

Deep Clean- Lesson 3

1 John 1:8–2:2

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Some years ago a Harvard psychiatrist wrote a provocative book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* In it he expressed his fear that sin was disappearing from our moral vocabulary—not just the word, but the very concept of a universal standard of wrongdoing. He bemoaned the declining sense of morality in our culture and people’s reluctance to take responsibility for their behavior. He was concerned for the impact it might have on our society and on people’s physical and emotional well-being. He wrote that book in 1973, and I think we’d all agree that his fears have become a reality.

When the church abandons the notion of sin, something has gone wrong with our message. We can never live deeply until we deal with our sin.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] When was the last time you read an article or heard a sermon on sin? What do you remember from it?

[Q] How does the word sin communicate something different than words like dysfunction, disease, mistakes, and failures?

[Q] What kind of words do you use to label things you do wrong? Why?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: We are sinful by nature and choice.

Read 1 John 1:8–10.

In these verses, John confronts two mistaken ideas people tend to have about sin—in his own day as well as in ours. The first mistaken idea is that sin is not a problem. Look again at verse 8: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” A more literal translation would be, “If we say we have no sin . . .” That expression, to “have sin,” is an unusual one, which is probably why the translators tried to improve it a bit. John is the only biblical writer to use that exact expression. He’s describing sin as a condition rather than an act. To say that we “have sin” is to say that we have a moral problem, an underlying principle at work in our beings, a disposition toward disobedience. It’s not just that we do wrong things; it’s that there’s something wrong with us, in us. The second mistaken idea people have about sin is this: sin is not a problem for me. In other words, other human beings may have a problem with sin, but I don’t. I’ve gotten beyond it. Look at verse 10: “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” Here John is not talking about sin as a condition, but sin as an action, a behavior. Apparently, there were some teachers and believers in the church who claimed they had achieved a level of spirituality in which they no longer succumbed to sin.

John refutes both lines of thinking. If we think human beings don’t have a sin problem, we’re deluding ourselves. And if we claim that we haven’t sinned, we’re making God out to be a liar. That’s pretty strong language. But John knows we can never live deeply until we face the reality of sin.

The reality is we are sinners by nature and by choice. In other words, we have a disposition toward sin and we commit sins. John is not the only biblical writer to make the point.

[Q] Read Psalm 51:3–5 and Romans 3:22–23. How do both of these passages make clear that we not only have sinful actions but sinful natures?

[Q] How is having a sinful nature different than saying that human beings are evil through and through or that they never get it right?

Note: The Bible is clear that human beings are created in God's image; our very nature is designed to reflect His goodness, love, justice, and beauty. And sometimes, often times, we do get it right. It's just that ever since the fall of the first man and woman, human beings have this skew in our nature away from God and His goodness- this disposition to do the wrong thing, to hurt people that we love, and to trash what God meant to be beautiful. Our very nature is shot through with these tendencies.

Teaching Point Two: We must get rid of our sin.

So what do we do with our sin? We've got a few options. We could ignore it. We could try not to think about it and make excuses for it. None of us would claim to deny sin, but practically speaking, we choose to ignore it—we minimize it, rationalize it, and learn to live with it. It's really just a cover-up, like John says. We don't want to admit to ourselves and God that we have a problem.

Another option is to obsess over it—to punish ourselves for it, to beat ourselves up over it, to wallow in guilt, shame, and regret. The problem with obsessing is that it only serves to drive us deeper into our sin and further from God, others, and our true selves.

[Q] Which of these two things do you tend toward—ignoring sin or obsessing over it?

[Q] Neither one removes the guilt, and neither one restores us to relationship with God and others. What does remove sin and restore us according to 1 John 1:9?

[Q] Why is confession so hard for us?

Teaching Point Three: If we confess, God forgives and cleanses us.

As important and helpful as it is to confess to other human beings, ultimately each of us has to confess our sins to God. He is the primary one we have offended, and he is the only one who can do something about it.

[Q] John says that if we confess our sins, God will do two things (v. 9). What are they?

Note: First, He will forgive us. To forgive someone is to release them from their debt and obligation. When someone forgives a loan, it means you no longer need to make payments on that loan. When God forgives you for your sin, it means you no longer need to pay for that sin. You don't need to punish yourself. You don't need to do penance. You're off the hook. The second thing God will do is cleanse us: and to purify us from all unrighteousness." That word purify could just as easily be translated cleanse. To purify something is to remove what doesn't belong there. To cleanse something is to get rid of the dirt.

[Q] Forgiveness releases us from guilt. Cleansing removes our shame. Forgiveness takes care of our past. Cleansing makes possible our future. Why are both necessary for us to go deeper in the Christian life?

[Q] Read 1 John 2:1–2. How do these verses explain how God can both forgive and cleanse us and still be a just God?

Note: God can forgive our sin because Jesus paid for it by his death on the cross. God can cleanse our sin, because the blood of Jesus washes it away—no matter how deep the stain.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

“My dear children,” says John, “I write this to you so that you will not sin.” John wants us to understand the deep damage that sin does to our souls and to our relationships. But he also wants us to know that if and when we do sin, we have a Father to turn to who can forgive us and set us free. Praise God for being faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, when we confess our sins to him. Action Point: On your own this week consider if there is any sin that is keeping you from going deeper in Christ. If there is, go to your pastor, small-group leader, or close friend and confess it. Ask them to pray with you so that you can begin to move ahead.