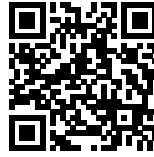


THE QUESTION OF SIN

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Have you ever thought what the world would be like if sin were absent? No armies, no wars, no police, no courts, no jails, no locks, no passwords, no scams, no weapons. Life would be Absolute Bliss.

The Apostle John speaks here about the age-old problem of sin. In these few verses John mentions the word, sin nine times. Why? Because it's such a problem and it's something that affects every person. It affects us in such a way which is detrimental to our well-being.

By speaking of sin nine times John is highlighting the fact that we cannot brush it under the carpet as if it doesn't really matter. He brings it out into the open by talking about it.

We all live in a world where every living creature has an enemy. A caterpillar must watch out for the birds; the frog has to watch out for the snake, the antelope must watch out for the lion. The tuna has to watch for the shark.

What about people? People have any enemy as well. The enemy is real, it's not imagined. It's like a virus which affects everyone; and the enemy is called Sin.

As John highlights public enemy number 1; he also introduces the theme of saying and doing. A person's Christian life is to amount to more than mere talk; we must also walk the walk, living out what we believe.

If we are in fellowship with God, if we are walking in the light, our lives will back up what our lips are saying. But if we are living in sin, walking in darkness, then our lives will contradict what our lips are saying, making us hypocrites.

The Bible calls the Christian life a walk. This walk begins with a step of faith when we trust Christ as our Saviour. But salvation is not the end it is only the beginning of a spiritual walk. Walking involves progress, and Christians are supposed to advance in the spiritual life.

Just as a child must learn to walk and must overcome many difficulties in doing so, a Christian must learn to walk in the light. God's light. But the fundamental difficulty is the matter of, you've guessed it, sin.

Sin, tries to stop completely, or interrupts our walk with God. Our sin causes us to stumble and fall and sometimes not get up at all.

Of course, sin is not simply outward disobedience, sin is also inner rebellion or desire. In the second chapter of this letter we are warned about 3 things. The desires of the flesh; desires of the eyes, and about the pride of life, all of which are sinful. Sin is also the breaking of God's law and refusal to submit to the law of God. Living in independence of God's law is the very essence of sin.

Suzannah Wesley was the mother of John and Charles Wesley and she had 17 other children. She herself came from a family of 29. She had a huge impact on the lives of both John and Charles.

One day as a young man, John asked his mother this question; he asked her; 'can you give me a definition of sin'? Not many children ask their parents that.

This was her answer; 'whatever weakens your reasoning; impairs the tenderness of your conscience; obscures your sense of God, takes away your relish for spiritual things; or increases the power of flesh over the spirit; that becomes sin'. Fairly comprehensive. There is no better definition I know. If we only ever pinpoint sin; I don't commit adultery so I'm OK; or I don't steal so I'm OK; I'm not a jealous person so I'm OK; I don't gossip so I'm OK. Then we become Pharisaic in our outlook.

But when we look at the big picture of how we live out our lives like Suzannah Wesley did it leaves no wriggle room. Our problem today is that we have lost the ability to define things for what they are and what they were. There are now in Western Society very few absolutes in a world instead defined by relativism. But the bible speaks of absolutes and always has. There is a clash then with what the bible says and what the world wants and desires.

Governments and people deal with issues today without any idea of definition. Because concerning the definition of a moral issue you have to draw on something or somebody from which to give you the moral compass you need.

You cannot just decide to make up a moral code, which of course is what is happening today. Today there are very few things that are labelled wrong or bad. Society today is re defining what sin is. It is being made up as it goes along and it's a road that leads to disaster. One of the things I love about the

bible is that it tells us the way it is. It doesn't conceal bad behaviour even by the saints.

The mighty Abraham the friend of God, who had great faith; became weak in his faith when he went down to Egypt and told a series of lies to the pagan Pharaoh that his wife Sarah, was his sister. And then foolishly through his impatience married the slave Hagar in order to have a child from her. In both cases God forgave Abraham his sin, but Abraham had to reap what he sowed.

God will remove our sins, we know this because of what Jesus did, but he does NOT change the result, as many of us I'm sure can testify. No one can unscramble an egg. Moses killed an Egyptian soldier in a fit of rage; and then had to live many years of his life on the run. God forgave him his sin, but he still lived in fear. You can easily trace King David's gradual downfall from when he had his illicit affair with Bathsheba who was married to another man. God forgave him, but his family soon after started to disintegrate. The kingdom started to break up.

The fact that Christian's sin bothers a lot of people. They forget the fact that their receiving the new nature does not eliminate the old nature they were born with. The old nature which originates in us, beginning inside our mother's womb fights against the new spiritual nature, which we receive once we trust in Jesus.

