

Born of God

An Exposition of I John

I John 1:9-2:7

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I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

By nature, man is born in sin and under its power. His righteousness is viewed by God as nothing more than filthy rags. As far as God is concerned, there are *none righteous, no, not one, none that doeth good, no, not one*. Together, then, both Jew and Gentile *are all gone out of the way and together become unprofitable*.

The single greatest thing then for a man to overcome is his belief that in his flesh, or more appropriately, by his flesh, he can be justified by God.

Romans 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Since it can never be by man's own merits that he can gain both fellowship and union with God, then it must come on the grounds of God's mercy. This is seen by men being justified by faith in God, and not by any religious improvement of themselves.

But for mercy to be given, and true faith in God to begin, there must first come a confession of sin.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Without exception, in Scripture, in every age, and in every generation, forgiveness of sin demands that confession of sin precedes it. Thus, if a man desires divine forgiveness for his sin, then he must openly confess it and not deny its existence.

If sin remains unrepented of and unwilling to be departed from, then it is certain that God will not hear pleas for help when called upon.

For those who regard iniquity, God will not hear.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me:

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To defend sin then, and not confess it when committed, shall result in God turning a deaf ear to prayer.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Ps. 66:18

If I regard iniquity in my heart—literally, “If I have seen iniquity in my heart.” That is, If I have indulged in a purpose of iniquity; if I have had a wicked end in view; if I have not been willing to forsake all sin; if I have cherished a purpose of pollution or wrong. The meaning is not literally, If I have “seen” any iniquity in my heart—for no one can look into his own heart, and not see that it is defiled by sin; but, If I have cherished it in my soul; if I have gloated over past sins; if I am purposing to commit sin again; if I am not willing to abandon all sin, and to be holy.

The Lord will not hear me—That is, He will not regard and answer my prayer. The idea is, that in order that prayer may be heard, there must be a purpose to forsake all forms of sin.

Without a confession of sin and a willingness to depart from it, all hope of receiving forgiveness is lost. Consequently, God will neither pardon nor give mercy to any who choose to continue to sin, and reject His command to depart from it.

For forgiveness and pardon there must be an acknowledgement of the wrong done as well as a genuine desire never to do it again.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 1:9

If we confess our sins—Pardon in the Scriptures, always supposes that there is confession, and there is no promise that it will be imparted unless a full acknowledgment has been made. Compare Psalm 51; Psalm 32:1–11; Luke 15:18 ff; Luke 7:41 ff; Proverbs 28:13.

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Because God is *faithful*, then provided there is a genuine and sincere confession of sin, God's promise to sinners is twofold: (1) He promises His own forgiveness; (2) He promises the complete and thorough removal of the sin committed.

In all things concerning the Christian, and in every promise made to him, including the removal of sin, the hope of fulfillment rests on God's faithfulness.

For if God was not faithful to remove sin from us, they would forever stain our being.

I Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 1:9

God is faithful—That is, God is true, and constant, and will adhere to his promises. He will not deceive. He will not promise, and then fail to perform; he will not commence anything which he will not perfect and finish. The object of Paul in introducing the idea of the faithfulness of God here, is to show the reason for believing that the Christians at Corinth would be kept unto everlasting life.

It is the nature and character of a holy God that what He has promised, He will perform. This holds true regarding both blessing and judgment. Those who are certain that God will judge shall equally be certain that He will forgive. Likewise, those who are assured that He will forgive must not forget that God's faithfulness also demands judgment for unconfessed sin.

Two other promises of faithfulness promised to the saved are seen in Scripture, in that He will not let men be tempted above that which they are able (I Cor. 10:13), and likewise will protect those saved by Christ from evil (I Thess 3:3).

Where sin, temptation, and the devil dwell, there God's faithfulness is the strong abiding force that prohibits the saved from being overtaken by sin and its deceptive nature.

God's faithfulness regarding forgiveness of sin also extends much further than just to one person or a group of individuals. In fact, it will continue and has proven to be present toward every generation of those born of Adam, on the earth.

Psalm 119:90 Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Ps. 119:90

Thy faithfulness—The accomplishment of thy promises.

