

First John (4) - Correcting Serious Mistakes(2)

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[0 : 0 0] In chapter 1, we're going to look this evening at verses 8 and 9. We're taking our time going through this particular part of it, because there's so much packed into these verses.

And tonight we read these verses 8 and 9. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You recall from last time, just to recap a little, that we noticed how in verse 5, John is giving this great affirmation about God, that in him there is no, that he is light and in him is no darkness at all.

And then he gives us three units that follow on from that, each of them beginning with if we say. And they're directly related to what is said there about God in verse 5.

Last time we saw, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus' Son cleanses us from all sin.

[1 : 1 5] So we noticed that in these three units, following on from the affirmation of what God is like and who God is, we have the error that John is addressing, set out, the serious defect, the error, and then that's followed by the outcome of that error, and then that's followed by the correction that John gives, just to correct the thinking of those who may be thinking in that way.

It looks like he's dealing with, again, with the false teachers who have left the church, who have gone out and are peddling heresies, and are perhaps influencing the thinking of people in the church that remain, that John is actually writing to.

And that is, many scholars think that that's why he's saying, if we say that he's really borrowing terms, that the heretics themselves, the false teachers are using, and using that against themselves here, in the way that he's dealing with things.

But in any case, you can find the same pattern in verses 8 and 9. If we say we have no sin, that's the error he's dealing with. And then he goes on to say, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

That's the result of that error. That's the outcome of it. And then he corrects it by saying, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[2 : 3 5] In other words, the way to deal with sin really and properly, not by denying it, not by minimizing it, it's not by treating it anything less than what the Bible treats it as, as exceedingly serious.

But then when you bring it to God in confession, you are assured of his pardon and cleansing of our sins. That's the pattern of these two verses.

So we look first of all at the mistake and its outcome. This is the second mistake, the second if we say, and the outcome of it as we've seen in verse 8. And then we'll look at the correction in verse 9.

Now the mistake, the error is, if we say that we have no sin. What does John mean by that? How were these people saying that they had no sin?

Surely that's something nobody in their right mind would actually say. Well, that's not the case, because down through the centuries, we've had people even belonging to the Christian church, who have said that they, as we'll see tonight, have progressed beyond sinning, that God has bestowed on them the gift of elevating them above actually sinning against him, that they're in that state by God's grace, by God's grace giving them faith to reach that level, if you like, and to maintain that.

[3 : 55] That's the second way. But the first way is, we can say that we have no sin if we deny original sin. I will explain that in a moment. Original sin, you've heard the term many times, I'm sure.

It's something that has been described in our catechism and theological statements over the centuries as what is true of us by nature, from which our actual sins proceed.

In other words, the nature that we have as human beings, fallen human beings, from the time of Adam's fall, the nature that we possess is a sinful nature.

And from that sinful nature, as a source of our doings, or our failure to do things that we ought to do, that's the source of it in our nature, in our very souls, and the acts of our doings or actions are the sins which come from that sin, from that original sin, our inmost being.

There are people that would actually deny that our nature is in fact sinful because there's a lot of influence, of course, through things like the influence of an evolutionary view of human life, that human life has progressively become better.

[5 : 18] And in fact, because we've come not from a creation by God, we've come from just some form of human beginnings that has developed into what human beings are nowadays.

So sin really doesn't fit into that. Sin is not meaningful because God doesn't really exist in the mind of such people who choose an exclusively evolutionary view of human life.

and others will see if they're not committed to that, see sin only as what we do and would maybe acknowledge, well, I believe in the concept of sin in terms of what I do, but I don't believe in sin being part of my nature or being at the root of my being as a human being.

I don't see that there's a problem of sin in my soul. The beauty of the catechism and our confessions is that they summarize the doctrine the Bible teaches us so well within a few words.

Let me remind you of catechism question 18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate into which man fell. In other words, what is the sinfulness of that state into which man fell?

[6 : 39] And the answer is the sinfulness of that estate into which man fell consists, firstly, in the guilt of Adam's first sin. Secondly, the want of original righteousness, the absence of original righteousness, what we had when we were created by God.

