

The Authentic Christian and Sin

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The Authentic Christian

1 John 1:5-2:2

I would like to begin with two stories that have recently received a huge amount of attention in the press and on late night comedy shows. The first involves Harvey Weinstein.

He is responsible for producing such award winning movies as “Good Will Hunting”, “Shakespeare in Love”, “The King’s Speech”, and “Lion”.

As almost all of you have certainly heard, dozens of women, including some of Hollywood’s most famous actresses – Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, and Ashley Judd.

Dozens of women have come forward accusing Harvey Weinstein of sexually harassing and, in many cases, molesting or even raping them. He’s reached a private settlement from charges brought by at least eight different over the years.

Dozens and dozens of people in his company along with many actors and actresses and reporters allegedly knew about Harvey’s despicable behavior for years and covered it up. An article just this past week said that Harvey’s behavior didn’t get the media attention it deserved because

“There were so many journalists on his payroll, working as consultants on movie projects, or as screenwriters, or for his magazine.”

What makes the story about Harvey Weinstein even more outrageous is that allegedly while he was harassing and molesting women in five start hotel rooms across the globe, his company was distributing films like “The Hunting Ground”.

It was a 2015 documentary about sexual assault on college campuses. Do you understand this? He’s producing a movie about sexual assault while sexually assaulting women. He also helped endow a “Gloria Steinem” faculty chair at Rutgers; joined the National Women’s March in Utah in January; and was a big fundraiser and supporter of Hillary Clinton.

What’s most astounding, at least to me, is that just this past year the Los Angeles Press Club gave Mr. Weinstein it’s Truth Teller Award calling him an example of Integrity and Social Responsibility.

That Mr. Weinstein gave lavishly to Democratic candidates has not been lost on the conservative media.

But let me share with you a story from the other side of the political aisle. A Tennessee Congressman first won an election in 2010. In the weeks before the 2012 election, papers from his 2001 divorce were released to the press. The documents revealed that this one time doctor, who was running again for Congress, had carried on multiple affairs with patients, co-workers, and a drug company representative. When he was married, he urged his wife to get two abortions. And he also encouraged a patient who was 24 years younger than him, with whom he was having an affair, to also get an abortion. Voters in Tennessee, of course, responded to this news by re-electing the congressman. He has now been re-elected several times and has received a 100% pro-life rating from the National Right to Life Organization.

Sadly, there are at least two other congressmen who have received 100% ratings from Right to Life while privately urging mistresses to get abortions.

My point in raising these stories of Harvey Weinstein and these other congressmen is not to try to suggest to you that everyone is a hypocrite, everyone is fake, no one can be trusted. There are many, many men in Hollywood who do not harass or molest women that they are working with. And there are many pro-life congressmen and pro-life politicians who are consistent in their private life and their public life. They're not just saying "Vote for me. Privately I'm a pig, but publically I support what you support." They are consistent.

My point in raising these stories is to say that there are many people who are hypocrites. There are many people who are cons. There are many people who are inauthentic. We ought not to be shocked by this. More than 1900 years ago, the Apostle John wrote about authenticity and inauthenticity in a little New Testament letter that we call 1 John. In his letter, John is concerned about the question of being an authentic Christian. Throughout the letter, he asks the question, how do you know if you or someone else is a real deal authentic Christian?

So many people in America claim to be Christian. I think I'm a Christian, after all I was raised in a church-going family. I'm a Christian because I was confirmed. I'm a Christian because I did eight years of Catholic school and had my knuckles rapped by a nun on many occasions. I'm not a Jew or a Muslim or an atheist so I guess I'm a Christian.

John's point in the letter is that you don't have to guess if you are an authentic Christian. You don't have to guess if someone else is an authentic Christian. There are ways to tell. There are ways to know. Today, we're going to look at John's discussion about the relationship an authentic Christian has to sin. I've called today's talk, "The Authentic Christian and Sin".

Let's pray.

Now, this is a text about sin. Sin or sinner is mentioned nine times in eight verses.

1 John 1:5-2:2

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Nine times in eight verses John mentions the word “sin”. How do we know what sin is?

How do we know if we have sinned or if something is a sin?

The standard for measuring sin

A survey recently in which one in five (nearly 20%) of self-described Christians don’t think that having sex with someone other than your spouse or girlfriend is sinful. One

out of three self-described Christians don't think that maintaining an online dating profile while you're married or dating someone else is sinful. One out of three self-described Christians don't think it's sinful cheating for a married person to be emotionally involved with someone besides their own spouse.

