

# 1 John 1:8 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			
From Talk Thru the Bible			

## STUDY GUIDE

### 1 JOHN 1

What is this? On the photograph of the Observation Worksheet for this chapter you will find handwritten 5W/H questions (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?) on each verse to help you either personally study or lead a discussion on this chapter. The questions are generally very simple and are stated in such a way as to stimulate you to observe the text to discern the answer. As a reminder, given the truth that your ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, begin your time with God with prayer such as Psalm 119:12+ "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." (you can vary it with similar prayers - Ps 119:18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171, etc) The questions are generally highlighted in yellow and the answers in green. Some questions have no answers and are left to your observations and the illuminating/teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some qualifying thoughts - (1) Use "As is" - these are handwritten and will include mistakes I made, etc. (2) They may not be the best question for a given verse and my guess is that on some verses you will think of a far superior 5W/H question and/or many other questions.

Dr Howard Hendricks once gave an assignment to his seminary students to list as many observations as they could from Acts 1:8. He said "So far they've come up with more than 600 different ones! Imagine what fun you could have with 600 observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that?" (P. 63 [Living by the Book](#) - borrow) With practice you can! And needless to say, you will likely make many more observations and related questions than I recorded on the pages below and in fact I pray that the Spirit would indeed lead you to discover a veritable treasure chest of observations and questions! In Jesus' Name.

Amen

Why am I doing this? **Mortimer Adler** among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Over the years I have discovered that as I have practiced reading with a 5W/H questioning mindset, it has yielded more accurate interpretation and the good fruit of meditation. In other words, consciously interacting with the inspired Holy Word of God and the illuminating Holy Spirit has honed my ability to meditate on the Scripture, and my prayer is that this tool will have the same impact in your spiritual life. The benefits of meditation are literally priceless in regard to their value in this life and in the life to come (cf discipline yourself for godliness in 1Ti 4:8+.) For some of the benefits - see Joshua 1:8+ and Psalm 1:2-3+. It will take diligence and mental effort to develop an "inductive" ([especially an "observational"](#)), interrogative mindset as you read God's Word, but it bears repeating that the benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest! Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of [inductive Bible study](#) and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures and living them out in your daily walk with Christ.

Although Mortimer Adler's advice is from a secular perspective, his words are worth pondering...

*Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading. (Adler's classic book [How to Read a Book is free online](#))*

[John Piper](#) adds that "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three verses and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20+ and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.... (John Dewey rightly said) "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful."

*"Asking questions is the key to understanding."*  
--Jonathan Edwards

That said, below are the [5W/H questions](#) for each verse in this chapter (**click page to enlarge**). This is not neatly typed but is handwritten and was used for leading a class discussion on this chapter, so you are welcome to use it in this "as is" condition...

#### 1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [ean eipomen \(1PAAS\) hoti hamartian ouk echomen. \(1PPAI\) heautous planomen \(1PPAI\) kai e aletheia ouk estin \(3SPA\) en hemin.](#)

**Amplified:** If we say we have no sin [refusing to admit that we are sinners], we delude and lead ourselves astray, and the Truth [which the Gospel presents] is not in us [does not dwell in our hearts]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**ESV:** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ([ESVBible.org](#))

**KJV:** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

**NLT:** If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**WBC:** If we claim to be sinless, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth has no place in us. (Word Biblical Commentary)

**Wuest:** If we say that [indwelling] sin we are not having, ourselves we are leading astray [nobody else], and the truth is not in us.

**Young's Literal:** if we may say -- 'we have not sin,' ourselves we lead astray, and the truth is not in us;

- **say:** 1Jn 1:6, 10 3:5,6 1Ki 8:46 2Ch 6:36 Job 9:2 14:4 15:14 25:4 Ps 143:2 Pr 20:9 Ec 7:20 Isa 53:6 64:6 Jer 2:22,23 Ro 3:23

Jas 3:2

- [1 John 1 Resources](#)

### Related passage

1 Kings 8:46 (1Ki 8:46) "When they sin against You (**for there is no man who does not sin**) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near;

2 Chronicles 6:36 "When they sin against You (**for there is no man who does not sin**) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to a land far off or near,

Psalms 143:2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

Jeremiah 2:35 Yet you said, 'I am innocent; Surely His anger is turned away from me.' Behold, I will enter into judgment with you Because you say, 'I have not sinned.'

Proverbs 30:12 There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness.

### **IF WE SAY...**

### **THE SECOND LIE: DENIAL OF SIN!**

If we say ([epo](#)) that we have (present tense) (ou - absolutely) **no sin** ([hamartia](#)), we are (continually) **deceiving** ([plano](#) - present tense) **ourselves** (not others but ourselves) **and** (definite article) **the truth** ([aletheia](#)) **is** (present tense) (ouk = absolutely) **not in** (locative of sphere) **us** - This is the second "**if we say**" declaration in which John shows their talk does not line up with the **truth**, which in fact is not even in these self-deceived people.

*The recognition of sin  
is the beginning of salvation.*

-- Martin Luther

**J Sidlow Baxter** observes that seven times John uses an "**if we say**" statement to describe and thus expose a lie or false belief...

- 1Jn 1:6 = False fellowship.
- 1Jn 1:8 = False sanctity.
- 1Jn 1:10 = False righteousness.
- 1Jn 2:4 = False allegiance.
- 1Jn 2:6 = False behavior.
- 1Jn 2:9 = False spirituality.
- 1Jn 4:20 = False love to God.

**Alfred Plummer** reminds us that "Walking in the light involves the great blessings just stated,—fellowship with God and with our brethren, and a share in the purifying blood of Jesus (1Jn 1:7-note). But it also involves something on our part. It intensifies our consciousness of **sin**, and therefore our desire to get rid of it by confessing it. No one can live in the light without being abundantly convinced that he himself is not light. ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

It was the great Puritan writer **John Owen** who said "I do not understand how a man can be a true believer in whom **sin** is not the greatest burden, sorrow and trouble.

**A W Pink** put it slightly differently, writing that "It is not the absence of **sin** but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors."

**John Blanchard** adds that "**Sin** denies man the *power of God* in this life and the *presence of God* in the next."

### **THE DOCTRINE OF SIN: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

**James Denney** emphasizes the danger of continual denial of sin "There is in truth only one religious problem in the world—the **existence of sin**. Similarly there is only one religious solution to it—the [atonement](#)."

**Comments:** Failure to recognize one's personal sin leads to failure to recognize one's personal need for a Perfect Savior!

**Jussely** said it this way "The doctrine of sin is the foundation of the doctrine of grace."

**Kierkegaard** adds "Christianity begins with the doctrine of sin."

**Related Resources:**

- [See Doctrine of Sin in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [See Doctrine of Sin in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)

If ([ean](#)) (**ean**) is a preposition which identifies a third class conditional clause which means "(If)...and it may be true or may not be true." A conditional clause in Greek is formed by combining a preposition with a specific verb mood, in this case combining **ean** with the **subjunctive mood**, the mood of probability ("**we say**" is in the subjunctive mood).

SUMMARY OF JOHN'S "IF" STATEMENTS		
	NEGATIVE (False)	POSITIVE (True)
1	1Jn 1:6+ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness	1Jn 1:7+ but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light
2	1Jn 1:8+ If we say that we have no sin	1Jn 1:9+ If we confess our sins
3	1Jn 1:10+ If we say that we have not sinned	1Jn 2:1+ And if anyone sins

**There are other "if" statements but these constitute the first and major group.**

**We say** ([epo](#)) is the first person plural which indicates that John is including himself in this suppositional statement. Some would take this "**we**" use this as an argument to state that John is not making a distinction between believers and unbelievers in this section. There is however another way to explain John's use of "**we**" which is very compatible with the context. As discussed in more detail elsewhere (See notes on "Who is **We** in First John 1?"), John uses the first person plural "we" to gently come alongside the "little children" to whom the epistle is addressed.

**Kress** writes that John uses "**we**" in this "hypothetical scenario to gently shepherd the flock which may be in contact with such people who make these types of outrageous claims. He addresses the issue in a very pastoral, yet clear way.

**S Lewis Johnson** explains the **if we say** this way - One of the commentators has said, "What we have here is the *lie* of the *lip*" and we also have the *lie* of the *life* characteristic of us as human beings who are sinners... We are responsible not simply to *think* right, but to *do* what is right. In other words, the truth is not simply what we think with the intellect, but it is that which is conformable to God's nature and will and is inclusive of the kind of life that we live. ([First John Sermons](#)) (Bolding and italics added for emphasis)

### "WE HAVE NO SIN!"

**If we say we have no sin** - Literally "*sin we do not have*". This is the third of six clauses in this first section introduced by **if** in 1Jn 1:5 through 1Jn 2:6 = 1 John 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 2:1, 3. As with 1John 1:6 and 1Jn 1:10, the statement in 1John 1:8 is a false doctrine which John brings to the light in order to warn his believing readers. Forewarned is forearmed. John does not tell us who is propounding these heretical doctrines, but from the context of the letter it is clear that false teachers had arisen among the people. It is also possible that there were those in their midst who professed to be believers and yet who held to these false beliefs.

**Marshall** agrees writing that "It is probable that these claims were real statements made by people in the church to which John was writing, and that they reflect the outlook of the people who were causing trouble in the church." (BORROW [The Epistles of John](#))

**McDermond** adds that "some influential person or group is **claiming** to be a model of how to relate to God, and yet the reality of their **lifestyle** leads the believing observer to draw the opposite conclusion. (McDermond, J. E.: 1 John--Commentaries: Believers Church Bible Commentary) (Bolding added for emphasis)

**We have** ([echo](#)) has the basic meaning of have or hold with a variety of nuances (determined by the context and accompanying terms). The **present tense** speaks of sin denial as their continual claim. In order to accurately interpret this passage, it is helpful to understand the significance of the phrase "**have... sin**" in the Greek. Therefore I have included the somewhat technical explanations

by Vincent and Harris to help understand what John is saying. The significance of this phrase is not apparent from simply reading the English translations.

**Marvin Vincent** comments that...

This form of expression ("**have** \_\_\_\_\_") occurs frequently in the New Testament, to denote the possession or experience of (**Ed**: "fill in the preceding blank" with one of the following) virtues, sensations, desires, emotions, intellectual or spiritual faculties, faults, or defects. **It is stronger than the verb which expresses any one of these.** (**Ed**: This is why it is significant!)

For instance, **to have faith** is stronger than *to believe*: **to have life**, than *the act of living*. It expresses a *distinct, personal realization* of the virtue or fault or sentiment in question... **to have sorrow** is more than *to be sorrowful*. In Mt 17:20, Christ does not say *if you believe*, but *if you have faith*, if faith, in ever so small a degree, is possessed by you as a conscious, living principle and motive. Compare *have love* (Jn 13:35; 1Jn 4:16); *have peace* (16:33); *have trust* (2Cor 3:4); *have boldness* (Heb 10:19; 1Jn 2:28).

