

Walking *in the Light*: Turning Away From Sin



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 3:19, 8:12, Rom. 3:10–20, 1 Tim. 1:15, 1 John 1:5–2:2.*

Memory Text: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NASB).

In 1982 an unusual work of modern art went on display. It was a shotgun affixed to a chair. The artwork could be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel. The problem was that the gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. Amazingly enough, people waited in lines to sit and stare into the shell's path, although they knew that the gun could go off at any moment.

Talk about tempting fate!

Unfortunately, people do the same thing with sin, thinking that they can stare it in the face and still get away unharmed. Unlike the gun, however, sin—unless dealt with—definitely will kill them.

This week John looks at the problem of sin and its solution in Jesus Christ.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible mean when it calls God “light”? What kind of errors regarding the reality of sin did John seek to deal with in these early verses? What promises does John present to us as the remedy for the sin in our lives? Why do we need those promises?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.*

The Light (1 John 1:5)

Read 1 John 1:5. What does John mean that “God is light”? After all, light is merely a physical phenomenon, a form of energy made up of photons. What point is John making? See Pss. 27:1, 36:9, Matt. 4:16, John 3:19, 8:12, 12:46, 1 Tim. 6:16.

Light is used in reference to both Jesus and the Father. Light is God’s glory, and it points to Him as the One who brings salvation. The image also emphasizes the concept of truth and revelation. And, especially in our immediate context, it stresses His moral qualities of righteousness, holiness, and perfection (*see also 1 John 2:9*).

Why is John not content to say that God is “light” but adds that “in him there is no darkness at all”?

By adding this phrase, the apostle underlines in strongest possible terms God’s perfection and His separation from sin. He is not comparable to the Greek or Roman gods, in whom one supposedly would find virtues and vices combined. God is pure holiness, pure goodness, pure righteousness. He is, in a sense, as opposite to sin as darkness is to light.

John’s mention of darkness, meanwhile, introduces a new element, one that sets the stage for what follows. As fallen beings, steeped in sin, humans belong by nature to the sphere of darkness rather than to the realm of light. If God is light and we are in darkness, the contrast between us and God, especially in terms of holiness and righteousness, couldn’t be greater.

Think about darkness. What kind of emotions, images, and thoughts does it evoke in you? Write down what you come up with about darkness, about what it represents, and about how it makes you feel. Why is it such an appropriate image for sin and unholiness? Bring your responses to class.

The Sin Problem *(1 John 1:6, 8, 10)*

First John 1:6–10 forms a unit. After his principal statement about God’s character, John deals with some beliefs apparently circulating among the believers. It is these beliefs that he criticizes.

All five verses begin more or less in the same way, namely, with the phrase “If we.” However, we notice a marked difference among them.

What are some of the claims that John, in verses 6, 8, and 10, is dealing with? What false statements are being made, and what do they have in common?

The first statement discusses fellowship with God. People claim to have fellowship with God, but in reality they walk in darkness, which means that they really aren’t walking with God.

In contrast (*vs. 7*), walking in the light results in true fellowship. Those who do that are cleansed from their sins. Therefore, to walk in darkness has to do with living in sin. Living in sin and claiming to have fellowship with God is, according to John, a lie.

The next two claims, in verses 8 and 10, also are linked with sin. Though John speaks against the practice of sin, he’s very clear about the reality of it in our lives. In verse 8 he seems to be dealing with the belief that humans are not sinful, a teaching that goes against the most basic Christian doctrine.

Why is John’s declaration in verse 10 so important? What are the implications of the idea that “we have not sinned”?

Notice the progression in these verses. In verse 6, the folk are lying. In verse 8, they deceive themselves. In verse 10, they make God a liar. Obviously, John understands the reality and seriousness of the sin problem for humanity.

How open and honest are you with yourself regarding the reality of sin in your own life? Do you tend to ignore it, justify it, or berate yourself over it? What should be your attitude toward your own struggles with sin, and what can you do in order to cultivate the right attitude? What is the right attitude?

