

When Men Call God A Liar

1 John 1:5-2:2

Introduction

1. People are not fond of the subject of sin. They do not like to think about it and they do not want to talk about it. In fact, most people want to ignore it or deny its existence altogether. In suburban Los Angeles there is now a “new age” church of some 7,000 members called the *Agape International Spiritual Center*. Making no claim at all to be Christian, but still calling itself a church, Pastor Michael Beckwith confidently exclaims, “we combine new thought with ancient wisdom. We don’t believe you are born into sin. We are born into blessings. While some seek salvation, we call it self-elevation” (*World*, Dec. 15, 2001, p. 16). In November 2001 *The Dallas Morning News* ran a story about Islamic converts. One was an ex-Methodist youth minister who boldly declared that she “wasn’t concerned about heaven and hell” and did not see “why Jesus had to die for my sins” (*World*, 11-24-01, p. 12).
2. Back in 1973 psychologist Karl Menninger shocked modern sensibilities with his book, *Whatever Became of Sin*. In it he provides a scathing critique of many of today’s preachers and the noticeable absence of the “S” word.

‘In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of “sin,” a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone’s mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles – sin with an “I” in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal – or asleep? Wrong things are being done, we know; tares are being sown in the wheat field at night. But is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sins?’

Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it?

The very word “sin,” which seems to have disappeared, was a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word. It described a central point in every civilized human being’s life plan and life style. But the word went away. It has almost disappeared – the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn’t anyone sin anymore? Doesn’t anyone believe in sin?

Congress voted some years ago to require the President to proclaim each year a national day of prayer, and Truman began it in 1952. The following year (1953) President Eisenhower made his first proclamation and in it he made a reference to SIN. He borrowed the words for his proclamation from a call issued in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln, the country’s first Republican and most theological President:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon.”

An article in “Theology Today” has this to say about Eisenhower’s use of the word “sin”:

“None of Eisenhower’s subsequent calls to prayer mentioned *sin* again. The word was not compatible with the Commander-in-Chief’s vision of a proud and confident people. ... Since 1953, no President has mentioned sin

as a national failing. Neither Kennedy, Johnson, nor Nixon. To be sure, they have skirted the word. The Republicans referred to the problems of “pride” and “self-righteousness.” The Democrats referred to “short-comings.” But none used the grand old sweeping concept of sin. I cannot imagine a modern President beating his breast on behalf of the Nation and praying “God be merciful to us sinners” ...’

‘Time was when it was very serious to contemplate that one had an unresolved sin in his heart, or an unconfessed sin on his record. “Sin, although we moderns may not think so, seemed to the ancient Jews a fearful imprudence. The hand of the Lord would descend on it heavily, and very soon.”

It is surely nothing new that men want to get away from acknowledging their sins or even thinking about them. Is this not the religious history of mankind? Perhaps we are only more glib nowadays and equipped with more euphemisms. We can speak of error and transgression and infraction and mistakes without the naïve exposure that goes with serious use of that old-fashioned pietistic word “sin.”

3. Russ Moore, a member of the faculty at Southern Seminary spoke at a liberal Episcopalian Church in New Albany, Indiana recently, (Feb. 2002), explaining what Baptists believe. During a Question and Answer session, a woman spoke up and said, “My daughter is 10 and she has never sinned and I don’t think she ever will. I don’t think she has it in her.”
4. Obviously sin is not a popular subject in our day. People will go to great lengths to hide it, rationalize it or deny it. But understand this, when they do **“THEY CALL GOD A LIAR!”** They challenge His Word and question His character. They say sin is not serious and Jesus did not need to die. They fall in line with liberal feminist theologian Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary in New York who said at the Reimagining Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1993, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came to show us something about life... I don’t think we need people hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”

Transition

1. John has an altogether different understanding both of sin’s severity and a Savior’s necessity. He recognizes the danger of calling God a liar and warns his “little children” (2:1) to be on alert. Find out what a person believes about Jesus and what he thinks about sin, John says.
2. 1:5 is the basis for 1:6-2:2 and the foundation for 1:6-3:10.
1:5-3:10 emphasizes God is light.
3:11-5:12 emphasizes God is love.
Following his declaration that “God is light,” John weaves together 6 “if” clauses and 3 “if we say” statements (1:6, 8, 10). 5 times he will use the word “sin,” 2 times the word “darkness.” To think correctly about Jesus you must think correctly about sin. When you see sin for what it is you will immediately see your need for Jesus as your advocate (2:1) and your atonement (2:2). You will also avoid the error of calling God a liar. How is it that we can avoid such theological folly and foolishness? John gives us 6 directives.