**Comment**: And so it follows that in 1John 1:8 to "**have no sin**" is a stronger way of saying it than if John had used the verbal phrase "*not sinned*". **Does this make sense?** John's point is that these individuals are saying in the strongest way in the Greek that they have no sin! John wants to make sure we understand that point.

**W Hall Harris** has an added note on John's expression "**have... sin**" (Greek = *echo* + *hamartia*) writing that "The use of **echō** + **hamartia** is an expression peculiar to the Gospel of John and 1 John in the New Testament **Ed**: However, see Vincent below where he mentions some *variations* in 2Cor 3:4, Heb 10:19). On the analogy with other constructions in 1 John where **echō** ("have") governs an abstract noun (e.g., "*have seen*" in 1Jn 1:3, "*have fellowship*" = 1Jn 1:6-7, "*have confidence*" = 1Jn 2:28, "*has hope*" = 1Jn 3:3, "*has eternal life*" = 1Jn 3:15, "*has eternal life*" = 1Jn 3:21, "*have come to know... have believed*" = 1Jn 4:16, "*have confidence*" 1Jn 4:17, "*has the Son, has the life*" = 1Jn 5:12 "*have eternal life*" = 1Jn 5:13) it would appear that a state is involved, which in the case of **hamartia** (*sin* in 1Jn 1:8) would refer to a **state of sin**. The four times the expression **echō** + **hamartia** occurs in the Gospel of John (Jn 9:41, 15:22, 15:24, 19:11) all refer to situations where a wrong action has been committed or a wrong attitude has already existed, resulting in a **state of sin**, and then something else happens which further emphasizes the evil of that action or attitude. Here in 1 John 1:8 the sense appears to be the same. The author is addressing people who have sinned (resulting in a **state of sin**), warning them that they cannot claim to be free from the guilt of that sin. ([1 John 1:5-22: Exegetical Commentary](#))

The **UBS Handbook** adds that the phrase "**have... sin**" "refers to inner possession, and shows a person to be in a certain condition, or to have a certain emotion, **which influences him continually**. Thus "to have sin" means that one has the source and principle of sin in oneself, and is continually dominated by it."

## **SIN: A KEYWORD IN FIRST JOHN**

**Sin** (**Hamartia**) is a **key word** in **First John** occurring 17 times -- 11x = "**sin**" singular; 6x = "**sins**" plural - 1Jn 1:7, 8, 9 (twice), 1Jn 2:2, 12; 3:4, 5, 8, 9; 4:10; 5:16 (2x), 1Jn 5:17 (2x).

**No sin** - In addition to using the stronger phrase *echo* + *hamartia* ("**have... sin**"), John also uses the stronger Greek negative (**ou**) ("**have no sin**") to indicate that these individuals are strongly claiming that they have (absolutely) no sin.

**Joseph Hall** gives an apt description of these individuals noting "How *easily* sin gets into the *heart*; how *hardly* it gets out of the *mouth*."

**Barnhouse** observes that "The tragic thing about this doctrine (if we say we have no sin) is that once people believe themselves free from sin, they believe that what they do is not sin. Thus they have low views of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin."

**Charles Spurgeon** once described a woman who claimed to be without sin and past sinning, until someone stepped on her toe, and as Spurgeon describes it "*her sinless perfection departed her like the morning dew*."

**Matthew Henry** emphasizes that saints still sin noting that "The best of saints may be tempted to the worst of sins."

**John Ker** puts it this way - "This is one of the sorest trials of a renewed life, that it is built over dark dungeons, where dead things may be buried but not forgotten, and where through open grating rank vapours still ascend." (**WOE!**)

**Sin is man's  
declaration of independence**

## from God.

**Sin** (noun) ([266](#))(**hamartia**) literally conveys the idea of missing the mark. Later **hamartia** came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. **Hamartia** in the Bible signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word or deed (righteous). It pictures the idea of missing His appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation from what is pleasing to Him. In short, sin is conceived as a missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is the Triune God Himself. As Martin Luther put it "*Sin is essentially a departure from God.*"

**F F Bruce** described **sin** when he wrote that...

There is something in man—even regenerate man—which objects to God and seeks to be independent of Him.

**John Bunyan** wrote that...

Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power and the contempt of his love.

**Spurgeon** on **sin**...

**Sin** drives men mad. Against their reason, against their best interests, they follow after that which they know will destroy them.

It is not the nature of **sin** to remain in a fixed state. Like decaying fruit, it grows more rotten. The man who is bad today will be worse tomorrow.

**Sin is a thief.** It will rob your soul of its life. It will rob God of his glory.

**Sin is a murderer.** It stabbed our father Adam. It slew our purity.

**Sin is a traitor.** It rebels against the king of heaven and earth.

The related verb **hamartano**, means to miss a mark, as when a warrior throws his spear and fails to strike his adversary, when a traveler misses his way, when a poet selects a subject which it is impossible to treat poetically or when he seeks to attain results which lie beyond the limits of his art. In the classic literature, **hamartia** mainly conveys the idea of failing to attain in any field of endeavor. In the moral/ethical realm, **hamartia** conveys the idea of missing the right, of going wrong.

There are generally two schools of thought on what John is saying. Some interpret "**have no sin**" as the assertion that we have no sinful nature, that we are not fallen creatures, that we are essentially good as human beings. In support of this thought is that in the Greek text **sin** is singular and also lacks the definite article (i.e., "*the*" in Greek), which many commentators interpret as pointing to the fact that the John intends to refer to the sin nature, not to the commission of individual acts of sin.

**William MacDonald** - to deny that we have a sinful nature means self-deception and untruthfulness. Notice that John makes a distinction between **sin** (1Jn 1:8) and **sins** (1Jn 1:9). **Sin** refers to our corrupt, evil nature. **Sins** refers to evils that we have done. Actually what we are is a lot worse than anything we have ever done. But, praise the Lord, Christ died for our **sin** and our **sins**. Conversion does not mean the eradication of the sin nature. Rather it means the implanting of the new, divine nature, with power to live victoriously over indwelling sin. (BORROW [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Jamieson** - Observe, "*sin*" is in the singular; "(confess our) *sins*" (1John 1:9) in the plural. *Sin* refers to the *corruption of the old man* still present in us, and the *stain* created by the actual *sins* flowing from that old nature in us... "*They who defend their sins, will see in the great day whether their sins can defend them.*" ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

**Vincent** on the other hand interprets **hamartia** in this context differently writing "**Sin (Hamartia)** is not to be understood of original sin, or of sin before conversion, but generally (**Ed**: Which basically agrees with [comments by W. Hall Harris above](#)). ([Vincent - Word Studies](#))

**Wuest** agrees with **MacDonald** that "Sin here is the nature, not the act, and for two reasons; the word is without the article, and such a construction in Greek emphasizes nature, quality, and because the word is singular...John again combats the Gnostic heresy which held that we do not have any principle of sin within us, since matter is evil and the soul is not contaminated by sinful flesh... Here we have the heresy of the eradication of the totally depraved nature during the earthly life of the Christian. The heresy of perfectionism and of the eradication of the evil nature is the present day form of this problem of the indwelling sinful nature. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

**Vine** interprets **sin** in 1Jn 1:8 not as "the committal of sin... but the principle of sin; yet not merely what is called *original sin*, but sin in the general sense, sin of every description."

**David Smith** in **The Expositor's Greek Testament** explains **sin** as our "inherent corruption" noting that "Our natures are poisoned, the taint of sin is in our blood. Grace is the medicine, but recovery is a protracted process. It is begun the moment we submit ourselves to Christ (Ed: This moment describes the one time event of justification), but all our lives we continue under treatment (Ed: This describes progressive sanctification, God the Spirit is the "Physician" and grace is His "medicine"!)" ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

Some writers such as **Henry Morris** interpret their claim as representative of "The heresy of perfectionism (Ed: See also David Smith in the [1 John 1 Commentary](#))--that is, the claim that our sin-nature has been completely eradicated so that we no longer commit sin--is self-deception. It is related to the Gnostic heresy of the time which claimed that the soul had been set free from one's sinful flesh." ([Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Plummer** takes a very reasonable "*middle of the road*" interpretative stance on "**have no sin**" - There is no need to inquire whether *original* (our depraved sin nature inherited from Adam) or *actual* sin (individual sins one commits) is meant: the expression is quite general, covering sin of every kind. Only One human being has been able to say '*The things pleasing to God I always do*'; '*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*'; '*The ruler of the world has nothing in Me*' (John 8:29, 46, 14:30). The more a man knows of the meaning of '**God is light**', i.e. the more he realizes the absolute purity and holiness of God, the more conscious he will become of his own impurity and sinfulness (Ed: Amen!): compare Job 9:2, 14:4, 15:14, 25:4; Pr. 20:9; Eccl 7:20. ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

**A E Brooke** is similar to Plummer writing that "Sin is the principle of which sinful acts are the several manifestations. So long as a Christian commits sins, sin is an active power working in him; and its power still remains after the forgiveness of sins... ." ([A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles](#))

**Comment:** See the table summarizing the Apostle Paul's growing awareness of his sinful state as he grew closer to Jesus the pure Light of the world!

