



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Am I Walking in the Light?

By MASON VENUSO

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 1 John 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." (1 John 2:1 ESV).

God's people do not walk in darkness (1 John 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 1 John 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 1 John 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).

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."
~ 1 John 2:1

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 John 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!"

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Sobering: How Blind We Humans Can Be!

By RICK LIGGIN

THROUGH THE PROPHET Amos, God warned the northern kingdom of Israel that He was about to bring sure and certain judgment down on them! These were not good people. They were the kind of people who just couldn't wait for the Sabbath to be over so they could get back to the business of cheating the helpless with dishonest scales and overpriced worthless wheat (Amos 8:4-6). To these ruthless and evil people, God said: "Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land...the Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, 'Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds. Because of this will not the land quake and everyone who dwells in it mourn?'" (8:7-8). Indeed, they would! God even went on to describe the "mourning" and "lamentation" that would certainly come soon on this unfaithful nation (8:8 - 9:10).

Did you notice what God said He had "sworn by the pride of Jacob" (8:7)? He

had sworn: "I will never forget their deeds" (8:7)! Whoa! How scary is that? God was, in effect, saying, "I swear I will never forget their sins!" Typically, we think of God as being One who "remembers our sins no more" (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12). But based on what we're learning here in Amos, there can come a time when people are so far gone in wickedness that God will never forget their sins. Wow! That is a truly terrifying thought!

Now, you would think that people who are this evil and corrupt must surely know that they are a wicked and rotten lot. But this is where this message becomes especially sobering. At this time in their history, the people of Israel felt that they were all "okay" with God. Their national prosperity, both militarily and materially, confirmed for them that "the Lord God of hosts" was "with" them (Amos 5:14). After all, they were extremely religious people. They held religious festivals and assemblies; they multiplied sacrifices and offerings; and they worshiped in songs with harps (5:21-

23). In fact, they were so confident of their right standing before God that they were convinced that "calamity will not overtake or confront us" (9:10). They believed that if any "day of the Lord" did come, it would turn out to be a day of deliverance for them from their oppressive enemies who would be judged (cf. 5:18-20).

But despite their arrogant confidence in their right standing before God, they were so wrong! They were totally blind to their faults. They were blind to the gross immorality among them (2:7). They were blind to their own materialistic greed, dishonest business dealings, and selfish abuse of the poor to their own advantage (8:4-6). And they were blind to the fact that all their religious activities were just meaningless rituals—they were only going through the motions of mindless "worship" (5:21-23). They just did not see the reality that they had become so corrupt that God's judgment against them could no longer be avoided. And so, the Lord warned: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (4:12), because He had "sworn by the pride of Jacob" that He would never forget their sins (8:7)! Wow! How terrifying is that?

It is a wonderful thing for God to promise that He will remember our sins no more; but it is altogether something else for Him to say to us...or to anyone: "I will never forget your sins." That's terrifying!

A Sobering Application for Us!

One of the real difficulties we have as humans is being objective as we evaluate ourselves before God. Real objectivity—seeing ourselves as God sees us—is hard. Think about Israel in Amos' day; they were so corrupt that God promised never to forget their sins. They had to be really evil for God to make such a promise; and yet, they were totally blind to their sin. They actually evaluated themselves to be right with God. Can this happen to us? We would like to think that we could never be so blind. But listen, folks; if it happened with Israel, mark it down; it can happen with us! Don't you dare doubt it!

Now, please know I'm not trying to indict anyone or suggest that we are like Old Testament Israel; but I do believe that their situation should move us to sober reflection, especially as we try to examine and evaluate ourselves spiritually before God! If Israel could be so blind as to see themselves as "okay" with God while He was promising never to forget their sins, then we must see that we, too, can be blind to faults or failings that need to be improved. Understand that the Lord *knows* our deeds...really! Do we? Let's not be blind to our faults like Israel. That would be terrifying!

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How's Your House?

By AL DIESTELKAMP

IT APPEARS THAT JESUS CHRIST never owned a house during His time here on earth. He said that He had no place of His own to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). However, Jesus did speak of a different kind of "house" that we should have:



A secure house: He spoke of a house that remains secure even during storms because it is built upon a rock (Lk. 6:48). We wouldn't consider building or buying a house that did not have a solid foundation. Of course, Jesus was referring to our need to build our lives upon faith in Him as the solid Rock of our salvation.

A clean house: He said that when demons were driven from a house, they were able

to reoccupy it because it was not filled with good (Lk. 11:26). Likewise, when we repent of our sins, it is crucial to fill the void with God's presence. Then there won't be room for sin to dwell therein.



