

TO WALK IN THE LIGHT IS TO SHARE  
GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN AND OBEDIENCE

(The First Test . . . The First Time)

I John 1:8—2:6

A. *The Text*

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (2:1) My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (3) And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep His commandments. (4) He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (5) but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: (6) he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. Is it possible for a child of God to sin?
2. What should a Christian do if he does sin?
3. What are the consequences of claiming we do not sin?
4. What is the relationship of Jesus *now* to a Christian who does sin?
5. What does it mean to "*know*" God?
6. Does the claim to know God in any way obligate the one making the claim?
7. What is the intended end of God's love to man?

C. *Paraphrase*

"(1:8) If we say—Sin have we none! we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (9) If we are confessing our sins faithful is

he and righteous that he should forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteous. (10) If we say—We have not sinned! false are we making him and his word is not in us. (2:1) My dear children! these things am I writing unto you in order that ye may not be committing sin. And if anyone should commit sin An Advocate have we with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; (2) and he is a propitiation concerning our sins, and not concerning our own only but also concerning those of the whole world. (3) And hereby perceive we that we understand him, if his commandments we are keeping. (4) He that saith—I understand him! and his commandments is not keeping is false, and in him the truth is not! (5) But whosoever may be keeping his word of a truth in this man the love of God hath been made perfect. Hereby perceive we that in him we are. (6) He that saith that in him he abideth ought just as He walked himself also to be walking.”

## D. Comments

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Eternal life is here considered as fellowship with God. To walk in the light as God is in the light is first to share God's attitude toward sin. This is the initial test of life presented by John after he has established the base (God is light) from which the tests are to be set forth.

To share God's attitude toward sin is to face reality. To deny it is to participate in that which is unreal and therefore to act our as well as speak a lie.

### 2. Translation and Comments

#### a. Sin denied as guilt . . . v. 8

(8) “If we should say that we are not having sin we are deceiving ourselves and sincerity is not in us.”

Sharing the attitude of God toward sin begins with the realization of personal guilt. If we should claim that we personally have no guilt we are deceiving ourselves.

We cannot deceive God in whom is no darkness at all. (V.5) To deceive man is ultimately pointless. In the vast beyond that is eternity it will not matter that we have been able to hide our guilt from men behind a facade of sophistication, social propriety, or pseudo-intellectualism. Fundamentally, it is the deceiver himself who is deceived.

The colossal ignorance which prompts the denial of personal guilt is measured by the fact that it removes the one who denies his guilt from

all that is real. The *sine qua non* of God's entire approach to man in the person of Jesus is the basic reality of human guilt! This is born out by virtually every writer of divine scripture.

For example, in Genesis 42:21, the brothers of Joseph recognized their *guilt* in the mis-treatment of him. In Numbers 21:7, the people of Israel came before Moses to confess their *guilt* in that they had spoken against the Lord. In Ezra 9:6, the prophet blushes to lift his face before the Lord because of the *guilt* of the people. Psalm 40:12, records David's recognition of his own *guilt* as being so great he is not able to look up. In Acts 2:37, those who had cried out for the blood of Jesus were cut to their heart by the *guilt* of what they had done and cried out for some means of deliverance. In Acts 24:25, Felix, the Roman governor, trembled in terror at the awareness of his guilt.

The last word on the matter is recorded by Paul in Romans 3:9-22. The passage begins with a quotation from Psalm 14 to the effect that *none are righteous* and ends with ". . . there is no distinction; for *all have sinned* and come short of the glory of God . . ."

Therefore, to deny the personal guilt of sin is to speak that which is contrary to the primary revelation of God. When men have attempted to discover the truth about guilt in their own wisdom, they have called it complexes. They have explained away the guilt of it on the basis of environmental handicaps, and they have tried to treat it by blasting it out of memory with electrotherapy and insulin shock.

God's solution to the problem begins with facing the reality of personal guilt by bringing it into the strong light of revealed truth.

b. Sin confessed as guilt . . . v. 9

(9) "If we are confessing the sins that are ours, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The recognition of guilt by the Christian results immediately and constantly in the divine therapeutic of forgiveness. It is for just this purpose that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

The tense of John's verb "confess" indicates that the confessing of sin is not a mechanical ceremony or ritual. Rather, this confessing is a constant attitude toward self before God, which faces the reality of personal guilt in the light of divine revelation.

*Homologeō*, here translated "confess," means literally "to speak as one." When our attitude toward ourselves is one of recognition of guilt; we are speaking as one, or agreeing with God about our sin.

The result of this attitude toward guilt is not, in the life of a Christian, a guilt complex or manic-depression, but rather the realization of forgiveness. God, through Isaiah, wrote: "Come now, let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

There is no greater blessing in the Christian life than that of *realized forgiveness!* It can only come to one who will stop rationalizing and realize his own personal responsibility, his own guilt, for his own misdeeds.

