

## ***'Living in the Light'***

A teaching series in 1 John by Rev. Robert Griffith

### ***Part 4: What Do You Do With Sin?***

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* (1 John 1:8 – 2:2)

In the 1970's American Sitcom TV show, *All in the Family*, Archie Bunker was complaining to Edith, something he commonly did. This time he was irritated by her goodness. He said to her, *"That's you alright. Edith, the Good. You'll stoop to anything to be good. You never make nobody mad. You think it's easy living with a saint? Even when you cheat, you don't cheat to win. You cheat to lose. Edith, you aint human."* Edith, in an effort to defend herself, says, *"That's a terrible thing to say, Archie Bunker. I am just as human as you are."* Archie retorts, *"Oh, yeah? Then prove you're just as human as me. Do something rotten."*

Archie sounds like he would agree with the child, who, when his Sunday school teacher asked her class: *"What are sins of omission?"* thought for a moment and said, *"They're the sins we should have committed but didn't get around to."*

Well, we may not be like Archie Bunker, but we may share his sentiment that it's difficult to live with a saint. Of course, the reason why it's difficult is that living with a saint reminds us that we are sinners. And we do not like to think about sin. In fact, sin is a very unpopular word these days – in spite of the fact that sin is mentioned 930 times in the Bible. Only two words are mentioned more than sin in the whole bible: *God* and *Jesus*. Sin was a pretty important issue in the Bible.

Several years ago the noted psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, wrote a book about how we fail to deal with sin, entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* Nothing became of sin ... it's still alive and well ... we just don't talk about it like we used to. We ignore it, deny it, rename it. Some will go so far as to suggest that sin doesn't exist anymore. It has been said that *"to err is human, and to cover it up is even more human."* Sadly, this cover-up regarding sin has even made it into parts of the Church.

Sin, in the eyes of many, is an outmoded concept. It's not fashionable to talk about sin. We live in an age where the philosophers and worldly gurus claim there is no absolute right and wrong. Our society today thinks that all truth is relative. What's true for you, doesn't have to be true for me. As a result, we are a society that has lost its moral compass. It should be obvious to any thinking person, just from media reports alone, that we are struggling with human depravity on a global scale.

Television specials are aired with commentators asking questions like *"What would make a teenager take a gun to school and shoot his teachers and classmates?"* We explore countless answers to this question, except the one we don't like to mention – sin. Human depravity. The evil that lurks in the human heart. We don't like to admit to that. Thomas Carlyle once said, *"The deadliest sin of all is the consciousness of no sin."* Why is it that we don't want to be honest about sin?

Well, one reason could be that we are very committed to sin - we humans like to sin! In fact, sin is even encouraged in our society. This is, in fact, a Satanic strategy. Satan has sold the half-truth that sin is fun and brings us fulfilment. I say it is a half-truth because sin can be fun, but it will never bring fulfilment. But we have bought the lie, and rather than deal with sin we can choose to deny sin. It is the choice of self-deception, otherwise we would have to face the fact that there are some very real consequences to sin and we don't like to think about that.

So let me ask you a question. What do *you* do with sin? John, in our text today, tells us that there are really only two options available to us. We can either deny it or we can deal with it. Denial seems to be a popular choice.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* (1 John 1:8)

*"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."* (1 John 1:10)

We like to deny the existence of sin, or the impact of sin, or the degree of sin, or the consequences of sin. We don't like to admit, like Archie Bunker, that we are capable of doing something totally rotten. And we especially don't like to admit that we do bad things because it's our nature to sin. We would rather claim to be without sin, or pretend that's the case.