In each of these illustrations, the "house" Jesus references represents our lives. If we allow Jesus to make our lives secure and clean and invite Him to dwell in us, we will be the beneficiaries of an everlasting "dwelling place" prepared by the Lord (Jn. 14:2-3).

Even if our earthly life were to be snuffed out, we have nothing to fear: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

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The Sovereignty of God

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

GOD IS SOVEREIGN (i.e. supreme ruler). He is King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15). God can do what He wills to do because He is God, and all of His ways are perfect. God's sovereignty is inherent as the Creator (e.g. Rom. 1:20; Rev. 4:11). I acknowledge it. I believe in it. I submit to it (imperfectly). I am *not* sovereign, and I am in no position to challenge God's authority.

Knowing that His ways are higher than mine, God is patient with my doubts and welcomes my laments about why things happen as they do in this life under the sun. He is perfectly faithful in His love, justice, and mercy. Indeed, these grand characteristics are not bigger than He is. He is not subject to them. He defines them.

Therefore, I must follow and teach what God has revealed. However, I do so with the understanding that my interpretation and application of His revelation can be as

imperfect as I am; and I am in no position to challenge God's sovereignty based on my limited understanding. Rather, I must do my best to conform my understanding to His revelation and immutable character.

Also, God is not subject to His revelation or to my conclusions about His revelation. His revelation is neither infinite nor sovereign. There is much more to God than He has revealed (cf. Deut. 29:29).

Therefore, respect for and submission to the sovereignty of God takes seriously what He *has* revealed while acknowledging that He may extend grace in ways that are beyond my ability to imagine. Conversely, respect for and submission to the sovereignty of God takes seriously what He has revealed so that I do not, in any way, alter or diminish the necessity of faithful obedience on the presumption of His grace.

I am gracious to others because God has been gracious to me (cf. Mt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). However, God's grace is not

mine to extend except as He has revealed in His Word.

As I wrestle with whether or not some teaching in Scripture is "necessary" in order to be saved, to be faithful, or to be sound, I must beware extremes. While I must not assume that *my* understanding of Scripture requires God to act accordingly, I am also not at liberty to declare some doctrine "unnecessary" on the basis that God can do whatever He wants. Belief in the sovereignty of God requires me to obey what He has revealed and to acknowledge that He is perfect in justice and will judge in whatever way is consistent with His character.

God is sovereign; I am not. Vengeance is God's, not mine (Rom. 12:19). He extends mercy according to *His* will, not according to mine (9:14-18). "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (11:33).

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THE CRISIS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

I HEARD A RELATIONSHIP counselor say that most married couples hit a point in their relationship that they called a "crisis of disappointment." It is when a spouse sees the flaws of his/her partner that had been hidden by the fog of emotional love. If nothing is done, patience wears thin and fights ensue. "I didn't think it would be this hard" and "I didn't sign up for this" become passing thoughts. Intimacy struggles, eyes wander, suspicion arises, separation and divorce hover on the horizon.

It occurred to me that this is a frequent scenario in the lives of Christians in their relationship with Christ. At first everything is beautiful. Forgiveness, blessings, fellowship, faith, hope, love, peace, future, and optimism are all there. But then a "crisis of disappointment" happens. Unbelievers mock, persecute, and ostracize. Physical life unravels: job loss, financial struggles, health problems, suffering and death of a loved one. The flaws of life that were temporarily hidden by the initial emotional love for Christ are still there. If nothing is done, patience with God wears thin and fights about His will ensue. "I didn't think it would be this hard" and "I didn't sign up for this" become passing thoughts. Closeness to God struggles, eyes wander to other life options, suspicion over whether God's will is in our best interest, separation from God and His people hovers on the hori-

zon. These similarities shouldn't surprise us because marriage is used as a metaphor for God's relationship with His people throughout the Bible.

Burying the crisis avoids uncomfortable and hard relationship work, but a lack of resolution dampens communication and robs relationships of growth and oneness. Talking to God about the unexpected negative things that are happening in our lives may feel awkward or even wrong, but it needs to happen. It happens in the book of Job without him sinning or charging God with doing something wrong (Job 1:22). The Psalms contain cringe-worthy complaints, desperate requests, and questions about the future, yet many of them were written by "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). I remind myself of something I heard a preacher say, "You can tell God what's on your heart. He knows it anyway."

Openly facing the crisis of disappointment gives us the opportunity to get answers and grow in faith. Ignoring the crisis leaves flaws in our understanding and faith, giving "place to the devil" (Ep 4:27; "foot-hold" [NIV] or "opportunity" [NASB, ESV] to the devil).

