

A white, two-story house with a dark roof and a chimney sits on a rocky cliff. Large, white-capped waves are crashing against the base of the cliff, creating a dramatic and somewhat stormy atmosphere. The sky is overcast and grey.

JOHN'S EPISTLES

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**LIVING** WITH  
**ASSURANCE**

JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2021  
**PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE**

LifeWay

# LIFE BY DESIGN

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**We live in a broken world, seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make life work.**

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Gen. 1:31 and Ps. 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16; Col. 2:14; and 1 Cor. 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15; Eph. 2:8-9; and Rom. 10:9.)

When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Phil. 2:13 and Eph. 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live and to die, and that He was raised from the dead to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

A white, two-story house with a dark roof and a chimney sits atop a rocky cliff. The house has several windows and a door. Below the cliff, white waves are crashing against the rocks, creating a misty spray. The entire scene is set against a light, hazy sky.

JOHN'S EPISTLES

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LIVING WITH G  
ASSURANCE

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# JOHN'S EPISTLES: LIVING WITH ASSURANCE

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I am a glutton for punishment. As a full-time pastor with a wife and four kids at home, I decided to embark on a Ph.D. I have always loved learning, especially about things I can use to sharpen my ministry skills. As I progressed through the degree program, I found the work to be rewarding and encouraging. That was true until I enrolled in the course entitled “Inferential Statistics.” I have never been a math guy, so this course required me to put in many extra hours of practice. The hardest part of the course was not learning the formulas and how to work them but reading the problem and choosing the right formula to solve the problem correctly. It did not matter if I put all the numbers into the equation correctly if I chose the wrong formula to use. This is much the same in our spiritual lives. When we face difficult situations in life, it is vital we understand rightly the things of God. His truth is the only way to see clearly through the fog of life. If we misunderstand or misappropriate a spiritual doctrine, it can devastate our faith, our walk with Jesus, or perhaps even our eternity.

It is from that setting that the apostle John wrote his letters. John wrote to instruct believers about a correct understanding of who Jesus is and why right doctrine really matters. He desired for them to see how their understanding of who Jesus is had real impact on their daily lives, decisions, and future. To see this in context, we know John wrote these letters as a response to disagreement among believers about correct theology and conduct. In his earlier Gospel (John 14:6-7), John recorded these words from Jesus: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father.” John may have had these words on his mind as he wrote these three letters. He knew his readers needed to see the truth about who Jesus is, and



**Sea of Galilee from Hipoos. John was called to follow Jesus from his fishing profession in Galilee (Luke 5:9-11).**

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE  
(60/9533)

he was concerned false teaching about Jesus had risen among the people, primarily that He had not been raised bodily from the grave.

John also had another concern. When we do not rightly understand the gospel, then we do not rightly understand sin. A robust teaching on the nature and mission of Jesus leads us to a right understanding of our sin. When false doctrine creeps in, the effect usually minimizes the destructive nature of our sin. We fail to see how sin impacts our thinking and living. This is a dangerous place to live. The Scripture often reminds us of the dangers involved in sinful living (Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-6; Jas. 1:15). John encouraged his readers (and us today) to have right thinking on the doctrine of the gospel in order to protect ourselves from the dangers of living in sin.

Lastly, John brought a word of encouragement to his audience. He reminded them continually of the great love God had for them. Therefore, they should love others. Love is the centerpiece of the gospel; it ought to be the centerpiece of a Christ-follower's life. When we walk in this love for Jesus, and toward others, we can be assured we have eternal life in Jesus. Our salvation never comes through our works (only by faith in Christ), but someone who demonstrates no love for Jesus nor for others most certainly does not possess a saving faith.

The Letters of John should serve as a blueprint for us as we examine our doctrine in light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. They should help us to live under the truth that sin is deadly and should be taken seriously. They should also help us to see the love of God and our love for others are key to walking faithfully in the kingdom.

It is possible 1 John was meant to be a cover letter for the Gospel of John. The gnostic heresy of the first century forms the background for both books. The Gospel has an evangelistic thrust, while 1 John is written to believers.

