

Often seemingly little things can matter...a lot. Just ask Oliver Jufer (**picture**). This 57-year old Swiss citizen during a drunken spree vandalized the King of Thailand's portraits. He pled guilty to five counts of *lese majeste* -- the crime of offending the dignity of a sovereign -- for defacing portraits of the king of Thailand with spray paint. Originally, he'd faced up to 75 years in prison, but the court showed mercy and sentenced him to 20, and then halved that term to 10 because Jufer confessed. A month later the King pardoned him.

The Western World was appalled that such a heavy sentence would be given for what we see as a minor crime. In the States vandalism usually results in a fine and possibly restitution. Any jail time is very rare. But Thailand takes crimes against their King very seriously.

The courts of Heaven take crimes or sins against the King of Kings seriously. The penalty for just one sin is death. Remember Genesis 2? "*And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die"*" (vss. 16-17). Ezekiel echoes that, "*The soul who sins is the one who will die*" (18:4).

Yet most don't take sin seriously. Even in the Church our view of sin is more like the world's than **The Divine Perspective of sin**. Many no longer believe in right or wrong. We no longer believe in sin. What is sin for you, may nor may not be sin for me. It's all relative and frequently, irrelevant.

We don't call sin sin or take responsibility for it. What we often call a disease or a dysfunction, the Bible calls sin. Sin is serious. It cost God the Father the life of His only Son to pay for our sin. It's not something to take lightly. In 1 John 1:8-2:2 (p. 862) we find **The Divine Perspective of Sin**.

Until we have **The Divine Perspective of Sin**, our situation is hopeless. We're doomed to live in death. You can re-label arsenic but it's still poison. Sin is deadly. Thomas Carlyle wisely observed, "*The deadliest sin is the consciousness of no sin.*" It's imperative that we see sin as God does. We need to take a line from our AA friends, "*My name is Scott and I'm a recovering sinner.*" In our passage we find both sin and its cure.

**1. Claiming we are sinless ultimately leads to blasphemy.** Dallas Seminary professor, Howard Hendricks (**picture**), was speaking at a conference and asked this question of the audience of 2000, "Do you know someone who is perfect?" He was about to go on when he noticed a lone hand raised in the back of the auditorium. So Howard Hendricks asked, "Are you perfect or do you know someone who is?" The man replied, "Oh, no, I'm not perfect. But as far as I can tell, my wife's first husband was."

Some falsely reason that sin is only sin as long as you believe it's a sin. If you follow that logic, we can conclude that if one does not believe in the concept of sin, they've never sinned. 1 John says, "No way!!!"

In verses 6, 8 & 10 there is a diabolical downward progression for such erroneous reasoning, a series of "if" statements that call us back to God's Perspective. Verse 6 "*If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.*" We lie to ourselves and others, and it hurts our fellowship. Verse 8 "*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*" We delude ourselves and lose our grip on truth and reality. Verse 10 "*If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him (God) out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.*" If we're not honest deny our sin, we're calling God a liar. Basically, we're saying God is nuts. That's blasphemy.

We all sin, even after conversion. For most of us the problem is that we don't define sin or see it as serious like God does. Denial is common. We deny the existence of sin, or the impact of sin, the degree of sin, or the consequences of sin. We get apathetic about sin. We don't like to admit we're capable of doing the most vile things. We especially don't like to admit that we do bad things because it's our nature to do them. We'd ignore it. This is the claim of the person that doesn't believe they have a sinful nature.

It reminds me of the story of the scorpion and the turtle (**picture**).

A scorpion, being a very poor swimmer, asked a 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'd drown and I'd go down with you. Now where is the logic in that?" "You're right," cried the turtle. "Hop on."

The scorpion climbed aboard and halfway across the river gave the turtle a mighty sting. As they both sank to the bottom, the turtle, resignedly, 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 my nature."