The realization of forgiveness depends upon personal confidence in the incarnate Word. It is through *His* blood that we have cleansing from sin. Just as we constantly maintain an attitude of personal responsibility for our guilt, so God, by Jesus' blood, is constantly cleansing us from all unrighteousness. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

When the fact of this forgiveness is realized, it brings peace that nothing else can give, and a boldness to stand straight and tall as a child of God.

c. Sin denied as fact . . . v. 10

(10) "If we should say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

From the consideration of sin as *guilt*, John turns our attention to sin as *fact*. Again we are to test the honesty of our claim to walk in the light, this time by our attitude toward the *fact* of sin.

If we deny the fact of sin (expressed here by the Greek aorist tense) we make God a liar! This challenges the imagination. For the creature to dispute the Creator's knowledge of reality to the extent that he actually makes God out as acting according to that which is not real staggers the faculties of perception! Yet this, says John, is precisely what one does say when he claims to know God and at the same time to deny that he does in fact commit sins.

In such an attitude, the word of God simply does not exist. His word is not in us, when we deny the fact that we sin. Whether we take this to mean the written word or the incarnate Word, the end result is the same. The written word is the record of God's revelation of truth. This revelation reaches its zenith in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word.

Everything God has revealed about man in his present environment indicates that man does not do as God would have him do; that man does what God would not have him do. This is perhaps *the* primary truth

of human experience. To deny this is true in the individual life is to remove from that life the entire revelation of God concerning human behavior.

d. Sin confessed as fact . . . 2:1-2

(2:1) "My little children, I am writing these things in order that you may stop committing sins. But if one should sin, we have one called to our side toward the Father, Jesus as righteous Christ (2) and He is a covering on account of the sins which are ours and not just concerning ours, but also concerning those of the whole world."

It is only in the recognition of sin and the sinfulness of it that there is any hope of eliminating it from ones life. So, says John to those he considers as dear little ones in God's family, "I am writing this to you in order that you may stop committing sins."

If we will recognize that there is such a thing as acting contrary to God's will, and that when we do so act, we are personally guilty, we will have come a long way toward the expelling of sinful activity from our daily lives. This stands out in contrast to the modern popular idea that there is no moral absolute. God has revealed right. The opposite of right is wrong.

If we will recognize the cost of our guilt by remembering that only Calvary is equal to it, we will have come close to seeing the tremendous seriousness of the matter. To know that the blood of God's only Son is required each day to cleanse us from the normal daily guilt of "well-adjusted" lives, is to realize the phenomenal deadliness of sin. This will go far toward changing the pattern of our behavior and the sinful acts will become less and less frequent.

But let us not be so blind as to believe that we will ever reach the point of perfection at which we do not need the blood. If we do sin, we have an Advocate.

The English word "Advocate" is used here to translate the Greek "*paraklete*." *Paraklete* means literally, "one who is called along side." The *reason* for calling is the primary concern. The idea seems to be "one who lends his presence to assist His friends."

The most precious idea of Jesus to be found in the Bible is that He is simply our friend! A great deal is made, in Hebrews chapter two, of the fact that Jesus shared flesh and blood with those he came to save. He has felt the tug of temptation as only a human being can feel it. While He does not approve of sin in the life of any child of God, he does understand the pressures of life which often bring it about.

It is just here that the real meaning of Jesus' incarnation experience begins to be seen in the life of a Christian. To the person who has committed his life to God on this ground, who constantly accepts not only the fact of his own sin but also its guilt, there is the blessed comfort of knowing that an understanding Friend intercedes for him before God. There is no need to make excuses. There is no need to deny or explain away sin. One who knows Jesus as a personal Friend can face up to his guilt in the awareness that ". . . He ever liveth and maketh intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25)

The word, *hilasmos*, (propitiation) in verse two is deserving of special attention. This friend who is our advocate or *paraklete* is also our propitiation for sins.

*Hilasmos*, (propitiation) has at its root the idea of appeasing and conciliation. The fundamental problem in any religion is that of personal relationship to God. The difficulty is brought about by sin.

To solve this problem of divine-human relationship, the idea of sacrifice is introduced. Every sacrifice ever offered by every human religion has been for the purpose of appeasing the wrath and currying the favor of a god or gods.

The idea of restoring divine-human relationships broken by sin is not strange to the Christian Gospel. We have already seen, in I John, chapter one, that the whole purpose of the incarnation is to establish fellowship between man and God, and consequently, between man and man.