Is unto all generations—Margin, "to generation and generation." From one generation to another. The generations of people change and pass away, but thy promises do not change. They are as applicable to one generation as to another; they meet every generation alike. The people of no one age can lay any exclusive claim to them, or feel that they were made only for them. They are as universal—as much adapted to the new generations that come upon the earth—as the light of the sun, ever-enduring, is; or as the fountains and streams, which flow from age to age.

Scripture gives us insight regarding God's faithfulness to forgive sin. The Greek word for *forgive* is #863 *aphiemi*. Its definition from *Strong's Concordance* is "to send away, leave alone, permit."

HELPS Word-studies defines the word as "properly, send away; release (discharge)."

From this definition, we can see how forgiveness mirrors the scapegoat being sent away into the wilderness, thus symbolically revealing how God has completely removed sin from the offender, and so far, that it will never be seen by him again.

This is in regards to the scapegoat. "Azazel" or "the scapegoat" is mentioned in Leviticus 16 as part of God's instructions to the Israelites regarding the Day of Atonement. On this day, the high priest would first offer a sacrifice for his sins and those of his household; then he would perform sacrifices for the nation. "From the Israelite community [the high priest was instructed] to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering" (v. 5). The priest brought the animals before the Lord and cast lots between the two goats—one to be a sacrifice and the other to be the scapegoat. The first goat was slaughtered for the sins of the people and its blood used to cleanse the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar (v. 20). After the cleansing, the live goat was brought to the high priest. Laying his hands on the scapegoat, the high priest was to "confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness" (vv. 21–22). Symbolically, the scapegoat took on the sins of the Israelites and removed them (v. 10). For Christians, this is a foreshadowing of Christ.

The Greek word for *cleanse* is #2511 *katharizó*. *Strong's Concordance* defines it as "to cleanse."

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HELPS Word-studies' definition is to “make pure (‘clean’), removing all admixture (intermingling of filth).”

While forgiveness provides for separating sin from the sinner, cleansing entails its complete removal. Once the Lord provides forgiveness and cleansing for sin, the sin cannot ever resurface again for any potential judgment unless it is returned to and committed again. Hence, if a man sincerely and genuinely repents of his sin, then God will honor His promise to forgive him and cleanse him from all unrighteousness.

It is the character and nature of a holy God to forgive and provide mercy for sin. This is God’s generous and benevolent nature, without which men would eternally die, in sin.

In God’s wisdom, He fully knows man’s weak and feeble condition. Because the Lord remains conscious of man’s corrupt and fallen nature, He shows the sinner divine pity.

Psalms 103:14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

Ultimately, God forgives the penitent because He knows his frail condition and the weakness that lives within him to remain faithful to divine will.

Mercy is often connected to pity; hence, because of God’s pity, He provides His mercy.

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, Ps. 103:14

For he knoweth our frame—Our formation; of what we are made; how we are made. That is, he knows that we are made of dust; that we are frail; that we are subject to decay; that we soon sink under a heavy load. This is given as a reason why he pities us—that we are so frail and feeble, and that we are so easily broken down by a pressure of trial.

He remembereth that we are dust—Made of the earth. Genesis 2:7; Genesis 3:19. In his dealings with us he does not forget of what frail materials he made us, and how little our frames can bear. He tempers his dealings to the weakness and frailty of our nature, and his compassion interposes when the weight of sorrows would crush us. Remembering, too, our weakness, he interposes by his power to sustain us, and to enable us to bear what our frame could not otherwise endure. Compare the notes at Isaiah 57:16 [*For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.*].

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Human history has proven since the very earliest of time that sin abounds in all men. None have ever lived who did not sin repeatedly, often, and to some degree daily.

God speaks of the unsaved as *sinner*s, simply because this defines who and what they really are. Hence, if God would never give sufficient grace and mercy for sin, then all hope for heavenly union with Him would be lost.

Ultimately, God’s divine grace is needed to be greater than human sin, lest men forever remain bound to it, and its final judgment of death.

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, Rom. 5:20

The offence—The offence which had been introduced by Adam, that is, sin. Compare Romans 5:15.

Might abound—Might increase; that is, would be more apparent, more violent, more extensive. The introduction of the Mosaic Law, instead of diminishing the sins of people,

only increases them.

