

## **What About This Sin Thing?** **1 John 1:8-2:2**

The Apostle John is well known as being “John the beloved.” After studying this first epistle of his, we might come to see why the Lord referred to him as such. The stand John takes against sin and anything that would destroy the purity of true fellowship with Him that is light may have moved the Lord to love Him as deeply as He did.

As I have said, there is no middle ground for the believer in the mind of John. There are no grey areas for the believer to stand in, in the mind of this writer. In the mind of John we are either saved or not. We either walk in the light or we walk in the darkness.

As we continue our study, I would like us to consider **verse 8** and **verse 9** of **chapter 1**.

Please note how the verse begins, “If we say....” We will discover a person can “say” anything they choose to say but the proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Our actions must match our profession. It is easy to say something. The challenge is in faithfully doing what we say.

In this passage, the great Apostle will teach us an invaluable lesson about sin and the believer. He will pull no punches. He will prove that sin is wrong in such a simple and pointed manner anyone can understand who chooses to.

John boldly says that self deception about sin is possible. He will show the difference between “sin” (in us as a nature) and “sins” (acts) which we commit as the result of that nature. Although some people believe and teach that a believer can reach a state of “sinless perfection” in this life, the Apostle says the opposite. Remember how **verse 8** begins? “If we say....” Although a believer does have a perfect salvation, it does not mean they are a perfect Christian. If someone takes the untenable position of sinless perfection, the only person he deceives is himself. If you don’t believe me, just ask your neighbor, your family, a friend that will be honest, but loving enough to tell you the truth about yourself.

**Verse 9** begins in a similar way but a greatly different way than **verse 8** does. “If we confess....” Allow me to share something I feel important here about the little but significant word “if.”

In our English language the word “if” refers to a hypothetical situation. It says “if some action happens then a certain outcome can be expected.” “If” is connected with “then.” In computer science, this type of thought process is known as a “Boolean” expression. In the Greek language, from which our KJ Bible has been translated, two different Greek words are always translated as “if.” They are:

*ean*...which corresponds to our “if” and refers to an unfulfilled, hypothetical condition or situation

*ei*...which refers to a fulfilled condition and is not hypothetical. Actually it means “since” or “in light of the fact” and can be seen as such in the following two examples: **Matthew 6:30, 2 Peter 2:4**

When reading the Scripture and trying to determine which definition fits, it will be easily seen that the context will clearly determine which one is proper.

Allow me to illustrate with my favorite example. Remember Jesus telling His Apostles He would “go to prepare a place” for them in **John 14:2**? As He continued in **verse 3** He said “If I go...” which could be spoken “since I go” or “in light of the fact I go.” There was no doubt about His going, therefore, there would be no doubt about His returning.

No wonder Paul taught Timothy, and us, the need to “Study to shew ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” **2 Timothy 3:15** It is in discovering little nuggets like this that, for me, makes studying the Word of God totally exciting!

Note again the expression “If we confess our sins...” Before we consider what happens if we don’t “confess our sins,” let’s think about what it means to “confess our sins.” J. Vernon McGee said “(confessing) is the right method for bringing together a sinful man and a holy God.”

To confess means to “say the same thing.” That is, to say the same thing God says about sin: any sin, all sin. To confess means we come over to the side where God is, see what we have done as He sees it, and then come to the same conclusion He has already come to. Then we confess! “I was wrong...what I did was/is sin. Forgive me and cleanse me.”

The verse goes on to say, when we confess our sins “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” How wonderful is that!? The key here is to “confess.” John is not laying down a way and means whereby a believer can sin without consequence. He is not suggesting that our sins are insignificant, even those we refer to as “little sins.” Mark it down, **there can be no**

Tom Price RGT 2020

**cleansing unless there is confessing!** It's just that simple. The cleansing God does only comes after we do the confessing. **If we desire to have unbroken fellowship with our Father, then we must confess our sins.**

But, allow me to ask, what happens when we, as believers, fail to confess? What does that mean? Do we lose our salvation as many people think? If we don't lose our salvation, what do we lose if anything? How does sin affect us in light of the grace available in this generation of grace? ***It breaks our fellowship with the Father, not our relationship!***

Those are great questions! So, what are the answers? Remember what Paul wrote in **Romans 5:20b-6:2**? "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." (pay close attention to how Paul, anticipating the question, responds) "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (with the strongest words possible he proclaims) "God forbid." (he is saying in essence, perish the thought! How foolish to even think such an absurd thing and then he continues) "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

As a young man and a young believer, before I came to understand the truth about the grace of God which is the only means whereby a man can be accepted by God and **the fact it gives a believer the liberty to serve the Lord and not a license to sin against the Lord**, I wondered what would happen if someone failed to confess his sins or simply refused to confess his sins? What then? What would the outcome be? How would our Father deal with such a rebellious child?

Since I am a child of God and have the permanent indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in me, would it possible for me not to confess my sin after being taken to God's spiritual woodshed? Long ago I clearly remember trying to figure all of this out and just couldn't get it clear in my mind until the Lord enlightened me, for which I am eternally thankful.