**James Montgomery Boice** writes that their claim to have no sin "can have more than one meaning.(1) It can mean that there is no such thing as sin and that, therefore, no one is a sinner. This is a view that has become quite popular in Western contemporary thought largely through Freudian psychology, which denies an objective basis for guilt. (2) It can mean that the particular individuals who make the claim have no sin and have never had it, that they are a unique and privileged people. (3) Or, finally, it can mean that they do not have sin now. In view of the fact that there seems to be a progression in the intensity and seriousness of the claims that John denies, it would seem that the third of these possible interpretations should be preferred. The first false teaching was that it is possible to have fellowship with God and still continue sinning. In this second claim there is the additional error that the individual, either through the Gnostic process of enlightenment or through spiritual development, has ceased to sin at all. ([The Epistles of John](#) or [BORROW](#)) (Numbering in parentheses added)

**I Howard Marshall** comments that despite their claim of "no sin" John is saying "that these men were sinners... This doesn't mean simply that they are telling a lie, but that **they have no share in the divine reality** (Ed: Cp 2Pe 1:4) **despite their claims to the contrary**. (Ed: Cp Similar "claim" by professors who are deceived in Mt 7:21 when it is too late!) There is a certain paradox in this statement. The converse is that **if we do say that we are sinners**, the truth is in us; the resolution of the paradox is that to admit our sin is to face up to reality instead of pretending, and it is as we confess our sin that it is cleansed and no longer stands against us (1Jn 1:9). If, however, we do not admit our sin (Ed: like those in 1Jn 1:8, 10), it remains unconfessed and unforgiven, and hence the truth is not in us ([see discussion](#)). The temptation to deny one's sin is common to both the non-Christian and the Christian. John's opponents included persons whom he did not regard as Christians (1Jn 2:19), who had cut themselves off from forgiveness by their denial of their sin and of Christ's ability to save; he feared that others in the church might follow their example and claim a sinlessness which could interrupt their fellowship with God. (BORROW [The Epistles of John](#) The New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Bolding added)

**Kenneth Barker** writes that "Whenever the principle of sin is denied as an ongoing reality, there follows a denial of responsibility for individual actions. Gossip, defiling of persons, hatred of the brethren, jealousy, and boasting become sanctioned as non-sins; walking in the light is denied; and the fellowship to which we are called is **never** permitted to exist. (BORROW [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#) or see [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**John Gill** on sin in all people, believers and unbelievers "Notwithstanding believers are cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ, yet they are not without sin; **no man is without sin**: this is not only true of all men, as they come into the world, being conceived in sin, and formed in iniquity, and of all that are in a state of unregeneracy, and of God's elect, while in such a state, but even of all regenerated and sanctified persons in this life; as appears by the ingenuous (showing innocent or childlike simplicity and candidness) confessions of sin made by the saints in all ages; by their complaints concerning it, and groans under it; by the continual war in them between flesh and spirit (Gal 5:17); and by their prayers for the discoveries of pardoning grace, and for the fresh application of Christ's blood for cleansing; by their remissness (slackness, negligence) in the discharge of duty, and by their frequent slips and falls, and often backslidings: and though their sins are all pardoned, and they are justified from all things by the

righteousness of Christ, yet they are not without sin; though they are freed from the guilt of sin, and are under no obligation to punishment on account of it, yet not from the being of it; their sins were indeed transferred from them to Christ, and He has bore them, and took them and put them away, and they are redeemed from them, and are acquitted, discharged, and pardoned, so that sin is not imputed to them, and God sees no iniquity in them in the article of justification; and also, their iniquities are caused to pass from them, as to the guilt of them, and are taken out of their sight, and they have no more conscience of them, having their hearts sprinkled and purged by the blood of Jesus, and are clear of all condemnation, the curse of the law, the wrath of God, or the second death, by reason of them; yet pardon of sin, and justification from it, though they take away the guilt of sin, and free from obligation to punishment, yet they do not take out the being of sin, or cause it to cease to act, or do not make sins cease to be sins, or change the nature of actions, of sinful ones, to make them harmless, innocent, or indifferent; the sins of believers are equally sins with other persons, are of the same kind and nature, and equally transgressions of the law, and many of them are attended with more aggravating circumstances, and are taken notice of by God, and resented by Him, and for which He chastises His people in love: now though a believer may say that he has not this or that particular sin, or is not guilty of this or that sin, for he has the seeds of all sin in him, yet he cannot say he has no sin; and though he may truly say he shall have no sin, for in the other state the being and principle of sin will be removed, and the saints will be perfectly holy in themselves, yet he cannot, in this present life, say that he is without it: if any of us who profess to be cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ should affirm this

**George G Findlay** notes that in regard to the denial of sin - Men might and did deny the reality of sin; by all kinds of sophistries and evasions they deceived themselves respecting its import and criminality. Not a few persons, it may be supposed, had espoused Christianity for intellectual or sentimental reasons, with very superficial convictions upon this head. Allowing the distinction of moral good and evil, they were slow to confess sin; they refused to admit an inherent depravity involving them in corruption and guilt. Their misdoings were mistakes, frailties, venial errors,—**anything but "sin."** That is an ugly word, and needless besides—a bugbear (an imaginary goblin or specter used to excite fear), an invention of the priests! St John hastens to denounce these notions; they are self-delusion, the folly of men who extinguish the light that is in them, the ignorance of a shallow reason without the inward substance of truth. The denial of sin so familiar in naturalistic modern thought—the resentment so often met with against the word itself—is a revival, in some cases conscious and intentional, of Pagan sentiment ([see Excursus on Pagan View of Sin](#)), an express revolt against the authority of Jesus Christ. This error has deep roots, and has sometimes a strange recrudescence at an advanced stage of the Christian life. The man of "sinless perfection," who imagines he has nothing left to confess (**Ed**: And thus this gives the context for 1Jn 1:9 - instead of sin deniers believers are sin confessors), nothing that needs forgiveness, verily "deceives himself"; rarely does he deceive his neighbor on this point,—never his God. ([1 John Commentary](#))

## TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES!

Remember that accurate interpretation hinges on careful observation of the context, which in this case is the previous description of those who are continually walking in the darkness (1Jn 1:6). Yes, true believers can venture into the darkness but they are now "light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8-note) and cannot remain continually in darkness. While "*The lost leap into sin and love it; the saved lapse into sin and loathe it.*" (Blanchard) In short, a Christian cannot **continually** walk in the darkness, nor can a genuine believer say that he **continually** has no sin. A believer simply cannot do that and have any assurance that they are truly born again (1Jn 5:13)! As vitally important as this truth is, sadly some evangelical commentators like Constable state that John is referring to a Christian who simply may think he is "permanently entirely sinless." How can that possibly describe a true believer! Is this difference of interpretation simply an academic one or are there significant implications of one interpretation versus the other (realizing that they cannot both be correct)? The respected Christian author Warren Wiersbe answers it this way...

It is a question of truth—or consequences! And if you do not face the truth, you must pay the consequences! ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Octavius Winslow** exhorts all of us...

to note this great evidence of regeneration: **Whoever is born of God does not (continually) commit sin.**" He does not commit it with the total, absolute, and complete assent and concurrence of the renewed will. He does not give himself over to sin "with greediness." "He would do good." He hates sin. Grace reigns, not sin. Sin dwells in him, but does not govern; it has power, but does not rule; it torments, but does not reign with a continued, unbroken supremacy. His experience accords with the promise, "sin shall not have dominion over you." It may for a **moment** triumph, as it did in David, in Peter, and in a host of other eminently holy men; yet still the promise is verified- as we see in the restorings of the blessed Spirit in their spirit and conduct, in their humblings and confessions, and holy and upright walk with God in after years- "sin shall not have dominion over you."

Reader, have you ever been made aware of the plague of sin within you? What do you know of warfare in the soul, of "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh"? (Gal 5:17) Your honest reply will

decide the great question whether or not you are born of God. ([The Soul after Conversion](#))

As John clearly teaches...

*No one who is born of God (continually) practices sin,  
because His seed abides in him;  
and he cannot (continually) sin,  
because he is born of God.  
(1 John 3:9)*

**James Hastings** rightly observes that...

One of the first evidences and signs of the coming of the Spirit of God—and His coming is the coming of the light in the heart—is a new discovery of the depth and reality of sin (**Ed**: Cp 1Jn 5:13). It is the imperfect light, the twilight, in which so many professing Christians live that accounts for that weakened sense of sin which is so marked a feature of the present day. Some little time ago a tourist who was walking through the Lake District was overtaken at night by a heavy storm of wind and of rain, and soon got soaked to the skin. In the darkness he was glad to see the twinkling of a light by the roadside that proved to be the light of a little inn, in which he at once took shelter from the pitiless rain. The landlord, with a rush light, showed him to what looked like a fairly clean and comfortable room, and the weary and soaked traveler was glad to get rid of his wet things and to have them dried by the morning. The morning sun streaming through the window awoke him, and the moment his eyes were opened he was horrified to see the room in which he had been sleeping. The walls and the floor and even the curtains were filthy, and he was glad to escape from the room as quickly as possible. The night before he thought the room was fairly clean, now he saw its foulness ; but the room had not changed during the night, it was only the light that had changed. The little rush light was not light enough to reveal all the dirt of the room, but when the sunlight of heaven came streaming in the revelation was made in a moment.' ([1 John 1:8,9 Righteous Forgiveness in his excellent work "The Great Texts of the Bible"](#)) (See Hastings' [Index To The Great Texts of the Bible](#)" - all are available at [Archive.org](#))

**Alfred Plummer** notes how 1Jn 1:8-10 leads to an enhanced consciousness and confession of sin - Walking in the light involves the great blessings just stated,—fellowship with God and with our brethren, and a share in the purifying blood of Jesus. But it also involves something on our part. It intensifies our consciousness of sin, and therefore our desire to get rid of it by confessing it. No one can live in the light without being abundantly convinced that he himself is not light (**Ed**: Believers are "light in the Lord" [Eph 5:8-note] but are not themselves the light [1Jn 1:5-note]).([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

*Our sense of sin is in proportion  
to our nearness to God.  
-- Thomas Bernard*

The **Puritan** saints **walked in the light** which produced in them an ever deepening sense of the **magnitude of their sin** against God and the **greatness of His matchless mercy**, for their prayers in the **Valley of Vision** repeatedly acknowledge their unworthiness in the light of His perfect holiness! They give modern saints a great (and challenging) pattern to emulate! For example listen to the heartbeat of the Puritan saints in the following excerpts from the [Valley of Vision](#)...

When I review my past guilt  
and am conscious of my present unworthiness  
I tremble to come to thee,  
I whose foundation is in the dust,  
I who have condemned thy goodness,  
defied thy power,  
trampled upon thy love,  
rendered myself worthy of eternal death.

But my recovery cannot spring from any cause in me,  
I can destroy but cannot save myself.  
Yet thou hast laid help on One that is mighty,

for there is mercy with thee,  
and exceeding riches in thy kindness  
through Jesus.

May I always feel my need of him.

Let thy restored joy be my strength;

May it keep me from lusting after the world,  
bear up heart and mind in loss of comforts,  
enliven me in the valley of death,  
work in me the image of the heavenly,  
and give me to enjoy the first fruits of spirituality,  
such as angels and departed saints know.

**And here are a few more excerpts from their prayers...**

Keep me conscious all the while of my defects,  
and let me not gloat in pride over  
my performance.

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I need spiritual comforts  
that are gentle, peaceful, mild, refreshing,  
that will melt me into conscious lowliness  
before thee,  
that will make me feel and rest in thee  
as my All.

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My sin is not so much this or that particular evil,  
but my continual separation, disunion,  
distance from thee,  
and having a loose spirit towards thee.  
But thou hast given me a present, Jesus thy Son,

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Before thy cross I kneel and see  
the heinousness of my sin,  
my iniquity that caused thee to be  
'made a curse',  
the evil that excites the severity  
of divine wrath.

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Let me not only speak the word sin, but see  
the thing itself.  
Give me to view a discovered sinfulness,  
to know that though my sins are crucified  
they are never wholly mortified.

