

“Hamartiology - Part 2”

1 John 1:8-2:2

February 11, 2018

Please turn in your Bible to 1 John 2. This sermon is part 2 on hamartiology, which is the study of sin. Throughout the book of 1 John, the Apostle John lists several reasons why he is writing to these dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.¹ For me, the most intriguing reason that John lists for writing is found in 1 John 2:1, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin...” This verse surprised me a little. John spends most of his 1st chapter telling us that we’re going to sin, that we need to acknowledge our sin problem. After pressing us to admit that we are deceiving ourselves when we claim that we’re without sin, John now throws something of a curveball: I’m writing you these things SO THAT you will not sin. I find this a little surprising...and a bit challenging...and also very encouraging. Wow, the thought of not sinning, of gaining daily victory over sin! Now THAT’S worth thinking about.

Last Sunday 1 John 2:2 reminded us about Jesus, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins....” So, on the cross, Jesus conquered sin once and for all. It’s a done deal. This was only possible because of who Jesus is. We learn at the end of 1 John 2:1, “Jesus Christ, [is] the Righteous One.” The *NIV* capitalizes “Righteous One” because this is a significant name for Jesus. It’s not just that He is righteous, but He is THE RIGHTEOUS ONE. Therefore, He was able to offer Himself as the perfect atoning sacrifice.² We are given another name for Jesus in 1 John 2:1: “...But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” In fact, some translations capitalize “Advocate.”³

1. Jesus is our daily Advocate. Because of Jesus’ one-time, all-sufficient, atoning sacrifice, He is now uniquely positioned to be our daily advocate. We commonly think of the Holy Spirit as our advocate. In John 14:26 Jesus says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”⁴ I can still remember trying to learn the Greek word for advocate, “παράκλητος.” A parAkletos is “one who appears in another’s behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper.”⁵ It was one of my vocabulary words when I was studying NT Greek.⁶ One of the memory tricks I used, was to think of “παράκλητος” as a “pair of cleats.” Cleats are what some athletes wear to help them get better traction on the field and to win in their sport. And since cleats come in pairs, they come alongside each other. That’s not a bad picture of the Christian life: Jesus and the Holy Spirit coming alongside of us and helping us in our efforts to live out the Christian life. More importantly, here we see our Trinitarian God at work. Similar to the Holy Spirit, Jesus is our Advocate. When we sin, Jesus appears on our behalf. He mediates between us and our Heavenly Father, interceding for us and helping us with our sin problem.⁷ What a delight and privilege it is for us to have Jesus Himself as our Advocate.⁸ Bible Commentator, William Barclay

¹ 1 John 1:4 mentioned, “We write this to make our joy complete.” 1 John 2:12-14 says, “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven ...because you know him who is from the beginning...because you have overcome the evil one...because you know the Father...because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you....” 1 John 2:21 says, “I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it....” 1 John 5:13 says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

² In fact, the forgiveness that Jesus purchased for us, is another one of the reasons that John wrote his letter to these dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord. When we confess our sins, God forgives. Forgive = “to release from legal or moral obligation or consequence, cancel, remit, pardon.” (ἀφῆ, 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. 156). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) God is the only one with the power/authority to pardon us. 1 John 2:12 says, “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”² What name? The name of Jesus. Every Sunday our church proclaims “the supremacy of Jesus Christ!”

³ See NASB and NKJV for example.

⁴ The Apostle John is actually the only New Testament author to use this noun. See also John 14:16-17, 15:26, and 16:7.

⁵ 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. 766). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ I may have actually been learning the verb form at the time.

⁷ We talked about this when we looked at 1 John 1:7 a while back - we clarified that the word “purifies” is in the present tense and has an ongoing, daily application to Christian living.

⁸ See 1 Timothy 2:5 and Hebrews 7:28-8:1.

says it well: “The tremendous thing about Jesus is that he has never lost his interest in... [us].”⁹ So this means that Jesus didn’t sacrifice Himself on the cross and then leave us to figure things out on our own. He faithfully advocates for us day in and day out.

So, as we consider this idea of “daily victory over sin,” what we’re focusing on this morning, is our opportunity to win against sin, in terms of its relentless, daily assault on our human nature and freewill. Man, how great would it be to not sin?! Sin is so painful, it makes such a mess of our personal lives and the world around us! Wouldn’t it be amazing to be free from it and all its collateral damage? Too often I’m afraid that we, as Christ-followers, feel that we’ll never be able to overcome sin. We resign ourselves to just live in a pattern of defeat. We sound a bit like Eeyore. Are you familiar with Eeyore? He’s that lovable donkey in Winnie the Pooh. He’s famous for quotes like: “It’s not much of a tail, but I’m sort of attached to it.” And after Winnie the Pooh greets him with “good morning,” Eeyore responds, “If it is a good morning, which I doubt.” Sometimes Christ-followers sound a bit too much like Eeyore: “Well, I’m a sinner, so I’m sure I’ll go out and sin today. That’s just the way life has to be.” With this kind of attitude, we can find ourselves in an endless cycle of “Sin, confess, receive forgiveness, REPEAT... sin, confess, receive forgiveness, REPEAT...”