It reminds me of the old story of the scorpion and the turtle. The scorpion, being a very poor swimmer, asked the turtle to carry him on its back across the river. *"Are you mad?"* exclaimed the turtle. *"You'll sting me while I am swimming and I'll drown."* *"My dear turtle,"* laughed the scorpion, *"If I were to sting you, you would drown and I'd go down with you. Now where is the logic in that?"* *"You're right,"* said the turtle. *"Hop on."* The scorpion climbed aboard and three quarters of the way across the river the scorpion couldn't resist the urge anymore and he gave the turtle a mighty sting. As they both sank to the bottom, the turtle said, *"Do you mind if I ask you something? You said there is no logic in your stinging me. Why did you do it?"* *"It has nothing to do with logic,"* the drowning scorpion replied. *"It's just in my nature to sting."*

While we don't like to admit it, it's just in our nature to sin. The Bible, in fact, teaches that all of us were born with a sinful nature. It is because of our sinful nature that we commit sins. We just don't like to think of ourselves as sinful from birth so we deny our sinful nature and deny even the sins themselves. By that I mean that we deny that sins are really sins. We call them something else. Abortion is just a women's right to chose. Adultery is just an affair. A lie is just stretching the truth. Sexual immorality is just sexual orientation. Prejudices are our convictions. Others are lazy, we are just busy. Others have pride, we have self-respect. These things may be character flaws, but they are certainly not sins ... are they? The irony is that this is all so obvious, but we just don't want to see it.

Some time ago the *Associated Press* reported that President Clifford Kurt of the Better Business Bureau in South Carolina was preparing to make a speech on ethics in the marketplace. So he went to the public library to research the subject of ethics, but the librarian explained that their main book on business ethics had actually been stolen. I'm sure the person just 'borrowed' it. ☺

The result of denying sin is self-deception and falsehood. This is what our text tells us – we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Another result is that we insult God. Our text says that we make God out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives. You see, when we deny sin we reject Jesus, Who came to save us from our sins.

Jesus is the great physician. But if you never admit that there's something wrong with you, you will never go to the One Who has the cure.

The only alternative to denying sin is to deal with it. This is really a continuation of John's discussion of walking in the light. In our last message we talked about how walking in the light is the key to fellowship with God. It is also the key to a perpetual cleansing from sin. Walking in the light does not hide our sin, it exposes it. Once exposed, we can then deal with it honestly.

John tells us that his desire is that we avoid sin altogether. He says the reason he has written these things is so that we will not sin. He wants us to walk in the light and avoid the darkness. He knows the impact of sin in our lives. He knows the consequences of sin. So he wants us to avoid it altogether. But he also knows that we are not perfect. He knows the stuff we are made of, and he knows that even if we aspire to perfection we will still slip and fall. So he reminds us that if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Here is the secret of dealing with your sins. God has made a way out. Through Jesus Christ our sins have already been dealt with before our Father in heaven. Jesus is the One Who has spoken to the Father in our defence. And He can defend us because He has dealt with our sins in the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In other words, through His sacrifice on the Cross He paid the penalty for our sins. When Jesus was hung on the Cross, He took our sins upon Himself there. He Who knew no sin personally, *became* sin for us. In fact, He bore the sins of the whole world. All sin was charged to Jesus' account. His death paid the penalty for every sin.

It is on that basis that all sins have been forgiven in Christ. It is on that basis that He has become our advocate. He pleads our case on the basis of His work on the Cross. He has dealt with our sin and the sin of the whole world. This is what makes it possible for a person to be saved and forgiven. Because of Christ's death, God has made a way for us to deal with our sin. It is not to deny it, or redefine it, or hide it, but it is to face it - to confess it. It has been said that *confession is good for the soul ...* and that's because it is!