Now, I don't know where they dug these people up from. But how do we know if something is sinful? Do we take a poll and ask what everyone else thinks and go with the majority? Or is it like the U.S. Senate, you need 60% in order to decide something? Or do we forget the polls and we just decide for ourselves what is or is not sinful?

As one famous politician said,

"I don't like to ask forgiveness. I am good. I don't do a lot of things that are bad. I try to do nothing that is bad."

Do we determine what is or is not sinful by asking ourselves if something bothers us? If it doesn't bother us, it's ok?

The Apostle John in this text, says that other people and their opinion of what is right or wrong are not the standard for defining sin. Neither is our own private opinion or what our own consciences will or won't allow. The truth is that depending upon where you were raised and how you were raised, you might condone terrible things. If you were

white and raised in the South before the Civil War, you might think that slavery was ok. That it's the natural order of things. If you are a man and raised in certain countries, even today, you might think beating your wife is ok.

The only safe standard of measuring right and wrong, what is or is not sin, according to the Apostle John, the only safe standard is God and his own character.

1 John 1:5

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Light in the Bible is moral purity. Darkness in the Bible is a symbol of lies. Darkness is ignorance. Darkness is error. John is saying that there is no deception in God. There is no hypocrisy in God. God doesn't publicly say one thing and privately do another.

There is not a division between God's statements and his activities or between his public and private self. There is no misleading, no distortion. Do you know God never changes his opinion from year to year just because society has changes, God's standards still remain the same. The only consistent, unchanging, safe standard for determining what is or is not sin is the character of God who is totally light without a hint of shadow or any dark corner in his personality.

Now the structure of this text is really lovely. Three times John lays out a false claim by the early opponents of Christianity

1 John 1:6

⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

1 John 1:8

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10

¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

False claims. Three lies. False claims are followed by three remedies, three cures for the lies.

The Bible is not like the typical self-help book. It doesn't spend more time on the diagnosis than on the cure. Anytime the Bible says, "here's the problem", it immediately comes around and says, "Now, here's the remedy for the problem". God doesn't drive us into the ground by simply telling us how bad we are. God holds up a mirror and tells us there's dirt on our faces, but he also says at the same time there's soap and water that you can wash your face clean. I want you to know that there's

something really wrong here, but here's the hope, here's the answer, here's the remedy. God's word offers us a balanced message – we are way worse than we fear but God loves us way more than we can imagine.

The heretics John was battling with made three false claims. They told three lies.

The first big lie – sin doesn't affect my relationship with God

John 1:6

⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

The heretics John was battling with claimed that you could be in a close relationship with God while at the same time living contrary to what his character demands. "I have a wonderful relationship with God. I feel so close to him. I constantly feel his presence. I hear his voice in my heart." Yet all the while, I'm involved in habitual sin. But sin doesn't affect my relationship with God at all.

John says that's impossible. You are deluding yourself to believe that you could walk in darkness and yet be in close fellowship with God who is light! Religion can be a cover for horrific behavior. Many, many people have fallen prey to the lie that we can pay God off with a little bit of religion. "Oh yes, I'm involved in some shady business

practices. Yes, I am unfaithful in my marriage. Yes, I'm a hothead and explode in anger. Yes, I do tend to gossip, but I am really close to God. You see, I pay God off. I tithe. I read my Bible. I go to church. I raise my hands during worship and I get really emotional. Therefore, I am close to God."

Brothers and sisters, biblical religion, the religion of the Old and New Testament was the first religion ever to tie together the worship of God and our morals. Throughout the Bible, the biblical writers – especially Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah – skewer this idea that I can be close to God who is light while I walk in darkness so long as I'm involved in religion.

John is telling us that an authentic Christian understands that you can't separate your spiritual life from your morals. God won't be bought off by a little bit of religion. And we can't say that sin is no big deal. "God is beyond all of that. He doesn't really care about the darkness in my life. He's ok with it. I'm the one beating myself up about this sin, but God is saying not to worry. Don't worry about your habitual gossip or your habitual anger or your habitual porn use or your habitual lying. It's no biggie."

John, throughout this little letter, says that sin is a huge deal to a Christian. Let me ask you a question. Do you consider sin to be a huge deal for you?

How does sin impact a Christian? I want to tick off a few things for you. If we habitually sin, it will damage our intimacy with God. That's what verse 6 is all about. We can't walk in darkness and claim fellowship with God who is light. Certainly, if we habitually sin, we can become enslaved to sin. When we open the door to sin may we find ourselves in greater and greater bondage so that we cannot not do this particular thing. That's what addiction is all about – slavery to sin. If we habitually sin, it will damage our witness. You know, we can't bring good news to people while we ourselves are bad news. How much damage is done to our witness for Christ by radically inconsistent living on the part of God's people?