No amount of self-discipline, no amount of man-made rules, and no amount of self-help programmes can control this old nature. It holds to us like a limpet on a rock. Only God's Holy Spirit can enable us to put to death the old nature and produce the Spirit's fruit in us through the new nature.

Sinning Christians like Peter, woman at the well, Moses, Abraham, David, Sarah, Jacob, are not mentioned in the Bible to discourage us, but to warn us.

Why do you keep preaching to us Christians, about sin, an angry church member said to the minister? After all, sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of an unsaved person. Yes, indeed said the minister, it is different it's much worse. All of us therefore, must deal with our sins if we are to enjoy the life that is real. And how do we do that you may say?

Well. we do a couple of things. One is we can decide to cover our sins. Mark Twain said; 'we are all like the moon. We all have a dark side, we want no one else to see'. The trouble with little sins is that they

don't stay little. Light produces life and growth and beauty, but sin is darkness; and darkness and light cannot exist in the same place. If we are walking in the light, the darkness has to go. If we are holding to sin, then the light goes. That is the reality.

How do Christians try to cover up their sins; the answer is by telling lies. We want our Christian friends to think we are spiritual people so we lie about our lives and try to make a favourable impression on them. We want them to think that we are walking in the light, though in reality that is not the case.

Once a person begins to lie to others, they will sooner or later start to lie to themselves and verse 8 deals with this. The problem now is not deceiving others, but deceiving ourselves.

The scary thing is that it is possible for a believer to live in sin, yet convince himself or herself that everything is fine in their relationship with God. The classic example is of King David and his adulterous affair with Bathsheba where he foolishly thought everything was fine with God and with life afterwards. He would continue on tending his royal vineyards as if nothing much had happened. You can read about that in the book of Second Samuel.

God cannot be mocked. But the spiritual decline becomes still worse. The next step is trying to LIE to God verse 10. We have made ourselves liars; now we try to make God a liar. We contradict his word, which says, 'that all have sinned'; and yet we maintain that we are the exceptions to the rule. We apply God's word to others but not to ourselves. We believe the message is for someone else in the pew behind us, not ourselves. Many who lean strongly to the left in politics hold to this view.

The whole process starts out with the believer telling lies and ends up with them becoming a confirmed liar. It begins as a role they play; then it becomes a longer role and then, the very essence of their lives. Eventually their character becomes eroded. Sin is lethal. Even the smallest dose is lethal. What do we do? We can try to cover our sins or we can confess our sins.

God is light. He is pure, perfect and Holy. Therefore, it is impossible for him to close his eyes to even the smallest sin. That smallest sin has to be dealt with because it's wrong and it offends God's holiness. But God is love too. He wants to save sinners and fill them with his love and grace and truth. How then can a holy God uphold his own justice and still forgive sinners?

The answer is in the sacrifice of Christ. At the cross God in his holiness judged sin. But God in his love offers Jesus Christ to the world as a sacrifice to atone for our sin and become our Saviour.

God was just in that he punished sin, but he is also loving in that he offers forgiveness through what Jesus did at Calvary. Jesus finished his work on earth; the work of giving his life as a sacrifice for sin; that's why He cried out from the cross; 'it is finished'. But he has an Unfinished work in heaven. For he represents us before God's throne.

As an Advocate he intercedes for us and helps us when we sin. When we confess our sins to God, because of what Jesus does for us in heaven, God forgives us. When we get to heaven we will need someone to speak up for us. Someone who is on our side. That's what an advocate does. Because Christ our advocate lives for us at God's right hand, he can apply his sacrifice to our need's day by day, hour by hour.

This is where the Cross and Resurrection dovetail perfectly together. The cross is dead without the resurrection. The resurrection is meaningless without the cross. All he asks is that when we have failed, we do Not try to cover sin up. Instead in faith we confess our sins. To confess sin means much more than simply to admit them. To confess sin, means to say the same thing about it that God says about it.

Confessing is not simply praying a lovely wee prayer, or making pious excuses. True confession is naming sin; calling it by name for what it is. It's simply being honest with ourselves, acknowledging that we are all steeped in sin from our birth and falling on God's infinite mercy.

Rev. Alan Wilson is a Presbyterian Minister in Northern Ireland, where he serves a large congregation, supported by his wife. Before he took up the call to serve Christ, he was in the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 30-years. He has two children and two grandchildren and enjoys soccer, gardening, zoology, politics and reading. He voted for Brexit in the hope that the stranglehold of Brussels might finally be broken. He welcomes any that might wish to correspond with him through the [Contact Page](#) of The Postil.

The [photo](#) shows, "Christ and the Adulteress Woman," by Domenico Morelli, painted in 1969.

