

(1 John #7) Walking in the Light - Part Iii

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of acknowledging our sin and the need for forgiveness, and highlights the consequences of denying our sin and making God out to be a liar.

Duration: 41:44

Scripture: John 2:1

Topics: "Following Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker analyzes John's writing style and his approach to addressing sin. He highlights how John first identifies the wrong profession made by individuals and then provides a correction. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing our sins and seeking forgiveness from God, who is light. They reference biblical verses, such as 1 Kings 8:46 and a psalm, to support the notion that all humans sin. The speaker concludes by stating that the word of God should awaken our awareness of our wrongdoings and prompt us to examine ourselves.

Transcript

Now, this morning we come to the third catastrophic denial made by some professing Christian people, according to the Apostle John. And the words of my text this morning will be found in 1 John 1, reading verse 10, and then the first verse in the second chapter. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him that is God, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Now, those of you who have been with us on previous Sunday mornings will remember that this is the third such charge that John the Apostle brings against certain professing Christians of his day.

In the first place, there were those who said that they had fellowship with God. Oh, they were so sure that they were in communion with the living God. But then John announced, and announced categorically, that the God with whom we have allegedly this kind of communion is one who is light.

He is holy. Now, he says, if you say that you have fellowship with God who is light, whilst you yourself are walking on the plane of moral darkness, well, he says, the thing doesn't make sense. We lie, as a matter of fact, says John.

It's a very outright statement. We lie, he says, and we simply do not the truth. That was one.

The second was this. If we say we have no sin. Now, the claim here is that we have no sin in our nature.

Somehow or other it's gone, if we had it at all. Some of these people believe that there had been no sin anyway in human nature, that human nature was perfect, untouched by sin. Sin was in the body.

Sin was only in the material part of us. Some of the Gnostics believe that. Says John, if we say that we have no sin, that is in our nature, well, that's just a matter of self-deception.

We know ourselves, he says, or if we know ourselves, we're just playing fast and loose with the facts that we ought to know about ourselves. We deceive ourselves, he says, and the truth of the gospel, the truth of God, is simply not in us. Now, the third.

The third denial to which John refers is a denial with regards to the practice of sin. Notice it. If we say we have not sinned, if we say we've not committed any sin, we have no charge that can be leveled against us.

We are innocent of all the charges of wrongdoing. If we say that, says John, then we make Him, that is, God, a liar, and His word is simply not in us at all. Now, let's look at this.

Following the analogy of John's style up to this point, in which he has stated, first of all, in these three cases, he has stated, he has referred to the profession that is made. If we say something, then he has come to his own conclusion as to what is said, and he says in each case that it is wrong. He uses different words, but he comes to the conclusion that it is wrong, and then he follows that with a correction.

In each case, he has a correction. He puts the correct view of things and the correct approach to things before the people. Now, if that is so, I take it that, really, the last verse in chapter 1 and the first two verses in chapter 2 ought to be considered together.

Now, we can't do that today, because it would take us too long. But I would like you to remember that in your mind. If you want to analyze this epistle properly and see how peace fits into peace, this is one aspect of the truth.

And we need to see verse 10 in chapter 1 alongside verses 1 and 2 in chapter 2. Now, that being so, there are three things to consider, two of which alone we shall be looking at this morning. The three things are these. First of all, John again refers to an abortive profession about sinning, if we say we have not sinned.

Secondly, he refers to the apostles' own announced intention in writing this epistle. These things I write unto you that ye sin not. And then, lastly, he refers to God's adequate provision for those who do sin, if we sin.

For then, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. What we are going to be dwelling upon this morning, then, is but one-half, or two-thirds, should we say, of this remarkable nugget of truth that we have in these verses.

Now, let's look first of all, then, at the abortive profession that someone makes concerning sinning as a practice. If we say we have not sinned, the disclaimer is clearly specified, and it's very obvious here in the language that John uses. He's envisaging the kind of person who, for one reason or another, claims that he or she has not committed sin in the sight of God.

The use of the aorist tense here, pardon the reference to grammar, but the use of this tense means that John is thinking of someone who says, I haven't even committed one sin. I haven't said a word. I haven't done a wrong deed.

I haven't done a thing that requires forgiveness. In other words, I stand before God without fault. He envisages someone who denies the solitary action of disobedience to the divine command.