Hatred, malice, ill-will,  
vain-glory that hungers for and hunts after  
man's approval and applause,  
all are crucified, forgiven,  
but they rise again in my sinful heart.  
O my crucified but never wholly mortified sinfulness!  
O my life-long damage and daily shame!  
O my indwelling and besetting sins!  
O the tormenting slavery of a sinful heart!  
Destroy, O God, the dark guest within  
whose hidden presence makes my life a hell.  
Yet thou hast not left me here without grace;  
The cross still stands and meets my needs  
in the deepest straits of the soul.

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**ILLUSTRATION OF "WE HAVE NO SIN"** - Mr. **D. L. Moody** says that once he visited a prison in New York to hold a service with the prisoners. Afterwards he spoke to each of the prisoners privately. He said, "*I never found such an innocent lot of men in my life as in that place. Each man explained that somebody else was to blame.*" ([1John 1:8,9 Righteous Forgiveness](#))

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In his little booklet, *The Way to God*, **D L Moody** writes that...

Another verse which has been very much used to convict men of their sin is 1 John 1:8:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

I remember that on one occasion we were holding meetings in an eastern city of forty thousand inhabitants; and a lady came and asked us to pray for her husband, whom she purposed bringing into the after-meeting. I have traveled a good deal and met many pharisaical men; but this man was so clad in self-righteousness that you could not get the point of the needle of conviction in anywhere. I said to his wife: "I am glad to see your faith: but we cannot get near him; he is the most self-righteous man I ever saw." She said: "You must! My heart will break if these meetings end without his conversion." She persisted in bringing him; and I got almost tired of the sight of him. But towards the close of our meetings of thirty days, he came up to me and put his trembling hand on my shoulder. The place in which the meetings were held was rather cold, and there was an adjoining room in which only the gas had been lighted; and he said to me, "Can't you come in here for a few minutes?" I thought that he was shaking from cold, and I did not particularly wish to go where it was colder. But he said: "I am the worst man in the State of Vermont. I want you to pray for me." I thought he had committed a murder, or some other awful crime; and I asked: "Is there any one sin that particularly troubles you?" And he said: "My whole life has been a sin. I have been a conceited, self-righteous Pharisee. I want you to pray for me." He was under deep conviction. Man could not have produced this result; but the Spirit had. About two o'clock in the morning light broke in upon his soul; and he went up and down the business street of the city and told what God had done for him; and has been a most active Christian ever since.

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**ILLUSTRATION OF DENIAL OF SIN BY THOSE IN THE ORGANIZED CHURCH** - Robert Schuller redefines sin to mean something other than what Scripture declares. He says (p. 65) that to define sin as rebellion against God is "shallow and insulting to the human being." He redefines sin as a lack of trust, which "is another way of saying that we are all born with a negative self-image...." He says (p. 67), "By nature, we are fearful, not bad. Original sin is not a mean streak; it is a non-trusting inclination." So he redefines being born again (p. 68): "To be born again means that we must be changed from a negative to a positive self-image—from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust." This, in turn, changes us from shame to self-esteem, so that we can now pray (p. 69, italics his), "Our Father in heaven, honorable is our name. So, the foundation is laid for us to feel good about ourselves!" (Steven Cole - [How to Have Fellowship With God 1 John 1:5-10](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION FROM AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "PICK-AND-CHOOSE CHRISTIANITY"**-This was a cross denominational survey of church members asking them which teachings they would accept and which they would leave behind. One of the least popular teachings was regarding sin. Here is a quote from the article...

What many have left behind is a pervasive sense of sin. Although 98 percent said they believe in personal sin, only 57 percent accepted the traditional notion that all people are sinful and fully one-third allowed that they "make many mistakes but are not sinful themselves." Said one typical respondent: "The day I die, I should only have to look up at my Maker and say, 'Take me.' Not 'Forgive me.'

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## [The Biggest Lie](#)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. —1 John 1:8

Today's Scripture : 1 John 1:1-10

A minister was walking down a street when he noticed a group of boys standing around a dog. Concerned for the dog's safety, he walked over and asked what they were doing. A boy replied, "This is an old stray, and all of us want it. We decided that whoever told the biggest lie would get it."

"You boys shouldn't have a contest telling lies," said the minister. "Don't you know that lying is a sin? Why, when I was your age I never told a lie!" There was silence for about a minute. Then, just as the minister thought he had gotten through to them, one boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, he wins. Give him the dog."

We smile, but the fact is, we've all told some whoppers. Oh, we tolerate some lies, calling them exaggerations—like when we add a few inches to the big fish we caught. We aren't that tolerant, however, when lied to and cheated in a business deal or when an untruth threatens our reputation. Yet, anyone who says he's without sin is telling the biggest lie of all.

So where does that leave us? Guilty, according to 1 John 1:8. But notice the good news that follows in verse 9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's a truth we all need to hear. And that's no lie! —By: Herbert Vander Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Deceit lies hidden in our hearts—  
We all have told a lie;  
Yet Jesus can forgive and cleanse—  
That's why He came to die.  
—D. De Haan

A lie may cover your tracks, but it cannot hide the truth.

## EXCURSUS ON PAGAN VIEW OF HAMARTIA

**Vincent** gives us an excellent summary of how the ancient world **viewed "sin"** or perhaps better how they **did not view sin** writing that...

Heathen authors say very little about sin, and classic paganism had little or no conception of sin in the Gospel sense. The nearest approach to it was by **Plato**, from whose works a tolerably complete doctrinal statement might be gathered of the origin, nature, and effects of sin. The fundamental idea of hamartia (sin) among the Greeks is physical; the missing of a mark; from which it develops into a metaphysical meaning, to wander in the understanding. This assumes knowledge as the basis of goodness; and sin, therefore, is, primarily, ignorance. In the **Platonic** conception of sin, **intellectual error** is the prominent element. Thus:

*"What then, I said, is the result of all this? Is not this the result — that other things are indifferent, and that wisdom is the only good, and ignorance the only evil?"* ("Euthydemus," 281). *"The business of the founders of the state will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which has been already declared by us to be the greatest of all — they must continue to rise until they arrive at the good"* ("Republic," vii., 519).

**Plato** represents sin as the dominance of the lower impulses of the soul, which is opposed to nature and to

God (see "Laws," ix., 863. "Republic," i. 351). Or again, as an inward want of harmony.

*"May we not regard every living being as a puppet of the gods, either their plaything only or created with a purpose — which of the two we cannot certainly know? But this we know, that these affections in us are like cords and strings which pull us different and opposite ways, and to opposite actions; and herein lies the difference between virtue and vice"* ("Laws," i., 644).

He traces most sins to the influence of the body on the soul.

*"In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible communion or fellowship with the body, and are not infected with the bodily nature, but remain pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And then the foolishness of the body will be cleared away, and we shall be pure, and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth"* ("Phædo," 67).

We find in the classical writers, however, the occasional sense of the universal faultiness of mankind, though even Plato furnishes scarcely any traces of accepting the doctrine of innate depravity. Thus Theognis:

*"The sun beholds no wholly good and virtuous man among those who are now living"* (615).

*"But having become good, to remain in a good state and be good, is not possible, and is not granted to man. God only has this blessing; but man cannot help being bad when the force of circumstances overpowers him"* (Plato, "Protagoras," 344).

*"How, then: is it possible to be sinless? It is impossible; but this is possible, to strive not to sin"* ("Epictetus," iv., 12, 19). ([Vincent - Word Studies](#))

## WE ARE DECEIVING OURSELVES: heautous planomen (1PPAI):

- **deceiving:** 1Co 3:18 Gal 6:3 2Ti 3:13 Jas 1:22,26 2Pe 2:13
- [1 John 1 Resources](#)

### DECEIVED BY SELF!

**We are deceiving ourselves** - More literally "We continually lead ourselves astray." We continually delude our own souls! The ironic twist is that these individuals can deceive themselves but not deceive others who know them! And is not this true about **sin** in general, for the writer of Hebrews says that **sin** is intrinsically deceptive (Heb 3:13-note). In fact, "*Sin keeps us from knowing the true nature of sin... To understand the deceitfulness of sin, compare its promises and its payments*" (Blanchard) "*Sin enough and you will soon be unconscious of sin.*" (O. Chambers) **O for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit to continually perform His miraculous work to reveal and uncover our sins to us that we might confess them to God, lest they continue to fester and pollute and defile our soul!**

**Deceiving** - KJV translates it **deceive** which suggests a one time event. The present tense as discussed below speaks of this as an ongoing deception.

**W A Butler** rightly said that "It is among the most potent of the energies of sin, that it leads astray by blinding, and blinds by leading astray."

**Augustine** wrote that "Before God can deliver us we must **undeceive** ourselves."

**Comment:** How do we "**undeceive ourselves**?" Without the Spirit's enabling power, we can do nothing that pleases God, but when we yield to His convicting ministry (Jn 16:8), we are led (even that enabled by Him giving us the desire and power! - Php 2:13-note, cp Ezek 36:27) to confess our sins and we are thereby "**undeceived**", as it were! (Compare 1John 1:9 = **confession** of sin = the "antidote" for **denial** of sin!)

**Deceiving** ([4105](#))(**planao** from **plane** which describes "a wandering" and gives us our English word "planet") means literally made to wander and so to go (active sense) or to be led (passive sense as of sheep in Mt 18:12-13) astray. **Brooke** writes that **planao** "*always suggests the idea of leading astray from the right path* (cf. 1Jn 2:26, 3:7; Jn. 7:12; Rev 2:20, 12:9, etc.). The mistake must have fatal consequences until we lead ourselves back into the way of truth." ([A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles](#))

**James** indicates what deceit involves declaring that "*if any among you strays from the truth...*" *Planao* involves straying from the truth. **Westcott** adds that the idea of the straying is "*not of misconception in itself, but of misconduct. Such going astray is essentially ruinous.*"

The related words (cognate terms) are used of the false Christs and prophets (Mt 24:4-5; Rev 2:20; 13:14; 19:20; compare 1Jn 4:6; 2Jn. 7); of Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:3ff), of Babylon (Rev 18:23), of Balaam (Jude 11).

### See the related resource

- Illustrations of the deceitfulness of sin!

**Literal wandering** is described in Hebrews 11:38+. Straying in the spiritual sense occurs when one **does not adhere to the truth** (James 5:19) and/or **forsakes the right way** (see 2 Peter 2:15+). **Spiritual wandering** is the sense in First John. John uses the **present tense** indicating that these individuals are continually causing themselves to err from the straight and true way. The **active voice** underscores the idea that these individuals are making an active, volitional choice to err from the right way, the highway of truth and holiness. In short these sin deniers are practicing willful self deception! John adds the **reflexive pronoun** (*heautos*) to emphasize that the action (deception) is directed or turned back on these individuals themselves. For example, "in the sentence *that man thinks a great deal of himself*, the pronoun *himself* is reflexive" (Collins English Dictionary). The erring is all our own doing! We are responsible for the error. No excuses!

