

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

WHEN WE SIN | | JOHN 2:1-2

John begins his short letter to the churches in Asia Minor by inviting us into the fullness of joy that is ours through fellowship with the Father and His Son.

John is not content, however, to simply point us to the source of our joy. He also wants us to know how easily we can lose our joy.

We forfeit our joy any time we pursue it apart from God. When we look to relationships, careers, kids, our bank balance, some vague notion of the suburban dream, or all the cool things we do on weekends, we soon find that none of them can bear the weight we place on them. While many of them are good things, none of them are ultimate things. When we turn good things into ultimate things we always come up empty.

Augustine came to this realization late in life. After squandering his youth in the pursuit of pleasure, he penned his now famous line, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you."

When we look to created things rather than our creator, we are, in a word, idolators. In Paul's words, we "worship and serve created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised." Sin always involves replacing God with something of our own making. John is deeply concerned about sin. He is not so much worried about all the rules we've broken along the way, as much as he is with what our tendency to break the rules reveals about our hearts.

While we are all too casual about sin, John encourages us to expose our sin, confess our sin, and beyond that, not to sin at all. But John is a realist. He knows we will sin, so he graciously reminds us of God's extravagant provision for our sin in Christ Jesus.

ENCOURAGEMENT NOT TO SIN (v. 1a)

^{1a} *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.*

1. What does the way that John addresses his readers tell you about his relationship with his readers?
2. What is his chief concern for his readers?
3. Why do you think this is so important for John?
4. How would you compare John's attitude toward sin with our attitude toward sin?
5. Read the following quote by Jackie Hill Perry,

Unbelief doesn't see God as the ultimate good. So it can't see sin as the ultimate evil. It instead sees sin as a good thing and thus God's commands as a stumbling block to joy. In believing the devil, I didn't need a pentagram pendant to wear, neither did I need to memorize a hex or two. All I had to do was trust myself more than God's Word. I had to believe that my thoughts, my affections, my rights, my wishes, were worthy of absolute obedience and that in laying prostrate before the flimsy throne I'd made for myself, that I'd be doing a good thing.

(Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018.)

How does Jackie help us put sin in perspective?

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR WHEN WE SIN (vv. 1b-2)

^{1b} *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.*

1. In the ancient world, "an advocate" was someone of standing who would take up the cause of someone who had minimal standing or no standing at all. While we often use the word to refer to a lawyer, in the ancient world, an advocate was more of a friend or a patron than a legal advisor.

In many traditions, believers are encouraged to appeal to any number of saints or holy people to plead their case before God. Why is Jesus better?

What are some ways that Jesus takes up our cause with God?

2. In John's gospel, the Holy Spirit is referred to as our advocate, in 1 John Jesus is our advocate. How do the Son and the Spirit work together to take up our cause before the Father? (You might want to look at Romans 8:26, 31-34 to get Paul's take on the same idea.)

3. Jesus is far more than our advocate, he is also our atoning sacrifice.

The Jewish sin offering (or the whole burnt offering) offers a meaningful backdrop to what God accomplished for us in Christ. The offending party was to choose the very best representative from their flock or herd (perfect and without blemish). While there were provisions for the poor, the gift was to be costly. They would take the animal to the tent of meeting. They would lay their hands on the animal in the presence of the priest, and God would accept the life of the animal in their stead. The animal was slaughtered in their presence. The blood would be collected and poured out on the side of the altar. The sacrifice was to be wholly consumed on the altar.

What are the similarities and the dissimilarities between the sin offering in the Old Testament and what God accomplished for us in Christ?

4. What does the cross tell us about God's attitude toward sin?
5. What does the cross tell us about God's affection for us?
6. How should the cross shape our attitude toward God?
7. How should the cross shape our attitude toward sin?
8. What are your biggest takeaways from this study?
9. What are some practical steps you can take in the days ahead to put these truths into practice?