But where sin abounded—Alike in all dispensations—before the Law, and under the Law. In all conditions of the human family before the gospel, it was the characteristic that sin was prevalent.

Grace—Favor; mercy.

Did much more abound—Superabounded. The word is used nowhere else in the New Testament, except in 2 Corinthians 7:4. It means that the pardoning mercy of the gospel greatly triumphed over sin, even over the sins of the Jews, though those sins were greatly aggravated by the light which they enjoyed under the advantages of divine revelation.

I John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Whenever a man denies his sin, it will become clearly evident that God's Word and any sincere love for it, will not be in his heart. By this, the lack of true love and affection for the Word of God, it is easy to discern who has either confessed or denied their sin.

Denial of sin and truth are set in contrast one with another in order that men may recognize that embracing one demands the removal of the other.

Teaching us that whenever the truth of God's Word resides in men, then confession of their sin will follow. But if a man denies his sin, and refuses to recognize his behavior as sin, then all true affection for the truth will be lost. As no one can truly and genuinely maintain affection for the Word of truth, thus love its purity, rejoice in its message, and yet possess unconfessed sin within himself.

This is why the apostate and the unsaved have no real use for the Word of truth, simply because love for God is lost, and therefore anything that has connection to Him, is believed to be unnecessary.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 1:10

We make him a liar—Because he has everywhere affirmed the depravity of all the race. Compare the notes at Romans 1; 2; 3. On no point have his declarations been more positive and uniform than on the fact of the universal sinfulness of man. Compare Genesis 6:11–12; Job 14:4; Job 15:16; Psalm 14:1–3; Psalm 51:5; Psalm 58:3; Romans 3:9–20; Galatians 3:21.

And his word is not in us—His truth; that is, we have no true religion. The whole system of Christianity is based on the fact that man is a fallen being, and needs a Saviour; and unless a man admits that, of course he cannot be a Christian.

I John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

All sin requires that men need an *advocate*, someone to plead their cause to God. Sinners cannot do this themselves, nor can they from themselves provide a sufficient offering for their sin. This is why Christ is provided by God, as an Advocate, to present His own death for sin as sufficient to negate any further judgment for it.

The Greek word for *advocate* is #3875 *paraklétos*. *HELPS Word-studies* defines the word as “(from 3844 /*pará*, ‘from close-beside’ and 2564 /*kaléō*, ‘make a call’)—properly, a legal advocate who makes the right judgment-call because close enough to the situa-

tion. 3875 /*paráklētos* (“advocate, advisor-helper”) is the regular term in NT times of an attorney (lawyer)—i.e. someone giving evidence that stands up in court.”

As an advocate, Jesus gives evidence in heavenly court that His death for sin is sufficient to appease God’s divine judgment for it.

He who sins, God’s Word states, must die; by Christ’s death for sin taking the place of the sinner, God’s judgment has been fulfilled.

By paying the cost for sin, Christ pleads that divine judgment has been met, and the justice of God has not been set aside. All sin requires death as its punishment, and Jesus’ death satisfies divine justice on this matter.

As the penitent’s Advocate, Christ’s death is presented to God, providing evidence that His own death, has paid the price for sin.

It is here that we observe the great importance and significance of Jesus’ ministry. He does not deny the sinner’s sin, when in God’s court, nor plead to God in any manner that sin was not committed by the accused, only that His own death in dying for sin has fulfilled God’s judgment for it.

Thus, the Lord presents His own death on the cross as a suitable atonement for all sins against God, to be stricken from the books.

Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, I John 2:1

The nature of his advocacy may be stated in the following particulars:

(1) He admits the guilt of those for whom he becomes the advocate, to the full extent charged on them by the law of God, and by their own consciences. He does not attempt to hide or conceal it. He makes no apology for it. He neither attempts to deny the fact, nor to show that they had a right to do as they have done. He could not do this, for it would not be true; and any plea before the throne of God which should be based on a denial of our guilt would be fatal to our cause.

(2) as our advocate, he undertakes to be security that no wrong shall be done to the universe if we are not punished as we deserve; that is, if we are pardoned, and treated as if we had not sinned. This he does by pleading what he has done in behalf of people; that is, by the plea that his sufferings and death in behalf of sinners have done as much to honor the law, and to maintain the truth and justice of God, and to prevent the extension of apostasy, as if the offenders themselves had suffered the full penalty of the law. . . .