**Hiebert** notes that "**Planao** implies serious departure from the truth. In Matthew 24:5 Jesus used the term of the coming false teachers; in Revelation it depicts the work of Satan, the arch deceiver (Rev 12:9; 13:14; 20:3, 8, 10). Such self-deception ("we have no sin") is possible only through a willful rejection of the evidence concerning one's inner nature as a fallen human being. ([1 John 1:5-2-6 Exposition](#))

**Westcott** adds "We know that the assertion which we make is false (pseudometha); and, more than this, we persuade ourselves that it is true."

**Plummer** puts it this way - We do for ourselves what Satan, the arch-deceiver (Rev 12:9, Rev 20:10) endeavors to do for us! The active (*planao*) is frequent in John, especially in the Revelation (1Jn 2:26, 1Jn 3:7; Rev. 2:20, Rev 12:9, Rev 13:14, Rev 19:20, Rev 20:3, Rev 20:8, Rev 20:10). An examination of these passages will show that the word is a strong one and implies serious departure from the truth: compare John 7:12 (where Jesus' opponents declared "*He leads the multitude astray.*") ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

**A E Brooke** writes that the phrase **are deceiving ourselves** "emphasizes the agent's responsibility for the mistake. The evidence is there; only willful blindness refuses to accept it. We have no excuse for the sin which we "have," in spite of our denial of the fact. ([A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles](#))

**Alexander** - To think of ourselves as sinless is not merely to err or to be deceived, but to lead ourselves astray. We are willfully blind to what is in us. The light is shining, but we are like a man who pulls down the blinds and sits in a self-made darkness. The truth which is Christ Himself (Jn. 14:6), who is also the light, is not in us and so we are blind to our sin.

**Matthew Henry** warns all believers that "We must beware of deceiving ourselves in denying or excusing our sins. The more we see them the more we shall esteem and value the remedy (1Jn 1:9)... The Christian religion is the religion of sinners, of such as have sinned, and in whom sin in some measure still dwells. The Christian life is a life of continued repentance, humiliation for and mortification of sin, of continual faith in, thankfulness for, and love to the Redeemer, and hopeful, joyful expectation of a day of glorious redemption, in which the believer shall be fully and finally acquitted, and sin abolished forever. (Hallelujah!)

Several "**Spurgeonisms**" on sin...

Our deceitful heart reveals an almost Satanic shrewdness in self-deception...

If you say you have no sin you have achieved a fearful success -- you have put out your own eyes, and perverted your own reason!...

It does not matter either, in what sense we say it. We may try to beguile ourselves with the idea that we say it in some peculiar gospel sense; but "we deceive ourselves" if we say it in any sense whatsoever, for we have sin, and we do sin...

Do not give fair names to foul sins (**Ed**: This is "self deception!"). Call them what you will, they will smell no sweeter...

As soon as I learn that a brother states that he has lived for months without sin, I wonder whether his secret vice is lewd-ness, or theft, or drink, but I feel sure that somewhere or other there is a leak in the ship.

John uses [planao](#) two other times in his letter...

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to **deceive** you. (1Jn 2:26)

**Comment:** What things? In context the "antichrists" who were "liars" (1Jn 2:18-25).

Little children, **let no one deceive** (present imperative with a **negative** is a command to stop something that is already happening!) you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous (1Jn 3:7)

**Harris comments:** Deceit is constantly associated with Antichrist and with the opponents, and it would seem that in this verse the author is dealing with the potential acceptance of the adversaries' claims (of no sin in 1Jn 1:8, 10) by some of the readers.

While there is a difference of opinion among commentators on whether **sin** they deny is the innate sin principle (the sin nature we all inherited from Adam which makes us want to commit individual sins) or it is the individual sins, both of these beliefs are deceptive. This "deception" is in modern Christianity in various forms - for example, there are those who believe that *sin* is determined by outside causes which are beyond our control (biological, hereditary, psychological, social factors, etc), and because this is true, each individual has little or no choice in relation to who they are and what they do. This fallacious reasoning can potentially lead that person to deceive themselves to conclude that they are not responsible for their personal sinful actions, which originate from our sinful nature, a fallen nature which even believers possess (see **flesh**). A variation on this deception is to re-title the sins to make them more "palatable" or acceptable in their own minds -- E.g., we say an affair instead of adultery, a "little white lie" instead of an overt lie, "my addiction" or "my disease" instead of my sin, etc.

**James Hastings** gives a pagan illustration of self deception "When asked whether he " had made his peace with God," Thoreau quietly replied that "he had never quarreled with him." He was invited by another acquaintance to enter into a religious conversation concerning the next world. " One world at a time," was the prompt retort.' ([1 John 1:8,9 Righteous Forgiveness in his excellent work "The Great Texts of the Bible"](#)) (See Hastings' [Index To The Great Texts of the Bible](#)" - all are available at [Archive.org](#))

**John MacArthur** emphasizes the practical consequence of the claim of **no sin** - "Not only did the false teachers walk in darkness (i.e., sin; v6) but went so far as to deny totally the existence of a sin nature in their lives. **If someone never admits to being a sinner, salvation cannot result** (Mt19:16-22 for the account of the young man who refused to recognize his sin). Not only did the false teachers make false claims to fellowship and disregard sin (v6), they are also characterized by deceit regarding sinlessness (Ec 7:20; Ro 3:23).

**Charles Simeon** has some piercing remarks regarding the deception of the "moralist" who says he is without sin...

"**They deceive themselves**" in relation to the extent of their attainments. They do, in fact, say with the Rich Youth, "What lack I yet?" whilst "they lack one thing," even that very thing which is indispensable to their acceptance with God. Our Lord brought the young man to the test; and, by a command which he gave, tried him, whether God or the world were the higher in his esteem? It was a grief to the young man to renounce all hope of an interest in the Saviour; but he knew not how to part with his possessions; and therefore abandoned the Lord Jesus rather than them. So, if moralists were brought to the test, they would show, and indeed they do continually show, that the love of Christ is not dominant in their hearts, and that they have never seen him as that "pearl of great price, for which they are ready to part with all."

They deceive themselves also in relation to their state before God. They imagine that they do not deserve, and consequently are not in danger of, his wrath and indignation. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul before his conversion. Hear his own acknowledgment respecting it: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died:" that is, before I understood the spirituality of the law, I thought my obedience to it so perfect that I was in no danger of condemnation for my offences against it: but when my eyes were opened to see the extent of its demands and the defects of my obedience, I saw at once that I was deservedly under a sentence of death and condemnation.

Thus it is with multitudes who are exemplary in their moral conduct: in the midst of all their confidence they deceive themselves; and whilst they take credit to themselves for being right in the sight of God, they show, that they have never yet received "the truth as it is in Jesus," and that, consequently, "the truth is not in them." ([1 John 1:8-9 Confession Necessary to Forgiveness](#))

**Can Christians deceive themselves?** Before we say "This passage does not apply to me", we need to do a self evaluation considering each of the following "bullet points"...**Lyman Abbott** writes...

How many are there in this congregation, I wonder, who would really say to themselves, "We have no sin"? I

do not mean, would say it just in that form. Of course not. We are too well educated for that. But practically would say it, and would resent with considerable indignation that anyone else should call them sinners.

(1) In the first place, we balance off against our sins certain pseudo virtues. We keep, not very correctly, and certainly not with very good bookkeeping, a debtor and creditor account. Over against the evil in our lives we set certain credit marks. We attend church with regularity — perhaps we say our prayers, as the phrase is; perhaps we read our Bible, if we are not too much driven in the morning with engagements, or too sleepy at night to take it in. And therefore we are virtuous... (**Note:** for complete exposition see [Deceiving Ourselves in the Biblical Illustrator](#))

(2) We assume virtues that are not our own, and think ourselves virtuous because of them...

(3) As men take the virtues that do not belong to them, see them and rejoice in them, so they do not take the vices that belong to them. They see the sins of others — not their own. The spendthrift can read you a homily on the vices of the miser, but it never occurs to him that there is any vice in the life he is leading; the miser will read you an eloquent sermon on the vices of the spendthrift, but it never occurs to him that there is no sin in clutching a dollar until it cries. How quick are we to see the vices of our neighbours; how slow to turn our eyes upon our own!

(4) We disguise our vices. We give them false names; we dress them up as virtues and call them such, and really think they are. And this young man who never has earned a dollar in his life by solid, honest industry, takes the money that his father has earned by hard industry and throws it freely, hither and yon, among his fellows, and calls it generosity, and thinks it is. He does not know that it is mean to spend in lavish living what another has toiled to acquire.

(5) We change the form of our sin, and then think we are done with it. We think that sin consists in the shape it assumes; we do not know that it consists in the evil heart that beats within...

(6) And when we can no longer disguise from ourselves that we are doing wrong, we hide behind all manner of excuses. We say: "Yes, I admit this is not quite right, but everybody does it." Or, "I admit this is not quite according to the Gospel idea, but the Gospel ideals are not practicable in the nineteenth century." Or, "I could not help it; I was made so." And so, little by little, we creep up to that excuse so common in our day: "There is no real moral evil, there is no real sin." What men call sin is only good in the making. It is the greenness of an apple that by and by will be ripe. It is the foolishness of a child who by and by will be wiser. The fall is only a fall upward. Let us not trouble ourselves, therefore, but wait. There is a good God, and by and by He will bring all things right. Think Canada thistles are wheat in the making; think a broken arm is an athlete's arm in the making; think that diphtheria and scarlet fever are health in the making; but do not think that to be estranged, self-willed, and self-indulgent is holiness and righteousness and goodness in the making. ([Deceiving Ourselves in the Biblical Illustrator](#))

The godly Scottish preacher [Robert Murray McCheyne](#) (who died at age 30!) said it honestly and well "The seeds of all my sins are in my heart, and perhaps **the more dangerous** that I do not see them. (**Ed:** "Amen" or "Oh my!")"

**C Stanford** said it this way - Motives that seem to you as white as the light may prove, when seen through His prism, to be many colored. Aims that seem straight as a line may, when tested by the right standard, prove indirect and tortuous. We shall find at last that, in many cases, what we have thought devotion was indecent; what we have thought love was struck through with the taint of selfishness; what we have thought faith was utterly vitiated with the poison of unbelief.

## AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US: kai e aletheia ouk estin (3SPA) en hemin:

- **the truth:** 1Jn 2:4 1Ti 6:5 2Jn 1:2 3Jn 1:3
- [1 John 1 Resources](#)

## DEVOID OF THE TRUTH!

**And the truth** - "God's truth, objective." (Alford). "The whole Gospel." (Vincent). See more discussion below on the meaning of "the truth" in this passage.