## **Date, Setting, and Author**

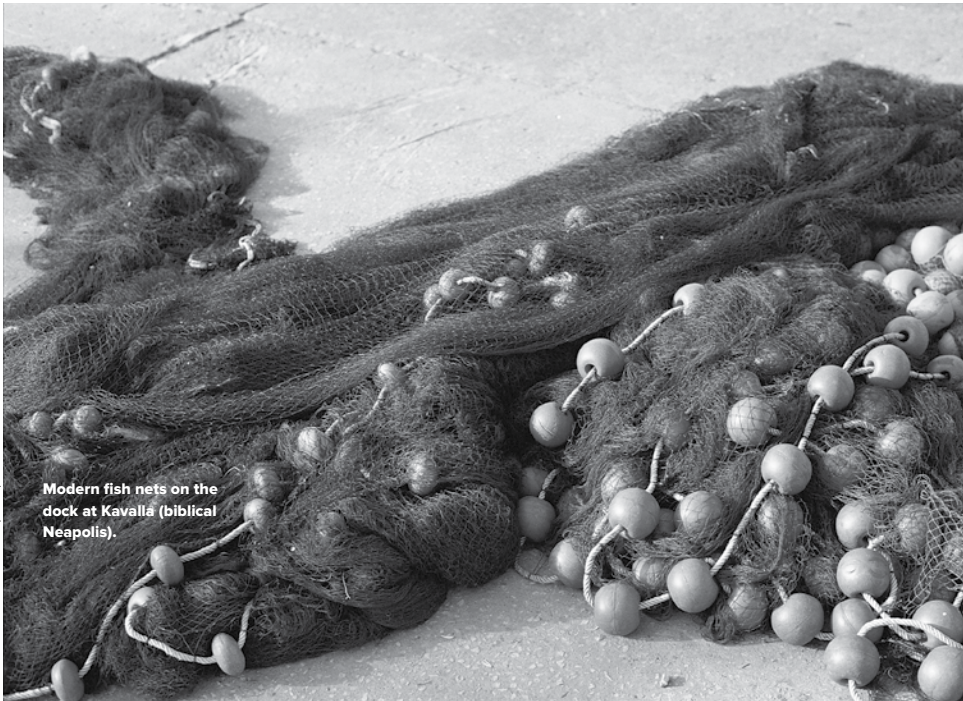
Before we examine in great detail the teachings of these letters, it is vital to understand their context and audience. Most conservative scholars agree the three letters were written by the apostle John (author of the Fourth Gospel). This consensus is not only a modern understanding, but dates back to early church leaders such as Irenaeus, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Tertullian. The apostle John, also known as the disciple Jesus loved (John 21:20,24), was called to follow Jesus from the fishing profession in Galilee (Luke 5:9-11). He, along with his brother James, were sometimes called the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17).



The first two of John's Letters appear to be written to churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Ephesus was the largest and most prominent city in the region. It was known to be both beautiful and wealthy. Ephesus was the leading trade center of the Roman Empire in the region. It was a cosmopolitan city full of pagan worship. The temple of Artemis (Diana) was located there. This temple was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

From Ephesus it is likely these letters were passed throughout the churches in the region in order to teach and encourage believers. The third letter has a more personal nature. It is addressed to a man name Gaius, who appears to have been a personal friend of John's. In this letter John praised Gaius for his faithfulness and his hospitality to fellow believers as they shared the gospel during missionary travels.

There is some debate as to when these letters were written. As previously noted, some even argue that 1 John is a cover letter to John's Gospel. However, most scholars date these letters late in the first century, between AD 85-95. This would allow enough time after the life and ministry of Jesus



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BOB SCHATZ (11/16/15)

Modern fish nets on the dock at Kavalla (biblical Neapolis).

for issues such as Gnosticism (false teaching that believed the spirit was good but the flesh was bad) and Docetism (form of Gnosticism that taught Jesus was not really human, but only took on the appearance of a physical body). These are two of the primary heresies that John wrote to correct.

## Focus for Us

John wrote these letters to address issues in the church of Asia Minor during the first century; however, the issues he addressed have significant relevance for how believers in Christ should worship and live today. As noted earlier, John wrote to correct false teaching and doctrine as well as to encourage believers to love God and others through both word and deed. While the conversations we have with those in our communities might not be directly related to the incarnation of Jesus or the philosophical understanding of humanity, we are having complex conversations with our neighbors. The topics of marriage, sexuality, gender, science, and ethics are in the news every day. We wrestle with how we love people who see the world differently because of their political views, their cultures, or their backgrounds. It is vital to our witness as Christ-followers that we are able to converse with others in our spheres of influence in ways that reflects both the light of the gospel but also the love of the gospel.

## Organization

To organize our study, we will divide 1 John into five sessions, then spend one session each on 2 John and 3 John. Here is a breakdown and theme for each of our sessions.