While pondering these things, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and led me to **Hebrews 12:5-11**. There it was! The answer I had been looking for...needing actually. It was so simple and clear. If I, as a believer sin (and on occasion we all do) and I fail or refuse to confess my sin so I can be cleansed and ensure my fellowship remains intact, my gracious, loving Father will chastise me. He does that because I am His son, because I am part of His family, because He loves me.

Please don't lose sight of the fact this letter by John is a very intimate letter. God is writing to His children. When one of His children sins, it is a family matter as to how our Heavenly Father deals with His children.

Chastisement is not punishment although it may feel that way to us when we are experiencing it. It is actually child training. I like the fact of knowing God only chastises those that are His and those that He loves.

Still, is it possible for one of His children to become so rebellious they refuse to do what they know they should do, that is confess their sin? If so, what does that mean? And, don't forget, I just told you a few paragraphs ago "the blood of Jesus of Christ, his Son cleanseth us from all sin" which means, once it begins doing its work, it does so, continually.

That brings us to another passage we will run into later in this Book of **1 John** but, this is a good place to examine it, briefly. Remember, one of the purposes for which John wrote what he has written was so we could "know" certain things. One of those things John wanted us to "know" was that we are saved and possess the witness of that truth within us. **1 John 5:12** "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: *that ye may know that ye have eternal life*, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (emphasis mine) He made that statement after he said "**He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.**" **1 John 5:10-11**

Now, either God means what He says or He doesn't. I believe He means what He says. So, I'm sure you are still wondering about what happens if we fail to confess our sins and what happens if our being taken to the woodshed doesn't work and bring us to a place of confession? The answer found in **1 John 5:16-17** "If any man see his brother *sin a sin not unto death*, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that *sin not unto death*. *There is a sin unto death*: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and *there is a sin not unto death*."

What John is saying is simple, but rather amazing. He is saying that if a person sins a sin which merits being taken home by the Lord by a premature death, there would be no reason to pray for that person. There would be no changing the mind of the Father. This truth is perfectly illustrated in what we find in **Hebrews 12:16-17**. There we see Esau could not change Isaac's decision about or his act of giving the firstborn's

Tom Price RGT 2020

blessing to his supplanting brother Jacob. Regardless of the tears shed by Esau, Isaac would not change what he had done. Esau learned too late how foolish his decision was to sale his birthright to his brother for a bowl of pottage.

So, can we not see that if God has judged one of His children as being rebellious and has decided to administer the most severe form of chastisement that could be administered, which is premature death, then there is no reason any to pray that the Father would change His mind about the chastisement of that person. God knows what's best for His children and will do what is necessary for both Him and them.

Paul's teaching to the Church at Corinth will prove helpful in our understanding of what John is saying in this passage. We find in **1 Corinthians 11:27-32** Paul addressing improper participating in the Lord's Supper. In that passage, it becomes clear that there are at least three different levels of chastisement. In **verse 30** this truth becomes evident. Those three levels of chastisement are:

1. Spiritual weakness...“many are weak”
2. Physical illness of some type (not all physical illness is a result of chastisement...“many are...sickly”
3. Premature death...“many sleep” (**John 11:11-13** clearly defines what is meant by “sleep” for the believer: that is what death is like for the body”

For those sins which men commit and which are not sins unto death, **James 5:19-20** offers good counsel for believers desiring to help those who have sinned such a sin. One more thing on the subject of a “sin unto death,” I do not believe anyone knows what that sin is. I believe, from what my studies have taught me, it may very well differ from individual to individual. I do not believe God is flippant when deciding to enact such severe chastisement on one His children, but is able and willing to do so when and if the need arises. I believe He would much rather restore one of His children to a place of fellowship than to take them home prematurely.

Allow me to close this subject with a simple, but I pray apt illustration. Let's say your child and your neighbor's children are playing baseball in your front yard when a ball hits the house. You go to the door, warn your child not play so close to the house for fear of breaking a window. Only a few minutes pass after the warning before the ball hits the front door...this time nothing broken. Again, you go to the door, issue another warning, more sternly, with an added promise: “You do that again and you'll be coming in the house! No more playing ball for you! You had better pay attention.” Then just as you sit back down in your Lazy Boy, a ball comes flying

through your front window. Back to the door you go...you instruct the neighbor's children to leave the premises. But, for your son or daughter, you take them by the arm, ear, or whatever body part becomes available first and bring them into the house reminding them as you do, "I told you to stop! I told you what I would do if you didn't! I warned you! Now get in here and I dare you to say a word!"

To the neighbor's children, because they are not your children, you let them go without any punishment. But for your child, because it is your child, the responsibility to do something is yours and yours alone. So, you prove your love to your child. I hope this illustration has helped in our desire to understand.

I will close, as I understand the Scriptures, with the purpose behind this. It is with a principle found in **1 Corinthians 11:32**. It reads "we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." God does not always provide us with a full explanation for His decisions and actions but we can rest assured that "true and righteous are his judgments." **Revelation 19:2**. I find great comfort in that statement. I hope you do too.

I know I have taken quite a bit of time dealing with this subject but I hope you think our learning was worth the effort.

Tom Price, 2020