

Bible Study for January 15, 2020

God's greatest problem is not "Can God make a rock so big that He can't move it?" or "Where did Cain get his wife?" God's greatest problem is how can he forgive you and me of sin while remaining Holy, Righteous & Pure. Fortunately, like all math problems, this one has a solution. However, unlike most math problems, we get to choose between only two possible solutions to this problem. They are both in this morning's text: Man's solution and God's solution.

The problem is stated in v. 5 and the two solutions are spelled out in vv. 6-2:2. The problem is essentially "How can sinful man and holy God come together?". Verse 5 uses the metaphors of light and darkness to declare that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

John says, "This ... is the message which we heard of him, and declare unto you ..." Jesus Christ revealed to those who followed Him, the holiness of God. This is basically what John is saying when he says "God is light." Light refers to moral purity or holiness. John says that in God there is not even one hint of darkness.

The kind of light that John uses to describe God is a kind which none of us have ever seen. None of us have ever seen 100% light. You're in a well lit room now, lighted by both the sunlight through the windows and fluorescent bulbs overhead. Yet if you look closely you will notice shadows even in this well-lit auditorium. Even the sun, the greatest bearer of light in our entire solar system is not 100% light. On its surface are sunspots, dark areas which are cold spots. They are only 4,000 degrees Celsius compared with 6,000 degree Celsius surrounding region.

But God is pure light. In Him is no darkness at all. Again this metaphor is given to describe the moral purity or holiness of God. The testimony of Scripture is overwhelming in its statements of God's holiness. For the Hebrew, the way to emphasize something was to repeat it. In the NT, we read of Jesus saying, "Truly, Truly" and we know that He is drawing special attention to what he is about to say. The Bible never says that God is "Love, love, love" "Eternal, eternal, eternal" or "Mercy, mercy, mercy." It only records the angels of God, that continuously worship God in heaven, as saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 4:8; Is. 6:3).

Simply put, God is without sin. He doesn't conform to some holy standard – He is the standard. He never does anything wrong. There are no degrees to His holiness, for He is perfectly holy.

God is holy! This truth causes the greatest of all problems for God. How shall God forgive and pardon the sinner and remain holy? This is our greatest problem. He is holy; we are unholy. It is our unholiness that separates us from Our holy God. Because He is holy. He cannot even look upon our sin, much less provide a home for us to live forever with Him.

There are only two possible solutions to this problem: Man's Solution and God's Solution. Let's look first how man tries to solve the problem of God's holiness: by denying the reality of sin.

Man's Solution to God's Holiness: Deny the Reality of Sin, vv. 6, 8 & 10.

Verses 6, 8 and 10 each begin with the phrase "If we say." These are the solutions that man offers in order to square himself with the holiness of God. Let me say up front that each of these denials are lies. They are probably three denials that the false teachers which John was writing against made in order to get around the implications of the holiness of God. These denials can be summarized as follows:

1. The Denial that Sin breaks our fellowship with God. v. 6
2. The Denial that Sin exists in our nature. v. 8
3. The Denial that Sin shows itself in our conduct. v. 10

Let's look at each of these denials in more detail now:

1. We Lie About Our Sin v. 6

The first way that man tries to deny the reality of Sin and escape the consequences of God's holiness is to lie about the effect of his sin. The Bible is very clear that those who live in unconfessed sin "walk in darkness" do not have eternal life. What is obvious here is that those who say they have "fellowship" with God and live impure lives are lying.

**Weekly Bible Study
meets on Wednesday at
two times (11:30-12 and
12-12:30). Both in
Capitol Annex 436 or, if
occupied, the 4th floor
lounge (404).**

Walking in darkness is the opposite of following Christ. All unsaved people walk in darkness; Christians have been delivered into the light:

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: Ephesians 5:8

So the way we get around the reality of our sin is to deny its effect. We simply lie and say “we have fellowship with him” when in reality we don’t. We say one thing while we live another way.

2. *We Deceive Ourselves About Our Sin v. 8*

The second way ... deceive himself about his sin nature. This involves the worst of deceptions: self-deception. They denied the reality of their own sinful desires. Some say what the false teachers were saying is that they deserved no guilt for their sin. Others say this means they were saying they had no inherent sin in their nature regardless of their outward conduct. Both are dangerous ways to be self-deceived. If we aren’t really to admit we are sinners, there can be no salvation.

3. *We Call God a Liar About Our Sin v. 10*

The third way ... call God a liar regarding the committing of actual sins. Those who say this may affirm both their sin nature and that sin breaks fellowship with God, they just claim to not have sinned. This denial is even more serious than the first because in it man calls God a liar (note the progression). It is a denial of God’s Word and our own experience.

So those are man’s attempts to deal with the holiness of God. They each fail miserably. Thankfully God offers another solution.

God’s Solution to God’s Holiness: Acknowledge the Reality of Sin

John Piper has wonderfully summarized God’s solution in this way:

The wisdom of God has devised a way for the love of God to satisfy the wrath of God without compromising the justice of God.

God’s solution to the problem of our sinfulness and His holiness is exactly the opposite of man’s proposed solution. Man denies the reality of his sin. God says for us to acknowledge the reality of our sin. There is no magic in our acknowledgment of sin as if they were magic words which mysteriously make us forgiven. However, the acknowledgment of our sin indicates that we have recognized our need for a Savior. It is only when we trust in Jesus Christ’s death as the payment for our sin that our sins are forgiven and that trust for forgiveness of sin must first include a confession of our sin. Each of man’s proposed solutions is countered by a statement of God’s one true solution to the holiness/sinfulness problem.

1. *Walk in the Light v. 7*

The first statement is that only those who walk in the light have assurance of the forgiveness of their sins. When John says we are to walk in the light as He is in the light he means there should be some moral semblance between God and those who are his children. In other words the evidence of that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ is that we are pursuing holiness in our lives. This does not speak of sinless perfection for what need would there be for forgiveness of sins if this were the case. What John does refer to is our pattern of life, is it a pattern of light or darkness? If we can live in unconfessed sin we’re not saved!

2. *Confess our Sins v. 9*

John’s second statement of God’s solution is to confess our sins. Continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation. Those who are willing to admit they are sinners, contrary to the false teachers, are showing that they acknowledge their need of a Savior. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. This is an amazing statement which seems to further the initial problem with which we began. How can God be faithful and just (of all things) to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It would seem the faithful and just thing to do would be for Him to separate us from Himself forever by placing us in the place of eternal torment called Hell. Yet, the astonishing statement is that if we confess (lit. “say the same thing”) our sins they will be forgiven! The reason this is still troubling is because there is still one final piece of the puzzle (or one final factor in the equation to stay with our math problem analogy) to be examined. That final factor is found in 2:1-2.

3. *Trust the Sacrifice of Christ 2:1-2*

John now tenderly addresses his readers as my little children and seeks to clarify his purpose for writing the text we’ve examined this morning. His desire, God’s desire, is that believers not sin. This could be misunderstood by readers up to this point. Some could say, “All we have to do is to acknowledge that we’re sinners and we’ll be forgiven. We can even keep on sinning.” That is the error that John wants to warn us against. Having said that, however, John again ties our experience to the heart of the gospel. It’s as if John says, “But when you sin ... remember the sacrifice of Christ, remember what he has done for us, for the whole world. Again and again we must be reminded that as John Stott has written:

Christianity ... “is not primarily an invitation to man to do anything; it is supremely a declaration of what God has done in Christ for human beings like ourselves.” (John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 12)