

# How and How Not to Deal With Sin

## 1 John 1:8-10

December 15 & 16, 2012  
Steve DeWitt

My sermon was basically prepared and then news came of the mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. We all feel horror about it and our thoughts and prayers go to the families and friends and the whole community there devastated by this evil. It is sadly ironic for us here as we studied 1 John 1:5-7 last week. This passage has a reality to it today:

God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Light and darkness. A metaphor describing two diametrically opposite moral and ethical realities. God is light. Absolute purity. Goodness and beauty. Holy and righteous. Darkness is the absence of light. Darkness is evil. To walk in darkness is to be capable of the most grotesque evil. What Adam Lanza did Friday was evil and sinful beyond imagination but not beyond biblical truth. Even the Christmas story we celebrate has Herod mass murdering all the children in the region of Bethlehem. Mathew says, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah (31:15), A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more. (Matthew 2:18) Our country hears the Rachels of Newtown weeping and our country tries to answer this with psychological profiles and societal ills.

The Bible's answer for this is the same as Columbine, 9/11, and the Holocaust. Mankind loves darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil (John 3:19). What does this completely messed up world need? It needs a Savior. It needs light. This is what Jesus said was his mission: To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:18)

Darkness to light. All sin is darkness and all sinners live there. Jesus came into our darkness to bring us into the light, and someday he will reign and there will be no more darkness and no more days like Friday.

If we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

My outline is as simple as John's outline. How NOT to deal with sin and how to deal with sin.

### How Not to Deal with Sin

The first of these we already saw last week in verse 6: If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

## Celebrate it (Verse 6)

They celebrated it by refusing to turn from it or seeing it in contradiction to God's light and holiness. Theologians call this antinomianism, ("anti-law" or better, "no law").

In practicality, people were taking the Christian gospel and saying, "Hey, I'm a Christian under the grace of God. I'm forgiven so now I can live any way I want. Come on, let's party because we go to heaven anyway! It's all grace, baby!"

It is the apparent celebration of grace but it actually is a perversion of it. God's grace doesn't sanction sin; it forgives it and does so at the infinite cost of the blood of Jesus. A genuine Christian can't celebrate or sanction sin because to do so is to devalue the cross and what Jesus accomplished there.

John calls that a lie and those who practice it, liars. Why? If we fellowship with a God of moral beauty, the moral orientation of our life will be toward that purity. We can't celebrate it because God doesn't celebrate it. He judges it and condemns it and punishes it.

That was last week. Now he introduces another fallacious perspective of sin.

## Deny it (Verses 8, 10)

- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (Verse 8)
- If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (Verse 10)

The second claim of the sessionists—"we have no sin" (verse 8) and "we have not sinned" (verse 10)—does not mean that they would say they never sinned in their whole lives. Rather, they were claiming that their version of Christianity allowed them to achieve a status of moral and spiritual perfection. Might we have anyone here claiming that? Probably not.

There are some branches of the Christian tree that historically have made such claims. The story is told of one of my spiritual heroes, Charles Spurgeon, who met a man that made the claim that he was without sin. Spurgeon invited him to his home for dinner. At the dinner table, Spurgeon took a glass of water and threw it in the man's face. The visitor was indignant and verbally retaliated against him. To which Spurgeon said, "Ah, you see, the old man within you is not dead. He had simply fainted and could be revived with a glass of water."

One writer says that is why a person making such a claim can only deceive himself, but he can't deceive anyone who actually knows him. Start with his wife.

What is behind this? The natural man has to do something with sin and its byproduct, shame. Adam and Eve hid themselves. David agonized for a year after Bathsheba. Everyone knows the feeling of guilt and accountability for our actions.

Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem, The Tell-tale Heart illustrates it well. The narrator of the story is a man who murdered someone. The days following the murder, the man hears a heart beating louder and louder. He thinks it's the heart of his victim and it eventually gets so loud he confesses to the crime. What heart did he actually hear? It was the loud beating of his own guilty heart. Sinners hear a loud beating heart and that heart is within us.

What do we do? Where do we go? How do we cover it or get rid of our sense of responsibility for it? We can claim we're not guilty of anything. Our culture is very good at this. Moral behavior is not described as sin because that suggests a moral standard, perhaps even a God to whom we are responsible. So we explain our actions away. We redefine sin as a syndrome. Or a biological need. Or we are victims of someone else's mistake in our life. I had bad parents. It's the government's fault or The educational system did it. Really anything can create a victim mentality. We are desperate to blame someone else for our actions.

- "Modern fallacies claim that sin is a disease or a weakness, something due to heredity or environment, necessity or the like; people come to regard sin as their fate, not their fault. Such people deceive themselves." (New Bible Commentary)
- The deadliest sin is the consciousness of no sin. (Thomas Carlyle)

John says, all such denials are examples of self-deception and show that the truth is not in us.