William Barclay explains it this way: “John says two things about sin. First, he has just said that sin is universal; anyone who says that he has not sinned is a liar. Second, there is forgiveness of sins through what Jesus Christ has done, and still does, for [people]. Now it would be possible to use both these statements as an excuse to think lightly of sin. If all have sinned, why make a fuss about it and what is the use of struggling against something which is in any event an inevitable part of the human situation? Again, if there is forgiveness of sins, why worry about it?”¹⁰ To be sure, sin is a very tough opponent. But a lack of spiritual fervor or a defeated attitude is not very helpful. This could stem from an abuse of grace or it may come from our short-sighted understanding of the power of God within us. John mentions sin 27 times throughout this letter. Overall, he seems to have 2 main thrusts:

- 1 - Be honest about your sin and your daily need for Jesus.
- 2 – Live out a victorious Christian life apart from sin, walk in the light!

Let’s dig into some very practical ways to find daily victory over sin.

2. Reducing our exposure to sin, helps us find daily victory. It’s interesting to me how often Scripture urges us not to be overconfident or cocky about our struggle against sin. This isn’t about being a wimp, it’s about being wise. Hebrews 12:1 urges us, “...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...” Sometimes finding daily victory over sin means making the hard choice to change the environment that keeps tripping us up. In fact, even though the Bible clearly calls us to be Christ’s ambassadors and to be salt/light in this world, it also warns us to be careful who we fellowship with. Reducing our exposure to sin means guarding our...

1) **Relational Environments.** For example, we are warned about keeping the wrong company in 1 Corinthians 15:33-34, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning....” We tell this to young people all the time, be careful who your friends are. It would only be consistent and wise for us as adults, to take this same advice, in the company we keep.¹¹ This gets a little tricky though, because we are called to reach out to those who are not yet Christians. We just need to be careful that we are the one having the influence, rather than being the one influenced. The Bible also warns us about being unequally yoked.

A yoke was a device that helped the oxen pull in the same direction. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”¹² This applies to our dating and marriage decisions but also in who we



⁹ William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Westminster Press, Rev. Ed., Philadelphia, PN, 1976, p. 38.

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Westminster Press, Rev. Ed., Philadelphia, PN, 1976, p. 35.

¹¹ And also, in the TV/movies/web content we consume.

¹² See 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 as well and consider the parallel with 1 John 5:21, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”

choose to have other close partnerships with. This is why it's good Christian counsel not to marry an unbeliever and not to get into a close business partnership with an unbeliever. At times, these partnerships are unavoidable, but we need to recognize the very real challenges that these relational environments present to finding daily victory over sin. In addition to relational environments, reducing our exposure to sin also means guarding our...

2) **Physical environments.** Especially when we are fighting against an addiction in our life or a particularly besetting sin¹³, we need to stay away from places that pull us toward sin. For me, a personal example is the magazine aisle at stores.¹⁴ Because of my own past struggles in the area of sexual purity, it's best that I not walk down that aisle. Over many years of experiencing purity in this area of my life, I've learned that if I want to experience daily victory over sin, I best not set myself up for failure. Therefore, I have decided to take 1 Corinthians 10:12 to heart: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"¹⁵ Our access to sin in today's society is unprecedented. And America promotes a culture of pleasure and entitlements. If we don't set a guard, we will fall. Once we recognize this reality, we agree with verses like Ephesians 5:11, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." So, how about you? What relational and physical environments are hindering you from daily victory over sin? What are you going to do about it?

Reducing our exposure to sin, helps us find daily victory. Also...

3. Encouragement & accountability help us find daily victory. Our church is a fellowship bound together by Jesus' precious blood. He is the One who daily purifies each one of us and allows us to be in close relationship with each other. Scripture counsels us to encourage one another and to hold one another accountable. When we see another believer walking in darkness, it's our loving responsibility to minister to them. This is why you'll often hear me refer to Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how we may **spur one another on** toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." To "spur one another on" sounds a bit forceful, a little pushy. Spurs are used on horses, not on people. And yet, that's the idea that Scripture intends. The word translated "spur"¹⁶ actually means = "rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking"¹⁷ Let me ask this question: do you have a Brother or Sister in Christ who knows you well enough to give you a spiritual kick in the pants? I ask this question because this may be exactly what it's going to take, to help you find daily victory over your sin.¹⁸