God calls us to deal with our sin *now* by confessing it. Why? God already knows all our sins, why waste time confessing it to Him? Confession is not for God. Confession is for us. Confession simply means 'to agree with' God. In other words, we stop denying our sins and admit the truth. And when we do, an amazing thing happens. The forgiveness of God which was secured for us by Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago on Calvary, washes into our lives right there and then to empower that confession and give us the motivation to make better choices in the future.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, "*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" God is faithful and just. God is faithful to His own word and His own nature. God's nature is love and compassion and God's word has given us the guarantee of forgiveness through Christ. God is just. Christ's atoning sacrifice has satisfied God's justice. The penalty has been paid and we go free. That freedom was secured for us, once and for all time, by Jesus Christ on the cross. But we can still choose to sin and stumble our way through this life without ever experiencing the power of forgiveness which is already ours in Christ.

Our confession doesn't *cause* God to forgive us. **Our confession connects us with the power of forgiveness as we acknowledge our failings and God's grace at the same time!**

Confession is a powerful thing, but it's also a dying reality as more and more people outside and inside the Church refuse to acknowledge the reality of sin. Part of the problem here (for us) is God's abundant grace and mercy. The thing that sets us free from sin, once and for all time, can be what leads us into sin – if we fail to really connect with the magnitude of the cross of Christ and the lengths God went to in order to redeem us and reconcile us to Himself.

The reason less and less people are serious about sin today is because they have not encountered that Godly sorrow which only the Holy Spirit can give us. That deep sense of brokenness and wretchedness we feel when we encounter the holiness, purity and love of our God. I am not talking about guilt and shame – they come from the devil. I am talking about a genuine godly sorrow and acceptance of sin.

The Apostle Paul encountered this in people whenever he preached about the grace and forgiveness of God, when people asked him, *“What shall we say then, should we sin more so that grace may increase?”* No, of course not! A person who has truly encountered the amazing grace of God and has tasted His love and forgiveness will never, ever ask such a question. They will be so overwhelmed by God’s grace, the very last thing on their mind is sin. We think that because we are forgiven, we can do what we like. Well actually, we can! However, I have never met a single person who truly understands the ugliness of sin and the cost (to God) of their forgiveness who ever *wants* to sin. They want only what God wants and they hate sin like God hates sin!

As the forgiving father ran towards the prodigal son in Jesus’ parable and embraced him as a son and poured love and grace and forgiveness into that boy’s life, do you think that son would have the slightest desire to go out and sin again at that point? No! Of course not. When you are overwhelmed with the unconditional love of God, your desire is only to live as God intended you to live – in perfect harmony with His will, empowered by His grace every day of your life.

God’s love, grace and forgiveness has dealt with the penalty of sin. That is the essence of the gospel and the reason we worship Him every day. But sin is still a reality. Sin is still evil, destructive and abhorrent. The consequences of sin in this earthly kingdom have never been greater. To deny we are part of that sinful reality is to deny the truth and call God a liar. Sin will still destroy lives, destroy marriages and families; sin will destroy whole Churches and damage the witness of Christ in the community. Sin will trigger wars and death and destruction. The human race has not escaped the reality of sin - just one evening news bulletin will confirm that for us. Sin is everywhere!

So God is calling on His people to be real about our sin and the condition of sin which plagues every human being. When we are honest with ourselves, with God and with those around us, we realise once more that mankind is powerless to deal with what is our nature. Like the scorpion, whose nature it is to sting, we acknowledge that it’s our nature to sin. This is where the gospel rises above the murky depths of our depravity and shines the light of God into our lives. This is where the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes our only hope. When I agree with God about my sin, when I confess my sin, I am actually proclaiming the gospel to myself. I am declaring, *“Without You, Lord, I am only a sinner and I will continue to sin my way through this life. But with You, Lord, I am a forgiven sinner who is saved by grace, overwhelmed by love and empowered to live in Christ, through Christ and for Christ.”*

As J.C. Ryle said so many years ago, *“The heart that has really tasted the grace of God in Christ, will instinctively hate sin.”* We don’t deal with sin by focussing on sin. We deal with sin by focussing on God and the grace He has lavished on us in Christ. The power of sin melts in the presence of grace. As we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face, all the things of this earth (and especially sin) will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!

Let those who have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to us today. Amen.