If we look back to verse 7, we see that to walk in the light is to become more aware of sin, not less and certainly not to deny it. If I may play with the metaphor a little, to be saved is to step into the light, but my understanding of the majesty of God's holiness is just beginning. As I grow in my understanding of who God is, that light gets brighter and brighter. As it does, my awareness of my ongoing struggle with sin also increases. One indication of a mature Christian is that he is exceedingly aware of his own failures. The Apostle Paul is exhibit A. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15 that in his own eyes, he is the worst sinner of all. In spite of his obvious advancement in godliness, he knew God which also revealed the depth of his own depravity and wrote, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

When we are in the light of God's purity, we see more sin, not less and certainly don't deny its presence.

So what are we to do with sin? Don't celebrate it. Don't deny it. Confess it.

### How to Deal with Sin (Verse 9)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

#### Confess it

If we confess. Don't celebrate it or deny it, rather own it; own up to it. The Greek word used here for confess is most helpful. It literally is, "to say the same word" or "to agree." Why would the translators go with "confess"? We see now how diametrically opposite the biblical response to sin is from celebrating it and denying it. God's holiness doesn't allow him ever to celebrate sin or overlook it. But gloriously, he can forgive it!

But that forgiveness is conditioned upon the confession of the sinner; owning it. It's not a syndrome. It's not someone else's fault. It's not because of a family member or my genes. It is because I am a sinner. When I confess, I am saying the same word as God about my sin. I am agreeing with his assessment of it. I don't hide it. I don't deny it. I don't celebrate it. I grieve over it. I repent. As a cross-centered Christian, I mourn in my confession that this is yet another sin Jesus died for.

At the end, I am going to give you a sample confession of sin. What we haven't yet seen is how our confession produces freedom from guilt and allows us to continue to walk in the light.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (Verse 9)

Faithful and just? Faithful to what? Just about what? Both of these are character qualities of God. Did you know God has promised to forgive sins confessed to him?

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

This passage describes how God will relate to us in the New Covenant which was inaugurated by Jesus and defines our relationship with him. A covenant is a promise. God promises to forgive our sins and not hold them against us. There are many more promises like this. God promised to forgive. At issue are his trustworthiness and his integrity. How do we know God will actually forgive us? Because he is faithful to his promise to do so.

If God doesn't forgive a truly confessed sin, he ceases to be qualified to judge the sin himself as he would be a liar (verse 10). Our sins are as forgiven as God is God.

But can God just do that? Just say, "You're forgiven?" This gets at the second word, just. God is just? How? Look back at verse 7, The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin; then verse 9, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. They're almost identical.

God's justice was fully satisfied by the redemptive merits of Jesus dying on the cross as our representative and substitute. God has to punish sin. All sin is and will be punished and paid for either on the cross by Jesus or in hell by the sinner. How did Jesus pay it for us? God's justice is fully satisfied by Jesus' moral payment of his life. So God is just in accepting that payment, a payment he makes himself! As Paul says in Romans 3, It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:26) The result of this forgiveness is the last phrase, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Here is the completeness of what God has done. It is one thing to say, "I forgive you for what you did." It is another to clean up the mess. To cleanse something is to make it disappear.

It's like a child who, in defiance of a parent, pours grape juice on the white carpet of the home. If he repents and confesses to his dad, his dad can forgive him. But the stain is still there. To cleanse it is to make the stain—make the pollution, the offense—go away.

How does God make the stain go away? Back to verse 7, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. His blood is the moral carpet cleaner. The guilt is taken away AND in God's eyes, it is as if there was never a stain in the first place. So what then is left for us?

### Receive forgiveness

This can be the hardest thing, particularly if you are a perfectionist type. We want to do something else to really show we are sorry for it. So we self-flagellate in some way, "God look, I really am sorry and I am not going to do such and such for three months as self-

punishment!" What that really says is that Jesus' death was not enough! I must punish myself in some way.

God says, Just receive it. I think of the words of Jesus to the woman caught in adultery, who apparently was sorrowful and contrite. Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on, sin no more. (John 8:11)

This is more wonderful than celebrating sin or denying it can ever be. If we just own it, confess it, and take God at his word, then with a sincere desire, we can step back into life with a desire to sin no more. If God forgave us when we were in darkness, can't he forgive us when we are in the light?

This is how we walk in the light. God continues to cleanse us as we confess and seek that cleansing. He purifies our hearts and minds and motivations and over time, we increasingly say no to ungodliness and create godly habits in our lives. It is never perfect. We are always in need of forgiveness, but we become more holy and grow more into the likeness of Jesus.

### A Sample Prayer of Confession

Dear God, I am a sinner in need of your grace and forgiveness. As you know, I \_\_\_\_\_ . I regret \_\_\_\_\_ and confess it to you as sin. I ask you to forgive me and thank you that Jesus died for this. Thank you for being a faithful and just God, please cleanse me from this sin and any future desire to do it again.

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2012 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) on the copied resource.