

## ***Loved and Loving: John's Epistles*** ***Living as Children of God***

Lesson #7 for August 15, 2009

Scriptures: Genesis 3:5; Psalms 51:4; Isaiah 1:2; John 1:12; Hebrews 9:26,28; 1 John 3:1-10.

1. This lesson focuses on the privileges and responsibilities of a Christian in relation to God and sin. We are to learn to live without sinning. Is that possible in our world? If the Bible says we are to do it, how is it possible? How many of us know someone who is living a sinless life?
2. Read 1 John 3:1-10. John made some very blunt and forceful statements about the relationship between God, the Christian, and sin. He said that if we continue to sin, we belong to the Devil, and we do not know God. If we are children of God, we should live in union with Him, and we will not continue to sin. If God is our Father, we cannot continue to sin. More than that, if we don't do right and don't love others, we are not God's children. But He also promises that when we see Him, we shall be like Him because we will see Him as He is. God has made a plan and He promises that it will work.
3. Have you found those statements to be true in your own life? How do those very forceful statements fit with the many statements about Jesus taking away our sins? What did Jesus do to deal with sin? (Romans 8:3) How did He take away or put away sin for us, destroying the works of the Devil? The emphasis in Christian churches today is on forgiveness. It is "explained" that if we are forgiven, we are justified and that is the only requirement for salvation. But if we are focusing on our sins, won't we become even more engaged in them? Protestants have gone out of their way to emphasize the idea that we are saved "solely" by what Jesus has done in our behalf. Otherwise, some would claim that we are saved partly by our own works, and that is anathema to Protestants. God calls for us to focus on Jesus so we can live better lives in the future. The problem arises when we start to think that we have to do something by ourselves. We can only allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. But we need to focus on Him.
4. What does it mean to be sons and daughters of God? (1 John 3:1) God promised us that we will have the right to become children of God; we will do what is right, and we will be able to claim God as our Father. But in doing so, we cannot continue to sin.
5. How does baptism and the beginning of the spiritual new birth help us to stop sinning? What is the relationship between faith and sin? (Romans 14:23) What does being God's children imply? Among the billions of galaxies and billions and billions of stars and probably planets scattered throughout the universe, why does God care about planet Earth and its inhabitants? Why would God make this earth His future headquarters? Does this kind of special love impact how we live day by day? What does it mean to you to know that God loves you, cares for you, even died for you?
6. Look at the experiences of Satan and Eve in wanting to be like God. (Genesis 3:5; Isaiah 14:14; Ezekiel 28:2,12-17) Clearly, Lucifer/Satan wanted to be like God in power, authority, and in the adoration of all created beings. Eve wanted to be like God in His omniscience. God promised that by beholding, His children will become changed to become like Him in character. What a contrast! Satan and Eve were seeking selfish goals. God's children will seek to be as completely loving as He is. Those two positions are opposite. In Scripture these contrasts are described as "the mystery of godliness" versus "the mystery of iniquity." Satan sought to raise himself up and to place himself above the throne of God. By contrast, Christ placed Himself as low as possible—coming to this earth, living as a human being, and dying the death of a common criminal. (Philippians 2:5-11)
7. So, what does it mean to be "like God"? Can we be like God in any real sense today? To be like God must include more than just having our sins erased from some book or books in heaven. Does being like God imply a real change in our lives? If all that is required to make us savable is erasing the sinful records in heaven, shouldn't God be able to do that for everyone—for all His children? Why can't God just hit the reset or reformat button and save everyone? That would turn all of us into

robots.