I. Do not deny the character of God. 1:5

John shifts attention to the nature and character of God. Men will call God a liar if they fail to understand who He is. John begins at an excellent place given the nature of the false teachers he was confronting.

1. God is the proclaimed light.

Message – report heard (W.A.R.) – it has not changed and it never will, for we heard it from Him (Jesus) and now declare (cont) to you, GOD IS LIGHT. The word “light” occurs 95 times in the New Testament.

Psalm 27:1 – “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 36:9 – “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.”

John 1:9 – “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”

John 8:12 – “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’ ”

John 12:36 – “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

John 12:46 – “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”

As the “light of the World” Jesus was the incarnation of the God who is light. The apostles saw this and now they announce it.

2. God is the perfect light.

- God is light and literally, “darkness in Him not is none.” God uses a double negative for emphasis, bad grammar for us but excellent theology for all.

- 4 times John declares God is ...

- 1) God is light. (Fellowship) 1 John 1:5

- 2) God is love. (Family) 1 John 4:8

- 3) God is Spirit. (Fullness) John 4:24

- 4) God is true. (Faithfulness) 1 John 5:20

- Some believe “light” conveys the ideas of moral purity and goodness.

- Some believe “light” conveys the ideas of truth and revelation.

- I believe “light” conveys the ideas of life and God as the source of life.

John 1:4 – “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

John 8:12 – “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’ ”

God as light means God has the nature of being the source of life. Light contrasts with darkness. Life contrasts with death.

Luther: “There is no darkness in him, not even the slightest.”

“Thus while light could mean, and does in other contexts, what is good, true, holy, or pure, here it is the idea of life, eternal life, the life of God” (Akin, 71).

*Life = life. Life is found only in Jesus, God became man. Deny Christ and you deny the only one who can give life, the one who is the incarnate Light of God. A denial of God’s Son is a rejection of God Himself (His character). Deny the Son and you deny His Father.

II. **Do not deny the consequences of disobedience. 1:6**

- 1st of the 3 “if we say” statements (vs. 6, 8, 10).
- Use of the “inclusive we,” = “anyone saying anywhere, anytime ...”

1. **Do not tell a lie concerning fellowship with God.**

Fellowship = eternal life, the life of God in communion with Him. Here fellowship is related to what we believe. Denying Christ as God in the flesh who atoned for sin, these false teachers lie when they say “we know God.” They say they know Him but in reality they do not. No fellowship with Jesus, no fellowship with God.

2. **Do not live a lie concerning fellowship with God.**

Walk (pre. tense) in darkness (death, the realm separated from God). They are both speaking and living a lie. By confession and conduct they reveal that they do not know God. Spurgeon, “Sin may enter the heart [of a Christian] and fight for dominion, but it cannot sit upon the throne. The Christian no longer loves sin ... He looks upon it as a deadly serpent, whose very shadow is to be avoided.” Denying the Savior and sin, they prove they are liars when they claim to know God. Disobedience = error. Make no mistake about it.

III. **Do not deny the cure in the blood of Jesus. 1:7**

- Verse 7 is the positive corollary to verse 6.
- Its Christ-centered focus clarifies what the darkness, at least in part, is in verse 6.

1. **Jesus provides communion for the saints.**

Walk (pre. tense) in the light means to walk where He (God) is. It is to walk in the eternal life of God revealed in Jesus.

Fellowship = eternal life. Here it is fellowship with God (note verse 6).

2. **Jesus provides cleansing from sin.**

Blood of Jesus – emphasizes his atoning sacrifice (death) cleanses (pre. tense) – those who enjoy the eternal life of God through His Son Jesus enjoy a sinless status before God. God’s Son provides a constant and continuous cleansing from sin to all who walk in the light, the life He has provided. Note: He provides a continuous cleansing from “all” sin.

