

INTRODUCTION

We mentioned last week that in the book of 1 John the apostle described our salvation experience as fellowship. Remember the tropical fruit we talked about last Sunday? Becoming a Christian is more than getting an entry permit to heaven. What is more important is a continual interaction with God and with fellow brothers and sisters. In the next section of the letter, John gradually unfolded how this fellowship looks like. John said that God is light. A Christian who has fellowship with God is walking in the light. The opposite of light is darkness, which John used as a synonym for sin. When we hear the word “darkness” we may think of many negative things like danger, fear and unknown. John stated that a person either belongs to the light or belongs to darkness. That is easy to understand. It is like some countries that do not recognize dual-citizenship. When you became an U.S. citizen then you have to give up your original citizenship. However, as children of light, we are still under the influence of sin. Whenever you connect to the internet, turn on the TV, or simply make contact with people you can feel the impact of temptation. Sometimes we are confused. Are Christians still sinners? Do you have that struggle? Hopefully, this message can help you resolve that dilemma. We shall learn from John’s explanation that fellowship with God alerts us to deal with sin seriously. In verses 6, 8 and 10 of this section John began with the same phrases “if we claim” to present three statements with regard to our relationship with sin. Then John immediately refuted all three situations to be false. Let us consider a hypothetical situation as we consider the problem of sin. Suppose I contracted a serious but curable disease. After some extensive treatment the doctor declared that I was healed. However, to prevent the same illness from coming back I have to take medicine for the rest of my life. I also need to maintain a good health with a balanced diet, quality sleep and regular exercise. How I should avoid getting the same sickness is similar to how I should avoid falling into sin. With that in mind, now let us study the passage.

EXPLANATION

1. 委身與光 Commit to the Light

First of all, John told us that we have to counteract sin by committing ourselves to the light. He spoke in **verse 6**: If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. Here we find the first “if we claim” statement in the passage. Having fellowship with God means walking in the light. If so, then one should not be walking in darkness. It is that clear-cut. All the verbs in this verse are in present tense in the Greek text, which means that they are all ongoing actions. In other words, a Christian should not be characterized by a lifestyle of sinning. It is like when a person tells others that he is a Christian and how important his belief is to him. However, all that people can see in him is a prideful and greedy person, and he cannot stop gossiping behind other’s back. He is lying about what he believes. Take note that John was not talking about the situation of falling into sin unknowing or occasionally. But the person sins unceasingly. He knows that it is sin, but he denies it to others. Using my hypothetical situation as illustration. I do not follow the doctor’s instructions. I skip the daily medicine, I eat potato chips and drink soda for lunch and I sit in front of the computer

and play video games all day and all night. After a period of time the ailment reappears. My friends comment: “Hey, are you okay? You look pale and lack of energy.” If I reply: “Yeah, I can’t be better.” then I am lying. Similarly, if I live a sinful lifestyle eventually it will be evident to others. What is the antidote? We have to commit ourselves to the light. John continued in **verse 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. Here we find the first proof of Christians in the book. A believer is a person who **walks in the light of God**. We need to stay away from darkness and come back to the light. When we walk in the light, God will reveal our sins. Then we need to ask Jesus to cleanse our sins. It is by His power that we can maintain a righteous standing with the Father. That is why daily Bible reading is so important. When we read God’s Word, we are doing a spiritual checkup. We allow God’s light to shine into our heart. In this verse John also reminded us that we should also walk with brothers and sisters in the light. We have the obligation to remind each other when we see fellow Christians not walking in the light. For example, when someone offends a coworker in the way he talks, or someone is too opinionated in insisting her views, then we need to pull the person aside and point it out in a loving way. When we walk in the light, we will naturally reflect God’s light in us. Paul put it this way in **Ephesians 5:8-9** – 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth). Our speech and deeds can verify if we are children of light. Sometimes I am thankful that Christian do not need to dress up in distinctive clothing like a Buddhist monk or Muslim lady. You can see from 30 feet away and know what religion the person practices. However, we often go the extreme and try to conceal our identity. There are so many CIA believers in the world. By CIA I mean “Christian in anonymity.” People can never tell they are Christians by the way they live. We should stop living a double-life. Rather, we let God’s light to shine through us so as to point people to the true light.

2. 承認己罪 Admit Our Sins

Not only that we have to tackle sin by committing ourselves to the light, we should also admit our sin honestly. Let us look at **verse 8**: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. In this “if we claim” statement, John stated that we deceive ourselves when we say that we have no sin. Perhaps we say that it is only our weakness, we are being careless or incompetent. We excuse ourselves: “I have a bad temper or bad mouth all my life. After all, who can be perfect?” We deceive ourselves. Back to the hypothetical situation of my sickness. All the symptoms point to the fact that I am sick. If I pretend that I am alright, then I deceive myself. I wear a hat when my hair keeps shedding, or put on a long-sleeve shirt to cover the blemish on my arms. By saying that we should recognize our sins, John has actually answered the question whether Christians are still sinners. Yes, they are redeemed sinners who will continue to commit sin in this life. When we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, He has washed away all of our sins – past, present and future. Paul said in **Romans 8:1** that: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Jesus has removed the penalty of sin in those who put their trust in Him. However, we still live in this fallen world and we have an inclination to commit sin. In reality, we will still keep on sinning. However, when we rely on God, we can live a victorious life. That is a privilege we did not have before we knew Christ. Also, after a person has received Christ, committing sin will not cut off his/her relationship with God. But sin will interfere our fellowship with God. All children are supposed to listen to their parents. But it

