

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/26/99 PM Baptismal Service
1 John 1:8-10 "The Remedy for Sin"

What's the remedy for sin?

How *should* we deal with sin? The Word of God answers that question for us in 1 John 1:8-10. In these three verses we discover God's remedy for dealing with sin. First, we learn what *not* to do, and second, what we *are* to do.

I. Here's how *not* to deal with sin.

It has to do with our *claims*. Don't make false claims regarding sin. That's exactly what was happening in the first century as it is today.

Notice the words "if we claim" in verses 6, 8, and 10. Apparently, the church at Ephesus was being hampered by individuals who distorted the truth. How? They *minimized sin*.

For instance, in verse 6 John describes a person who claims to have fellowship with God, while at the same time lives a life marked by sin. What's true of such a person? John says he is a *liar*. According to verse 6, "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."

A person who denies the seriousness of sin is off base. He's missed the essence of the Christian life. He's living a lie.

People in John's day were minimizing sin. The tragic truth is we're guilty of doing it today, too. And the consequences are severe--for churches, for individuals, and for society.

If you want to experience God's remedy for sin, the first thing you must do is refuse to make false claims about sin. What kind of claims? John identifies two claims he confronted.

A. Some people deny the principle of sin (8). Listen to verse 8, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Apparently, John knew some people who were claiming that their lives were not touched by sin. They were above sin. They denied that sin existed in their nature. As do some today, they asserted that they had achieved some kind of sinless perfection.

What exactly did they say? Their words: "We have no sin." Literally, "We are not having sin." Sin is in the singular. Here it refers, not merely to particular sins, but to the inherited principle of sin. Some were claiming that they did not possess a sinful character.

The Bible teaches that we are born in sin. We inherit a sin nature. We enter the world at odds with our Maker. We are not neutral, blank slates, but *sinner*s.

What makes me a sinner is not just that I've committed sins. It's more basic than that. The reason I sin is fundamentally because I am a sinner. I am born with a bent, a bent that takes me away from God and towards sin. I *have* sin.

I could illustrate my point vividly if I invited five two-year-olds to the platform right now, and put one toy in their midst. What would happen? Would each instinctively say to the others, "You play with it first. I'll go last."? Hardly. Why not? Is the problem that their parents taught them to be self-centered? No. The problem is that they have inherited a *sin principle*.

We are born depraved. We *have* sin. Lehman Strauss put it this way, "The Christian is no longer in sin, but sin is still in him."

But what if we claim otherwise? What about people who deny the principle of sin in their lives? According to John, if we do that two things are true: one, we deceive ourselves; and two, the truth is not in us.

Please don't water that down. It's tragic, yet true. It's possible to be a self-deceived church attender. It was true in John's day as in ours. What's the problem? Some people, instead of accepting God's remedy, deny the principle of sin. They foolishly claim to be without sin.

Others make a second kind of faulty claim which John confronts in verse 10...

B. Some people deny the practice of sin (10). Verse 10, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

This claim is different from the one in verse 8. It's a perfect tense verb. It has to do with specific sinful acts. It's a claim not only to be free from the principle of sin, but from the very practice of sin.

Several years ago I met a man who made such a claim. I was working in a factory as a summer job, when this fellow told me he was a Christian--and that he believed in sinless perfection. He claimed he hadn't sinned in the previous seven years. As I talked with him I discovered an interesting detail. To keep his "sinless" streak alive, he had to redefine sin. He had a few "mistakes" along the way, but he hadn't "sinned."

Hold on. Just what is sin? We find two helpful definitions of sin in 1 John.

First, sin is *transgression*. 1 John 3:4 states, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." Sin, then, is any violation of God's Word. God sets the standard, not us. We have sinned when we fall short of His holy standard.

Second, sin is *unrighteousness*. Here's how the NIV depicts it in 5:17, "All wrongdoing is sin." Sin is wrongdoing. Sin is unrighteousness. Any unrighteous thought, word, or deed is a manifestation of sin.

That's what sin is. It's transgression. It's unrighteousness.

Now what's true of a person who claims his life is free from the practice of sin? John mentions two sober implications that are true if we make that claim. One, we make Him a liar; and two, His word has no place in our lives.

This is worse than the first false claim. If we deny the principle of sin, we're deceiving (or lying to) ourselves. But if we deny the practice of sin, we're making Jesus a liar!

Let that sink in, dear friend. Do you realize what you are saying if you refuse to admit your need for Jesus? You're saying that He died in vain because you didn't need His help. You're making a liar out of Jesus. He says we are sinners--that's why He sacrificed His life on the cross. Do you agree with His assessment?

Ask yourself this question. Why do I need a Savior like Jesus? The answer is quite simple. I need a Savior because I am a sinner. The moment we forget that we are in big trouble. The Philips Modern English puts it in these terms, "If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of allusion and truth becomes a stranger to us."

Are you living in a world of allusion?