(3) as our advocate, he becomes a surety for our good behavior; gives a pledge to justice that we will obey the laws of God, and that he will keep us in the paths of obedience and truth; that, if pardoned, we will not continue to rebel. . . .

Jesus Christ the righteous—One who is eminently righteous himself, and who possesses the means of rendering others righteous. It is an appropriate feeling when we come before God in his name, that we come pleading the merits of one who is eminently righteous, and on account of whose righteousness we may be justified and saved.

For the believer, the grounds for being both forgiven and made righteous by God reside in the holiness, righteousness, and obedience of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Jesus Christ was in all respects holy and without sin. *Who did no sin* reveals the true character of the Savior. On these grounds of Christ's perfect righteousness, and therefore a perfect offering for sin, fallen man is redeemed. Because Christ is Himself completely holy, righteous, and without fault, His people can be made both holy and righteous through His own perfect walk.

I John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Greek word for *propitiation* is #2434 *hilasmós*. *HELPS Word-studies* defines it as "properly, propitiation; an offering to appease (satisfy) an angry, offended party. 2434 (*hilasmós*) is only used twice (1 Jn 2:2, 4:10)—both times of Christ's atoning blood that appeases God's wrath, on all confessed sin. By the sacrifice of Himself, Jesus Christ provided the ultimate 2434 /*hilasmós* ('propitiation')."

At its core, sin breaks, disregards, and sets at nothing divine will. In sin, men know the will of God but abandon it in favor of doing their own will instead.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He who does not go God's way ultimately goes his own way. Thus, if Christ did not seek out sinners, then men would forever remain estranged from God.

This is why Jesus seeks the lost, as they would never on their own, and without His strength, turn back to God.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

It is both right and righteous that God is greatly displeased with sinners, and men should not try to diminish the truth that God's anger exists towards any and all who transgress His laws.

Yet, because Jesus Christ took the place of the sinner and received divine judgment for him, God deems the penalty for sin has been met and His justice satisfied.

Salvation is provided to the sinner through Jesus Christ's *obedience*, and not his own. By this it is revealed that men's own righteousness, or what they think of as such, can never get them to heaven, but only through the One, Who was fully obedient to God's will for His life.

Romans 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

It is thus Christ's own *obedience* that allows for men to be made righteous, as their own personal walk could never accomplish such a holy standing before God.

Just as through one man's (Adam's) *disobedience* many were made sinners, so also through Jesus Christ's *obedience* shall many be made righteous.

Consequently, there will be *many*, a vast amount, an innumerable number of previous sinners, who *shall*, with utmost certainty, be made righteous through the Son of God. The only question is, who are these blessed souls whose sin is totally forgiven and to whom Christ's righteousness is imparted?

I John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

It is by keeping God's commandments, that believers are assured, that they know God. But for any also who ignore, reject, and desire not to keep God's laws, there is no assurance anywhere within the soul, that the Lord is known at all.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 2:3

And hereby we do know that we know him—To wit, by that which follows, we have evidence that we are truly acquainted with him, and with the requirements of his religion; that is, that we are truly his friends. The word "him" in this verse, seems to refer to the Saviour. The apostle had stated in the previous part of this Epistle some of the leading points revealed by the Christian religion, and he here enters on the consideration of the nature of the evidence required to show that we are personally interested in it, or that we are true Christians. A large part of the Epistle is occupied with this subject. The first, the grand evidence—that without which all others would be vain—he says is, that we keep his commandments.

The two most significant of Christ's commandments are given in Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 22:36–39 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

The greatest commandment that Jesus instructed His followers to live by consisted of loving both God and His people.

The greatest evidence that a man has kept Christ's words is that pure love for God and His people, is the dominant force in his life.

To not love a fellow brother in Christ, and instead hate them, reveals that all true profession of knowing God, has been a lie. As only those who truly love God, and keep His commandments, will equally love His people.

I John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

Ultimately, it is by the possession of love that every man can accurately gauge if he is a true disciple of Jesus Christ or not. Where Christ's love lives He is, but where it does not He also abides not.