If we sin, John is going to tell us later, we're going to lose our assurance that we're saved people. We may still be saved. We may still have eternal life. But we won't know it. We won't know if we're for real or if we're fakes, just fooling ourselves and others. The Bible tells us that if we habitually sin, if we give ourselves over to sin in an area of our life, we could open ourselves up to the demonic. Sin is a very big deal for the Christian.

What's the remedy for the false claim that sin does not affect our relationship with God, that sin is no big deal?

1 John 1:7

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

What's the remedy? Here in verse 7 it's:

The Remedy – walk in the light

I'm going to talk about the blood of Christ in a few moments as a remedy. John brings this up again later. But an authentic Christian walks in the light. What does it mean to walk in the light? Let me get at this by dealing with the opposite of walking in the light. That is, covering up our sins.

Friends, let me as plainly as possible say this. If you are at all involved in having to cover your tracks, that is a really good sign that you are outside of the will of God and doing what you ought not to be doing. The person who is in the will of God does not have to cover their tracks. A person who is in the will of God never has to go through their computer's history and delete certain items. A person who is in the will of God does not have to delete text messages from their cell phones, or hide certain financial transactions, or pretend to be where they aren't, or have someone else providing them with an alibi, or get their friends to lie for them. If you are involved in some sort of cover up, you are almost by definition in sin and not walking in the light.

And you know that you are walking in darkness, maybe an addiction, if you are covering it up. People who have eating disorders are always involved in cover ups. You have to hide your binging and purging. Alcoholics always cover up their drinking. You drink vodka because others can't smell it on your breath, eat breath mints or you drink when no one is around or use a sports bottle to drink from, or find creative places in your home to hide the bottle. Opioid addicts lose tons of weight – but claim they're dieting. Their constant runny nose is due to a cold. Their falling asleep is because they were up late last night. Those who are involved injecting cover their scars with clothes. Those who are involved in gambling cover up their financial losses. Those who find their comfort by shopping cover their debts by playing financial shell games with credit cards, hiding credit card statements.

If you are involved in a cover up of any kind, guaranteed you are not walking in the light.

Walking in the light is living transparently. It's living without cover up. It's not living without ever sinning, it's living without cover up and acknowledging your sins by being open and vulnerable. Acknowledging when you screw up. Quickly confessing that what you just did or what you just said was hurtful, asking for forgiveness, being humble about yourself. Walking in the light is endeavoring to live in God's light by asking God to search us out. Walking in the light is praying along with the psalmist:

Psalm 139:23-24

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

The first big lie? Sin doesn't affect my relationship with God. What's the cure? Walk in the light. What's the second big lie that John points to?

1 John 1:8

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

The second big lie – we are without sin

The heretics John was battling claimed to be unaffected by the sin nature. They were not fallen like everyone else. The heretics claimed that they were enlightened and so by their enlightenment, their sin nature was destroyed.

Now, how can anyone look inside and say, "I'm without sin. I don't have a sin nature. I'm so spiritually mature that sin is no longer a problem for me. I can handle any situation. I'm the kind of person who could walk near the edge of a cliff and not fall off. I can skate out on thin ice even though there are warning signs posted all over, "Danger! Danger! Thin ice." But I can skate out on thin ice and not fall through. I can visit my

boyfriend's apartment after a couple of drinks at midnight and not end up tumbling into bed. I can work in a really immoral environment and not be affected at all. I can put myself in a really compromising position and not give way to temptation. How can anyone think they are that strong and immune from the corrupting effects of sin?

Well, lots of people believe this about themselves. That's why so many wonderful Christian leaders fall and so many devoted followers of Jesus end up making dreadful, life-changing decisions. John tells us what the problem is, we deceive ourselves. The problem is self-deception.

We have so many ways to deceive ourselves. Much of psychoanalysis was designed 100 years ago to pull away, strip away, all of our defense mechanisms and all the ways we hide the truth from ourselves – by rationalization and denial and projection and so on.

What's the remedy for self-deception for believing that we can handle almost anything or something we're doing is right when it's not right?

The remedy – confession and cleansing

1 John 1:9

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Let me start with cleansing. John uses a particularly strong Greek word that we translate “purify” or “cleanse”. The Greek word is:

Katharizo = cleansing or cleaning out

This word expresses what happens to a person who confesses and is cleaned out by Christ’s blood. *Katharizo* is where we get the English word “catharsis” from. Are you familiar with the term “catharsis”? It’s used in psychoanalysis. Catharsis is undergoing a process where you release pent up emotions. Sometimes a person has gone through a traumatic experience and they’ve buried that experience, only they’re having all kinds of symptoms. In catharsis, the trauma is revealed and a person experiences a tremendous release. A release of all the pain, all of the buried hurt. We see this in inner healing.