### 1. Fellowship with God (1 John 1:1–2:2)

In these verses we will examine what our relationship with God looks like. We will see how sin has destroyed us, but that through our confession of sin and turning to faith in Christ we can experience new life. This new life is a source of great joy!

### 2. Remaining with God (1 John 2:3–2:27)

In this section we will see how John used the themes of light and darkness to help us examine our motives and actions. John admonished and encouraged believers in their walk with God.

### 3. Living as God's Children (1 John 2:28–3:10; 4:1–6)

Those who are God's children hate sin and desire to walk in the righteousness

that comes from a relationship with Jesus. God's Spirit marks those who are His true children.

4. Living with Love (1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-21)

We will find the importance of love in the life of a believer. Love is the true measuring stick of one's relationship with God. Do we love Him or do we love the world? John said those who love Him are truly His children.

5. Living as Conquerors (1 John 5:1-21)

To live as a child of God means there will be attacks from the world. John wanted readers to walk in confidence through life, not based on their flesh, but based on the cross of Jesus.

6. Faithful to Truth (2 John)

In his second epistle John stressed there is an enemy out there, and his goal is to deceive us. We must be vigilant and faithful as we navigate the world.

7. Hospitable in Truth (3 John)

Hospitality is one of the best ways to demonstrate our love for God and His people. We must always be ready to receive and care for our brothers and sisters of the faith. By doing so we demonstrate our understanding of the truth.

Let's get started!



# FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

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1 JOHN 1:1-2:2

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**R**elationships are important. In the movie *Cast Away*, Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks, is a FedEx executive. While en route to an assignment in Malaysia, his plane crashes somewhere in the south Pacific Ocean. Chuck survives the crash, but is washed up on the shore of a deserted island. Chuck makes several attempts to flee the island before eventually accepting his dilemma and beginning preparations to survive on the island. The island provides many of the elements necessary for survival, but it does not provide the one thing Chuck craves the most, relationship. Chuck becomes so lonely he makes his own companion out of a volleyball, whom he aptly names Wilson, that has washed up on shore.

All of us need relationships. We need other people, and most importantly we need God. When we are missing authentic relationships with God and others we, in our sin, create substitutes. Chuck missed real people to connect with on the island, so he created a pseudo friend in Wilson. We are no different. While we might be surrounded by people, we can still find ourselves alone in a crowd. John wrote about our need to be in right relationship with God and others. In his first letter, John reminded his readers that his purpose for writing them was so they would know the joy that comes from having fellowship with God. One of the great benefits of knowing God comes in the joy that fills our lives through such a relationship.

## PERSONAL TESTIMONY (1 JOHN 1:1-4)

John opened his letter by reminding his readers that he was writing to them about things he had actually seen, heard, and experienced during his years spent walking with Jesus. Many years had passed since John left his



**Housing area in Capernaum. Capernaum is believed to have been the home of Peter, James, and John during the earthly ministry of Jesus. John later lived and ministered in Ephesus.**

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (© 17714)

fishing boat on the waters of the Sea of Galilee, but John never forgot what he heard. John not only described what he personally experienced during his three years of walking with Jesus, he also described what was revealed to him through the Holy Spirit about Jesus. Similar to the opening of his Gospel, John began his first letter by describing the eternal nature of Jesus. Knowing Jesus **was from the beginning**, and that He is **the word of life** are not things one comes to know simply by watching. Those are things that were revealed to John by listening to the Holy Spirit.

When we read that Jesus was **from the beginning**, it ought to draw our attention back to John's introductory words from his Gospel where he declared, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created" (John 1:1-3). The fact that John would return to the doctrine of the incarnation so early in his letter should tell us something important about what John wanted his readers to know about Jesus. Without the incarnation, without the Word becoming flesh, we would have no fellowship with God. Without the incarnation, John could never have written the phrase **concerning the word of life—that life was revealed**. Revealed!!! God has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus. Everything John would write to his readers is based on this amazing truth. Jesus has come, God has been revealed, and this changes everything.

When we want someone to remember something, we tell them more than once. People learn by repetition. This is especially true of our doctrine. There is a reason certain people can sing some of the old hymns from memory even though we have not heard many of them in years. For the first eighteen years of my life we sang the same fifty or so hymns every year. It was the repetition of hearing those songs over and over that caused those words and tunes to be seared into my mind and heart. Before John could make his argument for why **our joy may be complete** in Jesus, he needed to remind his readers again that Jesus transcended their circumstances. He was the incarnation of God. If our joy is made complete, then it has to be based on something, or in this case Someone, that is bigger than us. The incarnation teaches us that Jesus stands outside the circumstances of our lives. One of the hymns my church sang often was written by Edward Mote in 1834. He titled it, *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*. The first verse of that hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name." Mote understood that our hope,



## MY TESTIMONY

John's letter opened with the reminder that he had personally seen, heard, and known Jesus during the years spent as His follower. John's personal testimony was the basis for his letter and the authority with which he wrote.

