

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Freedom From Sin

by Dan Trygg

“...if ever we might be walking in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have a sharing with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son continually-cleanses us from every sin. ^{1:8} If ever we might say (at a point of time) that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If ever we might confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous in order that He might forgive (send-away) our sins from us and He might cleanse us from every injustice/unrighteous-act. ¹⁰ If ever we might say (at a point in time) that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. ^{2:1} My little children, I am writing these things to you in order that you might not sin. And if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation (satisfactory-sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

1 John 1:7-2:2

The most common mistake we make, when trying to interpret the Scriptures, is that we lift verses out of context. If we do not accurately see what the writer is talking about, in his flow of thought, we can easily misconstrue the point of what he is saying, or miss an important connection that he is trying to make. When these letters were first written, they had no verse numbers or chapter divisions. These were added centuries later, to help a group of people find the same place in the text. Unfortunately, however, they often make it difficult to see the flow of thought, and they introduce breaks in the argument that were not meant to be there. **John said that he was writing about “age-type life”, the life of the age-to-come that was embodied in Jesus, and is now imparted to everyone who believes in Him.** He said that He was writing about this, so that we might have a “sharing” (communion, participation; Gk.- *koinōnia*) with the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. **Jesus came to demonstrate this life, and to speak of it.** His message was that whoever would believe in Him would receive this “age-type life” (Jn. 3:16; 5:24). After His death and resurrection, and His ascension into heaven, He received the Holy Spirit from the Father, and poured Him out upon those who believe in Him. If we take Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are born from above, and receive the Spirit as our inheritance. **It is the Spirit that brings this “life-of-the-age-to-come” into our present experience.** It is translated as “eternal life”, but **it is really “age-type life”, life of the kingdom of God, the same life that Jesus walked in and demonstrated.** (The word translated as “eternal” [*aiōnion*] is an adjective form of the word for “age” [*aiōn*]. The word is used to describe a qualitatively different life, ...the life of God's kingdom..., not just the everyday life humans live, going on forever.)

So, in the first few verses, John made it clear that his purpose was to proclaim this age-type life, ...in order that we might share in this life that comes from God. This is not something that only John preached. Peter said the same thing, “All things of His Divine power have been granted to us, the things pertaining to life and godliness (good-devotedness), ...in order that you might become partakers (sharers, participants in – Gk. - *koinōnos*) of the Divine nature, escaping (fleeing-away-from) the corruption in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:3,4). Somehow, Peter is saying that we are to share in the very nature of God Himself. It is made possible by God's power, and His promises, which have been given to us, ...and also by the recognition of God Himself at work within us (vs. 3). John calls this “age-type life”.

If we take seriously what John said, his purpose is to proclaim this age-type life, and enable us to participate in it. If this is true, then we need to see that he is not changing the subject, but rather helping us to understand and identify what is this genuine life from God. 1 John is all about explicating this life, so that we could see when we are walking in it, and when we are not.

The first identifying characteristic of this life is that it is consistent with God's own nature. He is Light, ...there is no darkness or evil in Him at all. Since that is true, **we should expect that the life that comes from Him would produce righteousness in us. If we are walking in that life, we should see a qualitative change in our character.** This is the same message that Paul communicated in Galatians 5. The outworking of the sinful flesh produces sensual sin, pride and divisiveness, ...but the fruit of the Spirit produces characteristics that are consistent with God's nature (Gal. 5:19-23). So, if we see immorality, dissension and addictive behaviors in our lives, we can know that these are coming from our fleshly sin nature. If we see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control in our lives, these are evidences of the Spirit's inworking in our lives.

John is developing a similar argument. **In order to help us process our experience, and to identify and pursue what is from the “age-type life” of the Spirit, he lays down some parameters. He first points out some erroneous ideas.** “If we say that *we have no sin*, we are deceiving ourselves (leading ourselves astray)” (vs. 8). If we say *we have not sinned*, we make God a liar” (because He clearly *has said* that all have sinned – Rom. 3:23) (vs. 10). **Then, he states some important truths for us to process and pursue:** “I am writing to you that *you may not sin*” (2:1). John

wants us to know that it is possible not to sin, and he is telling us about this age-type life to lead us to victory in this area. Finally, “if *anyone does sin*, we have an Advocate with the Father” (2:1). **If we were to state these as positive statements or propositions:**

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| (1.) We all “have” or “possess” sin – sinners by nature. | (2.) We all have sinned in the past – sinners by choice. |
| (3.) It is possible for believers not to sin . | (4.) It is possible for believers to still commit sin . |

The experience of every Christian falls within these parameters. We cannot escape these realities, but now we can experience a level of freedom that we never could have apart from Christ.