It's our nature to sin. Scripture teaches that all of us were born with a sinful nature. Because of our sinful nature, we sin. While salvation conquers our sinful nature in that there is a new King on our heart's throne, it doesn't eradicate our sinful nature. But we don't like to think we're really infected, so we deny our sinful natures, and deny even the sins

themselves. We call them *mistakes*. Gossip is sharing concerns. Gripping is expressing our opinion. Pride is healthy self-esteem. Adultery is an affair. A lie is a white one. Prejudices are convictions.

The result of denying sin is self-deception and broken fellowship with God. The outcome is that we insult God. Our text says that we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives. When we reject God's word, we reject Him and deny His eternal plan for our salvation and the atoning sacrifice of His Son. We will struggle with our old sin nature until we're finally Home. John Calvin (**picture**), *"There remains in a regenerate man a smoldering cinder of evil, from which desires continually leap forth to allure and spur him to commit sin."*

But we often convince ourselves that we're right until confronted with the truth of God's Word. Then, we must make a decision as to what we are going to do with that knowledge. **Claiming we are sinless ultimately leads to blasphemy.** But there's good news. There's a cure.

**2. When we agree with our Father about our sin, He forgives us.** There's another wonderful "if" statement sandwiched in here in verse 9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* The word *confess* literally means *"to say the same thing as."* To confess your sin means that you agree with God that you blew it, that you're a rebel, that your heart is evil and your actions deserve condemnation. This is important because there is both false and true repentance.

False repentance is like King Saul when he was confronted by Samuel. He didn't really think he'd done wrong by disobeying God and sparing Agag the king of the Amalekites and the best of the animals. He insisted that what he had done was in the spirit of God's command. He only said that he was wrong when the kingship was about to be wrenched from him. True repentance is like David when he was confronted by Nathan after his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. He cried out: *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are proved right when you speak and justified when You judge"* (Ps. 51:3-4).

Wonderfully, when we agree with God and repent, God always forgives. We don't have to beg for forgiveness. God wants to forgive us. Richard Foster wrote, *"At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive."*

*Catharsis* is a term used by counselors and psychologists in describing things that help people release some of the anxiety and emotion they've acquired because of experiences they've gone through. This phrase *"and cleanses us from all unrighteousness"* contains the Greek word *katharos* from which we get our English word *catharsis*. It means *"clean, pure, purified by fire, like a vine cleansed by pruning and so fitted to bear fruit, free from corrupt desire, from sin and guilt."*

The word *cleanse* is in the present tense which means that it is a continuous action. Isn't that great!! If we walk in the light then the blood of Jesus literally *"keeps on cleansing"* us from all sin. Agreeing with God about our sin is *catharsis* in which we free our heart of all guilt.

It's important to remember that John is writing this letter to those who are followers of Christ. As we strive to live a life that pleases God, we're going to fail. The remedy isn't to cover up our sin, pretending everything's all right, but to confess our sins to God.

Some have thought this is talking about the Roman Catholic sacrament of confession to a priest. While Scripture encourages us to confess our sins to each other, there's no indication anyone else is involved except the person who's sinned and God. There's no need to go through an intermediary or do penance. We simply confess our sin and trust God to keep His promise. But if we don't deal with sin, it reproduces and infects others.

In 1818 one out of six women who had children died of something called "childbirth fever." Back then, a doctor's daily routine started in the dissecting room where he performed autopsies and from there he made his rounds to examine expectant mothers. No one ever thought to wash their hands, at least not until a doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis (**picture**) began to practice strict hand washing. He was the very first doctor to associate a lack of hand washing with the huge fatality rate. Dr. Semmelweis only lost one in fifty, yet his colleagues laughed at him. Once he said, *"Childbirth fever is caused by decomposed material conveyed to a wound...I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proven all that I've said. But while we talk, talk, talk, women are dying.. I'm not asking for anything world shaking, only that you wash your hands."* Yet no one believed him.

1 John 1:9 tells us to confess our sins, to regularly wash our souls. It's essential. The failure to confess our sins results in spiritual infection that hinders us in our own spiritual walk. God is not asking for anything earth shattering, only that we confess--that we wash our souls--regularly so that we truly walk in the light.