What makes the *Christian* sacrifice unique among sacrifices is that *God* has offered the sacrifice to *man*! In II Cor. 5:19, we learn that ". . . God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself . . ." Thus, while we would contradict scripture should we deny the wrath of God is released against sin, we gain in Christ a much deeper insight into both the wrath and the mercy of God. God's wrath is not appeased by sacrifices of human origin. It is rather conciliated through our acceptance of the sacrifice which He Himself has provided!

In brief, we are brought back into fellowship with God, not because we desire it to the point of offering sacrifices, but because He desires it to the point of sending His only Son as the propitiation, the covering for our guilt. It is, therefore, impossible to even discuss, much less to comprehend the love of God apart from the fact of sin and His sacrifice of Jesus for it. (John 3:16)

John further adds that this sacrifice is not only a sin covering for us, but for the whole world also. Hebrews 2:9 tells us Christ tasted death

"for every man." The Gnostic fancied himself to be part of an exclusive few in whom God took special interest. This interest included endowment with special knowledge, and the knowledge revealed in Jesus was the choicest of it all. Not so, says John! Jesus is not the means whereby a few are brought into a special relationship with God; He is the propitiation of the entire world.

This ought not be construed as supposing universalism, or the doctrine that all men are automatically saved by Christ, and that, therefore, none will be lost. The tests being presented by John are evidence that those who do not meet the tests do not have life, much less fellowship with God.

e. Hereby we know we know Him . . . v. 3

(3) "And in this we are knowing that we come to know and still do know Him, if we are keeping His commandments."

"Know" is the favorite word of the gnostic. John here turns their own word on them, and will do so many times throughout the remainder of the epistle. *Hereby we know!*

There is a play on the tenses in verse three which is not apparent in the English versions. John, quite literally, says, "In this we are knowing that we got to know, and still do know, Him; that we are keeping His commandments." Here is a challenge to the claim of *special* knowledge by an appeal to *experimental* knowledge. The person, who really got acquainted with God and to whom knowing Him is the way of life, has the habit of keeping God's commandments. "Not my will, thine be done" is more than poetry, it is the touch stone of practical Christian life.

James says, ". . . faith apart from works is barren." (James 2:20) John here makes virtually the same claim for knowledge. Knowledge apart from obedience is no knowledge at all! Perhaps a timely application of the truth can be made by saying that a knowledge of God's word is meaningless in the life of one who does not practice obeying it. Such a person may "really know the Bible," and not know the God of the Bible at all!

What commandments does John have in mind? The moral precepts of the ten commandments? Perhaps. Certainly, John includes obedience to that which Jesus identifies as the first and second commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Upon these depend all God's commandments. (Matthew 22:40)

He who does not love does not know God, no matter what his claim to special enlightenment.

Safely, we may assume that John's test includes the willingness, and the effort to obey "all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) When love meets command, the result is obedience.

f. To say we know God, but not keep His commandments . . . v. 4 (4) "whoever is saying, "I know Him," and is not keeping His commandments, is a liar, and reality is not in him."

Here is a terrible indictment. It is but the negative side of the test presented in verse three. If keeping His commandments proves we *do* know God, failing to keep His commandments proves we *do not* know Him.

Perhaps a word should be said just here about the meaning of the word *ginosko* (know). A synonym is *oida*, and it is in the contrast between the two that the real meaning becomes apparent. *Oida*, also translated "know," means to know through reflected study, and mental deduction. *Ginosko* (know) means to know by observation and experience. *Ginosko* is properly called "experimental knowledge."

It is only the constant day by day experience of keeping God's commandments that gives one this experimental knowledge. The claim to know God aside from this day by day experience is unreal. Consequently, John says whoever makes the claim is lying and the truth (reality) is not in him!

If failure to keep His commandments proves we do not know Him, it is also evidence we do not have life. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36)

g. The intended end of divine love . . . v. 5 (a) (5) "But whoever goes on keeping His word, truly in that one the love of God has reached its intended end."

The love of God toward man reaches the completeness of its purpose when an individual habitually keeps God's word. To keep His word is to obey Him faithfully, not by loud claims contradicted by lives inconsistent with the claim. Rather such obedience becomes more and more habitual in the life of one who lives daily in the awareness that Christ is Lord.

Everyone is familiar with John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him



might not perish, but have everlasting life." It was the love of God from the beginning which brought Jesus into the world. The long years of preparation recorded in the Old Testament were overtures of this divine love.

In Luke 24:44-ff, Jesus pointed out to His apostles; it stands written in the "Law and the Prophets and the Psalms" that the Christ must suffer and be slain and be raised again the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to the whole world in His name. God did not *begin* to love the world the night Jesus was born. He loved the world when he called Abram and made with him a covenant through which He would bless all the nations of the earth. Everything that went before the birth of Jesus was preparation for the manifestation of His love on Calvary.

