

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles
Walking in the Light: Turning Away from Sin

Lesson #3 for July 18, 2009

Scriptures: John 3:19; 8:12; Romans 3:10-20; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 1:5-2:2.

1. This lesson focuses on what it means to “walk in the light.” What is that light? Is God “light”? The Bible describes God as “light.” How do we walk “in it”? How is the light related to sin? These epistles of John are very different from some of the books in the Old Testament where the name of God is not even mentioned! These books make grand statements about God on a regular basis. We must take a different approach to reading and understanding these books. The challenge here is to determine what evidence the Bible provides for these grand statements. What do they mean? To many Christians, salvation is based on forgiveness and forgiveness is the key to justification. But, *salvation* means *healing* not just *forgiveness*. We must learn not to waste our time trying to stamp out sin—which is impossible—but rather, to crowd it out by filling our lives with the “light.”

2. How do we do that?

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward. {GC 555.1}

3. Unfortunately, the most common human response to sin was described quite well by Alexander Pope:

Sin is a monster of such frightful mien
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
But seen too oft, familiar with its face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace!—*Essays on Man*

The big question for our lesson today is: Who is winning the battle for your attention and thoughts? Is it God or Satan?

4. Romans 8:3 states that God sent His Son “to deal with sin.” What needs or needed to happen to deal with sin? What is sin? (1 John 3:4; James 4:17; Romans 14:23; Isaiah 59:2) This requires a good understanding of the whole great controversy to answer one question! What is the relationship between “light” and “darkness”? How is “darkness” related to “error” or “sin”? When someone is truly ignorant about something, we say they are “in the dark” on that subject. Darkness cannot exist in the light. Light dispels darkness. When we are walking, the light makes it clear where we are headed. Adam and Eve were apparently clothed in “light.” It illuminated everything around them. But when they sinned, it disappeared. In the Scriptures darkness is equated with death; light with truth. John 3:19-21 makes it clear that, ultimately, we judge ourselves by our response to the “light.” Why do people love the “dark”? So, what is our response to the light? What should it be?
5. Read 1 John 1:5 (Compare John 1:5). This verse states that God is pure and clean, without any trace of sin or darkness in Him. By contrast, we are sinful—full of sores, darkness, and sin. (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 1:5,6; Romans 3:10-20; 1 John 1:9,10) If we are sinners and, therefore, somehow “dark,” how can we associate with God who is “light”?
6. We would all agree that sin makes us guilty and unclean. We need forgiveness and purification. How is forgiveness related to purification?
7. Do our lives give evidence of the purification process? If we are trying to travel over unfamiliar territory, adequate lighting is absolutely essential. In what way does God—“as light”—make it possible for us to progress from living lives of sin to living lives of righteousness?

8. Read Ephesians 5:8-14. If God's light shines on something and clarifies it, does that also become "light"?
9. If we want to walk in the light, we must be aware of three potential hazards and three promises from God: (See 1 John 1:5-2:2)
 - 1) The danger of inconsistent conduct: "If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in the darkness, we are lying both in our words and in our actions." (1 John 1:6, *GNB*) We must live and "walk what we talk." Profession and conduct, worship and fellowship must be consistent or we are, in fact, children of the evil one.
 - 2) The danger of denying the fact of sin: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us." (1 John 1:8, *GNB*) Many in our world today try to deny the very existence of sin! They talk about moral lapses, relational defects, or the breaking of civil laws. Are those merely lapses in our conduct or the breaking of civil human codes? Do those breaches of conduct have anything to do with breaking the moral code of God's commandments? Sin is much more than a "lapse" in our moral behavior; sin damages us, scars us.
 - 3) The serious danger of claiming sinlessness: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar, and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:10, *GNB*) The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that we are all sinners. (See #5 above) To say that we are not sinners, implies we believe God is a liar. Does God ever expect sinless perfection this side of the heavenly kingdom? We must all know people who live very "strait-laced" lives. Others look at them and say, "If heaven is going to be like that, I don't want to go there!" God certainly wishes that we were not sinners! Does God really expect us to live sinless lives? (Matthew 5:48) Or is that just a distant goal? Why does He make provision for our faults. Will He ever stop doing that? If so, when?

There are at least two ways to view sin: 1) If you talk about sin as a series of acts that people do, then you are almost forced to come up with a "legal" solution to the sin problem. 2) But if you call sin a relationship problem, then the solution is to improve the relationship. As we come nearer to a light, it becomes brighter and brighter. We need to grow up in our relationship to Him. In so doing we will become more like Him—more loving and more gracious.
10. The only successful way to eliminate sin from our lives is to crowd it out. We can never stamp out sin. By focusing on sin, we just become more embroiled in it. Far too often, we as human beings have made claims that are not consistent with the above truths. If we claim that we are sinless, that we are walking in the light, and that we are experiencing fellowship with God while still living sinful lives, John says we are just lying. We cannot live in sin and claim to have fellowship with God. (1 John 1:6,8,10)
11. How honest are we in dealing with our own sins? Do we like to pretend that they do not exist? Do we make excuses for our sins? Or, do we just berate ourselves because of them? What is the attitude God asks us to take towards sin?
12. If by beholding we become changed, is it a good idea to focus on our sins? If sin is truly evil, totally destructive, and keeps us out of the kingdom, shouldn't it scare us? Why is it that Christians have traditionally been comfortable with sin and afraid of God when we should always be comfortable with God and afraid of sin?
13. God is light. (Genesis 1:3; Psalms 119:105,130; Isaiah 5:20; John 1:5,7; John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:8; Revelation 21:23) These verses make it very clear that God represents Himself and His word as "light." Both God the Father and Jesus Christ are described in the Bible as light. (John 8:12) Are we willing to let that light shine in our lives? Are we willing to let that light shine out of our lives? (Matthew 5:16)
14. Read 1 John 1:7-9; **2:2**. Do these verses imply that *everyone's* sins are forgiven? If so, and we also agree that forgiveness leads to justification—which is the basis of our salvation—does that imply that everyone will be saved? Jesus forgave the men who were pounding nails through His hands! Does that mean that they will be saved? Certainly not! God is forgiveness personified. Look in the Old

Testament at all the statements that God made to David's descendants about David. (1 Kings 11:6,38; 14:8, etc) What do these statements teach us about God's forgiveness? Has God forgotten about David's life?

