**Am I Walking in the Light?**

When you sin, do you approach the Father with a view of yourself as His enemy? Do you approach Him as one on the outside of fellowship with him? When a child of God sins, is he immediately and necessarily lost—cut out of fellowship with God? One does not have to be taught this in order to begin to relate to God in this way. If this does describe your understanding of sin in the life of a child of God, please stop reading this article and read 1John 1:1-2:6.

Really. Please. Take your time.

What John has to say is relevant for saints who are asking themselves whether they are truly in fellowship with the Father. My interest in addressing this topic is to encourage fellow disciples in their walk in the light. This was John’s purpose: “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” (1John 2:1 ESV).

God’s people do not walk in darkness (1John 1:5-6). If we walk in darkness and claim fellowship with God, we live a lie. If we continue in sin, refusing to confess, refusing to repent, and consistently bearing bad fruit, we are walking in darkness and do not have fellowship with God. John’s message is a wake-up call for any who would wish to ignore his or her own sin.

Here is my technically literal translation of 1John 3:6 —“Everyone who abides in Him does not sin; everyone who sins has not seen Him or known Him”. In isolation, this sentence would seem to imply that any child of God who sins is *at once* lost. However, a technically literal translation does not necessarily make for a good translation. By reading this inspired book in the order it has been written, we will benefit from the way John defines his own terms. In 1John 1:1-2:6, John addresses the matter of sin that is in the life of one who has fellowship with God.

We who walk in the light and who have fellowship with one another are people whose sin Jesus cleanses (1:7). If we suppose that John is only referring to sin prior to our covenant fellowship with Christ, then 1:8 makes his meaning clear. We (the very same people who walk in the light) would be lying if we said that we do not have sin. Pause for a moment to appreciate God’s wondrous grace toward us! None of us who walk in the light avoids sin absolutely. Yet, we have fellowship with God and each other and the blood of Jesus cleanses us! Since a person who walks in the light also has sin, John must mean something more than an instance of sin in 3:6. One who abides in God will not be impenitently steeped in a life of sin. “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning” (3:6 ESV).

Such an understanding is consistent with John’s purpose in this book. John is aiming to reassure those who are true children of God. He has proclaimed the word of life so that we may have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:3). In 5:13, John reiterates his particular concern that we “may know that [we] have eternal life”. This is why the subject of sin in the life of a Christian is addressed. If we are immediately and necessarily lost each time we sin, then there is little to no assurance. We would be in a lifelong game of spiritual roulette, given that the return of Christ or our death could come at any moment. Further, we would be relating to God, not as his children or his friends, but would be regularly approaching him as his enemies. Those consequences are not merely daunting; they are inconsistent with the peace described for all who are in Christ.

Marriage is meant to teach us about Christ and the church. My wife and I have fellowship with each other. When either of us has sinned against the other, we have not ceased to be married. We have not divorced or separated. We confess our wrongs and forgive *within* the relationship. We do not approach each other as enemies, but as husband and wife—not merely offering the possibility of fellowship, but seeking reconciliation in light of the relationship that already is. Children of God have an advocate *within* the relationship (2:1). He has already died for us (2:2). We have already been justified through faith. We have already been united with him.

Permit me a reference to a conceptually parallel passage in Romans. Before Paul addresses the problem of sin and suffering in the life of a Christian (the subject matter of Romans 5-8), he reminds us, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). This is where he then urges those in Christ to perceive themselves as reconciled already—not as enemies any longer (5:10).

What does all of this stir within me in regard to sin? John does not take our responsibility lightly. We are to confess our sins (1:9). John’s admonition to walk as He walked (2:3-6) implies a transformed life. John’s teaching about sin in the life of a faithful disciple is effective for overcoming sin. My wife’s grace toward me should not be seen as excusing or enabling sin. On the contrary, such grace strengthens me for spiritual growth. How much more does God’s grace transform me! On the cross, we have seen the cost and the glory of God’s grace toward us.

So we walk in its light. As Horatio Spafford put it so encouragingly, “My sin—O the bliss of this glorious tho’t—My sin, not in part but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord O my soul!”