Why is it that we often don’t feel a catharsis, a cleaning out, a purging of the guilt and regret of the felt accusations that we experience after we sin – even though we go to God? Why don’t we experience catharsis, a freeing up of our emotions, a cleansing of our souls – even though we’re praying?

John tells us that there is condition for this cleansing, this purging.

1 John 1:9

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The condition for catharsis for cleansing is confession. Now, the word confess is also an interesting one in the Greek. The word is

Homologeo

Homo = same

Logeo = word or speech

John is saying that to confess is to say the same thing as God says about a certain behavior, a certain attitude. To confess is to come into full agreement with God about what you're doing and what you're saying.

I've found it helpful in confession to not only agree with God about what I did and what I said and that it was wrong, but in order to go through this catharsis I have found it helpful to confess to God all the results of my sin. As a result of me saying that my child felt really put down. My wife felt judged. Here are all the results of what I did. Not only what I did, but here's what happened as a result of what I did – here's the hurt I caused, here's how what I did or failed to do affected me and here's how it affected other

people, here's how it affected my relationship with you, God. Agree with God about yourself and your activities and attitudes. You'll feel cleansed. You'll be purged. You'll be released.

The first big lie is that sin doesn't affect my relationship with God. The second big lie is that we are without sin. What is the third big lie?

The third big lie – we have not sinned

1 John 1:10

¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

I'm not a sinner, I'm a good person. I don't do things that are wrong. We've been talking around this issue, but specifically what does the Bible mean by the word "sin"? This is a huge topic and we could spend weeks exploring what the Bible means by sin. But I want to hone in on the particular word that John uses for sin. The particular word for sin here is the Greek word

Hamartia = to miss the mark or to miss the point

To veer off from God's purpose. That's what sin is. God has a purpose for everything. Everything he created was created with purpose. God is a purposeful God. He is an

intentional God. Whatever God made, he made for a purpose. We sin when we miss the purpose.

I remember years ago seeing in Westerville a guy driving his Mercedes. I hope you're not here in our congregation. His license plate read

GOT3BNZ

"Got three Benzes". That's what he's saying on his license plate. When I saw his license plate, I thought, "You have missed God's purpose for your money, friend. God hasn't blessed you so you could acquire three Mercedes Benzes. Or that you could create envy in others by advertising on your license plate how many Benzes you have. He blessed you so you could be a blessing to others."

How often do you and I miss the purpose for which God created something? The purpose for speech is not to tear someone else down. Or to make us look good. Or to tell the world how great we are and to belittle others. To toot our own horns. The purpose of speech is to encourage other people, to instruct others, to thank God, to bless, to bring truth. The purpose of work is not to establish an identity for ourselves, it's to participate in God's great work; to partner with God to heal the world. We constantly miss the point, the purpose. And so we sin.

What's the remedy. Here's what we read:

1 John 2:1-2

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The remedy – Jesus Christ our righteous defender and our sacrifice

When we mess up and we come to God in confession, when we agree with him about ourselves, when we turn from darkness and walk into the light, we don't come before God alone. We have Jesus Christ, our righteous advocate, to speak up in our defense.

John is saying when you go to court in the divine court, you're not going there without a lawyer pleading with God to be merciful to you. You have Jesus Christ interceding, arguing on your behalf. And he's a righteous advocate. Look at this with me.

1 John 2:1

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Jesus is not some shady attorney cutting corners, arguing on the basis of a technicality, finding some loophole in the law, claiming we haven't done anything wrong. Jesus Christ upholds God's law. What does Jesus Christ plead?

1 John 2:2

² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus pleads, "Father, you sent me in love to pay for this one's sins. To cleanse their conscience and to establish the righteous requirements you demand." And understand this, friends, Jesus is not prying forgiveness from the unwilling closed fists of the Father. God the Father in love sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. When Jesus defends us before the Father, he stands before a Father who wants to forgive us. Who made provision for us and wants us to come into his presence. It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. It is God's desire to show us grace. It is God who created the plan of salvation by offering his Son.

There is a way, brothers and sisters, for us to be authentic. It's by walking the light, being honest and clear in our confessions and turning to Jesus Christ as our advocate and our sacrifice. Let's pray.

- I. The standard for measuring sin
- II. The first big lie – sin doesn't affect my relationship with God

The remedy – Walk in the light
- III. The second big lie – we are without sin

The remedy - confession and cleansing
- IV. The third big lie – we have not sinned

The remedy – Jesus Christ our righteous defender and our sacrifice