Whether or not the person concerned likewise denies the presence of sin in his or her nature is beside the point for the moment. At least, they deny this much. I have not sinned.

I don't need forgiveness. I don't need to repent. I wonder, my friends, whether, though we may judge such people harshly, I wonder whether, as we come into God's presence today, we all came with the realization that sinners, believers, and unbelievers, we have all sinned.

Did you come to God's house today knowing that you needed forgiveness? Now, if you didn't, don't be too harsh on this man that John exposes. Far too often, we Christian people only deal nebulously and generally and unspecifically about our sins. Oh, Lord, forgive us our sins, but we're not consciously acknowledging any one solitary item that is positively wrong.

Like the lady who went to John Wesley, I guess you've heard this many times, and said to him, Oh, Mr. Wesley, I'm such a terrible sinner. You are, he said. I beg your pardon, she said.

What do you know about me? You know, it's so easy, isn't it? We say it in our prayers. Miserable sinners, we say about ourselves. But if someone turned around and said, Sir, you're a miserable sinner, we'd be terribly offended.

You see, we don't take it seriously. What we have here, then, is a claim to perfection of practice, if not a perfection of condition. Now, if you proceed, as I'm sure you would do in your thoughts at the present time, if you proceed to ask, How can anyone honestly say this or claim this? Well, historically speaking, there have been one or two reasons why people have done it.

Sometimes, in history, people have claimed a kind of perfection. It is alleged, and I deliberately put it like that, that John Wesley did. When John Wesley preached so much about perfect love, it was believed by some people that he was preaching a doctrine of actual Christian perfection.

Now, John Wesley actually disclaimed that. In just a year or two before his death, in a certain London newspaper, he made a public announcement to the effect that he had told the whole world that he himself was not perfect, but still a miserable sinner under the blood of Christ, and in need of it. I say it is alleged that Wesley believed in this doctrine.

Someone who did, of course, was Dr. Charles Finney. Now, I don't want to enter into the details of the beliefs of these good people this morning, but just to refer to them, people have done this. People have believed that they did not commit acts of sin over a period, at any rate.

Now, how can they do that? Well, historically speaking, one of the main factors, and I can only refer to one, one of the main factors is this. That they distinguish between what they call sin, in the true sense of that word, and shortcomings or faults. And ultimately, there is such a downgrading of sin that they can do certain things and not call them sins.

You see, as a few evenings ago, when we were dealing with a doctrine of sin in the evening, whether it's malignant or benign, if any of you were here then and you have good memories, we were saying that one of the main words in the Old Testament and the New Testament describing sin is a word which means simply this, shortcoming. Coming short of the mark, aiming at the bull's eye and failing. All shortcoming is sin, says Paul.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The standard of perfection in the Bible is the glory of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Anything that comes short of that standard is essentially sin in the sight of God.

Now, some people have been able, therefore, to claim that they have no sin because, really, they have not followed through the implications of the biblical doctrine of sin. The moment we take this view of sin to heart, then, it becomes clearly impossible--I mean the proper view, the biblical view--it becomes impossible to deny that we have transgressed. What happens is this.

The turn and to quote from the prophet Isaiah, the moment we acknowledge this high elevated view of righteousness and of purity and of perfection, that very moment we have to acknowledge that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Now, this is what the prophet does. He does that because he accepts the glory of God as the norm.

Man was made on the likeness of God. Redemption is a renewal after the likeness of God. Sanctification, fully completed, brings us back into the image of God.

Anything short of that is sin. You know, there is, in the book of Exodus, chapter 28 and verse 38, a very terrifying reference. It's a reference, actually, to the atonement that was made in ancient Israel for the iniquity of the holy things.

Of the holy things. Now, this is the King James Version that I'm quoting. In other words, the Israelites brought their offerings and they went through their worship, but even the bringing of their offerings and the going through the formalities of worship had sin in it.

Sin that required atonement. Just, my dear friends, as we have to acknowledge our prayers need cleansing, and our praise is faulty. I'm not referring to the choir now.

I'm referring to myself. But oftentimes our hearts are not aglow with praise to God, and our lips say what our hearts do not. You know, there was a time in the 18th century when men like Wesley, and I could quote a number of others, who only chose a hymn that they concluded from the pulpit was in agreement with the ethos and the atmosphere of the congregation.

