

Hamartiology & Cookie Jars

1 John 1:8-2:2
February 4, 2018



A little boy is lying in bed one night but he just can't sleep. He's got something on his mind...cookies! You see, his mom had just baked a fresh batch of her famous chocolate chip cookies. She'd let him have 2 of them that evening, with a glass of milk, but only 2. There was a whole jar filled with cookies downstairs and that's all this little boy could think about. So, he quietly snuck down to the kitchen. He left the lights off in order not to draw any attention. Then, he quietly dragged a chair over to the tall kitchen cupboards (there's a loud screech as he slides the chair). He climbs up on the chair and opens the cupboard. Oh yeah, baby, it's the mother load – literally! His mother had baked a load of cookies. He wraps his little arms around the cookie jar and grunts and groans as he places it down on the counter... He lifts the lid... Yes! There they are. He reaches in and takes just one cookie, and eats it. Then, he quickly eats another and then another. Pretty soon he's lost count. He's just cramming these things into his mouth, double-fisted. Oh what joy! Delicious, wonderful joy! Suddenly, he hears footsteps coming down the stairs. Someone's awake! He quickly puts the lid on the cookie jar, lifts it back into the cupboard, closes the cupboard, jumps down from the chair, "quietly" drags it back to the table... And just when he finishes putting everything back in its place, the kitchen light comes on. It's mom! "Hi mommy," he says in his sweetest little boy voice. His mom replies, "hi there, Sweetheart, what are you doing awake?" "Oh nothing... I was just...I was just... um... I was just getting a drink of milk," he says. His mom replies, "are you suuuure that's all?" "Well, yes mommy, I'm sure. I was just getting some delicious, healthy milk." His mom asks, "you weren't eating more cookies, were you?" "No mommy, you said... you said... um... only 2 cookies today and then I could have 2 more after school tomorrow." (Now, mom is trying her best here to keep a straight face, because she can clearly see the evidence of cookie eating. Not only is the counter a mess and the floor a mess, but her little boy has chocolate all over his face. It's all over his little hands, it's in his hair, it's even in his ears!)

The reality of the cookie disobedience was clear, but still this little boy denied it. And this is not too unlike each one of us sometimes. Here's the moral of the story: It's in our human nature to want more than 2 cookies.¹ To go after, what we've been told, is not good for us. The evidence of our sin is all around us, all over us, but we still try to deny it. Sin can be defined as "not living God's way." And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, "sin." You may have noticed my sermon today is entitled, "Hamartiology & Cookie Jars." Hamartiology is the study of sin. It comes from the Greek word "hamartia" which means "missing the mark."² When we don't live our lives according to God's design, we miss the mark, and we sin. Please turn in your Bible to 1 John. As we consider this idea of hamartiology, the study of sin, the first thing that we need to consider is that...

1. Sin is a reality. When the Apostle John wrote his letter to these dear Bros/Sis in Christ, he spent time articulating exactly why he is so concerned about the reality of sin. 1 John 1:8 teaches that, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."³ 1 John 1:10 teaches that, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. It's helpful to compare these 2 verses side by side:

v. 8 shares a kind of poetic balance with v. 10

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

"If we claim we have not sinned,
we make him out to be a liar
and his word has no place in our lives."

Verse 8 talks about our claim not to have a sin problem, while verse 10 addresses our claim to not have sinful behaviors. Verse 8 says we deceive ourselves with this kind of claim, while verse 10

¹ Consider Genesis 2:16-17 with Genesis 3:6.

² www.Dictionary.com Retrieved 20 November 2014. "ἁμαρτία"

³ 1 John 1:6 taught us, "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth." John is calling out any kind of spiritual hypocrisy. Don't say that you are in fellowship with God and then choose to walk in darkness.

scolds us for basically calling God a liar.⁴ If this is our claim, then verse 8 concludes that the truth isn't in us and v. 10 declares that His Word has no place in our lives.⁵ It's helpful to distinguish "sin" from "sins." They're closely related, of course, but there's a significant nuance that we need to keep in mind. The Bible describes "sin" as a condition that humans are born into.⁶ We inherit it, as it were, from our great grandpa Adam (i.e. Adam/Eve) Romans 5:19 teaches us that, "...through the disobedience of the one man (that's Adam) the many were made sinners... (that's you and me)"⁷ The Bible also talks about "sins" as individual actions and attitudes. Romans 3:23 declares, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Therefore, due to our sin condition we commit sins.

Theologians categorize sin into sins of commission and sins of omission. **Sins of Commission** are when we "commit wrong." Doing what we are not supposed to do, breaking God's rules. This makes us think of the 10 Commandments in the OT. "Thou shalt not...murder, commit adultery, steal, lie etc." Sins of commission cross God's boundaries. They happen when we leave the path that God intends for us. **Sins of Omission** are when we "omit good." This is not doing what we are supposed to do; failing to act in loving and selfless ways. It about poor stewardship of our time/talent/treasures.⁸ It often means being passive rather than active; choosing not to move or act when God wants us to. James 4:17 explains it this way, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Understanding sins of omission, clarifies for us just how high God's standards are. It's not enough to merely "not commit sins." God calls us to "commit good deeds." The letter of 1 John is a corrective to any misunderstanding that we may have concerning what we believe about our own personal sin, or any supposed lack thereof. Rather than denial, John calls these believers to be honest about the reality of sin in their lives. The reality of sin should convince us that...