Responses to the Sin Problem *(1 John 1:7, 9; 2:2)*

It's clear that in these verses John is dealing with the seriousness of sin. How does he understand sin? In 1 John 3:4 he equates sin with lawlessness. According to 1 John 5:17, sin is wrongdoing or unrighteousness. It is a departure from the will of God as revealed to us in Scripture. Sin also is opposed to truth. It alienates from God the person who commits sin, and this alienation leads to spiritual death. *Sin*, in the singular, may point to the separation of the sinner from God; in the plural, *sins*, it may point to sinful acts. However we view it, one thing is certain: Sin is real, and unless dealt with, it will destroy us.

First John 1:7 and 9 contain divine promises regarding the solution to the sin problem. What are those promises, and how can we make them real in our own lives? How can we experience for ourselves what God is promising us here?

Forgiveness of sins has become possible because of Christ's death on the cross, the shedding of His blood as the sacrifice. Because we have transgressed the law and therefore deserve death, He died in our place and has set us free from the eternal condemnation that our transgression otherwise will bring us. More so, His blood purifies us from every sin.

However, from our side, confession of sins is necessary. The term *to confess* in 1 John 1:9 also can mean "to admit," "to acknowledge." The text does not mention to whom sins have to be confessed. God is certainly implied, because in the next part of the verse we hear that if sins are confessed, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins. It may be that confession of sins includes also public confession before those who were hurt through our sins; even so, the forgiveness of sin comes only from God.

First John 1:9 also has the force of a command. We should lay our sins before God, and He will forgive us and purify us. Sinning makes us guilty; we need forgiveness. Sin makes us unclean; we need purification. Through Jesus, God has made a way for us to have both.

What areas of your life might you need to change in order to better avail yourself of these wonderful promises? What holds you back from choosing to surrender all your sinful ways to God?

The Christians' Goal *(1 John 2:1)*

In 1 John 2:1 John calls us not to sin. How should we understand this admonition?

The context of the call here not to sin comes in the context of walking in the light, which was introduced with the statement that God is light. If we want to live in fellowship with Him and His children, we must walk in the light, and to walk in the light means to renounce sin (*1 John 2:1*).

John addresses the believers in a caring and intimate way, calling them “little children” and telling them one reason for writing his letter: They must renounce sin completely. By doing this, he is not suggesting that a completely sinless existence is possible, but he is pleading that Christians stay away from any definite act of sin.

Why does John balance his admonition not to sin with the phrase “and if anyone sins” (*NKJV*)? See also *1 Kings 8:46*, *Rom. 3:10–20*, *1 Tim. 1:15*.

The discussion of sin here could have been misunderstood in the sense that someone might think that sin does not matter: “Do not claim to be without sin; you are a sinner anyway. Therefore, just live your life and do not worry about sin.”

John therefore has to balance his statements about sin, and he does this with *1 John 2:1*. The goal of a disciple of Christ is not to sin. Christians must admit that they are sinners, yet, they must seek to live without sin.

At the same time, John doesn't want to give the idea that we can be perfectly sinless. Therefore, along with his admonition against sinning, he says: “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate . . .” (*NKJV*). This is a clear acknowledgment of the reality of sin in the lives of Christians. Even consecrated and sincere Christians may commit sins. Unfortunately, sinning is always a real possibility for church members. Therefore they need help. They need someone to help them resist temptation, but they also need someone who intervenes for them after they have sinned.

How can we learn to live with the tension of being sinners, and yet being admonished—very strongly in the Bible—not to sin?

The Christians' Comfort *(1 John 2:1, 2)*

First John 2:1, 2 contain wonderful statements that comfort repentant sinners and fill them with hope and courage. In spite of sin and guilt and horrible consequences that often arise from our sins, there is a solution. John has already mentioned forgiveness, or purification of sins. Now he comes back to this topic again, saying that this forgiveness has become possible through Jesus.

How? First, He is our Advocate, and He intervenes in our behalf. This Advocate is identified as the Messiah (“Christ”), and it is said that He is righteous. Righteousness was attributed to God the Father in 1 John 1:9. It is attributed to the Son in 1 John 2:1, and it’s because of His righteous character that He can intercede for us.

Second, 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.

John therefore portrays Jesus as Sacrifice and Intercessor. In the context of the New Testament witness, this implies 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.