The truth is that God has provided us with a remedy for sin. But it will do us no good as long as we are settling for a different remedy. So we need to know how *not* to

deal with sin. Don't deceive yourself by denying the principle of sin and the practice of sin. We have sin. And we sin.

Now the good news. There is a God-given remedy for sin! It's found in verse 9.

II. Here's how to deal with sin (9).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

I would remind you that John is writing primarily to Christians (see 5:13). As Christians, what do we need to do when we sin? Not deny it. Not minimize it. But confess it.

Could it be that the lack of power in the Church today is due to the presence of unconfessed sin? Could the reason that many of us are groping along, confused and battered in our Christian walk, be that we're not dealing with sin?

We need 1 John 1:9. As we unpack it we discover three things.

A. The remedy involves our responsibility. "If we confess our sins." The Greek verb for "confess" is *homologeō*. It comes from two smaller Greek words, *homo* meaning "the same," and *legeō* meaning "to say."

To confess, then, means to say the same thing as another. Confession of sin means that we are saying the same thing about our deed or thought that God says about it.

A counselor was trying to help a man who had come forward in an evangelistic meeting. "I'm a Christian but there is sin in my life. I need help." The counselor showed him 1 John 1:9 and suggested the man confess his sins to God. The man prayed, "O Father, if we have done anything wrong." The counselor stopped him. "Just a minute. First, it's not 'we,' so don't drag me into your sin! And secondly, it's not 'if,' so you'd better get down to business with God!"

That's right. Confession is not vague, abstract general prayer. When we confess sin, we must be specific. And all of us need to confess sin.

In his book *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur states: "Pursuing the standard of perfection does not mean that we can never fail. It means that when we fail we deal with it. Those with true faith will fail—and in some cases, frequently—but a genuine believer will, as a pattern of life, confess his sin and come to the Father for forgiveness. *Perfection* is the standard; *direction* is the test." (192)

We have a responsibility. We are to confess our sin to God. But what gives us confidence to confess our sin to God?

B. The remedy involves God's character. "He is faithful and just." God is faithful. Because He's faithful He's true to His Word and He keeps His covenant. Hebrews 10:23 states, "He is faithful that promised." If we confess our sin, He will forgive us. It's certain.

God is also just. Why is that significant? Because God is just, He cannot leave the guilty unpunished (Ex. 34:7). The Judge of all the earth cannot overlook sin. He's just. How then does He forgive undeserving, guilty sinners like us?

The answer is *the Cross*. On the cross, a faithful and just God made a provision for the removal of our sins. Remember, a just God must punish sin. And that's what He did on the Cross. He punished His own Son.

On the Cross, Jesus Christ made a substitutionary payment. He took upon Himself the sins of every person who would ever believe on Him. And He took the wrath of God in their place.

The fact is that our sin must be punished. The question is *by whom*. If you reject Jesus Christ, a just God must punish you. But what happens if you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? 1 John 1:9 tells us.

C. The remedy involves God's activity. "And will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The word "forgive" means "to release or let go." That's what God does with our sin if we confess it to Him, trusting in Christ. He remits our debt. Furthermore, He "purifies" us. He removes the stain of our unrighteousness that previously marked our lives.

When we say the same thing about our sin that God does—that it's horrible and that only Christ can remove it—God takes it away from us. He removes our guilt. He restores us to Himself. And He offers pardon and cleansing to us.

By the way, if we are Christians, when we sin do we cease to be God's children? Do we need to be saved all over? No. But we do lose something when we sin. What is it? Our fellowship with God. Yet when we confess our sin, He forgives and cleanses us, and brings us back into intimate communion with Him.

It breaks my heart as a pastor to see the casualties of sin. I talk with people constantly whose lives are wrecked by sin—both Christians and non-Christians. What's so tragic is that it doesn't have to be that way!

I plead with you tonight. Don't minimize sin in your life. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. Confess it, and God will forgive.

A *National Geographic* television episode filmed in the Australian Outback once depicted the lambing process of a large sheep herd. Dozens of ewes were giving birth to their lambs. But as often happens, several baby lambs were stillborn or died soon after birth. And on the other hand, some ewes died from complications, leaving helpless orphaned lambs. These orphans would soon die.

There seemed to be a simple solution. Pair up an orphaned lamb with a ewe whose lamb had died. But the ewe rejected the strange lamb.

Through years of experience, the shepherds learned how to deal with the problem. They remove the skin from a dead lamb and stretch it over a surviving, orphaned lamb. When that's done, the ewe sees the orphan as her own, and gives it her full acceptance and care.

What a beautiful picture of how God accepts us! He provided us with a covering, none other than the blood of His own Son. When we confess our sins and place our trust in Christ, God forgives us and accepts us as His own.

Has that happened in your life? Would you like to experience God's remedy for sin? You can this very moment. Confess your sin and your sins to God. Accept the provision He made for forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

That's what happened in the lives of some individuals who will be baptized tonight. It can in yours, too.