2. Sin requires confession. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."⁹ To put this inversely, if we will not honestly confess our sins, then we will not be forgiven for it. Honesty about our sin means that we agree with God about it, which causes us to want to confess sin for what it is. Praise God, we serve a God who is faithful.¹⁰ He is faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful to Him. It's simple: when anyone genuinely confesses his/her sins, He forgives them. We can have full confidence that God will do this for us. This restoration to close fellowship with God rests entirely on His dependability, NOT on ours.¹¹ Praise God for that! We also serve a God who is just.¹² He has high standards of right/wrong and His judgements about them are fair. He cannot look the other way or ignore sin. There must be a reckoning. Now, some of us might be thinking, "yeah, that's right, if you commit the crime, YOU should do the time." But this is where Jesus steps in. 1 John 2:2 says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."¹³ Some Bible translations use the word "propitiation." That's a good theological word. Propitiation means that Jesus'

⁴ 2 weeks ago, we learned that God is light, there is no darkness in Him at all. Being light, God knows very well that there is darkness in people, so He offers to purify us from that darkness and invite us into His light. But if we resist, claiming we don't even have a sin problem, that we don't even commit sins, then we disagree with God. We distance ourselves from even thinking that we need God. "I'm good enough on my own, I have no need for God."

⁵ Can you imagine having no place in your life for God's Word? What a frightening and misdirected chaos that would be. And yet, we see that kind of chaos in our world today. America today is not all that different than what we read Judges 21:25 when, "everyone did as they saw fit." That is a choice that we can make; to live our own way and by our own rules. To declare that there is no sin because our way of living is the right way of living.

⁶ We have to decide. As Christians, are we just being overly negative and pessimistic about the human condition, or are we right? Are we simply being realistic about our need for God? I've stated several times this year that "sin is our greatest threat." If that's not true, then perhaps we need to change our entire focus for why people need to hear the Good News about Jesus. In fact, maybe God didn't even need to send Jesus...IF people are just fine the way they are. 1 John 4:10 says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Sending Jesus was an act of love based on the understanding that our sin is a genuine and universal problem. If we disagree, we are saying that we disagree with God. In fact, we are saying more than that we disagree, we are saying God Himself is a liar; that He doesn't know what He's talking about and that He doesn't know how to sovereignly rule over us. (See sermon on Article 3 of our Statement of Faith "What We Believe about the Human Condition" from April 9, 2017. It's available at <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media/>.)

⁷ Romans 3:9 adds that, "...Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin..."

⁸ See Titus 2:12.

⁹ This word "purify" echoes back to what we learned in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

¹⁰ "πιστός" = "of God as the One in whom we can have full confidence" (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 821). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

¹¹ Read Psalm 143:1. See note on p. 1552, Zechariah 8:8, from *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

¹² "δίκαιος" = "pertaining to being in accordance with high standards of rectitude, upright, just, fair." Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 246). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹³ See a helpful discussion on propitiation versus expiation at <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/two-important-words-good-friday-expiation-and-propitiation/>

death on the cross satisfied God's wrath and brought us back into a right relationship with God. This is talking about substitutionary atonement. That's a fancy way of saying that Jesus took our place.¹⁴

There are some who might conclude from this verse, that since Jesus' atoning sacrifice is for the sins of the whole world, then everyone has been saved from sin.¹⁵ This teaching is called "universalism," that all people will ultimately will be saved regardless of any confession of sin or putting their trust in Christ.¹⁶ However, if every person is automatically saved through Christ, then 1 John 1:9 doesn't make any sense. No confession or repentance would be necessary. And John 3:16 wouldn't tell us that, "whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish." There would be no need for belief or trust in Christ. The Bible reveals a sobering reality: some people will perish because they will not put their faith in Christ. Faith matters to our salvation. We must choose to put our trust in Jesus' atoning sacrifice or we must face the consequences of sin on our own merit. And our own merit will prove woefully inadequate. The *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* gives a good summary which refutes this idea of universalism: "...Jesus' death was sufficient to deal with the sins of the whole world, but it becomes effective only when people believe."¹⁷ Through faith, there's a marvelous exchange here. The innocent Son of God takes our place, pays our debt, and incurs God's righteous wrath on our behalf. Now, at first, that may seem unfair. But it is completely within the sovereignty of God to provide full payment in whatever way He sees fit. Therefore, God's just demands are fully met in Christ and His grace toward mankind is demonstrated in Jesus Christ. God's grace is so amazing; we sing about it all the time! So, what's the holdup? Well, here it is:

3. We tend to stink at confession! Sometimes, instead of confessing our sins...

1. Sometimes we deny our sins. Just like the little boy caught in the cookie jar, even though we know we're guilty, even though we're caught red-handed¹⁸, we try to lie. We think that somehow, we might just get away with it.