**Consider your own testimony about Jesus:**

How has He revealed Himself to you?

How has He healed you?

How has He changed you?

How has He set you free?

How has He given you peace or direction?

How has He called you?

our life, our joy, must be built on something other than life's circumstances; it must be built on a relationship with Jesus—the incarnate One, who was, and is, and is to come.

## FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT (1 JOHN 1:5)

Those of us who have been married for very long can look back and see we have had some good times and times when we struggled. If we are honest, we can likely see that the times we struggled most were when we were out of fellowship with each other. A major reason we get out of fellowship is that we cease communicating well with each other. In some cases, we allow work or some other time consumer to take us away far too often. Other times circumstances around life take our attention away from each other. The result is frequently a breakdown in our communication and fellowship. When we are not listening well, we miss hearing about one another's joys, needs, concerns, and hurts. We might be in geographic proximity to one another, but we are not in fellowship with one another. If we Christians are going to walk in fellowship with God, we have to listen carefully to the message He has declared to us, and not just be in the proximity of the truth. In verse 5 John wrote that he was declaring **the message we have heard from him**. If we are going to have fellowship with God, it must begin by listening to His words through the Scripture.

In middle school my class took a field trip to Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. I apologize now to the middle-school teachers who went with our group on that trip. I am sure taking a few hundred kids safely into a dark cave took an immense amount of bravery and skill. As we navigated down into the cave, there was a section that opened up into a giant room. There were benches in the cavern, and our class was asked to sit as the park ranger gave a lesson on darkness. The ranger talked about ambient light, and how even in a dark room at our house or a dark night outside, some measure of light is still present. Then she turned off the lights in the cave so that we would experience total darkness. In my middle-school mind, I figured it couldn't be much different than I had experienced before on camping trips or in my room at home. I was wrong. When the lights went out, I couldn't see anything. Nothing! It was completely dark. This darkness lasted about one minute until a few of us middle-school boys figured out we could poke the people sitting in front of us and no one would know who it was. At that point the teachers asked the ranger to immediately turn the lights back on.



John used the motif of **light** and **darkness** to explain what fellowship with God looks like. However, instead of describing physical darkness like in a cave, John wrote that in Jesus there is no darkness at all. Whereas I could not see anything in that cave, through fellowship with God nothing can be hidden. There is only light, no darkness. These words are striking because John did not tell the reader God creates light or that He is similar to light. He said **God is light**. James Montgomery Boice noted that many biblical writers told us what God does, but John told us who God is. John wrote that God in His true nature is spirit (John 4:24), God is light (1 John 1:5), and God is love (4:8).<sup>1</sup> When we understand that God is light, we can see the impact of these words in John's Gospel, "This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

### THE TRUTH ABOUT SIN (1 JOHN 1:6-10)

Many parents have had to deal with our kids telling lies. We might even know that what they are telling us is nowhere near the truth. In some cases, when we confront them, they tell more concoctions that deep down make us laugh. Have you ever wondered if God does not shake His head at some of the unbelievable things you and I do and say? Surely on some occasions He must be thinking, "You expect Me to believe that? I am the God of the universe. The One who never slumbers or sleeps. The One who knitted you together in your mother's womb, and you expect Me to believe that?" We might be able to hide some things about who we really are from other people, but we cannot hide anything from the all-knowing God. He knows when we walk in truth, but He knows when we don't as well. In the next section of text John exposed many of the lies we are apt to believe about our sin.

John used three **If we say** statements in verses 6-10 to demonstrate people's misunderstanding of how their sin impacts their fellowship with God. His primary reason for this was to correct the false teaching of the Gnostics. The Gnostics were a group of people who claimed to have a superior knowledge and fellowship with God. They believed they had a more enlightened understanding of God. John wrote to deconstruct or break down their arguments and in turn, he gave us a framework to examine our own hearts and lives.