And if they could not think of a hymn that agreed with a temperature, the spiritual temperature of the hour, they didn't sing. They thought it was hypocrisy. Now, the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Wales under God was one of these men.

He was a vast knowledge of hymnology, but if he could not put his hand on a hymn that he felt was truly representative of the general atmosphere and response of a congregation, he would just dismiss the people. Because people sing what they don't believe. Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee.

How many of us have sang that and we've never consecrated ourselves? Take my silver and my gold, take my voice and let me sing ever only for my king. No, we just don't do that. We sing for anybody and we

sing everything.

You see, we're not genuine in these things. There is a sin, there is an iniquity of holy things. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags as the prophet.

Every failure to do what we know to be our duty, says James, if we know what is right and we do it not to that person, it is sin. It's as serious as that. The disclaimer specified, if we say we have not sinned, now the disaster exposed.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. These words describe the most serious state of affairs envisaged in any of the three false approaches mentioned in this challenging context. To make God out to be a liar is the most serious thing yet.

For me to lie to God is serious. For me to lie to any man is serious. A lie is a lie.

To deceive myself by saying there's no sin in my nature, it never was there or I got rid of it, it's self-deception. That is serious in spiritual matters as in any other matter. But when I deliberately make my God out to be a liar, that's still more serious.

In other words, the whole revelation of the Bible says that all men sin. It calls us not to sin, and yet it tells us there is no man who sinneth not. Now, John adds a further comment here, and it adds to the gravity of the situation.

He says we make him a liar, and then he says his word is not in us. Now, let us try and get this. It's exceedingly important.

We make God a liar, but his word is not in us if we say this kind of thing. It's not in us. We may have read it.

We may have heard it, but it's not got in. It's not got in. And it's not working within us.

Now, sometimes in the New Testament, even our Lord Jesus Christ appears to distinguish between the word and the truth. You notice earlier on John said the truth is not in us. Now he says the word is not in us.

Does he mean to distinguish between one thing and another? I don't know, but I ought to say this. Sometimes the New Testament takes one view, truth is one thing, the word is something slightly different, related, but different. Let me quote to you what I mean.

In John 8 and verse 31, Jesus said, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. Now you see the point. The word is the verbiage The word is what we have written down here.

We continue in the word, right? But if we continue in the word, we will get beyond the word to the truth of which the word speaks. And that is one way of looking at it. Jesus apparently looks upon it like that in that context.

But then in John 17, Jesus lets us think that they're wholly separate, and there's a dichotomy between them, as some of our Bartian friends suggest, and others. Jesus says, thy word is truth. Now there are these two strands, and to be fair with scripture and objective, we've got to acknowledge them.

Thy word is truth. We may not have come to the depths of the word where the truth is at the beginning. We're just dealing with words.

Someone that I once counseled said to me that she came from a very godly home. And she says, my mum and dad only hurl texts at me. I just don't know what they mean.

Now she wasn't ungrateful for that, but she hadn't been taught concerning a most important moral principle. And her allegation, I don't know whether she was right, was this, that her mum and dad threw the texts out at her. Learn your texts.

Learn your scriptures. Now that's great. I'm not condemning that.

Please don't misunderstand me. But the truth lies hidden. The principles, the reality, the truth is still deeper than the word.

He shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. There are many of us who know the words, and we are as fast bound to temptation as ever we were. If John is distinguishing between the two here, then what he's saying is this.

What he's saying is this. Even the word is not in you, let alone the truth. It's all on the outside.

It's in the head. It's objective. You've never let it in.

You know, we can do that when we hear the word of God preached or taught, whatever it is. We can be a kind of spectators in the grandstand, and we look at the preacher and we say, well now he's going through his part. And we're just lookers-on, spectators.

But we've got our armor on. We keep it out. But that represents some of us this morning.

You know, you can go through a lifetime of religion just like this, and the word is on the outside of the window. It's all out there. I'm examining it.

It is objective. It is outside of me. But the word is not penetrating.

And therefore it is no explosive dynamic in the soul. The positive truth to be considered at this point, of course, is this. When once the word of God gets in, it makes me aware of sin and of sin.

That's what, John, that's the whole philosophy. That's the principle upon which John bases this. If only the word of God was inside, really in your heart, really in your conscience, really in the depths, then you couldn't say that you've not sinned.