And then thirdly, the corruption of our whole nature which is commonly called original sin together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Now it's that latter part of the answer that I want you just to focus on tonight in regard to our text. This is commonly called the corruption of our whole nature commonly called original sin and it's from that it says that our actual, all actual transgressions proceed from that.

If you think of a river at its source as it comes wherever it begins out from the ground that's, you see, if you think of that as being our human soul, our inmost spiritual being, that is the source of our sin.

The source of our sin is not in our outward actions. You go into deep within our being and the catechism there reminded us of the teaching of the Bible. That's where our sin begins.

[7 : 56] That's where our sinfulness exists first of all. And it's from that that our sins then proceed. Let me remind you of what it says in the Bible itself of which the catechism is a summary really.

Do you remember David in Psalm 51? We so often go to Psalm 51 as God's, David's confession to God of his sin but also of his sinfulness.

David came before God not just to confess the wrong of what he had done and how he was ashamed of what he had done how he saw his actions as sinful. Yes, he did that.

He says, blot out my transgressions. Wash me from my sins. For I know my transgressions. My sin is ever before me. Against you only have I sinned and I've done what is evil in your sight.

He's talking there about his actual sins. the actions that are really sins in the presence of God and the opinion of God. But then he goes on you see to say, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.

[9 : 09] He's not blaming his mother for the sinfulness of his actions or the sinfulness of his being. He's not blaming his mother for the fact that he knows he has a sinful heart, a sinful soul.

That is from that sinful nature that these transgressions, these sinful actions that he's confessing to God have proceeded. What he's saying is, I know, Lord, that my very being is sinful from the moment of my conception, from my development even in the womb, I was conceived in iniquity.

That's where our sinful nature begins. sins. We don't become sinners from the moment of our birth when we do our first sinful action.

We are sinners at the root of our being from which our sinful actions proceed. And that's one of the ways that we could deny that we have no sin.

We could deny that we don't have that original sin, that we're not corrupt at the root of our being. A lot of people just have no time for Calvinism. And some people have caricatures of Calvinism.

[10 : 22] We love Calvinistic theology because we believe it's true to the Bible. There's a proper interpretation of the Bible. And one of the great things that Calvin taught and passed on through his writings was the doctrine of total depravity.

Total depravity. And some people take from that the mistaken view that Calvin taught that we are as bad as thoroughly bad as we could possibly be. And that's not what he taught.

That's not what the Bible teaches. That's what Psalm 51 is saying to us. That's not what the catechism means by original sin. It doesn't mean that we are as corrupt and as sinful as we could possibly be.

Thankfully God keeps a check on that. Even for the most part in the world. Total depravity means that all parts of our being are affected by sin.

Every single faculty we have our minds our conscience our understanding our emotions as well as the actions that we do outwardly they are all sinful in themselves.

[11 : 33] And it's necessary to emphasize that because as we said so often until you begin to get a proper grasp and understanding of sin and what sin is and where our sins proceed from that sinfulness of our heart we are not in a position to appreciate God's forgiveness God's redemption God's salvation the death of Christ why did he have to die?

Because this is what we are as sinners in need of salvation. We are corrupt at the root of our being and from that root proceeds actual transgressions as the catechism put it.

That's the first way we could deny that we have sin. Second is as I mentioned well let's do another one first of all there's the kind of idea which we can call the good Christian idea because there are some people that think sin equals murder some desperate crime or other some wrong that's very obviously a wrong something that you do when you go out and kill somebody or you stab somebody or you defraud somebody you engaged in serious stealing or defrauding someone or company whatever but these major things are what many people think of sin to be and they would never say of themselves that they are actually sinners because they would say well you surely don't mean that I'm a sinner I've never done that sort of thing I've never robbed anybody I've never gone out and committed murder I've never committed adultery I don't really speak badly of people