Often the biggest problem is our expectations. As in marriage, we may not enter Christ objectively. People may paint things as being only sunshine and rainbows in order to attract us, even to seduce us, to Christ. Of course, "every spiritual blessing

in the heavenly places" is in Christ (Eph 1:3). But is this what we are looking for—spiritual blessing? Will we be content with this? When Paul asked that his "thorn in the flesh" be removed, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9). Is grace really enough? Grace was enough for Paul, but will grace be enough for us?

This is not just about having positive mental attitudes and trying to see the good in every situation. This isn't just about putting on a happy face and using smiling emojis in our texts when we are actually suffering and dying on the inside. We are told to confess our doubts, struggles, suffering, temptations, and sin (1 Jn 1:9; Ja 5:16). We are to engage in the wrestling match between flesh and spirit (Ep 6:12; Ga 5:17). God and His people can and will help us.

The crisis of disappointment is a critical point in our spiritual walk. Many disciples experienced a crisis of disappointment when Jesus refused to meet their expectation of being fed in John chapter six, so they quit following Him (Jn 6:66). But a few continued to follow Jesus and learn from the One who has the words of eternal life and is the "Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn 6:68-69). One way leads to death and destruction (Mt 7:13-14); the other leads to righteousness, salvation, and eternal life (2 Cor 7:10). How will we handle the crisis of disappointment? It's our choice.

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The article in our previous issue entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?" elicited some good feedback about future publications of *Think*. Most who chose to reply said they prefer receiving the paper in its hardcopy form. Some noted how its physical presence in their houses reminds them to read another article or to pass it along to others. We appreciate the words of encouragement to keep writing regardless of the format used for distribution. Our inclination for the present is to continue printing and mailing copies as we have been doing for the last 56 years "as ability permits." This issue is expected to cost about \$890 which will create a deficit of about \$58.

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I Guess This is My Life Now

By NOAH DIESTELKAMP

WHEN I AM FEELING uncomfortable, I find it difficult to remember how it felt to be comfortable. Perhaps some examples from my own life will sound familiar to you. By day three of a head cold, I can no longer remember what it feels like to breathe through my nose. At this point, I am tempted to think, "I'm sure it was nice breathing through my nose, but I guess this is my life now." When I am eating tortilla chips or popcorn, something gets stuck among my teeth and gums and no matter how skilled I am with toothpick or floss—it holds fast. The ache is still there the next day, and again I think to myself, "Eating was fun while it lasted, but now every bite hurts. I guess this is my life now!" By this point in my life, I've experienced this phenomenon time and time again, so I ought to know that these discomforts don't last forever; but in the moment, it feels quite permanent. "I guess this is my life now."

I have experienced the same phenomenon in my spiritual life. Weeks full of discouragement can go by. Whether it is

caused by my friends, by my community, or by my own attitude, I sense the same idea creeping in—"I guess this is my life now." A month into a breakneck schedule of work, travel, activities, and evening plans, I begin to wonder what life must have been like when I had time to pray, meditate on God's Word, and invest in my family. "Time must have been nice while I had it, but I guess this is my life now." As my head hangs in shame after I became impatient or angry for the fifth (or fiftieth) time that day, a heavy fog settles in my mind, saying "I never will escape this sin. I guess this is my life now."

But in saying this, I have accepted a lie. Yes, we experience troughs and valleys in all kinds of areas; but this does not mean we have to stay there! We are not meant to "settle in" to the valleys. When we find ourselves in a valley, we are meant to appeal to God for the path back up the mountain! When we are trapped in sin, we can confess it to God, confident that He is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:9). When we are distracted, we can heed the instruction given to the church in Ephesus: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen;

repent, and do the works you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). When we are discouraged, we can find rest and hope in God because his steadfast love never ceases and he is our portion (Lamentations 3:22-24)!

I do not deny the difficulty of life's valleys, nor do I want to downplay just how "stuck" we can feel in the moment. However, when we find ourselves there, we must fight the urge to shrug our shoulders and say, "I guess this is my life now." Imagine how different the Luke 15 story of the Prodigal Son would be if—when he was at his lowest, sitting with the pigs and wishing he could eat their food—he had said, "I guess this is my life now." Instead, we see he remembered the one person who could save him from the wretched situation he had brought upon himself—his father.

Friend, whether you're discouraged, distracted, or trapped in sin, look to your Father. Through Jesus, he continually extends his hand to welcome you, forgive you, and redeem you for his work. *This is your life now.*

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