2. Sometimes we blame others for our sins. We might blame the people around us or our family. We might say something like, "if you knew the kind of home I was raised in, you'd understand the way I live." Or, "if you knew my situation at home right now, then you'd understand why I make the choices I make." Sometimes we may even hold a grudge against God because of the pain in our lives. We might think something like, "if you knew how much hurt I've gone through." Or, "if you only knew the difficulties in my life right now, you would see why I have a bad attitude or make some poor choices."

3. Sometimes we rationalize our sins.¹⁹ We choose to just ignore them by convincing ourselves, "My sin is not nearly as bad as other people's sins. Just think of all the terrible things happening in the world today. Look at what terrible things some priests and pastors have done! My sin is miniscule compared to that." Or, maybe you've heard someone ask something like this: "who decides what does and doesn't count as sin anyhow? How do we really know what's right and wrong? It's just one person's opinion against another's. Besides, who are YOU to judge me?"

When I was a kid growing up in northern WI, we used to play a lot of kickball at my friend Terry's house.²⁰ We would gather together as many kids as we could scrape together from the neighborhood. It usually ended up only being about 4-5 kids on each team. We were all different ages and sizes. Some of us were quite talented and others just tried really hard and felt lucky to be included with the group. But, no matter how good you were at kickball or how bad, there was one thing all of us had in common. At some point in time, every one of us kicked the ball out of bounds. You see, the guys and girls who thought they were really good, always tried to kick the ball right down the



¹⁴ Learn more by reading Isaiah 53.

¹⁵ Consider 1 John 5:12-13, "...whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

¹⁶ *NIV Study Bible*, 2011, p. 2126.

¹⁷ *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, D. A. Carson Gen. Ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2563.

¹⁸ "The expression 'caught red handed' has its origins in Scotland around the 15th century. Given how it was used in the earliest references, the phrase "red hand" or "redhand" probably referred to people caught with blood on their hands from murder or poaching." Accessed 2/2/18 from <http://mentalfloss.com>

¹⁹ A 4th thing that some people will do rather than confess is to **feel proud of their sin**. They might say something like, "I'm free to live however I want to live. If God wants to judge me, let him. All my friends are going to hell anyway, I'll just party it up with them down there."

²⁰ Some may remember I shared this illustration back on Dec. 26, 2004 in a sermon called "Five for 05," from Hebrews 10:19-25.

base line. This made it difficult for the outfielders to catch their kick. The guys and girls who weren't quite as talented usually just tried to kick the ball as hard as they could and hoped for the best. And, whenever it was a foul ball, everyone who was playing out in the yard, people from both teams, would yell, "Do over! Do over!"

The Christian life can be a lot like that game of kickball. As Christians, we are all, still prone to sin. We all get outside of God's boundaries from time to time, no matter how good we may be or how hard we may try to be holy. But sometimes, unlike kickball, we don't want to "take the do over." Instead, we deny our mistakes. Or, we blame others, or we try to rationalize our sin.²¹ 1 John 1:9 teaches, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." If you are a believer in Jesus and you have crossed God's boundaries, don't make excuses for it. I urge you: Take the do over. I say this as a veteran kickball player who has kicked the ball out of bounds many, many times before. Take the do over!

I invite you to read Psalm 32. It's a personal testimony from King David. I love the way he ends this Psalm, with gladness and rejoicing for the Lord's unfailing love toward those who choose to trust in Him. Psalm 32:1-11²² says, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.'" And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

Dear Brother or Sister in Christ, Proverbs 28:13 reminds us that, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."²³ **Let's renounce our sins day by day as we choose to walk in God's light. Amen.**

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on October 22, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

²¹ Sometimes, we let the guilt of our sin hold us back and we sit on the sidelines. We chose not to draw near to God because our sin makes us feel insincere about our faith and unsure of our walk with God. When we do this, we miss the point of Christ's supremacy. The reason Jesus opened up the way for us to enter God's presence wasn't because He expected perfection from our own efforts. It was because He understood that our own efforts would never be sufficient. Jesus understands that we need daily grace. "God's response toward those who confess their sins will be in accordance with his nature and his gracious commitment to his people." (2011 *NIV Study Bible*, p. 2126)

²² Psalm 32:1-11 lays out 3 main ideas. Verses 1-2 talk about the blessing of God's forgiveness. Verses 3-5 give personal testimony of why confession is so good. Verses 6-11 then give a call to receive and be glad for God's righteousness. See also Acts 3:19.

²³ Proverbs 28:13 urges us to "renounce" our sins, which means to declare that we will no longer engage in sin, we refuse to abide in it any longer!