I watch what I say I'm careful about what I do I help lots of people in their lives who are in need of help it's that good Christian idea that person who would say well I'm not perfect but I'm not a sinner don't describe me as a sinner otherwise you're lumping me together with all of those people who have done terrible things in their lives and to other people in the world well the Bible actually does precisely that because when you go to just for one example to Paul's letter to the Romans where he's preparing for that great emphasis on salvation or justification being through faith in Christ not by the works of the law well in chapter 3 this is what he's saying what then are we Jews any better off that's any better off than Gentiles no not at all for we have already charged that all both Jews and Gentiles are under sin as it is written none is righteous no not one and he goes on then to add to that the verses which follow but that's what he's demonstrating there is no one righteous no not one we are all sinful and we're all sinners and we're all in need of redemption and we're never in a position to say if we haven't been born again if we haven't actually come to know

God's forgiveness we're never in a position to say but I'm not a sinner other people in the world I can see are sinners but don't please classify me as a sinner that's often typically something that nominal Christianity teaches the kind of teaching the kind of preaching that's all too common in the world that really just describes Christianity as a system of good works and just think good of yourself think good of your fellow human beings do good to them and you're a Christian that's what God wants you to be and God accepts you for that and there's no emphasis really on the depth of sin or original sin there's no emphasis in those churches and those groupings of the need to be born again the need for a radical conversion you're in the privileged position of knowing this the Bible as you know teaches you about sin teaches you about original sin teaches about what you are as well as what you do teaches about the root of sin in your being from which transgressions actual sinful deeds emanate and flow you know that that's the gospel you've been taught that you have that privilege and so you know it's not wrong to emphasize the fact that you are a sinner and I'm a sinner that we're all in need of redemption in need of God's salvation in Christ so you can deny original sin and therefore you deny that we have sin you can deny the sin that is true of each of us whatever kind of works we're performing and then there's been down through the years thirdly a claim on the part of some that they've reached or by God's grace been enabled to reach a state of no longer sinning now maybe there was something like that in the false teaching that John was countering we don't have access exactly to it but certainly soon after the apostolic age there was a system of teaching known as Gnosticism and within that

[16 : 54] Gnosticism and the complexities of it there were things such as a denial that sin was real or that was actual sin on the part of people who lived a certain way and that made its way into the church as well down in later years you find monasticism for example is just a way of trying by your own efforts to reach perfection to reach a position in life where you're as sinless as possible but then you have other deviations in theology the likes of John Wesley for example a famous Christian that you would never deny he wasn't a Christian but he was an Arminian in terms of his theology he was also somebody who began a movement known as the Holiness Movement within which there developed an idea that God actually could give certain people through faith itself victory over sinning and it came to be known as perfectionism and people like the famous

American theologian B.B. Warfield wrote a great treatise against perfectionism but in various ways therefore that perfectionism was something that was claimed by Christian groups in different settings and it's still very much part of what you see in certain Christian ideas particularly among charismatic groups who will tell you that this is possible in this life to achieve perfection to achieve sinlessness to be in a position where you're no longer actually sinning where God has given you the kind of faith and the degree of faith that puts you above sinning and keeps you in that position of not sinning well the Bible certainly doesn't teach that and that's easy enough demonstrated from scripture because if you go to the likes of John chapter 8 for example that's a passage that's very often in brackets because it doesn't appear in some of the early documents of the Christian of the scriptures in the New Testament but anyway it's a thing for scholars to dispute but this woman caught in adultery remember the beginning of chapter 8 of John the scribes and Pharisees brought this woman who they claimed had been caught in the act of adultery and placed her in the midst they said to Jesus teacher this woman has been caught in the act of adultery now in the law of Moses we're commanded to stone each woman such women so what do you say this was of course to test Jesus to see what his reaction would be and he wrote with his finger on the ground that famous incident and they all skulked away and disappeared and he turned to the woman and said woman where are your accusers has no one condemned you she said no one Lord and he said this neither do I condemn you go go and sin no more from now on from now on sin no more now you have two things in that you have what you might call pardon forgiveness justification where Jesus said neither do I condemn you

I'm not condemning you I'm forgiving you but go and sin no more he didn't say now that I've forgiven you now that I don't condemn you you're now set above sin and you don't need to worry about sin anymore it'll take care of itself you're in a special category no Jesus is saying I've forgiven you I don't condemn you I'm not going to mark your iniquity against you is what he means but go and sin no more go and attend to your life so that you deal with your sinful life and turn away from your sinful life and seek gradually bit by bit by God's help to overcome your sinful life that's sanctification and what perfectionism does is really mix up something of justification and sanctification because God in giving us faith doesn't give us the faith that's able to say at a certain juncture that's it