The term *paraklētos*, translated “advocate” in 1 John 2, has been translated differently; for example, “comforter,” “helper,” “advocate,” “mediator,” or “intercessor” (see *John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1*). It is a person who is called to the side of someone else and who stands up for someone else. A *paraklētos* can be a person who helps a friend. In the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is the helper. In the first Epistle of John, Jesus is the helper and intercessor (*1 John 2:1*).

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. Such a picture of God is unwarranted. He is the One who sent Jesus in our behalf (*John 3:16*). Also, a few verses earlier we were told that He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (*1 John 1:9*). Jesus does not have to pacify the Father. On the contrary, the Father is the One who has revealed, through Jesus, His desire for our salvation.

Based on what we have just read, how do you understand the wonderful promises given us in 1 John 2:1, 2? What do they mean in terms of our daily walk with the Lord? How can you make those promises more real in your own life? What changes should those promises bring to our experience?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Confession,” pp. 37–41, in *Steps to Christ*.

“ ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ The conditions of obtaining mercy from God are simple and reasonable. The Lord does not require us to do some grievous thing in order to gain forgiveness. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to commend our souls to the God of heaven or to expiate our transgression. He that ‘confesseth and forsaketh’ his sin ‘shall have mercy.’ Proverbs 28:13. In the courts above, Christ is pleading for His church—pleading for those for whom He has paid the redemption price of His blood. Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 552, 553.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, read what you wrote about the thoughts and emotions and images that the idea of “darkness” brought to you. How does that help you better understand not only what it means to be unrighteous and in sin but also what it means to walk in the light of God?
- 2** How could you help those who are so burdened with their sins and guilt that they are ready to give up on God completely? What promises and encouragement can you offer them? What examples from the Bible can you find of God forgiving some very heinous sin?
- 3** Some people believe that we have to be utterly free of all sin before we can be saved. How do you deal with this belief without, at the same time, giving the impression that sin doesn’t matter?
- 4** Someone killed most of a family of people who were not Christians and who never professed faith in Jesus. Years later, on his deathbed, the murderer confessed his deeds and accepted Christ as His Savior. How would you respond to this comment by a surviving member of the family: “So, according to you Christians, my whole family is destined for final punishment, while the person who murdered them now has the promise of heaven? Is that what your religion teaches?”

A Better Tomorrow

by E. KIKOMEKO

Eric is 20 years old and a student at Bugema Secondary School in Uganda. His father left the family several years ago, and his mother tries to support her four children by selling vegetables and snacks she makes. But it's difficult. She managed to build a four-room mud-brick building that she rents to provide a small monthly allowance for her children.

Eric is the eldest, and the man of the house. His siblings are 15, 13, and 12. The four live in a single room, and Eric supports them by working during his school breaks. He cuts grass with a machete, fetches water for people, and does whatever he can to earn a little money. The other children keep the house clean, wash clothes, and cook their daily porridge of beans and cornmeal. Sometimes—when they can afford them—they eat a few potatoes.

Eric has been caring for his siblings since he was 17. He studies hard, and his grades are OK. Classes begin at 5:00 A.M., and except for dinner, he stays at school to study until lights out at 10:00 P.M. Life is difficult at best, and almost impossible at other times. The school helps him financially by letting him continue his studies, even if he owes on his bill. The headmaster gives him work whenever he can, and sometimes he gets a little financial help. During holidays he makes bricks.

In spite of his almost impossible schedule and responsibilities, Eric insists that his brothers and sister do their best. He encourages them to keep moving forward and assures them that life in the future will be easier than it is now. He dreams of becoming an engineer, but he knows that it will take many years to finish his education.

Eric isn't the only student on campus who's struggling; many others must work to pay their school fees too.

"I have faith that God will see us through," he says. "We cannot see the end from the beginning, but we know God sees our needs and cares for us. I try to tell my siblings that it's up to them to make the right decisions and to work hard. If they choose the wrong path, it will affect their entire lives.

"As I care for my brothers and sister, I'm learning what it's like to be a father, to teach them and to care for them and to discipline them. That will help me in the future."

Eric is grateful for the Adventist school that has opened its doors to him and his siblings. "Without this school, what would we have?" he asks. He looks around him, at textbooks and papers. "Nothing. Thank God for a Christian school in which to study." And thank you for making Adventist education possible through your mission offerings.

E. KIKOMEKO lives in Bugema, Uganda.