**3. If we love the Father, we won't want to sin.** *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin"* (2:1a). Most have seen the bumper sticker, *"Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven."* John would add another line, *"But they're*

*striving for holiness.*” That bumper sticker seems to say, “God accepts me, faults and all, so you need to accept me, too!” Okay, but please give me some assurance that you’re working on things!

As the author of Hebrews states (12:14, ESV), we are to “*strive for...the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*” Holiness is not an optional accessory that you may add to your Christian life at some point if you choose. Holiness is essential. If we love the Father, we’ll strive to be holy. We’ll strive not to sin.

By calling them “*my little children,*” the Apostle John reflects both his pastoral heart for them and his longer experience as an old man. He cares for them as a father or grandfather does. He’s lived longer than they have and speaks with experience about how to live a holy life.

Sometimes we reason, “If I sin, I can claim 1 John 1:9 and God will forgive me.” We act as if 1 John 1:9 is a parachute BUT God’s will is that we stay in the plane and not test it. We need to be frightened and as hesitant to sin as we would be to jump from a plane. If we truly appreciate our salvation, if we truly love God – we don’t want to sin.

You and I will never be cured of this sin disease in this life but we can do things that are preventative medicine: being in the Bible, praying, worshiping with God’s people, fellowship, having someone hold us accountable, etc. That’s what John is saying. Do everything you can to not sin! John Newton (**picture**) the former slave trader and author of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*, understood this, “*I am not what I ought to be; but I am not what I once was. And it is by the grace of God that I am what I am.*”

**4. God’s grace in Christ’s sacrifice is the solution for our sins.** “*But if anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense—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*” (2:1b-2). There are three terms used here to describe Christ’s sacrifice for our sins: **a) He is our Advocate with the Father; b) He is Jesus Christ the righteous; and c) He is the propitiation for our sins.**

**a) The second person of the Godhead is our Advocate.** “*we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense.*” Some versions translate this as “Advocate.” It’s from a Greek word transliterated *Paraclete*. It’s only used of Jesus Christ in our text but Jesus uses it of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. It refers to one who is called alongside to help, especially in a court of law.

If you’ve been accused of a crime, you need a defense attorney to come to your aid and plead your case before the judge. The Holy Spirit, as our *paraclete* comes to believers while we are on earth in Christ’s place to testify of Him and lead us into all truth. He assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). But here John says that Jesus is our Advocate or *paraclete* in heaven “*with the Father.*”

Jesus is always before the Father in Heaven. He never takes a vacation or a coffee break. Whenever we need Him (which is always!), He’s always there, coming to our aid. When we sin, Satan, the accuser (Rev. 12:10) charges us as guilty before God. But Jesus Christ, our defense attorney, steps to the bench, but He doesn’t enter a plea of “not guilty.” That wouldn’t be true. We’ve sinned. Instead He enters a plea of guilty, but then He argues for pardon because He paid the penalty for that sin by His own substitutionary death. Therefore, His client is not liable for punishment.

Although we should confess our sins, John doesn’t say, “**If** we confess our sins, we have an Advocate.” Rather, he says, “*If anyone sins, we have an Advocate.*” Our forgiveness and standing with God don’t depend on anything we do but on the finished work of Christ. Because Jesus Christ is perpetually in heaven presenting His shed blood before the throne of God, every person that draws near to God through Christ can know that Satan our accuser has no grounds for conviction. We’re guilty as charged, but our penalty has already been paid by our Substitute, who is also our Advocate or defense attorney and pleads our case for us!

John also doesn’t say that our Advocate pleads our case before the Judge, but rather, with the Father. God is not a hostile judge who has to be won over grudgingly. No, He’s the loving Father who sent His own Son to pay the penalty we deserved! The Father didn’t compromise His own righteousness or justice in any way because His sinless Son fully met the demands of His holy law. As Paul puts it, God is both “*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26 NASV).