Unfortunately, many people look at 1 John 1:9 and 2:2 and somehow convince themselves that they can continue sinning and God will continue to forgive them and everything will be just fine! God is trying to help us realize that sin will kill us. We need to reduce our sinning and eventually eliminate it.

When we drive at night, we do not have to have the entire road from beginning to end illuminated fully before we begin our journey. We only need to see the first few hundred feet. In the same way, God does not have to show us all the changes that we will need to make in our lives before we start making any changes.

15. Scholars have pointed out that sin has two aspects: 1) *Sins* (plural) refer to our evil deeds. 2) *Sin* (singular) refers to our sinful, rebellious attitude toward God. Sin is what separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2) and will eventually lead to our destruction—if not corrected.
16. How do you understand 1 John 1:7? What does “living in the light” have to do with “fellowship with other Christians”? How does that, in turn, relate to “the blood of Jesus” and “purity from every sin”? Is that “purification” process a legal one whereby the “blood of Jesus” erases sins from our records in heaven? Or, does it make a real change in our lives here and now? Does the blood “cover us” so our sins are not apparent—even to God? Does the blood of Jesus “pay our debt” of sin or transgression so that God no longer holds us responsible for our sins? If the blood of Jesus is a symbolic term referring to His death on the cross, how does that deal with our sins? Did God have some way of taking our sins and placing them on Jesus so that when Jesus died, our sins were dealt with? Do our sins “die” with Him?
17. Was God able to forgive sins before the death of Christ? Was Jesus able to forgive the sins of the man that He healed at the pool as described in John 5? Was Jesus able to forgive those who crucified Him—and forgive them even though they did not ask? (Luke 23:34) Does God have to change His mind about us for us to be forgiven? Does God ever change His mind? What do we mean when we say that our sins were nailed to the cross? (Colossians 2:14) What do we mean when we say that Christ died in our place? If sin is like poison and I am permeated with it, how does Christ's death 2000 years ago keep me from dying of the poison right now? How does His death purify us and set us free? Do we need to understand any of this process? Or, does God just take care of it?
18. Read 1 John 2:1. God challenges us to rise to the standard of not sinning. We need to renounce sin completely. But if we recognize our sinfulness, we realize the need of a Savior. And that is why Jesus came.
19. How do you deal with the apparent conflict between being a known sinner and God's constant call to living righteous (sinless) lives?
20. Read 1 John 2:1,2. What do these verses mean to you? What is Jesus doing right now in the heavenly sanctuary? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* describes two things which Jesus is doing in heaven right now:
 - 1) He is our Advocate, our Mediator, our Intercessor, our Intervener. What gives Him authority to speak on behalf of sinners? The fact that He lived a perfect life in a sinful world sets Him apart and makes Him unique. Does that give Him permission to be our Legal Counsel in the courts of heaven?
 - 2) Our forgiveness is secured because, through His sacrificial death, Jesus brought about propitiation, or atonement; this means that He paid the penalty for our sins. The debt that we owed, which we could never pay, Jesus paid for us. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for July 16, 2009)

Is our God angry so that He needs to be propitiated or appeased? Or, are Jesus and the Holy Spirit

working with the Father in doing everything divinely possible to accomplish our salvation?

What is the debt that John wrote about? John represented Jesus as both Sacrifice and Intercessor. What does that mean to you?

21. Is it important to know that “Jesus lived a sinless life among us, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, where He intercedes in our behalf”? (*Ibid*)
22. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are described as our *parakletos*, or “Advocate,” “Comforter,” “Helper,” “Mediator,” or “Intercessor.” (see John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1) A *parakletos* is a person who is called to the side of someone to assist them, particularly in military conflicts, especially if one has been wounded. When called, Jesus comes to our side. When called, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid.
23. Our *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for July 16, 2009 says:

When we talk about Jesus as our Advocate and take great comfort in the fact that He is instrumental in providing forgiveness for our sins, we must be careful not to give the impression that the Father is mean and harsh and must be persuaded by a go-between to forgive us.... The Father is the One who has revealed, through Jesus, His desire for our salvation.

24. This lesson touches on several of the core aspects of the plan of salvation. Why did Jesus have to die? What is Jesus doing now in the heavenly sanctuary? What should our relationship be to God the Father? These questions must be answered if we are to understand the impact that the plan of salvation will have on you and me as individuals. But, the questions must also be answered in a much larger context and setting to understand the issues in the great controversy between God and Satan over God’s character and government. Until those larger issues are settled, our salvation is impossible! Would you even want to be saved to live forever with a “god” that is in any way arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, harsh, tyrannical, unforgiving, even severe—as Satan has claimed that God is? Those are actually descriptions of Satan rather than God. Would you want to live with Satan for eternity?

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