**The truth is** (present tense) **not** (*ou* =strong, absolute negation) **in us** - This clause can be paraphrased as "*the truth is continually,*

*absolutely not in us*" which parallels their claim to *continually have no sin!* The verb **is** (estin) is **present tense** and denotes continual action indicating that the truth is continually not in these individuals.

**Henry Alford** on **not in us** - "That truth respecting God's holiness and our own sinfulness, which is the very first spark of light within, has no place in us **at all.**"

**The UBS Handbook** adds that "The clause means to say: the truth is not in us and this will remain so. Thus the situation of the false teachers (**Ed**: or anyone else who believes this lie), who claim to know God, is shown to be quite the contrary of what they claim... The phrase "**to be in**" serves John to express a very close and intimate relationship of Christ with God or God with Christ (John 17:21), of men with God or God with men (1 John 2:5; 5:20; and 4:4), of an aspect of God's being (as represented by Christ) with men (here), or of the devil with the world (4:4). Cp. also "to abide in" (2:6), which emphasizes the continuity of the relationship. Some renderings used are, 'to live in,' 'to be one with,' 'to belong to,' 'to be before,' 'to be in the presence of,' 'to be in the innermost of' (that is, to agree with, to act according to the will of, The Bible Translator, 20.79f, 1969). In the present case it is often preferable to change the structure of the clause, taking "we" as the subject. This leads to such renderings as, 'we are not familiar with the truth (of God),' 'we do not have the truth (of God) in our heart,' **'we have not the true One/God in our heart.'**

It is interesting that in the Old Testament David (in the context of confession of sin) describes "the antithesis" of truth not in someone writing...

Behold, You desire **truth in the innermost being**, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.  
(Psalm 51:6)

**Spurgeon's Comment on this passage is relevant to 1Jn 1:8:** Behold. Here is the great matter for consideration. God desires not merely outward virtue, but inward purity, and the penitent's sense of sin is greatly deepened as with astonishment he discovers this truth, and how far he is from satisfying the divine demand. The second "Behold" is fitly set over against the first; how great the gulf which yawns between them! Thou desirest truth in the inward parts. Reality, sincerity, true holiness, heart fidelity, these are the demands of God. He cares not for the pretence of purity, he looks to the mind, heart, and soul. Always has the Holy One of Israel estimated men by their inner nature, and not by their outward professions; to him the inward is as visible as the outward, and he rightly judges that the essential character of an action lies in the motive of him who works it. :

## **TRUTH IN JOHN'S EPISTLES**

What is "**the truth**" which is (essentially) *never* in these individuals!

One of the best ways to **interpret** Scripture is to compare parallel or related Scriptures (**See discussion of comparing Scripture with Scripture**). In the case of "**the truth**" we are fortunate for this is one of John's favorite terms. Therefore, it behooves us to study John's uses (**in context**) to see if they provide a clue about his intended meaning of **the truth.**" Alternatively we could "save time" and look at how the commentaries interpret "**the truth**", but how would we know whether the **Interpretation** of that commentator was correct or was merely their opinion or their "best guess"?

**Truth** is used 20 times by John in his three **epistles** (20/109 NT uses ~18%, compared to 23 uses in John's **Gospel**-see **Excursus on John's use of truth**), and thus is a **key word** which clearly identifies "**truth**" as one of **John's main themes** (a major topic or subject of his epistles and his Gospel)...

1Jn 1:6, 8; 2:4, 21 (twice); 1Jn 3:18, 19; 4:6; 5:6; 2Jn 1:1(twice), 2Jn 1:2, 3, 4; 3Jn 1:1, 3 (twice), 3Jn 1:4, 8, 12

1 John 2:4-5 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; **but (contrast)** whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him

**Comment:** What do we observe about "truth" in these two verses? What is John contrasting? In verse 4 notice that John again calls attention to the pattern of "saying" and "doing", of what one says with their lips versus how one lives. There is an old secular saying that "Talk is cheap." One of John's overarching purposes in this letter is to help believers know that they are not just professors but possessors of a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ (cp 1Jn 5:13). He has repeatedly declared that one's actions speak louder than their words. In verse 4 **one** (note the change from "we say" in chapter one) says "I know Jesus. I've experienced Him." and yet they do not obey His commandments. The disobedience is a clear indicator that they are not born again. Don't misunderstand -- obedience never saved anyone. Faith alone saves, but faith that is saving results in a new heart and a new power in one's life so that at least the general direction of their life is toward obedience.

John is not saying they will obey perfectly. He is only saying that the general direction of their life is to obey their Lord. John is describing a change of direction in one's life, not an attainment of perfection in this life! John then affirms that one can know for certain that they are "in Him" (born again, in covenant with Christ, in union with Him) be the fact that their behavior has changed. Whereas before they were "in Him", they were continually disobedient, now they are generally obedient to His word. Their general obedience does not save them but it does serve to demonstrate that they are legitimate children of God (1Jn 3:1).

It follows that when John states that "the truth is not in us", he is saying the same thing as 1Jn 2:4 which is a description of one who is not born again. In short, John is saying here in 1Jn 1:8 that individuals who continue claim they have no sin are not born again!

**Storms feels that:** Whenever "truth" [aletheia] appears in the Johannine literature with the definite article ["the"] it refers to the body of Christian truth, i.e., the Gospel in its fullness (cf. John 1:17; 3:21; 5:33; 8:32,40,44,45; 14:6,17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:17; 18:37; 1 John 2:4,21; 3:19; 4:6; 5:6; 2 John 1,2; 3 John 4,8,12). ([1 John Sermon Comments](#))

John mentions **truth** in his second and third epistle...

THE elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in**truth**; and not only I, but also all who know (ginosko in the perfect tense = having come to know experientially at a point in time and this knowledge persisting) the **truth**, 2 for the sake of the **truth** which abides (present tense = is continually "at home") in us and will be with us forever (this description seems to aptly describe the permanent indwelling of the Spirit of Truth in every believer - cp Jn 14:16-17): 3 Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in **truth** and love. 4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in **truth**, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (2John 1:1-4)

**Comment:** Here we see that truth is one of the markers of a believer - they know the truth by experience (2Jn 1:1). The truth abides in them forever (2Jn 1:2). Believers walk in truth.

For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your**truth**, that is, how you are walking in **truth**. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the **truth**. (3Jn 1:3-4)

**Comment:** Walking in truth is tantamount to walking in the light and is used by John to describe a believer. So to say as he does here in 1Jn 1:8 that those who profess to have no sin, do not possess the truth within themselves, is to classify them as unbelievers.

**Finally** note that John uses **truth** (aletheia) 23x in 20 verses - John 1:14, 17; 3:21; 4:23f; 5:33; 8:32, 40, 44ff; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 17:17, 19; 18:37f

See Marvin Vincent's discussion: [Excursus on John's use of Truth](#)

**B F Westcott** interprets "**the truth**" in this context as "the whole Gospel as that which meets the requirements of man's nature. Comp. John 8:32ff.; 18:37. The same conception is found in the other apostolic writings (Read 2Th 2:12; Ro 2:8; 2Cor. 13:8; Gal. 5:7; 1Ti 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2Ti 2:15, 2:18; (Titus 1:1); Heb. 10:26; 1Pe 1:22; Jas 3:14; 5:19." ([The Epistles of St. John](#))

**D Edmond Hiebert** comments on **the truth is not in us** noting that "Self-deception involves refusal to allow **the truth** a place in one's inner being. **The truth** denotes "*that specific body of truth, both moral and soteriological* (Ed: related to salvation), *that God has revealed to His people.*" As a person commits himself to Christ that truth becomes his inner possession. ([1John 1:5-2-6 Exposition](#))

**David Smith** in **The Expositor's Greek Testament** feels **truth** is...

the revelation of "the True (alethinos) God" (1Jn 5:20; cp John 17:3 also uses alethinos), which came "through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), Himself "the Truth" (John 14:6). Nearly equivalent to *the logos* (1Jn 1:10). The Truth is a splendid ideal, never realized here, else it would cease to be an ideal; always as we pursue it displaying a fuller glory, And thus the nearer we approach it the further off it seems; when we walk in the light we see faults which were hidden in the darkness. Self-abasement is a characteristic of the saints. When Juan de Avila (A.D. 1500–69) was dying the rector of his college approached him and said: "*What joy it must be to you to think of meeting the Saviour!*" "Ah!" said the saint, "*rather do I tremble at the thought of my sins*" ([The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Alfred Plummer** writes that **the truth** is not in us because "we are in an atmosphere of self-made darkness which shuts the truth out. The truth may be all round us, but we are not in contact with it: it is not in us. One who shuts himself in a dark room has no light,

though the sun may be shining brightly. All words about truth, 'the truth, true, truly,' are characteristic of John. ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

**Lenski** observes that John is saying in essence that when we deny sin we "are not only not doing the truth (1Jn 1:6) but are wholly devoid of it, "the truth is not in us." This is the same *aletheia* that was mentioned in 1Jn 1:6, the saving Gospel truth or reality, the light that delivers from the darkness. When "the truth" is not in us, we are not by any means empty but are full of fictions, fables, myths, self-made fancies, notions that are not so. (BORROW [The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John](#))

**Sam Storms** says John "is not saying merely that the truth is "not interwoven into the fabric of their thoughts," as some suggest. Rather, the truth is **not** in them. **Period.** As Marshall says, "This doesn't mean simply that they are telling a lie, but that they have no share in the divine reality despite their claim to the contrary". ([1 John Sermon Comments](#))

**John Stott** explains that "not only do we **fail to do the truth** (1John 1:6); **we are void of it.** For if it did indwell us we should inevitably be aware of our sinfulness. John's affirmation is equally applicable today to those who deny the fact or guilt of sin by seeking to interpret it solely in terms of physiological, psychological or social causes." (BORROW [The Epistles of John : an introduction and commentary](#))

**Alford** on the truth in this passage "The truth respecting God's holiness and our sinfulness, which is the very first spark of light in us, has no place in us."

**John Gill** concludes there is no real work of grace in the case of those who claim to be without sin writing that "it is a plain case the **truth** of grace is not in such persons, for if there was a real work of God upon their souls, they would know and discern the plague of their own hearts, the impurity of their nature, and the imperfection of their obedience; nor is the **word of truth** in them, for if that had an entrance into them, and worked effectually in them, they would in the light of it discover much sin and iniquity in them; and indeed there is **no principle of truth**, no veracity in them; there is no sincerity nor ingenuity in them; they do not speak honestly and uprightly, but contrary to the dictates of their own conscience.

**Adam Clarke on the truth is not in us** 'We have no knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus, the whole of which is founded on this most awful truth—all have sinned, all are guilty, all are unholy; and none can redeem himself. Hence it is as necessary that Jesus Christ should become incarnated, and suffer and die to bring men to God.