That's the implication. Because when the word comes in, it brings with it its own diagnostic capacities, and it quickens me to an understanding of things that are wrong. You remember this great classical passage in the epistle to the Hebrews? The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

And before him, now you notice that speaking about the word of God, and now the writer speaks of the word of God in the masculine, because God and his word are one here. And before him, the God of the word, no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare before the eyes of him with whom we have to

do Hebrews 4, 12 and 13. The word of God, then, within us, at any rate, ought to quicken an awareness of things we've done wrong.

My friends, if the word of God doesn't do that for us, we need seriously to examine ourselves. Something's gone wrong somewhere. It may be capable of being rectified, but somehow or other we've gone wrong, and we've got to go to the physician, and we've got to get things put straight.

And it's disparately important if our aim is fellowship with God who is light. You see, the word of God, even viewed objectively, even before it comes into our hearts as the seed of the gospel, even viewed objectively, tells us categorically there is no man who doesn't sin. I quote from 1 Kings 8, 46, there is no man who does not sin.

I quote from a psalm, the Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God. They have all gone astray. They are all corrupt.

There is none that does good, no, not one. I quote from Ecclesiastes, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. I quote from Isaiah 53, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We've turned everyone to his own way. I quote from Isaiah 64, we've already referred to it. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

And from Paul, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Even objectively, the word tells us that no man does so live that he never commits it. But when that word comes into us, into the depths of the soil of our hearts, it will quicken us to an awareness of things that are wrong with God.

Incidentally, this is such a big theme. You know when the canon of Scripture was being brought together in the early church? Now this was something that happened over a period. The question that people often ask is this, how did the church gather together these documents into the Bible and leave some documents outside? Now this was a consensus over a period.

But one thing that the old saints insisted was this, concerning the books now found in our Bible, whenever you hold them in your hand and let your eye fall upon them, they make you dirty. Now, I've not made a mistake. They used to put it like that in Hebrew.

The Scriptures make you unclean. What do you mean? And of course what they meant was this, these Scriptures create a sense of sin, because they're the word of God. The words of men don't make you feel sinners, don't make me feel a sinner.

The words of men, popular philosophy, popular theology even, it just doesn't make you feel a sinner. But the word of the Holy One does. It has the capacity to disclose the hidden thoughts of the heart and the measure of their being out of alignment with the purpose of God.

It's an abortive profession that we have not sinned. Now, and very briefly with this this morning, I've got to turn to the next one because we've got to see these two things together. Immediately afterwards, it's a pity that we have the division of the chapters here.

There should not be a division at this point. There wasn't, of course, in the original manuscripts. And very often we find that these chapter divisions are good, but very often they're not.

They divide things up that should never be divided. Well, the very next breath, it would seem, John goes right on to say, my little children, these things I write unto you that ye sin not. If any of you claims that you've not sinned, then you're wrong.

But don't you judge from that, says John, that you've got a license to sin. But God excuses sin, all that the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ can excuse. Not on your life, he says.

What I have said does not for one single moment excuse wrongdoing. You see, some of the things that John has said could be interpreted, I say could, need not be and should not be, but could, by a perverse mind, could be interpreted in this way. But John was making light of sin in one sense.

For example, he has said, you see, that God has provision to forgive and to cleanse all sin. Jesus Christ has died to bring about forgiveness, to bring about pardon, and to bring about cleansing. And then, as we stressed when we were in that passage, the blood of Jesus Christ is some cleanses us from all sin.

All right, then. If there is such a vast provision, it's not all that important that I sin not, is it? Uh-huh. But the one who died to make it possible for my sins to be forgiven and cleansed is the blessed Son of the living God.

And he is my Savior. He's the beloved of my soul. He's the one who sought me when I was lost.

He's the one who, though he was rich, became poor, that I, through his poverty, might be made rich. And I love him. And therefore, I don't want to trade upon his mercy and to crucify him afresh with my sins.

That's the logic. So John proceeds, and he says, now he says, these things I write unto you that ye sin not. In other words, the aim and the goal of every Christian should be not to sin, not to sin, to be a nonconformist as far as evil is concerned and the breaking of the law of God.

I'll be brief and just dwell a moment on this. Notice John's affection here. These apostles were men, but they were great men.

Oh, how the grace of God had wrought in their hearts. My little children, says John. And he's here not simply speaking as a man of age who has the right to speak to his juniors.

He is speaking as a man of affection, the beloved disciple whom Jesus loved. And that love of Jesus would flow through him. And now he takes them up, and like little children in his arms, he caresses them.

