Later that week, our family went on vacation in Minnesota. While there, Rollin had a heart attack. He was rushed to hospital and underwent angioplasty. Upon returning from vacation and finding out that Rollin had a near death experience, I unloaded the car and went to make a visit. At his home, Rollin was in his pajamas and sitting in his rocking chair.

I asked, “Brother, are you okay?” He brought me up do date and filled in the details. Then he started crying. Through the tears, he said, “When I was on the table, not knowing if I was going to live or die, I thought back to the class last week. It was then I realized that I had nothing more to do than fully trust Jesus' words. With an overwhelming peace, I knew, without a doubt that I was forgiven just like Jesus said in the Scriptures. I was saved at 25, but was finally assured at 74. I have not stopped thanking God for forgiving my sins ever since.”