**A E Brooke** writes that "The statement that **we have not sin**, shows that those who make it have not "**truth**" working in them as an inner and effective principle... It is more than the sense of **truth**, uprightness and honesty of self-examination and self-knowledge... It can be regarded both objectively and subjectively, either as something that can be done (1Jn 1:6), an external standard in accordance with which actions must be shaped, or as an inner principle, working from within and molding a man's inner life. ([A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles](#))

**Haas** comments that "**Truth** is used here (and often elsewhere in the Johannine writings) with another shade of meaning than in v. 6, namely, as a reference to God's own truthfulness. God is truthful in that His acting and speaking cover each other completely. ([The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series](#))

**Vine** writes that **the truth is not in us** first of all "is an advance upon 1Jn 1:6, a worse condition than "not doing truth." The truth is "the body of Christian doctrine," the revealed counsels and will of God, communicated to our hearts by His Spirit. To claim sinlessness is to be void of that revelation, just as to walk in the darkness is to fail to do those things by which the truth is translated into the life. ([Collected writings of W. E. Vine](#))

**Haas** comments that John is giving a description "of the false teachers, who claim to know God, (but) to be quite the contrary of what they claim." ([The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series - on the Letters of John](#))

**Kress** describes the serious implications noting that "If we say we have no sin, the truth is not in us. And in verse 10, those who claim sinlessness make God out to be a liar and His Word is not in [them]. This is tantamount to saying, if you're not a confessor of sin as God defines it, you are not a true Christian (cf. 1 John 2:20–21). John's point is crystal clear here in 1 John 1:8–10: unlike some who may claim sinlessness, genuine believers are characterized by the confession of sin because of their fellowship with the God who is Light (see Isaiah 6:1–7 for a graphic illustration of this truth). (Notes for the Study and Exposition of 1st John)

**Truth** (225)(**aletheia** from **a** = indicates following word has the opposite meaning ~ without + **lanthano** = to be hidden or concealed, to escape notice, cp our English "*latent*" from Latin = to lie hidden) has the literal sense of that which contains nothing hidden, that which is not concealed. **Aletheia** is that which that is seen or expressed as it really is. **Aletheia** is the **manifestation** of a **hidden** reality. For example, when you are a witness in a trial, the court attendant says "Raise your right hand. Do you swear that you will tell the truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?" And you say, "I do" and you sit down. The question the court attendant is asking is "Are you willing to come into this courtroom and **manifest** something that is **hidden** to us that only you know so that you

will bear evidence to that?" Therefore when you speak the **truth**, you are manifesting a "**hidden reality**". Does that make sense? A parallel example in Scripture is the case of the woman in the crowd who had touched Jesus (Read context = Mk 5:24-25, 26-27, 28-29, 30, 31-32), but when she became "aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth " (Mk 5:33) and nothing but the truth. She did not lie. She spoke no falsehoods. In summary, **truth** then is the correspondence between a **reality** and a declaration which professes to set forth or describe the **reality**. To say it another way, **words spoken or written** are **true** when they correspond with **objective reality**. Persons and things are **true** when they correspond with their profession (which we describe with words like integrity, sincerity, non-hypocritical, etc). In short, truth is true to the old adage "what you see is what you get!"

**Peter Barnes** reminds us of the context of John's epistle (**context** always being critical in arriving at the correct interpretation of a passage)...

The heretics in John's day were apparently claiming to be enjoying fellowship with God, but going on in the ways of the world (1Jn 1:6). They were, in effect, saying that sin does not matter. John's reply is not that Christians are perfect—not at all. The claim that we have no sin is a delusion (1Jn 1:8). But John is saying that because God is holy, his people must be committed to holy living. A person who claims to know God but who walks in darkness is lying and not carrying out the truth. He may believe in Jesus as Lord, he may preach and prophesy in his name, he may perform miracles and cast out demons—but if he practises lawlessness he is damned as one whom Christ never knew (Mt. 7:21, Mt 7:22, 23). If we are not slaves of righteousness, we are slaves of sin (Ro 6:15-18). Without holiness (or sanctification), no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14). The evangelist may tell the unholy believer that he is safe, but Christ says that he is not.

In John's day the Docetists with Gnostic leanings thought that the body did not come from God. This led to one of two consequences: they could turn to asceticism and torture their bodies and flagellate themselves; or they could engage in immorality and drunkenness, or whatever, and think that their spirits were pure, so it did not matter what their bodies did. It appears that John was especially confronting the latter consequence. The '**Children of God**' cult in the 1960s taught that people could be won to Christ through sinful means—women were even encouraged to be 'hookers for Christ'. Roman Catholics may think that they are saved because they are baptized and they attend mass. Professing evangelicals may appeal to a decision for Christ that they have made. But we are not to be deceived (**Ed**: present imperative with a negative ~ stop letting this happen, implying some of the readers were already being deceived!). Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous people, drunkards, revilers and extortioners will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Ed**: This is another way of saying they are not genuinely born again) (1Cor 6:9–10). In recent times the American gangster Mickey Cohen was reputedly converted, but later declared that he wanted to be a Christian gangster! If you find yourself habitually practising any of the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19–21, you have no reason to believe that you are a Christian. ([Knowing Where We Stand The Message of John's Epistles - recommended resource - well written](#))

## **EXCURSUS ON JOHN'S USE OF "TRUTH"**

**Marvin Vincent** feels that John uses **truth** in this context to speak of

The whole Gospel. All reality is in God. He is the only true God (**alethinous** is an **adjective** which describes that which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the name and thus real, true and genuine not spurious, fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended. John 17:3; see on John 1:9). This reality is incarnated in Christ, the Word of God, "the very image of His substance," and in His message to men. This message is the truth, a title not found in the Synoptists, Acts, or the Apocalypse, but in the Catholic Epistles (Jas. 5:19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 2:2), and in Paul (2 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 1:13, etc.). It is especially characteristic of the Gospel and Epistles of John.

**The truth is represented by John objectively and subjectively.**

**1. Objectively.** In the person of Christ. He is the Truth, the perfect revelation of God (John 1:18; 14:6). His manhood is true to the absolute law of right, which is the law of love, and is, therefore, our perfect pattern of manhood.

Truth, absolutely existing in and identified with God, was also, in some measure, diffused in the world. The Word was in the world, before as after the incarnation (John 1:10. See on John 1:4, 5). Christ often treats the truth as something to which He came to bear witness, and which it was His mission to develop into clearer

recognition and expression (John 18:37). This He did through the embodiment of truth in His own person (John 1:14, 17; 14:6), and by His teaching (John 8:40; 17:17); and His work is carried out by the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13), sent by God and by Christ himself (John 14:26; 16:7). Hence the Spirit, even as Christ, is the Truth (1 John 5:6). The whole sum of the knowledge of Christ and of the Spirit, is the Truth (1 John 2:21; 2 John 1).

This truth can be recognized, apprehended, and appropriated by man, and can be also rejected by him (John 8:32; 1 John 2:21; John 8:44).

**2. Subjectively.** The truth is lodged in man by the Spirit, and communicated to his spirit (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). It dwells in man (1 John 1:8; 2:4; 2 John 2), as revelation, comfort, guidance, enlightenment, conviction, impulse, inspiration, knowledge. It is the spirit of truth as opposed to the spirit of error (1 John 4:6). It translates itself into act. God's true children do the truth (John 3:21; 1 John 1:6). It brings sanctification and freedom (John 8:32; 17:17). See on John 14:6, 17. ([Vincent - Word Studies](#))

**John Stott** - The second claim of the heretics was one stage worse than the first, namely to be without sin, 'to be sinless', (NEB). The first heretical claim at least appeared to concede the existence of sin, while denying that it had the effect of estranging the sinner from God. Now the very fact of sin is denied. These people cannot benefit from the cleansing effects of the blood of Jesus because they claim to be without sin. 'Sin' is again in the singular and refers to the inherited principle of sin or self-centredness. The heretics are now saying that, whatever their outward conduct may be, there is no sin inherent in their nature. Perhaps they asserted that in those enlightened with gnōsis the sinful nature was eradicated, and claimed a kind of sinless perfection, as some still do today. Alternatively, John is referring to the Gnostic subtlety that sin was a matter of the flesh and did not touch or defile the spirit. Whatever their exact pretensions, John repudiates it. To claim that we have no sin means that we deceive ourselves, that is, we are self-deceived rather than deliberate liars, and the truth is not in us. Not only do we fail to live by the truth (v. 6); we are void of it. For if it did indwell us we should inevitably be aware of our sinfulness. John's affirmation is equally applicable today to those who deny the fact or guilt of sin by seeking to interpret it solely in terms of physiological, psychological or social causes. (BORROW [The Epistles of John : an introduction and commentary](#))

**Bishop J C Ryle** in his article "Are You Born Again?" has a practical application...

Are you born again? This is one of life's most important questions. Jesus Christ said, "Except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; I suppose I'm a Christian." Thousands of nominal Christians show none of the signs of being born again which the Scriptures have given us—many listed in the First Epistle of John.

No Habitual Sinning - "No one who is born of God will **continue** to sin" (1 John 3:9). "We know that anyone born of God does not **continue** to sin" (1Jn 5:18).

*A person who has been born again, or regenerated,  
does not habitually commit sin.*

He no longer sins with his heart and will and whole inclination. There was probably a time when he did not think about whether his actions were sinful or not, and he did not always feel grieved after doing evil. There was no quarrel between him and sin; they were friends. **But the true Christian--hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, considers it his greatest plague, resents the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be completely delivered from it.** Sin no longer pleases him, nor is it even a matter of indifference to him; it has become a horrible thing which he hates. However, he cannot eliminate its presence within him.

**If he said that he had no sin, he would be lying** (1John 1:8). But he can say that he hates sin--and that the great desire of his soul is not to commit sin at all. He cannot prevent bad thoughts from entering his mind, or shortcomings, omissions, and defects from appealing in both his words and his actions. He knows that "we all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2). But he can truly say, in the sight of God, that these things cause him grief and sorrow, and that his whole nature does not consent to them. What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again? ([Are You Born Again](#)) (See also [Are You Regenerate](#))

*Anyone who professes to be a Christian,  
but who does not live in truth, is either deceived or a deceiver.*

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**Jim Bomkamp** lists the following indicators or marks of a genuine believer from John's first chapter...

1. Walks in the light - 1Jn 1:6

2. Has fellowship with other Christians who walk in the light - 1Jn 1:7

3. Believes he has a sin nature - 1Jn 1:8

4. Occasionally sins - 1Jn 1:10

(see [34 Marks of a True Christian in 1 John](#)).