Illustration

Times have not changed all that much when it comes to the themes false teachers love to parade. 500 years ago, Martin Luther faced similar attacks and set forth God’s eternal solution.

“It is strange that although we preach about the blood and the suffering of Christ every year, yet we see so many sects bursting forth. Oh, the great darkness of the past! But if we cling to the Word that has been made known, we have this treasure, which is the blood of Christ. If we are beset by sins, no harm is done. The blood of Christ was not shed for the devil or the angels; it was shed for sinners. Accordingly, when I feel sin, why should I despair, and why should I not believe that it has been forgiven? For the blood of Christ washes sins away. The main thing is that we cling simply to the Word. Then there is no trouble.”

IV. **Do not deny the condition of all humanity. 1:8**

- 2nd “if we say”
- First they lie to others. Now they lie to themselves.

1. **Do not be deceived concerning the truth.**

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”

- A claim of sinlessness, having no sin, apart from Christ and His cleansing blood.
- We have no sin and we need no Savior.

****Proverbs 28:13** – “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”

****Romans 3:23** – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

2. **Do not be devoid of the truth.**

- To deny you are a sinner is to embrace that which is false, to accept a lie and to walk in darkness.

- Note Romans 3:9ff.

- Truth finds no home in any human heart that says “I don’t have a sin problem.”

****John** does not dispute our need for sinlessness. He simply notes we cannot find such a state within ourselves.

****Spurgeon**, “The idea of having no sin is a delusion; you are altogether deceived if you say so; the truth is not in you, and you have not seen things in the true light; you must have shut your eyes to the high requirements of the law, you must be a stranger to your own heart, you must be blind to your own conduct every day, and you must have forgotten to search your thoughts and to weigh your motives, or you would have detected the presence of sin. He who cannot find water in the sea is not more foolish than the man who cannot perceive sin in his members. As the salt flavors every drop of the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature.” (“Honest Dealings With God,” June 20, 1875).

V. **Do not deny the confession of sin. 1:9**

- Verse 9 stands in stark contrast to verse 8.
- There are sayers who cover/conceal their sin.
There are confessors who acknowledge/admit their sin.

1. **Confess your sins personally.**

We ... our **not** I ... your!!!

2. **Confess your sins continually.**

Confess (pre. tense) * “calls for such confession as their standing practice (Hiebert).”

* “God is constantly cleansing the sins of those who are confessing (MacArthur).”

* Confess means to agree, say the same thing about sin God does and say it continually.

3. **Confess your sins confidently.**

- God is faithful – dependable, trustworthy to keep His Word.
God is just – righteous, for us to do what He says and then withhold forgiveness would be wrong.

- God is faithful and just in forgiving sinners who confess their sins and trust in Jesus as their advocate and atonement.
 - *What are you confessing?
 - *Who are you trusting?

VI. Do not deny the correctness of God's Word. 1:10

- “The one who lies to himself and believes his own lies comes to a point where he can distinguish no truth either within himself or around him, and thus enters into a state of disrespect towards himself and others. Respecting no one, he loves no one, and to amuse and divert himself in the absence of love, he gives himself up to his passions and his vulgar delights and becomes a complete animal in his vices, and all of it from lying to other people and himself.” – From Dostoyevsky’s “The Brothers Karamazov.”
- 3rd “if we say”
- Lie to others (1:6), lie to self (1:8), now lie about God (1:10)!

1. Do not defame the Lord.

- A claim of sinlessness again (cf. 1:8).
- A claim that calls God a liar.
- God says “you are a sinner” and you say “I’m not.”
- God says “you need a Savior” and you say “I don’t.”

2. Do not be destitute of His Word.

- Verse 6 we walk in darkness.
- Verse 8 the truth is not in us.
- Verse 10 His Word is not in us (and we make Him a liar; a double condemnation).
 - *God is a liar.
 - *I’m not a sinner.
 - *Jesus is not needed as a Savior.
 - (Note the reverse is actually true.)