Sometimes we are afraid to confront another believer or call them out on their sin. We might think to ourselves, "well, I'm not perfect either. I need to take the plank out of my own eye first." And that's true. But, all too often in northern Minnesota, we use this line of thinking to avoid any kind of confrontation and we fail to do the hard work of tough love.¹⁹ John loved these fellow believers. He loved them so much that he was willing to tell them the truth: "you can't have it both ways!" you can't walk in darkness and claim to have fellowship with God. Now, this idea of "spurring one another on" is mitigated by using good discernment for each situation. We know this because God calls us to restore one another GENTLY. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently...." Therefore, any accountability we offer one another should be done in a spirit of restoration and love. Our goal is not to render final

¹³ Pastor Fred Martin preached a great message on this called "Me and My Temptations" back on July 29, 2012. Let the church office know if you'd like a copy of the transcript.

¹⁴ Read all of Proverbs 7 and note verses 7-8 and 22-23.

¹⁵ I remember being in Las Vegas to visit my dad one time. There was absolutely nowhere that I could avert my gaze and not see impure images. Over time, I've learned the habit of "bouncing my eyes" immediately in a different direction when I first see an image that may prompt me to lust. See Job 31:1.

¹⁶ παροξυσμός

¹⁷ 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. 780). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁸ Consider Proverbs 27:6 and James 5:16.

¹⁹ It's painful sometimes when we bump into a brother and sister in Christ whom we haven't seen in a while and we both know that they've been drifting from God. For one reason or another, they are not living in the light of God's truth. Sometimes the light of our walk with God shines on another believer who is wandering in sin and their sin is revealed. It's like you accidentally took a powerful flashlight and shined it right in their eyes.

judgement but to help one another gain victory over sin. And if we agree that this is God's design, then we will not only give accountability but also receive it. We'll be teachable and coachable in our own faith. Proverbs 27:6 reminds us that, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted..." Do you have Christian friends who you can be vulnerable and transparent with? Do you invite them to speak into your blind spots and help you work on your areas of weakness?

This is part of why we need to devote ourselves to small groups. If you are not yet part of a small group, where you can connect for real encouragement and spiritual accountability, let me urge you once again – get plugged in somewhere. It doesn't necessarily have to be one of the groups listed on this insert. Some of us are meeting in groups that are less official or less public. That's fine. Whatever you do, don't try to live out the Christian life on your own. It's incredibly difficult to find daily victory over sin apart from the help and support of fellow Christ-followers.²⁰

I'd like to share one more illustration on "daily victory over sin." Hercules was a fictional hero in the Greco-Roman world who had many adventures, including the defeat and capture of Cerberus.²¹ Cerberus²² was a fictional beast who supposedly kept the dead from leaving Hades. He was commonly known as the "Hound of Hades." He was a 3-headed wild dog w/ a serpent's tail and the heads of snakes all over his back. Well, that's an interesting statue Pastor Jerry, but what does that have to do with me? Do you see the abs and biceps on this guy Hercules? Not exactly the image I see when I look at myself in the mirror. Well, me neither, although I'm working on it. 😊 But consider this: what do you see when you look in your spiritual mirror? Not an image of our physical self, but an image of our spiritual self. Do you see a mighty spiritual warrior who can win in the fight against sin? Or, do you see someone easily defeated and fairly powerless against sin?



At church we sing beautiful songs like "In Christ Alone."²³ Here are the words to the final stanza: No guilt in life, no fear in death — This is the pow'r of Christ in me; From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand; Till He returns or calls me home — Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand. We also sing a song called, "Same Power."²⁴ It is based on Ephesians 1:18-20, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead...."²⁵

If this is true, that there is incomparably great power for us who believe, then perhaps it shouldn't surprise us at all, that John would write 1 John 2:1, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin...." This was John's personal faith experience. Not only was he an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus but he was a first-hand partaker in His power. He lived out a daily life of faith and victory over sin through the power of Christ. As Christ-followers today, we can do the same!

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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²⁰ Consider James 5:19-20, "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

²¹ Learn more at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hercules>

²² Learn more at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/cerberus.html>

²³ "In Christ Alone" Words and Music by Keith Getty & Stuart Townend Copyright © 2002 Thankyou Music(PRS) adm worldwide at CapitolCMGPublishing.com excluding Europe which is adm by Integritymusic.com

²⁴ Publishing: © 2015 Stolen Pride Music (ASCAP) (admin. at CapitolCMGPublishing.com) / Sony ATV Timber Publishing / Open Hands Music (SESAC) (Admin. by Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC) Writer(s): Jeremy Camp and Jason Ingram

²⁵ Contact the church office to request a sermon transcript of "Hope and Power" based on Ephesians 1:15-20a from June 5, 2016.