I John 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

For the second time, the apostle reveals whom God considers liars: (1) Those who refuse to confess themselves as sinners; (2) Those who claim and assume falsely to know the Son of God and yet do not keep His commandments.

Thus, he who denies the presence of sin in himself is a *liar*, just as he who claims to know God but does not keep His commandments has also, by divine revelation, been marked out by God as a *liar*.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 2:4

He that saith, I know Him—He who professes to be acquainted with the Saviour, or who professes to be a Christian.

And keepeth not his commandments—What he has appointed to be observed by his people; that is, he who does not obey him.

Is a liar—Makes a false profession; professes to have that which he really has not. Such a profession is a falsehood, because there can be no true religion where one does not obey the law of God.

I John 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

If God's Word is truly kept by His people, then God's own love will be perfected in them.

The Greek word for *perfected* is #5048 *teleioó*. *Strong's* defines it as "to bring to an end, to complete, perfect. . . . Usage: (a) as a course, a race, or the like: I complete, finish (b) as of time or prediction: I accomplish, (c) I make perfect; pass: I am perfected."

True obedience to divine law gives its fruit in the perfection of love in the obedient one. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, and all who are truly led by it will manifest this fruit in their lives. The increase and expansion of the love of God in the Christian's heart also brings greater confidence that he is in God, and that God is in him.

Ultimately, love for God and obedience to His Word cannot be separated. Therefore, whenever there is an absence of godly love, no real obedience to God can exist. And though men may claim they have kept God's commandments, if love is not the main essence of their character, all true profession of fellowship with Him is false.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 2:5

In him (or in the man who believes in Christ) *verily is the love of God perfected*—He professes to have the love of God in his heart, and that love receives its completion or filling up by obedience to the will of God. That obedience is the proper carrying out, or the exponent of the love which exists in the heart. Love to the Saviour would be defective without that, for it is never complete without obedience.

I John 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

The standard for the Christian's behavior is seen in his Savior. To therefore claim true relationship with Jesus Christ, men must both walk in and pursue those divine principles that governed the Savior.

This includes laying down our lives for the brethren (I John 3:16), bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), and always seeking to do the will of God in our life (John 6:38).

To say we are Christ's then, demands we both seek to live and walk as Jesus did on the earth. Hence, he who proclaims that he abides in the Son of God ought to himself walk as Jesus walked.

There is therefore removed any excuse that those saved by the Son of God, need not to walk righteously after their conversion. Indeed, if there is even a profession of faith in the Son of God, then men should walk as He Himself walked.

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Ultimately, when a man seeks to walk as Christ walked, he will, like the Son of God, be about the Father's business (Luke 2:49), be willing to humble himself to serve the needs of others (John 13:14), follow Christ's example of being meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29), lose his life for service to God (Matt. 10:39), and seek to fulfill the responsibilities of the great commission.

To therefore profess that we abide in Christ demands that we pursue and live a life, like our Savior. There is no other way that Christians are instructed to walk, than following, and seeking to imitate, the love, humility, sacrifice, and faithfulness of the One, Who has saved them.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 2:6

He that saith, he abideth in him—Greek, “remains” in him; that is, abides or remains in the belief of his doctrines, and in the comfort and practice of religion. The expression is one of those which refer to the intimate union between Christ and his people. A great variety of phrase is employed to denote that.

Ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked—Ought to live and act as he did. If he is one with him, or professes to be united to him, he ought to imitate him in all things. Compare John 13:15. [*For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*]

I John 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

Benson Commentary, I John 2:7

“The new commandment,” says Macknight, “of which the apostle speaks, is that contained in 1 John 2:6. That Christ's disciples ought to walk even as he walked; and in particular that, as Christ laid down his life for his people, they ought to lay down their lives for one another, chap. 1 John 3:16. Thus, to walk as Christ walked, St. John, with great propriety, termed a new commandment, because, notwithstanding the precept to love one another was strongly enjoined in the law of Moses, consequently was not a new commandment, the precept to love one another as Christ loved us, was certainly a new commandment, and so is termed by Christ himself, (John 13:34,) and is thus explained and inculcated 1 John 3:16: He laid down his life for us, therefore we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”