Let's examine each of these claims. We will begin in verse 6 where John said, **If we say, "We have fellowship with him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.** John taught that people who truly know God and are in fellowship with Him, see the connection between belief and conduct. The type of life John was warning against is the person who has a practice of habitual and unrepentant sin. John did not imply that people never find themselves in dark moments of sin. We all fall short far more often than we would like to admit. What he taught was that walking in darkness is not a regular lifestyle for someone who experiences fellowship with God. The inverse of walking in regular habitual sin is to walk in the light. Those who walk in this manner will find the grace of God (the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin) is readily available. This great news is that it frees us to be honest with ourselves, with others, and most importantly with God. Walking in the light does not mean we live a life absent of sin, it means we live a life confessing and repenting of it.

Following the first "if we say" statement, we see how John unpacked the benefits of walking in the light. The first benefit is we will be in right relationship with both God and others. Relationships are hard. They require patience and grace. God deeply cares about our relationships with other people. We cannot be in right fellowship with Him and be out of fellowship with others. Therefore, we should **walk in the light** not only before God, but also before others. The benefit in doing so is that we will experience the depths of His love and grace. Walking in fellowship with God and others is so important that John tied it to the cross itself. What Jesus did on the cross was to cleanse us. The great news from this text is that we can have fellowship with God through His Son Jesus. It does not matter what type of sin we have been involved in. Today you might be struggling with porn, or gossip. You might be having an affair or stealing from your company. Today you might be carrying the heavy burden of debilitating sins of years gone by, but the good news for you today is that through the sacrifice of Jesus you can be in fellowship with God. There is no better news than this.

The second use of the phrase "if we say" appears in verse 8. Here John confronted the Gnostics on another one of their claims. This claim was that it was possible to know God so well that we no longer sin. The Gnostics taught that it was possible to become so enlightened that one ceased to struggle with sin. They believed it was possible to achieve a level of perfection on earth. John wrote that followers of Christ ought to know better.

We ought not be **deceiving ourselves** by this. John wanted his readers to understand how pervasive our sin is. We no longer pursue its momentary pleasures as we learn to walk in the light, but it is not something we escape from in its entirety while living on earth. This ought to be a great encouragement to us. I have been a Christian for over thirty years, and while my

*The Gnostics taught that it was possible to become so enlightened that one ceased to struggle with sin. They believed it was possible to achieve a level of perfection on earth. John wrote that followers of Christ ought to know better.*

**Below: Papyri fragment containing the end of the Apocrypha of John and beginning of the Gospel of Thomas, two Gnostic texts. John wrote his epistles in part to combat Gnostic ideas and concepts.**



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: BOB SCHMIDTZ / COPTIC MUSEUM / CARO (S/17/15)

desire is to walk in righteousness and faithfulness to God, there are still some places in my heart and life where I struggle—places where I must return to the well of His grace more frequently than I wish. As we follow Him, we need to be honest about our sin. If we do not understand the dangers of our sin, then we will not understand the power of Christ over it, and we will not be able to walk in right fellowship with God.

One of the dangers of misunderstanding sin comes when we fool ourselves into thinking that sin does not matter or that we can evade it. John Owen, the Puritan theologian, rightly described sin in this manner: “It has no doors to open. It needs no engine by which to work. It lies in the mind and in the understanding. It is found in the will. It is in the inclinations of the affections.... It has such intimacy in the soul.”<sup>2</sup> Owen accurately described how sin so easily captures our affection. To faithfully oppose the false teaching of the Gnostics, John confronted the notion that it is possible to separate our fellowship with God from the patterns of our lives. If we fall for this lie, then we have deceived ourselves into believing like the world. The world teaches us that we are inherently good people who occasionally mess up. The Scripture teaches us that we are inherently sinful people separated from God, and that if it were not for the grace of God, lavishly poured out upon us through the person of Jesus, we would be separated from God and would have no fellowship with Him. The gospel calls us to daily die to self, repent of our sin, and lean into the grace of Jesus. Pretending not to struggle with sin leads us into darkness, hypocrisy, and a works-based theology; all of which lead to death.

So, how do we battle the sin in our lives? John showed us how in verse 9. The answer to sin in our lives is to expose it to the power of the cross (the light). We must **confess our sins** to Jesus and others who love the light. Confession is crucial to combating the false claim that we are without sin. When we confess our sin, we declare something great about the nature of God. First, we confess that He is **faithful** and second that He is **righteous**. If He were not both of these, then our sin would surely be the end of us, but because He has faithfully declared us righteous in the person of Jesus, we are made so. Second, God is just, so we can take comfort in the fact that the righteous judge has accepted the payment of Christ for our sin. So, in those attributes of His nature He demonstrates His mercy toward us in that He first will **forgive** us and second, He will **cleanse** us.