One cannot read the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion without being moved by the demonstration of God's love for a world which was deserving of anything but love. The insults, the shame, the humiliation, the pain of the cross, bespeak a love beyond human comprehension. The *controlling factor* of this love in God's people is that Christ died for all. (II. Cor. 5:14) The *aim* of this love is that ". . . repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations." (Luke 24:47)

All the plan of God, all the call of the covenant, all the ages of preparation, all the agony of the cross are meaningless until they produce in the individual heart the "obedience of faith." (Romans 16:26) So, John writes, ". . . whoever goes on keeping His word, truly in that one the love of God has reached its intended end."

h. Hereby we know we are in Him . . . v. 5 (b)

(5) "In this we are knowing from experience that we are in Him:"

It is not "hereby we know," as though this were the only test necessary. John will present two other tests equally significant in testing eternal life as fellowship with God. Rather, "*in this*" we are knowing. (See on 2:4 concerning "know") The habitual keeping of His commandments is an experience had only by those who walk in the light as He is in the light. Thus keeping His commandments becomes to the individual evidence that he is indeed "in Him."

i. Moral obligation and proof of the claim to know God . . . v. 6

(6) "The one claiming to remain in Him is morally obligated himself to keep on walking just as that one walked."

In His prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus identifies eternal life as

knowledge of God and His Son, "And this is eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3)

The word translated "know" in John 17:3 is the word *ginosko* (experiential knowledge—see on v.4 above) This knowledge which results from experience is here presented as resulting from fulfilling the moral obligation which comes from claiming such knowledge of God. Whoever says he knows God is morally obligated to walk as Jesus walked. It was His commitment to God's will which substantiated His claim to know the Father! (John 6:38) Here is the practical meaning of walking in the light. (I John 1:7)

This entire passage (I John 1:8-2:6) deals in phrases familiar to the ancient world. As is typical of John's style, he takes well known phrases and pours them full of Christian meaning. The one of these with which we are especially concerned here is "knowing God."

The Ancient Greeks of the pre-Christian era were convinced that they could arrive at the knowledge of God by the sheer process of intellectual reasoning, argument, and thought. This concept is reminiscent of the "modern liberal" theologian who believes he can deduce the nature of God (whom he prefers to call the "Ground of Being") through dialogue, counsel, and the sharing of various religious traditions.

Obviously, such an academic approach to God has no essential bearing at all on human behaviour. It is not necessarily ethical. A man may "know" God in this sense, if indeed God can be known in this way at all, and it makes no difference in his life.

The later Greeks, who were contemporary with John and Jesus, sought to find God through an emotional experience. They re-enacted the myths of martyred gods in public services in such a way that the worshiper identified himself emotionally with the suffering god. Special lighting effects, sensual music and such were used to bring about this emotional experience. Once the desired emotion was produced, the worshiper believed that he shared the victory and immortality of his slain deity.

This practice at once calls to mind many of the devices used by some present day revivalists to produce a "Christian experience." The purpose of such revivalism, whether it be practiced in a marble hall in Greece or in a tent on Main Street, U.S.A., is to produce a knowledge of God through emotional experience.

The emotional approach to God shares, at its base, the same failure

as does the intellectual. It does not carry with it any necessary change in the moral and ethical life of the individual. The "Christian experience" which proves salvation is obedience!

John's contention here is that the test of validity for the claim to know God is that the one making the claim must necessarily act as Jesus acted. Whether it be based on academic deduction or revivalistic emotion, the failure to produce a new life puts the lie to the claim. There is no knowledge of God that does not issue in obedience to Him! It is by the experience of obedience that we know we know Him, and thereby, we know we have life eternal . . . for eternal life is to know Him!

### E. *Review Questions*

1. What does the claim not to sin reveal about the sincerity of the one making the claim? (I John 1:8)
2. What is meant by "If we confess our sins?" (I John 1:9)
3. What is the attitude toward God of one who claims he has not sinned? (I John 1:10)
4. Why does John say he is writing these things? (I John 2:1)
5. If one should sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Explain. (I John 2:1)
6. Jesus is our propitiation for our sin. Explain. (I John 2:2)
7. In what sense is Jesus also a propitiation for the sins of the whole world? (I John 2:2, compare I John 2:5)
8. How does I John 2:3 challenge the claim of the gnostic to special knowledge of God?
9. How is keeping God's commandments evidence that we know Him? (I John 2:4)
10. How does the love of God reach its intended end in the life of the individual believer? (I John 2:5)
11. What does it mean to "walk as That One walked?" (I John 2:6)
12. What is the moral obligation of one who claims to know God? (I John 2:6)
13. State in your own words, in a single sentence, the first test presented in I John whereby we may assure ourselves that we have eternal life.