

# “What Can Wash Away My Sin?”

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## **Text:**

I John 1:5 - 2:2

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

## **Introduction:**

John is writing to us so that we might experience the same communion with God and with his Son Jesus Christ that he experienced. He has told us that to do this we must remember that God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all. It is, he says, impossible for us to have fellowship with him if we are walking in the darkness. We are presently working through his four conditions for walking in the light. They are:

- We must renounce sin
- We must obey God and love
- We must reject the world
- We must keep the faith

What John has to say about renouncing sin comes in the form of the refutation and correction of three false claims. The first which we have already considered is that sin is not important; that we can be in fellowship with God without renouncing sin. As we have seen, this is impossible as both our fellowship with God and with one another depends on our walking in the light.

Today we will look at the second false claim about sin and then try to come to some conclusions about how we can renounce sin. The second and third are similar, but there is an important nuance of difference between them. The first: "If we claim that we have no sin" is a denial of what we sometimes call the sin nature. It is seeing ourselves without a natural inclination to sin, seeing humans as essentially good. John says to do this is to deceive ourselves. He also says that anyone who makes such a claim does not have the truth abiding in him. The truth he is speaking of here is generally what he means when he speaks of the truth. It is the truth that has been revealed by Jesus Christ. To see ourselves or other humans as essentially good is self-deception. Everything we know about human history and behavior tells us that there is something wrong with us. We may aspire to the good. We may dream of the good, but most of the time we come far short of achieving it both individually and corporately. Almost anything we set out to do that involves humans will fail if we do not factor in sin as a major element of the equation.

Again we do not know exactly what those who were making this claim in the first century were saying or how they were thinking, but it really doesn't matter. What is import for us is to take sin seriously both in regards to ourselves as individuals and to the human organizations that we form. We will never advance in the Christian life or achieve much that is worthwhile in life until we find a way to discover and deal with the corruption and corrupting influence of our sinful human nature. How should we view human sinfulness and our own personal sinfulness? Based on John's argument in this passage let us consider some points of action.

## I. Take Sin Seriously

The first thing we can say is that we must take the corruption of sin seriously. As we have already seen to do otherwise is self-deception. We must admit that it does exist and that it our major enemy. It is our enemy first because it is the cause of death and destruction, but it is also our enemy because it keeps us from God's *shalom*, from living in peace with God and with one another. Sin skews our thinking, corrupts our desires, and poisons our acts. Unless it is brought to light, exposed for what it is, and renounced it will constantly sabotage everything that we undertake.

It is for this reason that John says that the proper approach for the believer is not to deny that he has this inclination to evil, that sin is in him, but rather to "confess his sins". To confess is to acknowledge, to avow, to admit. Notice that the false claim here is sin singular which as I said is denying our basic inclination to sin. The remedy, John says, is to confess our sins, plural. The way we deal with sin is by dealing with sins. Most of us do not mind admitting to our sin, but we have a harder time acknowledging our sins. It is much easier to say: "I am a sinner" usually quickly adding "like everyone else", than to say: "I am a liar", or "a thief", or an "adulterer".

We must treat sin in the soul like disease in the body. We begin by focusing on health. As we do the right thing to promote the health of our bodies, so we must have an overall plan for encouraging spiritual health. When sickness occurs, however, we must treat the specific illness from which we are suffering. No doctor will give you a remedy for disease. He will treat you for the specific disease from which you are suffering. So we must deal with the specific sin that is troubling us. We begin by identifying it, by naming it, by calling it what it really is. This is what John means when he says: "If we confess our sins." Once we have confessed it we must renounce it. Christ died to deliver us from the power of sin as well as the penalty of sin. This is the reason Paul says in Romans 6 that sin shall not rule over us.

## **II. Desire not to Sin**

Not only must we take our penchant to sin seriously, we must also have a sincere desire not to sin. We must understand that Christ died to set us free from sin, and that when we persist in sinning we are rejecting the light that he has brought into our lives and into the world. The desire to avoid sin comes first from our desire to be in fellowship with God. Once we have experienced that communion, the desire to remain in fellowship with God should motivate us above everything else to not want to sin.

We should also be motivated by the destructiveness of sin. Once we have experienced the destruction and the disorder that sin brings into our lives and into the lives of those around us. Once we see how it disrupts the harmony and peace of all human organizations, we should profoundly desire to see its end. We should purpose in our hearts that we will not be its source or its cause. Even with this desire we will stumble at times, but without it we will be constantly defeated.

## **III. We Must have A Clear Understanding**

The next thing I would mention in overcoming sin is that we must have a clear understanding of what is and isn't sin. We must have a conscience that is in sync with the will of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:13-14). In this passage he is telling his hearers that they had had ample time and opportunity to reach a state of spiritual maturity, but that some of them are still at the beginning stages of faith and hence in danger of going astray. What especially interests me is his description of spiritual maturity. He says that those who are mature "have their power of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil".

Remember Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. The worst evil is often that which hides behind a veneer of goodness. The conscience must be exercised, developed so that it sees each situation each act and potential act in its true light for what it really is or would be if it were carried out. Only then will we see clearly so that we may do right.

#### **IV. Christ our Guide**

What is the source of this spiritual maturity? How do we come to have a conscience that informs us clearly and concisely, enabling us to avoid the pitfalls of sin and to walk in the light. If we had read on a few more verses in chapter 2 we would have read these words: “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). To walk in the light is to walk as Christ walked. Paul’s image is that of having Christ formed in us, or having the mind of Christ. In Ephesians 4 he is explaining how God has placed us in the church and has given gifts to the church so that each of us may attain spiritual maturity. He describes what this maturity looks like in verses 13 and 14 in these words: “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” The measure of maturity is Christ. To perceive the good and evil in the situations we face in life we must see them as Christ sees them. Where we might see opportunity, he would only see temptation. Remember he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. He always saw through the temptation to what truly lay behind it.

Let me give you one example. In John 6, the morning after he had fed the 5000, crowds came to him and wanted him to be their king. We might say: “what an opportunity, think how much good I could do for these people if I were their king.” Not for an instant did Jesus entertain a thought of accepting their offer. He knew the source of the offer. He had heard it before in the wilderness. He knew

what he was on earth to accomplish and he immediately heard the voice of the evil one in the proposal of the people. It is this kind of perception that we need to discern good and evil; to understand the thoughts and intents of our own heart. It is Christ formed in us that gives us this capacity. It is the ability to see the situation as he would see it, hear the words as he would hear them that give us the ability to act as he would act.

So we come back to the beginning injunction: “Walk in the Light”. The light is Christ.