John is writing to help us to see that God's grace was sufficient to remove our past sins – Jesus was the once-for-all sacrifice of atonement that satisfied God's wrath and demand for justice. **Even now, if we do fall into sin, we can experience forgiveness and cleansing from all unrighteousness by confessing our sin.** God will be faithful (dependable) to send-away our sin, and make us clean. **We still “have sin” in our members. It is part of our Adam-nature that we carry with us until we die, or until Jesus returns.** There will never be a time when we can say that “we have no sin”. *That* statement is erroneous, and misdirects our attention. **That said, however, it is possible to walk in righteousness by the power of the inner life of the Spirit.** John wants us to **recognize this is true, and motivate us to pursue this qualitatively different life that comes from Him. It is possible not to sin.** In fact, this is what John says, “These things I am writing to y'all in order that you might not sin.” Did he mean that? Yes! He comes back to this idea several times in this letter. **If we walk in the “age-type life”, we will not be sinning. Why? Because that life-of-the-age-to-come is incompatible with sin.**

If the most common mistake we make, when trying to interpret the Scriptures, is that we lift verses out of context, ...then **another of the most common errors we make is that we interpret the Scriptures by our experience, instead of allowing the Scriptures to speak to or challenge our experience.** Instead of accepting the testimony or teaching of the Scriptures at face value, we tend to say, “Well, that is not *my* experience, so the author cannot mean what is plainly stated. There must be another explanation.” We miss the whole purpose of the revelation of God. **God is telling us what we would not easily be able to see or discover on our own. God has to reveal this to us, because it is not obvious, or does not fit with our normal experience or expectations of the nature of the world.** For example, there are many people who dismiss the reality of miracles, simply because they have never seen or experienced one. People doubt the existence of demons, because they have never encountered someone who was clearly and obviously demonized. The Scriptures, and the testimony of many people over the centuries, is that miracles happen, and demons are real. So, many have tried to explain away miracles, or demons, with some other naturalistic explanation, simply because they are not convinced that these things are possible, or to be expected. The same is true here. **If you have never experienced the life that John is describing here, ...a life where we experience freedom from sin..., and, moreover, if you are surrounded by many people who do not seem to be experiencing or expecting such a thing..., it is easy to discount it.** And, *yet*, the clear language of John is “I am writing these things to you *in order that you might not sin*.” Which is it? **Are we going to challenge our experience with the Word of God, ...or doubt the Word of God because of our lack of experience? Why is it that we can accept the message of forgiveness more easily than the message of freedom? When we start out, both are invisible to our eyes.**

If we were to work through the passage again, John is saying that if we walk in the Light, as He Himself is in the Light (a euphemism for walking in the “age-type life” of the Holy Spirit), then we are having a sharing (common participation) with God (1:3) and with one another, and the blood of Jesus continually-cleanses us from every sin that might come to mind or be expressed. We all have sin within our members, and we have all chosen sin in the past. If we confess our sins (call it what God calls it) and get it out into the Light, God will be faithful to forgive (send-away) our sins, and cleanse us from every unrighteous-act. John's purpose in writing is to help us discover that we are *not* compelled to sin anymore. We can experience life that is free from giving in to sinful suggestions and thoughts. But, if anyone should still fall into sin, we can be assured that Christ is our Defense Attorney. He Himself provided the satisfactory-sacrifice of atonement for us, ...and not only for us, but for everyone who calls out to Him in faith.

We can all relate to what John said, about having sin within us, and having sinful thoughts come to mind. The good news is not only that God has provided a way to remove the distance and damaging effects caused by sin, but He has also introduced into us the Light of life, ...the life of the age-to-come-in-the-here-and-now, the life of God Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit..., to expose the darkness of sinful thoughts and behaviors, and to enable us to walk in power and purity that is characteristic of His nature. Because we are “doing the truth”, we come to the Light, and we bring any sinful thoughts out into the open, through confession and yielding to God. **As we come to Him, and walk in the Light in this way, the blood of Jesus will cleanse us both from sinful thoughts and unrighteous choices. We not only experience the freedom and fellowship of forgiveness, but we are drawn to focus and act upon the inworking of God's Spirit.** As we do so, we experience the fruit of the Spirit, and we delight to testify that *this* is the life of God expressed through ours.