Let’s examine how God responds to our confession through forgiveness. When God says He has forgiven us, He means that He no longer holds our sin against us. He has forgiven the debt we owe. However, there



## IF WE SAY

John used three “If we say” statements in 1 John 1:6-10 to demonstrate how a person’s misunderstanding of sin impacts fellowship with God.

Reread each statement. Have you ever believed one of these lies? Prayerfully consider your own current relationship with God and whether or not you are believing false statements. Write a prayer in response to each of the passages.

If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

is more to how God responds to our confession. He not only forgives, but He also cleanses us. This cleansing means we are no longer defiled by our sin. What has kept us separated from God has been removed. The tense of these two Greek words indicates that both the forgiveness and the cleansing are completed works. They are not an ongoing action. This work was already accomplished by Jesus on the cross and not caused by the confession itself.

The third “if we say” statement comes in verse 10. Here John exposed the worst lie we can believe about our sin. It is the lie that we have never sinned, specifically that **we have not sinned** after coming to faith in God. We actually find this to be the opposite in our own lives. The more deeply we walk with Jesus, the more sin we see in our own hearts. What makes this belief so dangerous is that when applied in our lives, it does not just make me a liar, but if it were true (which of course it is not) it makes God Himself a liar. For the Christ-follower, there are not many things we can say that are much worse. Paul said it this way in Romans 3:4, “Let God be true, even though everyone is a liar.” These three “if we say” statements ought to serve as a checklist against a false understanding of our sin and God’s grace toward us as sinners.

## SIN AND THE GOSPEL (1 JOHN 2:1-2)

As we enter into the second chapter, John continued with an emphasis on how our fellowship with God is inseparable from the gospel itself. This is important because some may read the previous verses and see the gospel message and think that John was providing excuses for us when we sin. John wrote those words to push back against false teachers and to speak truth into the lives of those who desire to follow Jesus. In order to make sure his readers did not wrongly see his teaching as a license to sin, he concluded with these words: **My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin.** In this statement we see the heart of a shepherd. John called his audience his **children**, indicating a natural love for them and a desire to see them grow in their knowledge and faith. However, he also strongly spoke truth into their lives by urging them to view the grace of God not as a license to sin, but as balm to brokenness from sin. He then finished this thought by pointing to the One who provides this truth and this grace, Jesus. Have you placed your trust in Him? If not, would you do so today?

**A CLOSER LOOK***Propitiation*

**J**ohn used an interesting word in 1 John 2:2 to conclude this section. It is a word that is only found a handful of times in the New Testament. What makes it a difficult word for us is that we do not use it very often in our language. To rightly understand it and its significance, we need to take a closer look. The Greek word is translated in the Christian Standard Bible (and others) as “atoning sacrifice.” In the King James (and others) it is rendered as “propitiation.” The word literally can be defined as “the means by which sins are forgiven—the means of forgiveness, expiation.”<sup>3</sup>

This word also appears in Romans 3:25 where Paul wrote, “God presented him as the mercy seat (propitiation) of his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.” The mercy seat was the place in the Holy of Holies where the high priest on the annual Day of Atonement sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial lamb in pleading for the forgiveness of God’s people. We can see by Paul’s reference that he was also referring to the work of Jesus on the cross as the atoning sacrifice.

When we come across this word in the text, it ought to cause us to think about the means by which we can experience fellowship with God. The Scripture is clear, there is only one way that we can experience this forgiveness. God made it possible only through Jesus. Therefore, it is impossible to have fellowship with God without a relationship with His Son. This is true not only for us, but, as John wrote, also for those of the whole world.

## Personal Reflection

1. All of us are people of relationship. If an outside observer studied your life, with whom or what would that person say your most important relationship is? Why would the observer conclude that? Would you agree with the observer's conclusion? If not, what do you need to change to cause your life to better reflect your valued relationships really are important?

2. How much of the joy you experience in life would you attribute to your fellowship with Jesus? Explain your answer.

3. What evidences of "light" and "darkness" do you see in the world around you? To what degree do you reflect that "God is light" to the world around you?

4. On a scale of 0 (never) to 10 (frequently), how regularly is confession of sin part of your devotion to God? Would your answer more nearly reflect an admission of sin or a deceiving of yourself about not having sin? Why?

1. J. M. Boice, *The Epistles of John, An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 28.

2. John Owen, *Triumph Over Temptation* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2005), 47.

3. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Volume 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 504.