8. Sin is a real problem in our lives. We have all come to live with the idea that sin is a permanent part of our existence. What does God think about that attitude? Can we be sinners—and be like God? If we claim to be God’s children as He promises, does that, in fact, make it impossible for us to continue sinning? How does that actually work?
9. John said that Christians are “born of God.” (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18) Clearly, that implies something more than just a human or physical birth. It is not just an accident of conception. It is a result of Christ’s life and death on this earth. (John 3:1-3,16; Colossians 2:12,13; Titus 3:4-7) The apostle Paul said that we are reconciled to God, (2 Corinthians 5:18) and therefore, we will have peace with Him. (Romans 5:1) That makes us His adopted children. (Ephesians 1:5)
10. The most famous definition of *sin* is found in 1 John 3:4: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” (KJV) That is actually a very free translation of the Greek. The Greek says literally, “Sin is lawlessness,” or “Sin is rebelliousness.” What does the Bible say about the very nature of sin? (Exodus 9:27; Psalm 36:3; 51:4; Isaiah 1:2; 59:2; Jeremiah 3:13; Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 6:17,20; 14:23; James 4:17; 1 John 1:8; 3:4; 5:17) In these verses sin is described as wrong, rebellion, lawlessness, separation from God, and being against the God who died for us while we were still sinners. Lawlessness is like what Cain did to his brother. By contrast, obedience implies the keeping of the commandments. (1 John 3:22,24)
11. As we all recognize, Satan was the father of sin and the father of lawlessness and rebelliousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:3)
12. Are you thankful for the privilege of being a child of God? Is there a difference between being just a child of God and being a Christian? Aren’t all human beings children of God? Do Christians think differently from those of the world? Why aren’t we afraid of thinking like Satan thinks? Are Christians obedient children and non-Christians disobedient children? Are Christians the only ones whose lives give glory to God?
13. What kind of privileges are connected with being children of God? In thinking of that, John wrote, “Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us.” (1 John 3:1) When you stop to realize that you are no longer an alien, an orphan, or stranger, but that you have been adopted permanently into the family of God, how does that impact the way you live day by day?
14. But we must also recognize that along with the wonderful privilege of being God’s children, come certain responsibilities. What responsibilities would you list as being primary for those who consider themselves children of God?
  - 1) Clearly, God’s children are expected to live lives of purity, apart from sin, becoming more and more like Him as they behold Him. That process is sometimes referred to as sanctification.
  - 2) As far as possible, God’s children will cease to live in sin. They will not continue sinning. (1 John 3:6,9) Unless we live changed lives, it is a parody to say that Jesus appeared to take away sin in our lives. (1 John 3:5) If we claim to be Christians and continue to live sinful lives, we are saying that God is a liar because His plan does not work.
  - 3) God’s children will recognize the deadly seriousness of sin. Sin is rebellion against God’s law. (1 John 3:4) It began with the Devil. (1 John 3:8) It resulted in the death of Jesus. (1 John 3:5,8) Continuing to indulge in sin is to deny Jesus and what He did. (1 John 3:6) It makes us the children of the Devil. (1 John 3:10) Christians must not claim perfection here on this earth, (Matthew 5:48) but they must learn to live lives without sin. (1 John 1:8-10; 3:6,9) What does that mean?
15. **So, how do you deal with sin in your own life? How do you relate to your “favorite sin”? Do you find excuses for it? Do you rebuke yourself for continuing to do it? Does it seem more and more sinful to you each day and each week? Or, does it seem less and less sinful as you continue to do it and make excuses for it? The ultimate way to describe sin is to say**

**that it is any deviation from following the example of Jesus.**

16. When Jesus came to this earth, what did He do that actually “dealt with” sin? Read John 1:29; 1 John 1:2; 2:2; 3:5,8; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 8:3; Isaiah 59:2; Hebrews 9:26,28; 1 John 4:10; Revelation 1:5,6. All of these passages help to make it clear that Jesus came to this earth and lived and died to “deal with sin,” to take it away, to put it away, to forgive us, and to free us from our sinful lives. How does that work? What does the death of Christ on the cross have to do with our living sinful lives today? How does the fact that God has won the great controversy affect the way we live our lives every day? Jesus showed us that it is possible to resist Satan’s temptations and to live a victorious life here on earth.
17. Many Christians believe that the answer to that question is that because Jesus died for us, God has set up some sort of “magical” way of erasing our sins from the books of heaven. Thus, we can stand “sin-free” before God. Has God lost His omniscience? How will we be able to study the plan of salvation and our Bibles for the rest of eternity if all trace of sin is gone? Will all Bibles have to be burned? Is that the primary meaning of all of those passages? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, August 12, 2009, says:

Christ’s death in our behalf, in which He suffered the penalty for all our sins, forms the foundation of the plan of salvation. Christ’s death was the only way possible for humans to be saved and have the promise of eternal life. To miss that is to miss the point of the entire Gospel.