Illustration

“One of the best things about summer is taking our shoes off and going barefoot. At first, it is a little rough because our feet have yet to become hardened. But, in a short time, they become callused, and we can walk or run without feeling discomfort. Our hearts are a lot like our feet. The longer we continue living a lie and deceiving other people, the more hardened our hearts become. One lie leads to another. One wrong action leads to others. The thing that once thrilled and satisfied doesn’t anymore, so we try something else. All the while our hearts are becoming more callused until we aren’t able to hear God anymore.”

VII. Do not deny the cost of salvation. 2:1-2

Images of Jesus all too often say more about the people making them than about the Savior ... Today, fashionable theologians continue to appropriate Jesus to their own uses. For some, He is a sandaled ‘60s hippie; for others, a Marxist revolutionary. An African-American theologian has concluded that “Christ is black because He is oppressed, and oppressed because He is black.” A feminist theologian of some distinction has dismissed the crucifixion on “the antipatriarchal grounds that the

doctrine of atonement amounts to divine child abuse.” Another feminist is willing to grant the crucifixion its place in history as long as she can reimagine Jesus on the cross as a “woman suffering from menstrual cramps.” We want a Christ we can be comfortable with.”

George McCartney (in *Chronicles*, Feb. 1999, pages 32-33).

John is not interested in a Jesus we are comfortable with. John is interested in the Jesus who is real and the Jesus we need. John is interested in the Jesus who is our advocate and the Jesus who is our atonement.

1. Jesus is our advocate. 2:1

- My little children – (term of endearment, of fatherly concern). Used 7 times in 1 John.
- I write (not the inclusive “we”). He speaks as a pastor to his people.
- These things – looks back to 1:5-10.
- May not sin – not that they can be “sinless” but that they do “sin less!” We cannot avoid the presence of sin but we can avoid the practice of sin. (esp. sinning after the likeness of the false teachers who deny their sin and thus their need for a Savior).
- And if anyone sins – implication is we will.
- Advocate – *paraclete* in a “face to face” relationship with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
 - × Paraclete – 5 times in New Testament (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). 4 times of the Holy Spirit, 1 time of Jesus. We have a paraclete both in our heart and in heaven.
 - × Means “helper,” “one called to help,” one who comes alongside in time of need. This helper helps us when we sin. He is the Christ, God’s Son, the Righteous one, *par excellence*. (cf. Is. 53:11, “my righteous servant,” Jer. 23:5-6). He is the cleanser of sin, forgiver of sin, the helper when we sin (cf. Heb. 7:25!). It is a fool who has himself as an attorney!
 - × Judge – The Father; Prosecution – Satan; Defendant – us; Defense Attorney – Jesus.

2. Jesus is our atonement. 2:2

- He Himself – and no other
- Propitiation – (*NIV*, atoning sacrifice) – Greek word *hilasmos* (cf. 1 John 4:10; also Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17).
The word means satisfaction. Christ by His death, by His bloody sacrifice satisfied God’s wrath and God’s holiness. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus by the offering of His death turned away the wrath of God from sinners.
 - × Teaches that sin is serious.
 - × Teaches that divine love is great.
- Delores Williams is simply wrong when she says, “There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross” (*Sisters in the Wilderness*, 61).

- John Spong misses it when he says, “I don’t want a God that would go around killing people’s little girls. Neither do I want a God who would kill his own son.” (*Daily Record*, N.J., Jan. 27, 2000).
- No, He is our advocate. He is our atonement.
 - × His provision universal – for the whole world. The application limited – for us, for those who acknowledge both their sin and their need for a Savior, a Savior who is Jesus Christ the righteous.

Conclusion

“We could never have been delivered even by the one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, had he not been God as well. When Adam was created, he was of course righteous, and a mediator was not needed. But when sin placed a wide gulf between mankind and God, a mediator was called for Who was unique in being born, in living and in being slain without sin, in order that we might be reconciled to God and brought by the resurrection of the flesh to eternal life.”

Augustine, *Enchiridion*, p. 108

“I have looked far and wide, inside and outside my own head and heart, and I have found nothing other than this Man and His words which offers any answer to the dilemmas of this tragic, troubled time. If His light has gone out, then, as far as I am concerned, there is no light.”

Malcolm Muggeridge

“If Jesus be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him!”

C. T. Studd