**b) The second person of the Godhead is our righteousness.** He’s “*Jesus Christ the righteous.*” Each name points to an essential part of our forgiveness. First, we needed a human Savior, *Jesus*. Only a human being could atone for the sins of other human beings. Jesus was completely human, not just in appearance, but in His very nature.

We need a divine Savior. Jesus is the *Christ*, God’s anointed one, sent to bear our sins (Isaiah 53). A mere man’s death would only pay for his own sins. As God in human flesh Jesus’ death had infinite merit to atone for the sins of every human being who will ever live.

He is also Jesus Christ the *righteous*. Jesus had to be “*a lamb unblemished and spotless*” (1 Pet. 1:19). If He had sinned, He would have had to die for His own sins. But He fully kept God’s law and His righteousness is now freely imputed to anyone who trusts in Him. “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become*

*the righteousness of God in Him.*” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus Christ alone is an adequate Savior. He is all we need to stand before a holy God, not in a righteousness of our own but because of His righteousness. We can add absolutely nothing to what Christ has already done.

**c) *The second person of the Godhead is our propitiation.*** “*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*” John uses a word used in ancient pagan writings to refer to the appeasing of an angry god, usually by a sacrifice or offering. While God is loving, He hates sin and is angry at sin. That’s not something that we talk about a lot today. Theologian, John Murray (**picture**), puts it this way: “*The Doctrine of Propitiation is precisely this, that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own Son to the end that He by His blood should make provision for the removal of this wrath. It was Christ’s so to deal with the wrath that the loved would no longer be the objects of wrath, and love would achieve its aim of making the children of wrath the children of God’s good pleasure.*”

And it doesn’t end there, “*and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world*” (2:2b). John flings open the doors to the entire world, as if to say, “God’s grace is far more extensive than you can even begin to imagine! Christ’s sacrifice is not just for the enlightened few; it is not just for the Jews; it’s for the entire world!” Anyone, anywhere who trusts in Christ’s sacrifice for sin will be saved.

**Conclusion:** Sin is deadly. If we’re going to please our Heavenly Father, we must realize how costly it is. It cost the Father His only Son. It’s nothing to be trifled with. We are called to be a holy people and we must have God’s perspective of sin. Someone said, “*Treating sin lightly is like stroking the head of a tiger and saying ‘nice kitty’.*”

One of Woody Allen’s most powerful films was *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (**picture**). In the film there’s a dramatic scene of a man struggling with guilt, whether he should confess it or cover it.

He’s committed adultery. The main character, Judah, comes down to his den in the middle of the night during a thunderstorm. He’s been speaking with his rabbi brother, Ben. Judah is trying to explain his reasons for wanting to murder a woman with whom he has been carrying on an affair for two years and Ben is trying to talk him out of it.

Each of us must make that some choice...to confess our sin or attempt to cover it up. Which one will you choose? Will you confess your sins to God or just try to cover them up? As we pull this together, let me summarize these vital truths with three concluding statements.

**a) *Holy living is a possibility.*** John wrote, “*so that you may not sin.*” While we’ll never attain sinless perfection in this life, we can and must live with consistent victory over sin. Christians can and must live holy lives.

**b) *Perfectly holy living is not a possibility.*** John adds, “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate.*” The *we* includes the Apostle John. Though an old man who’d walked with the Lord for many years, he knew that he was not beyond the possibility of sinning. While the general tenor of our lives should be growth in holiness, we will never in this life get to the point where we no longer sin.

**c) *Understanding God’s gracious, sacrificial work through Christ will lead to consistent holiness.*** If you understand what Jesus Christ did for you on the Cross, you will not want to take advantage of it by sinning more. Instead as you reflect on God’s amazing grace shown to you, you who deserved His wrath and you think about His love that sent His Son to be the propitiation for your sins, it will make you hate sin and strive to live to please the Savior. Remembering what Christ did for you on the cross will motivate you to cut sin out of your life and grow in holiness.

“*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*” By God’s grace, let’s look at sin from God’s perspective, **The Divine Perspective of Sin** and fight to not give in or sin! But if we sin, confess it quickly! We need to keep short accounts with our Heavenly Father!