How does Christ’s life and death on the cross accomplish those things? Are we just expected to do our best and God will take care of the rest? Could a person be saved even at the very beginning of that struggle? What about the thief on the cross? Would it be more correct to say that Christ’s life and death are God’s way of revealing the truth about His character and His government, thus, giving us a chance to respond?

18. So, what do we mean when we say that Christians will not continue to sin? (1 John 3:6,8,9) How can that be put together with 1 John 1:6-2:2 where John assured us that God has made provision for taking care of our sins? But in 1 John 3:6,8,9, John stated unequivocally that we are expected to stop sinning. Commentators have struggled with this apparent contradiction in the first three chapters of John’s epistle. If our lives are supposed to be lived without sin, why has God made provision for our sins? Several possible suggestions have been made:

1) John was clearly talking about the ideal. But he recognized that we will not all live ideal lives. Of course, the ideal is that we live without sin, and John was making it very clear how serious sin is.

2) It is important to point out that the verbs in Greek are in the present continuous tense. Christians will not continue to sin. It means that by daily Bible study, prayer, and as far as possible, living in harmony with God’s plan for our lives, we will gradually be changed to become more like Him; and thus, we will cease living in sin.

19. Peter suggested that we must live those kind of lives in order to hasten the second coming of Christ. (2 Peter 3:10-14) Are we doing that? What assistance does God promise us for living such lives? (Ephesians 6:11)

20. Ellen G. White was also very direct in her comments about sin in our lives:

**Let none deceive themselves with the belief that they can become holy while willfully violating one of God’s requirements. The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit and separates the soul from God.** “Sin is the transgression of the law.” And “whosoever sinneth [transgresseth the law] hath not seen Him, neither known Him.” 1 John 3:6. Though John in his epistles dwells so fully upon love, yet he does not hesitate to reveal the true character of that class who claim to be sanctified while living in transgression of the law of God. “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth

is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.”  
1 John 2:4, 5. Here is the test of every man’s profession. We cannot accord holiness to any man without bringing him to the measurement of God’s only standard of holiness in heaven and in earth. If men feel no weight of the moral law, if they belittle and make light of God’s precepts, if they break one of the least of [473] these commandments, and teach men so, they shall be of no esteem in the sight of Heaven, and we may know that their claims are without foundation. {GC 472.3}

And the claim to be without sin is, in itself, evidence that he who makes this claim is far from holy. It is because he has no true conception of the infinite purity and holiness of God or of what they must become who shall be in harmony with His character; because he has no true conception of the purity and exalted loveliness of Jesus, and the malignity and evil of sin, that man can regard himself as holy. The greater the distance between himself and Christ, and the more inadequate his conceptions of the divine character and requirements, the more righteous he appears in his own eyes. —Ellen G. White, *the Great Controversy*, pp. 472,473

21. How much is our individual concept of sin affected by the society in which we live? Can you think of examples of behaviors which are accepted in some societies as being normal, and yet, in other societies are considered sinful? How do we relate to those differences of opinion?
22. Does God expect each one of us in our direct relationship with Him to be able to overcome every sin? At what point do those who are struggling with depression, addictions, etc. need to seek professional help? What did Paul imply when he said, “Bear one another’s burdens”? (Galatians 6:2)
23. To those of us who have adopted a “great controversy” understanding of the plan of salvation, sin is more than just a collection of acts which we do here on this earth. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is an allegiance to Satan—the first great rebel—and a willingness to follow his selfishness and rebelliousness. We believe that those who are true Christians will learn to separate themselves from the selfish attitudes of Satan and of a very selfish world around us and slowly, but surely, be transformed to exhibit the kind of loving care that is the hallmark of God’s kingdom. The only way to accomplish that is to regularly and continuously “behold” the life and death of Jesus and “by beholding, becoming changed.” We cannot do that for ourselves. We can only allow the Holy Spirit to do it for us through Bible study, meditation, prayer, and witnessing. But, considering all the privileges that God has promised us, it is worth every tiny bit of effort that we put forth.

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