I was reading from a grammarian this last week, and he said that both in Latin and in Greek, diminutives have a special affection in them. Diminutives are words which are used, as it were, with a caress. My little one.

And that's exactly what John says here. He uses a diminutive. He wants every believer addressed by him here to know, look, I'm coming to you as a father, and I'm coming to you as a lover.

Oh, my little one, he says, I'm writing to you that you sin not. His affirmation is simply that. The intention of his writing is not to make it easier to sin, but to encourage and summon them to aim at nothing less than a life that is free from sin.

Now, there is a tension here, a very real tension, and John means us to live with it, apparently, as long as we are in the body. For only when we see our Lord, says John in chapter 3, only when we see him shall

we be made like unto him. When we see him, we shall be made like unto him.

We have privileges now. But only then shall we be likened, and that means without sin. The tension to which we refer is this.

Whereas none of us can claim complete freedom from the polluting influences of sin, or from deeds of sin, at this present time, we must be content nevertheless with nothing less than aiming at this. Now, that's a tension. We must resolutely and consistently aim at nothing less than the noncommittal of evil.

The policy laid down in the New Testament is not to go as near to the precipice as we can, without falling over, but is to keep far away from sin. An old proverb that comes from the Middle East, I'm not quite sure which country, but it comes from the Middle East, and it says this. Don't let the camel put his nose under the canvas of the tent.

Well, why not? His nose might be cold occasionally. Why not let him warm his nose? I don't remember the precise wording of it, but it goes on to say, because when once the camel gets his nose in, he'll get himself in. My dear friends, sin has a habit of bringing Satan into the heart, as with Judas.

And Satan moved in lock, stock, and barrel, and entered into Judas's carrier. But sin had its nose in a long time ago. You play with sin, and you play with fire.

The first time I commit moral evil, it's comparatively easy. No, sorry, I meant to say comparatively difficult. I have to wrestle with myself.

I have to coerce myself. I have to reason against reason to get over the difficulties in my own soul. For the second time, it's not quite so difficult.

These things I write unto you that ye sin not. My good friends, I don't know what this is to say to you this morning. I know what it has to say to me.

It asks me a very serious question, how far this is my aim in life. In all the relationships of life, in the home, on the street, in the church, in private, in public, in matters spiritual, in matters secular, how far is it the set motive of my soul not to displease my Lord? How far is it yours? Honestly now, how far? Of course, sinlessness is but a negative side of a truth. John is not simply after sinlessness.

We haven't come into the body of the epistle yet. He's going to clothe us. He's after righteousness, which is more than sinlessness.

He's after a positive quality of life. But this is the way towards it. This is the first step.

He's preparing the stage. John Owen the Puritan was right, I believe, when he said, he that hath slight thoughts of sin never could have great thoughts of God. He who deals lightly with sin never deals honorably with God.

There's a prayer I would like to pray this morning. I wonder whether you could join me. It's the prayer of a hymn and it comes from the pen of Charles Wesley.

Jesus, my strength, my hope, on thee I cast my care. With humble confidence look up and know thou hearest my prayer. Give me on thee to wait till I can all things do.

On thee almighty to create, almighty to renew. I want a godly fear, a quick discerning eye that looks to thee when sin is near and sees the tempter fly. A spirit still prepared and armed with jealous care forever standing on its guard and watching unto prayer.

I want a true regard, a single steady aim, unmoved by threatening or reward to thee and thy great name. A jealous just concern for thine immortal praise, a pure desire that all may learn and glorify thy grace. These things I write unto you that ye sin not.

And against that background we shall return a few weeks from hence and we shall look at the second half of this great truth because it is only people that have come here that can appreciate it. If any man sin, what then? Since sin is so serious. Well, says the apostle, God has made provision, hampful and full and free.

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed, but these things I write unto you that ye sin not.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, our Father, we turn to thee with the desire to be honest and open before thine all-seeing eye. And we would not make a kind of general confession of sin in the light of thy word to us today.

We would not be guilty of such an affront to the deity that we call them by their names. We acknowledge them, thou knowest what they are, sins of word and sins of thought, sins of deed. O God, our Father, cleanse us and forgive us and give us the single steady aim of which we read, an aim that is satisfied with nothing less, content with nothing less, than thy great glory in our lives.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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