does not mean that they will not disobey. When your kids rebel against you, they will not become orphans automatically. However, their defiance will grieve your heart because you love them dearly. They will feel ashamed to look at you too. What your kids have to do is to admit their wrongdoings and ask for your forgiveness. Our relationship with God works the same way. John said in **verse 9**: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Here lies the second proof for Christians. A believer is a person who eagerly **claims the forgiving grace of Jesus**. A person who does not confess his/her sins will not ask God for forgiveness. The word “confession” literally means “saying the same thing” in Greek. We call sins as sins just like God does. We stop deceiving ourselves. When I see signs of illness, I should accept it as a fact, look for treatment and get back to a healthy lifestyle. John told us that if we acknowledge our sins, God will always forgive us. He will remove the burden of guilt in our hearts. In doing so, our fellowship with God will be restored. I know what some of you smart people are thinking now. If we have such a miraculous solution, then we can continue to sin. Whenever we feel the need, we just turn back to God and make a confession. Paul convicted such mentality in **Romans 6:1-2** – 1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Paul presented an interesting argument here. For example, I spoke a lie, later confessed and God forgave me. That shows God’s grace. Should I commit a bigger sin like robbing a bank to verify that God has even greater forgiving grace? If our children truly know how much we love them, then they will not abuse our affection and live in rebellion. By the same token, if we indeed understand how much Jesus sacrificed on the cross to redeem us, then no genuine Christian will continue to dwell in sin. Dear brothers and sisters: we have such an amazing grace. Why choose to live in darkness? Come to Jesus, stop deceiving yourself but admit your sin. Only He can set you free.

3. 順服真理 Submit to the Truth

We should deal with sin by committing to the light and admitting our sins. Thirdly, we should also submit ourselves to the truth. John told us in **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 third “if we claim” statement is a more serious assertion than the first two. We do not only lie to others and deceive ourselves if we say that we have no sin, we even make God a liar. We declare that God makes a wrong judgment by labeling our wrongdoings as sin. This is a deliberate rebellion against God. It is as if we are asking God to leave us alone. We see many examples of it in the Bible. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit that God clearly told them not to consume. The Israelites did not follow God’s order to take possession of the land of Canaan. God disciplined His children in every incident. Our proper reaction should be submitting to the truth. We obey whatever God says. John told us in **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 one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. We have to submit to God’s ruling. Whenever we sin, we go back to Jesus, who is the only remedy for our sins. John said that Jesus is our advocate before the Heavenly Father. Imagine we are taken to a court proceeding. The Heavenly Father is the judge. We are guilty as charged. Jesus is our defense attorney. He cannot say that we are innocent. The only argument He would use to plead for us is that He has substituted us for the penalty we deserve. God the Father will set us free if we rely on our advocate. But most people will not put their trust in Jesus. We live in a society that denies God’s truth. It is seen as unkind to point out people’s

misbehaviors. Pop artist Lady Gaga released a song in 2011 titled “Born This Way.” As a disclaimer, I am never a fan of her! Pay attention to part of the lyrics: “I’m beautiful in my way. ’Cause God makes no mistakes. I’m on the right track, baby. I was born this way. Don’t hide yourself in regret. Just love yourself, and you’re set.” The message is that no one should judge another person. You are free to do whatever you want as long as it is okay with you. Do not call it sin. Different from others does not mean you are wrong. You cannot help it, because you are born that way. That is a complete lie. It is true that in a free society nobody can force you to do anything against your will. However, there will surely be consequences if we do not submit to God’s truth. Our society glorifies the freedom of a sinful lifestyle but tries to cover up the alienation and brokenness as a result of it. If I do not listen to the doctor’s advice, eventually I will suffer from the disease again. It is not a matter of what I consider right versus wrong. The reality will gradually sink in if I do not take care of my body. But there are too many people in our world who indulge in instant gratification at the expense of future outcome. To submit to the truth means that we humble ourselves and yield to God. Admitting our sins is the first step. That is the knowledge level. However, submission to the truth requires our will and action. We make up our mind to follow the truth. God delights to see us turn back from sin. He will never say to us: “You again? How many times do I need to forgive the same sin you have committed?” Satan cannot wait to dump lies in our mind, telling us that God is tired of our confession and He will not accept us again. Do not believe in him! Rather, come back to the truth. God hates sins but He loves sinners. Jesus is always on our side if we trust Him as our advocate.

CONCLUSION

We learn from this passage that fellowship with God alerts us to deal with sin seriously. Even Christians will continue to fight against sin for the rest of their lives. Great Bible commentator of the yesteryear Matthew Henry once said: “The Christian religion is the religion of sinners. The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, of continual faith in, thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer.” There is always hope in Jesus. The reality show “Dr. Pimple Popper” brings a lot of hope to desperate patients. Her real name is Dr. Sandra Lee. She is a licensed dermatologist by profession. My wife’s brother-in-law, the Caucasian guy whose favorite food is pig’s colon, is a big fan of the show. We watched a few episodes when we visited his family last summer. The program features real patients with various kind of tough skin diseases. Some of them have big lumps of strange tissue on their back or on their faces. They cover up the problem areas with clothing, and some of them have been enduring pain for years. Their social life or even career is hampered by their diseases. Dr. Lee shows compassion to the patients, and she uses her medical training and experience to treat them. She performed surgeries in front of the camera in her clinic. To be honest, some of the footages were quite gross. Skin was cut open, and unhealthy tissue was removed and fluid was drained. After the treatments, health was restored and self-esteem was regained. Those people were truly grateful for Dr. Lee. The reason why this reality show has become a huge sensation is not because of the unpleasant scenes. But the audience are attracted to the feel-good moments. There is no doubt that Dr. Lee changed the lives of a lot of people. We may not need to consult her. However, according to the Bible, there is a more serious and universal problem called sin that is in every person. Jesus is the only solution God prescribes for us. In Christ, we can have long-lasting solution to sin.