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## **IS PERFECTION POSSIBLE? 1 John 1:8 - John MacArthur**

The false doctrine of perfectionism teaches that there is some point following conversion when the believer's sin nature is eradicated. But according to today's verse and especially in the apostle Paul's treatment of the subject in Philippians 3:12–16, perfection in this life is only a goal, not an achievement. We must pursue it, but we'll never attain it while on earth.

Paul denied perfectionism by calling us to pursue a prize that can be fully obtained only in heaven. He confessed that he himself had not reached perfection—and he wrote to the Philippians nearly thirty years after his conversion! He was perhaps the most committed Christian who ever lived. If after thirty years he wasn't perfect, certainly none of us should claim to be.

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## **James Smith - A UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE.**

"Who can say, I have made my heart clean?" (Prov. 20:9).

This clearly implies that—

1. The heart needs cleansing. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). The heart is deceitful above all things. There is none that doeth good, no, not one. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). The carnal mind is enmity against God.

2. No man can make his own heart clean. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:4). Outward reformation is but the whitening of the sepulchre, ornamenting a charnel-house, painting the dead. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

3. The Lord alone can cleanse the heart. "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8, 9). The heart may be cleansed as a fountain, like the stream at Jericho, by the putting in of the new cruse of the Spirit, with the salt of the Word of God (2 Kings 2:20, 21).

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## **Warren Wiersbe - 1 John 1:8 SELF-DECEIT**

A dishonest person loses his fellowship with God and with God's people. As a result, prayer becomes an empty form to him. Worship is a dull routine. He becomes critical of other Christians and starts staying away from church.

A group of church members were discussing their new pastor.

"For some reason," said one man, "I really don't feel at ease with him. I believe he's a good man, all right—but something seems to stand between us."

Another member replied, "Yes, I think I know what you mean. I used to have that same problem with him, but now I don't have it anymore. The pastor and I have great fellowship."

"What did he do to make things better?"

"He didn't do anything," said the friend. "I did the changing."

"You did the changing?"

"Yes, I decided to be open and honest about things, the way our pastor is. You see, there isn't one stain of hypocrisy in his life, and there was so much pretending in my life that we just didn't make it together. He and I both knew I was a phony. Since I've started to live an honest Christian life, everything is better."

Applying God's Truth:

1. Most people never verbally claim to be "without sin," so how can you tell when someone is being dishonest with himself or herself?

2. When your own praying becomes empty and worship becomes dull, what do you do to get back "on track"?

3. When fellow Christians criticize you, do you consider they may be going through a personal spiritual problem and "cut them some slack"? What are some recent examples of conflict where this might have been the case? (See [Be Real \(1 John\): Turning from Hypocrisy to Truth - Page 39](#))

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## C H Spurgeon -Honest dealing with God (Full sermon [Honest Dealing with God](#))

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.' 1 John 1:8–10

Our tendency to be false is illustrated in 1 John 1, where we find three grades of it. There is first the man who lies: 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth'. We say and do that which is untrue, if, while abiding under the influence of sin and falsehood, we claim to have fellowship with God. If this tendency is left unchecked, you will find the man growing worse and doing according to the eighth verse, where it is written, 'we deceive ourselves'. Here the utterer of the falsehood has come to believe his own lie; he has blinded his understanding and befooled his conscience till he has become his own dupe. Falsehood has saturated his nature, so that he puts 'darkness for light, and light for darkness'. This is at once his sin and his punishment; he closed his eyes so long that at length he has become stone blind. He will soon reach the complete development of his sin, which is described in the tenth verse, when the man, who first lied, and then deceived himself, becomes so audacious in his falseness as to blaspheme the Most Holy by making him a liar. It is impossible to say where sin will end; the beginning of it is as a little water in which a bird may wash and scatter half the pool in drops, but in its progress sin, like the brook, swells into a torrent deep and broad. We must judge ourselves very severely, lest our natural tendency to falseness should lead us to false assertion as to ourselves, and then urge us on till we delude ourselves into the foolish belief that we are what we proudly represent ourselves to be, and dare in the desperation of our pride to think God himself untrue.

*'Just and holy is Thy name,  
I am all unrighteousness,  
False and full of sin I am;  
Thou art full of truth and grace.'*

-- Charles Wesley

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### The Truth About Sin

A man rebuked me for admitting that I still sin and often need forgiveness. He quoted 1John 3:6 and 1John 3:9 and said that a Christian does not sin, implying that I was not a Christian. I assured him that I don't want to sin, but that I can't say I'm Christlike in everything I think, say, and do. I suggested that the verses in 1 John 3 refer to a sinful lifestyle, and I pointed him to other verses in 1 John which teach that Christians still need forgiveness (1Jn 1:8-10, 1Jn 2:1).

Becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. Only in heaven will we be without sin. I believe that's why John warned us to beware of three lies about sin: First, saying "we have fellowship with [Christ]" while we "walk in darkness" (1 Jn. 1:6). Second, saying "we have no sin" (v.8). And third, saying "we have not sinned" (1Jn 1:10). Following each lie he gave us the truth. First, if we walk in the light, Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin (1Jn 1:7). Second, if we confess our sins, He forgives and cleanses us (1Jn 1:9). And third, if we sin, Jesus speaks in our defense before the Father (1Jn 2:1).

In our struggle with temptation and sin, let's pray as David did, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins" (Ps. 19:12+ Ps 19:13+).— by Dennis J. De Haan (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Please help me, Lord, in all I do  
To act and think with motives true;  
And by Your love reveal to me  
Those sins that only You can see.

—DJD

Christians are not sinless,  
but they should sin less.

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### The Biggest Lie

A minister was walking down a street when he noticed a group of boys standing around a dog. Concerned for the dog's safety, he walked over and asked what they were doing. A boy replied, "This is an old stray, and all of us want it. We decided that whoever told the biggest lie would get it."

“You boys shouldn’t have a contest telling lies,” said the minister. “Don’t you know that lying is a sin? Why, when I was your age I never told a lie!” There was silence for about a minute. Then, just as the minister thought he had gotten through to them, one boy gave a deep sigh and said, “All right, he wins. Give him the dog.”

We smile, but the fact is, we’ve all told some whoppers. Oh, we tolerate some lies, calling them exaggerations—like when we add a few inches to the big fish we caught. We aren’t that tolerant, however, when lied to and cheated in a business deal or when an untruth threatens our reputation. Yet, anyone who says he’s without sin is telling the biggest lie of all.

So where does that leave us? Guilty, according to 1 John 1:8. But notice the good news that follows in verse 9. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” That’s a truth we all need to hear. And that’s no lie! — by Herbert Vander Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Deceit lies hidden in our hearts—  
We all have told a lie;  
Yet Jesus can forgive and cleanse—  
That’s why He came to die.  
—D. De Haan

**A lie may cover your tracks,  
but it cannot hide the truth.**

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## **[The Tyranny of the Perfect](#)**

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8

Today’s Scripture & Insight : 1 John 1:5–2:2

Dr. Brian Goldman obsessively tried to be perfect in treating his patients. But on a nationally broadcast show he admitted to mistakes he had made. He revealed that he had treated a woman in the emergency room and then made the decision to discharge her. Later that day a nurse asked him, “Do you remember that patient you sent home? Well, she’s back.” The patient had been readmitted to the hospital and then died. This devastated him. He tried even harder to be perfect, only to learn the obvious: Perfection is impossible.

As Christians, we may harbor unrealistic expectations of perfection for ourselves. But even if we can somehow manage the appearance of a flawless life, our thoughts and motives are never completely pure.

John the disciple wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The remedy is not to hide our sins and to strive harder, but to step into the light of God’s truth and confess them. “If we walk in the light,” said John, “as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (v. 7).

In medicine, Dr. Goldman proposes the idea of a “redefined physician” who—in a culture where we are hesitant to admit our errors—no longer toils under the tyranny of perfection. Such a physician openly shares mistakes and supports colleagues who do the same, with a goal of reducing mistakes.

What if Christians were known not for hiding their sins but for loving and supporting each other with the truth and grace of our God? What if we practiced a risky yet healthy honesty with each other and with the watching world? By: Tim Gustafson (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Father, it’s so difficult for us to share our faults with each other, but You call us to wholeness as Your people. Empower us by Your Spirit to live courageously in love and honesty.

Honesty with God about our sin brings forgiveness.

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## **[Fox Trouble](#)**

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. — 1 John 1:8

Today’s Scripture : 1 John 1:5-10

The British are having trouble with foxes. According to The Wall Street Journal, the sly little fellows have moved into London and are making a general nuisance of themselves. They knock over rubbish cans, swipe shoes left out to dry, destroy gardens, and leave a

foul odor. With the city borders being pushed farther into the countryside, the little troublemakers are adapting rather than moving—and many Londoners are frustrated and upset.

When you stop to think about it, little “foxes” can become great aggravations for followers of Christ who are trying to honor Him. What we may consider “little” or “harmless” sins can be our downfall. “Stretching the truth,” for example, is actually lying. And gossip is nothing less than character assassination. The trouble is that those little sins will inevitably grow larger. Before we know it, we’ll need to do some serious repenting and confessing.

If some little foxes have crept into the backyards and gardens of your spiritual life, the time to deal with them is now. With the help of the Holy Spirit, identify them. Admit your guilt, confess these pesky little practices to God, and get rid of them before they ruin the entire landscape of your life. By: David C. Egnor (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Today pull up the little weeds,  
The sinful thoughts subdue,  
Or they will take the reins themselves  
And someday master you.  
—Anon.

The most deadly sins do not leap upon us, they creep up on us.

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### **I'd Rather Die Than Lie**

Children who are taught to tell the truth are blessed. One grateful adult said, “Today, as a result of my upbringing, I’d rather die than lie.”

Being honest with others is vital, but another aspect is equally important—being honest with ourselves. Most of us easily see the faults of others but fiercely resist admitting the truth about ourselves.

Pastor and author Bob Smith lists some of our self-deceptions: “Others have prejudices, but we have convictions. Others are conceited, but in me it’s self-respect. When you spend time on your personal appearance, it’s vanity; in me, it’s just making the most of my God-given assets. In you, it’s touchiness; but in me, it’s sensitivity. In you, it’s worry; in me, concern.”

The apostle John teaches that if we say one thing but practice another, we are lying (v.6), deceiving ourselves (1Jn 1:8), and even making God a liar (1Jn 1:10). Having diagnosed our dishonesty as sin, John gave the prescription in 1Jn 1:9—confession, or calling it what it is.

If we confess our dishonesty to God, we are forgiven and thoroughly cleansed. The glorious reward of that cleansing is the freedom to walk in the light (1Jn 1:7). As always, honesty pays! — by Joanie Yoder (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

All falsehood we would cast aside,  
From You, O Lord, we cannot hide;  
Lord, by Your Spirit grant that we  
In word and deed may honest be.  
—DJD

*Truth is so precious  
that some people use it sparingly.*