

Lesson for July 17, 2005

The Book of I John

Chapter 1

Verse 8

“If we say that we have no sin”

Sin is transgression of God's laws or falling short of God's righteousness. Any verbal, mental or overt activity that is contrary to God's perfect will, character or standards is sin. All human beings have a sin nature and all human beings commit sin as a result of succumbing to temptation from their sin nature. “If” is a third class condition meaning “maybe we will say it and maybe we won't.” “Sin” in this verse is singular and refers to the sin nature. The Greek word for sin is “hamartia” and literally means “missing the mark.”

There are three types of sin according to the Bible.

- 1) Imputed sin - Adam's original sin is imputed to the entire human race at birth. It was Adam's sin that alienated the entire human race from God (spiritual death). (Romans 5:12b; I Corinthians 15:21-22)
- 2) Inherent sin - When Adam sinned he brought into existence the Sin Nature. The human race inherits the Sin Nature through physical birth. (Romans 5:12a, 18, 19; Psalm 51:5)
- 3) Personal sin - Personal sin is not imputed to the human race. Personal sin is succumbing to temptation, which originates with the Sin Nature. (Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:8; II Corinthians 5:19)

There are results in each of the three categories of sin.

- 1) Imputed sin – Brings spiritual death (separation from God) upon the entire human race. (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 6:23)
- 2) Inherent sin – Mankind inherits a Sin Nature genetically at birth from which comes temptation to commit personal sin. (Romans 5:19)
- 3) Personal sin - We personally sin because we succumb to temptation from the Sin Nature; we don't have a Sin Nature because we sin. (Romans 7:15-20; I John 1:8-9-10)

“we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”

A believer who says that he does not possess a sin nature is fooling only himself (certainly not those around him).

The word in Greek for *deceive* is “planao” and means “to roam”, “to go astray”, “to err” or “to seduce.”

Saying that you do not have a sin nature means that you are ignorant of Bible doctrine (truth). The Word of God teaches us that we are born with a sin nature passed down to us genetically from our father. The temptation to disobey God’s laws originates from the sin nature. Temptation is not sin, but saying “yes” to the temptation is sin. Acknowledging the fact that we possess a sin nature means we understand that we will be tempted to sin. (Romans 5:12)

Verse 9

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins”

“If” is a third class condition – maybe a believer will confess his sins and maybe he won’t. However, until he does confess his sins, he is not forgiven.

The Greek word for “confess” is “homologeo” and literally means “same name.” It is used most often in a legal sense when confessing a crime. “Confess” can be translated to name, to cite, to admit or to acknowledge. All of these fit with the proper meaning that John is teaching. By “confessing” our personal sins to God, we are saying that we acknowledge our wrongdoing, we admit that we transgressed God’s law, we are naming our sin (jealousy, envy, slander, etc.) and we are citing our failure. All of these concepts are contained in the word “homologeo.”

When we confess our sins to God, He always does the same thing, which is to forgive us. If we name the same sin a thousand times, God is always faithful to forgive that sin. Forgiveness is based on God’s faithfulness and has nothing to do with how the believer feels about his sin. Penance, remorse, sorrow or any other emotional or overt act has nothing to do with your forgiveness. Genuine sorrow for committing personal sin *may* accompany confession, but has *nothing* to do with God’s forgiveness. An advancing believer may feel sorrow for personal sin because sin takes him out of fellowship with God. *However, how you can feel about your sin does not bring God’s forgiveness.* You may feel sorrow for your sin “until the cows come home”, but until you confess your sin you are not forgiven.

Not only is God faithful to forgive your sin, He is justified in doing so. God’s justification for forgiveness is based on Christ’s payment for sin on the Cross. Since all three categories of sin have been paid for and the believer has accepted this payment, God is just in forgiving sin.

The word for forgiveness in Greek is “aphiemi”, which means “to send away from or to send forth.” Theologically, forgiveness means the deliverance from the penalty of sin. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all sin (pre-salvation and post-salvation). (II Corinthians 5:21; I John 2:2) At salvation, the believer’s pre-salvation personal sins are forgiven. (Ephesians 1:7) After salvation the believer’s personal sins separate him from fellowship with God and the filling of the Holy Spirit, and must be dealt with. (I John 1:8-10) Confession of known sin is the only way to appropriate God’s forgiveness for post-salvation sinning. (I John 1:9) The divine mechanics go back to the Cross where all sin was judged and forgiven. Human mechanics simply agree with the judgment that took place on the cross. Confession is an extension of propitiation (God is completely satisfied with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross).

“and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

Cleanse is the Greek word “katharizo” and means to purify or purge. When the believer names his sin to God, not only is He faithful and justified to forgive those sins, He also purges us from ALL unrighteousness. “All unrighteousness” would include any sins we could not remember committing or sins we do not yet know are sins.

Unrighteousness is the Greek word “adikia” and means any deed, word or thought that violates the law or the standards of God. This word could also be translated “wrongdoing.” Therefore, God in His grace “wipes the slate clean” and we can once again resume our spiritual lives. In order to help us understand the concept of unrighteousness, let’s take a look at the doctrine of righteousness. Righteousness is translated from the Greek word “dikaio-sune.” Righteousness is an attribute of God that denotes His perfect character. Originally it was spelled “rightwiseness”, which clearly expresses its meaning. It also means “right action”, which in the case of God means that He always does the right thing. God’s justice operates according to this perfect standard of righteousness. What righteousness demands, justice executes.

In order to fully understand righteousness we must go back to the etymology of the word. Interestingly, the meaning of many words evolved into more complex and abstract meanings as the great thinkers of Athens sought to expand their thinking beyond the accepted norm of the day. This is exactly what happened to the Greek word for righteousness. There were two words originally: one a noun (dike) and the other an adjective (dikaos). Those thinkers of Athens simply added a suffix to change the meaning slightly (-sune).

At the time of the writing of the New Testament “dikaiosune” (righteousness) no longer meant simply being “good”, but rather a principle that would lead one to the correct thought and action based on a standard (God’s integrity or holiness). In other words, righteousness in the New Testament means adjusting to God’s integrity, first in thought then followed by action.

Verse 10

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us.”

“If” is a third class condition in this verse and means, “maybe he will say it and maybe he won’t.” If a believer says that he has not committed personal sin, he is literally calling God a liar. God says that everyone has sinned. (Romans 3:23) The word liar in Greek is “pseustes”, which is the same root word as “pseudo”, meaning false. It is a dangerous thing to call God a liar or to call His Word false.

Not only is this believer calling God a liar, he does not have accurate Bible doctrine in his stream of consciousness regarding personal sin. Anyone with a sin nature is going to commit personal sin and personal sin quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit. When this occurs, fellowship with God is broken (including the Holy Spirit). No fellowship with God the Holy Spirit means that He is no longer controlling your life. (Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:30, 5:18; I Thessalonians 5:19)

There is a school of thought among some Christians that says, “After salvation, it is not necessary to confess your sins.” The logic seems to be that a person is automatically forgiven on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary spiritual death. If this school of thought was Scriptural, there would be no need for verse nine of this passage. There would also be many false statements throughout Scripture regarding the result of post-salvation sinning (i.e. prayers not being answered, etc.).

Why would God the Holy Spirit have the Apostle John write these verses if it were not necessary to confess our personal sins after salvation? The answer is that He wouldn’t. In context, verses 8-10 make it very clear that we need to address personal sin in our lives (which originates from the sin nature) and use God’s recovery system to restore fellowship with God and the guidance of God the Holy Spirit.