I'm above sin I'm no longer sinning I'm perfect yes you're perfect in your justification where God gives the righteousness of Christ to you where he imputes that to your account that's in a sense the legal position the judicial position where God is saying your sins are forgiven but then there's the actual life that you now live and God is saying you need my spirit I'm giving you my spirit to sanctify you to progressively make you holy so that you are able to attend to what I require as expressed in my word so the claim that we are in a state where we no longer sin is not biblically valid either we often have stories from about C.H.

Spurgeon we had one this morning I think if I remember rightly but here's another anecdote somebody a woman who came to Spurgeon apparently and had fallen into this idea that she was no longer in a state of sinning and she came to Spurgeon and said you know I think for the last month or so Mr.

[22 : 40] Spurgeon I have not been sinning God has given me the grace to put me above sinning and I'm sure I no longer actively sin and the good man of course turned around and said to her well that's quite interesting he said I'm sure you're proud of that oh yes she said and of course he then said well I thought you would be pride is one of the chief sins after all isn't it because she was caught out by the wisdom of Spurgeon in the way that he answered so if we say we have no sin however we come to that conclusion and I've given you just three ways briefly we this is the consequence the result of it we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us that's pretty straightforward and blunt isn't it if we say that we have no sin what are we doing we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us even if we say that we're now above sin remember if I can just remind you of one verse from Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 3 and verses well it's verses 12 to 14 and it reminds us of something that's extremely important for us always to remember and it is the deceitfulness of sin the sin that's still within us the sin that is part of our nature the sin that we need to overcome the sin that we need to war against daily what does it say in Hebrews 3 well it says this take care brothers he's not writing this to unbelievers to non-Christians he's saying take care brothers fellow Christians lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God but exhort one another every day as long as it's called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin you know every time we we get up in the morning every time we go to our devotions whatever they are one of the things we ought to try and capture in our minds is

Lord keep me today from the deceitfulness of my own heart the deceitfulness that persuades me or would want to persuade me that I am what I'm not or that would persuade me that I'm not what you tell me I am the deceitfulness of your heart is something you have to guard against that you have to take the truth of God and apply it against that deceitfulness because until the day we die you and I we have a deceitful heart and until the day you die even as an experienced Christian you have to watch against the deceitfulness of your heart one of the greatest believers in the Old Testament was Gideon and yet he ended his days in a very sad way in idolatry or in at least setting up something which became idolatrous practice for the people your heart is sinful and being sinful it's deceitful and you young people tonight

I want to speak to you as well in that regard always go by what the Bible tells you not what other people tell you and not what your own heart might tell you not what your own best ideas would be always go by what God says and this is what God says if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us but then he goes on to say if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness well confession of our sins I want to try and just finish this tonight otherwise we're going to really spend more time than I anticipate not that that would be a bad thing we're trusting that God is leading us through this part of his word and we want to take enough time to really consider these very very important doctrinal parts and practical parts that he's laying before us so bear with me while we just make another five minutes perhaps to just conclude this study if we confess our sins now confession of our sin is more than just apologizing to God an apology is something you do when you bump into somebody on the way past and you say oh I'm sorry and then you move on or maybe unfortunately you've dinged somebody's car in the car park or somebody has dinged your car and you exchange apologies and maybe some details and then you've just gone your different ways and the thing is dealt with and that's it that's an end of it you no longer have an ongoing relationship with that person anyway when you confess your sin to

God you take account of who God is and what God's view of sin is and that sin is a transgression of his law of his standard that is something that's deeply offensive to God go back to Psalm 51 go back to it again and again as I must as well and look at Psalm 51 and look at how Psalm 51 sets out the seriousness of sin in God's view and therefore in David's view as well against you you only I have sinned and done this evil apart from thinking that he doesn't have any sin any longer or just treating sin lightly even if he's coming to acknowledge that he does and know that he sinned David is saying Lord please forgive me this evil this deep offense that I've caused you is that how we see sin tonight because small sin means small God if we don't see sin as being the way

God sees it and describes it in his word why did Jesus die do you think Jesus died for something that's really not very significant if our sin was just a shallow thing that affects ourselves and our fellow human beings only and there is no impact at all upon God would Jesus have died the death of the cross would God have sent his son into this world for anything less than sin being serious as it is of course not one of the greatest if not the greatest demonstration of the seriousness of sin is not the law of God although that of course gives you the seriousness of sin or the teaching of the gospel in regard to our human nature no you see the seriousness of sin on the cross and the death of Christ and the agony of Christ in the way that he in his inner soul experienced the wrath of God against sin the sin of his people and if we confess our sin as offensive to

[30 : 11] God God and you see he's using the present tense as well it's not just saying if we confess it today and I want off and that's it this word this verb is continuous it's something that goes on because our sinning goes on our confession needs to go on our repentance needs to be renewed day by day and we confess our sins to God but you see it's not so that we'll major on the confession of our sins that he's giving us this if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness in other words he's going back to the nature of God he's not saying to us if we confess our sin that confession will commend itself to God and will be the very basis of his forgiveness no that's not what he's saying if we confess our sins know for sure that it's what God himself is that guarantees our pardon he is faithful and he is just to forgive us our sins in other words God is always going to be true to himself and when he promises forgiveness to those who come to confess he's not going to renege on that you don't need to be suspicious of

God as you come before him even if the sin you're going to confess is huge in your eyes he is faithful to his promise of pardon as he is to everything else to forgive our sins you could say to cancel our debt but he's also just to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness faithful and just both to forgive and to cleanse to wipe our record clean as well as to cancel our debt because sin is both it's a record of our debt to God that we can never pay and it's a record of our defilement that we can never cleanse thanks be to God Jesus has done that he's paid the price and as the previous verses tell us the blood of Jesus the son cleanses us from all sin that's the gospel friends this Jesus the heart of the gospel the substance of the gospel the forgiver of our sins the cleanser of our sins

God's provided savior to save us from our sins so there is the second mistake second error the outcome of that error our deceiving of ourselves and the truth is not in us but here is the counter here is the great correction that John places against that error this assurance of pardon assurance from God himself that who he is and what he's like is our guarantee of forgiveness and cleansing in the words of a song by one of the current Christian groups casting crowns casting crowns that group have a song entitled who am I and part of it goes like this who am I that the lord of all the earth would care to know my name would care to feel my hurt who am I that the bright and morning star would choose to light the way for my ever wandering heart who am I that the eyes that see my sin would look on me with love and watch me rise again who am I that the voice that calmed the sea would call out through the rain and calm the storm in me and then there's the chorus not because of who

I am but because of what you've done not because of what I've done but because of who you are that's our God that's his promise was addressed to you and to me through the gospel let's pray Lord our gracious God and our Father in heaven forgive us we pray for the many ways in which we do sin against you for the many times that we forget oh Lord that we are sinful at the root of our being for the many times even though forgiven our sin we nevertheless fail to realize and to take with us our need of the power of your spirit to cleanse us and to keep us in the right way oh bless us we pray tonight with the blessing of pardon the blessing of sanctification the blessing of closeness to the saviour the blessing of assurance that you are true to your word that you will not send anyone away from you who comes with confession of their sin bless us now then we pray and unto this week that we have entered guide and direct us we pray for Jesus sake amen well we'll conclude this evening singing in Psalm 103 and that's again from the Scottish

Psalter Psalm 103 singing from the beginning verses 1 to 4 the tune is Barrow O thou my soul bless God the Lord and all that in me is be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless all the way through to verse 4 who doth redeem thy life that thou to death mayst not go down who thee with loving kindness doth and tender mercy's crown these verses to God's praise O thy my soul bless God the Lord and God in me is be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless bless o my soul the

[36 : 48] Lord thy God and not forget for me of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on me.

All thy liquidy to death most graciously forgive.

Through thy diseases, all I've faced, doth heal and be real me.

Who doth redeem thy life that thou to death is lost for time?

Who he will love in kindness, and tender mercy is come.

[37 : 59] I'll go to the main door tonight after the benedictions now. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen.