

1 Jn. 1:5-2:2

I. The message is that God is morally pure and perfect (5)

A. This is the message from God, proclaimed about God (5a-c)

John began with an introductory formula, introducing the message he was about to give.

1. This is the message: (5a)

This section continues on from the preceding verses. In verses 1-4, John told about the One Whom he had seen, heard and touched – the One Who is the bringer of life. In those verses, John proclaimed about this person and this life in order that the readers may have fellowship and joy. In this passage, John proclaimed the message about this same One, and then elaborated on the difference this makes for our life.

This introduces the content of what was proclaimed, first to John, and then by John to his readers. It is a message about God's character which has tremendous implications for our lives.

2. Specifically: The message from God we are proclaiming (5b-c)

a Which we heard from Him (5b)

This message comes from God Himself, through His revelation in Jesus, Whom John had known, by Whom John had been taught, and also through the inspiration to John as an apostle and Biblical author.

b And we are proclaiming to you (5c)

John was a messenger from God to His people, passing along the message – proclaiming it, and spelling out what difference it makes. John here claimed that his writing was not just his opinion, but rather was a message from God Himself.

B. That God is completely pure and morally spotless (5d-e)

1. That God is light (5d)

In the Gospel of John, we learned that Jesus is the light that came into the world and shines, and that He is the light of the world (see Jn. 1:5, 9, 8:12, etc.). These statements assumed His moral purity and concentrated more on His revealing God and overcoming the darkness. But here in First John, the emphasis is completely on the moral purity of God.

The message is that God is completely pure and morally spotless. John said it using his typical symbolic contrast between light and darkness. God is light. God is completely light.

Later in this book (4:8), John will say that God is love, which, of course, is true as well. But first, he needed to stress the moral purity of God, so that we don't misunderstand the fact that God is love. Because, in our twisted society, the word love is made to mean many things, some of which are contrary to God's character. So, in order to understand what it means for God to be love, we must first come to grips with His moral perfection.

2. And darkness is not in Him at all (5e)

John reinforced God's moral perfection, and the fact that He is light, by highlighting that there is no darkness in Him *at all*. And John stated this in strong language. He is all light and no darkness, not a mixture of both. It is not 99% light and 1% darkness. It is 100% light and not even the smallest bit of darkness. There is no blemish, no compromise with evil, nothing impure about God at all. We need to stop thinking that our sins don't matter to God. We need to stop telling people that God doesn't care about their sin. We need to be careful about saying that "God loves people unconditionally." He loves us beyond our comprehension, but it cost the death of His Only Son. So, His love cannot be taken lightly. And we cannot be nonchalant about our sin, which caused the death of Christ. God is too pure to let sin slide. He is too holy to ignore it. He is light, and He will not allow any darkness, because there is no darkness in Him *at all*.

II. Implications: We should live in light of God's purity and perfection (6-2:2)

If it is true that God is light, with no darkness, which it is, then this has some implications for our lives – specifically, how we think about and deal with our own sin. And this is what the rest of this passage is about. It is three rounds of fencing both sides against two opposite mistakes we are in danger of making about our own sin – taking it too lightly, and taking it too seriously (that is forgetting the atonement and the reality of forgiveness).

Each round consists of a negative/positive contrast. And most of these are in the form of a series of conditional “if/then” statements.

A. Don't be hypocritical about your character, but live rightly (6-7)

1. Neg: Don't be hypocritical liars about your relationship with God (6)

a Condition: If we claim to know God, but walk contrary to His character (6a-c)

1) If we would claim relationship with God (6a-b)

a) If we would say: (6a)

This is just an introductory formula to introduce a hypothetical attitude expressed in speech, of which John will then show the consequences.

This is also an expression of John's theme of confessing – that is, claiming something to be true, not just to others, but to ourselves as well. So, the emphasis is not just on what is claimed, but the fact that someone is hypothetically making this claim.

b) That we have fellowship with Him (6b)

If we claim relationship with God. If we claim that everything is great between us and God. This means that we are claiming to have a commonality of attitude, purpose and goals. Of course, it is possible that this claim is true in some cases. But this claim is put in the context of the next proposition, which seems to put this claim in serious doubt.

2) And we walk in the darkness (6c)

This is an example of John's symbolic theme of light vs. darkness. And the reference is to moral darkness. Walking in darkness means to have a lifestyle characterized by the absence of God, by the absence of good. It is living as if God does not exist or matter. It is living in evil, selfishness, and sin, and the opposite to all that is good. It is to be surrounded by all that is shameful.

This proposition is juxtaposed to the previous claim that we are having fellowship with God. If we talk God with our mouths, but live like the devil with our actions. It is a reasonable possibility to claim to be in fellowship with God. And it is certainly possible to walk in darkness. But John is pointing out the unreasonableness of claiming to be in fellowship with God, *while at the same time*, walking in darkness. These two realities don't match, as demonstrated in the following conclusions. And that is why some translate this phrase, “...*even though* we walk in the darkness.”

b Result: we would prove to be false (6d-e)

1) We are lying (6d)

If the condition above is true, then we are hypocritical about our character and relationship with God. We are lying. We are living a falsehood. Our claim to be in fellowship with God is not true. We need to recognize the falsehood of our claims to be in fellowship with God when our lives do not match this claim.

2) And we are not doing/practicing the truth (6e)

Literally, this says, “we are not doing the truth.” This obviously means we are not putting the truth into practice; we are not acting according to the truth.

These two phrases apply to outright pretenders – to those who know they are pretending to be Christian, and know that they really are not. And it applies to those who have been deceived into thinking that they are Christians, that they are in God’s Kingdom, when they have not truly been changed. This is part of the tests that John gave, by which his readers could know if they indeed have eternal life. And therefore, it is a challenge for those who fail the tests to genuinely believe in God’s Son in order to find life.

But it also applies to all of us whenever we do not live up to the standards or God’s total purity. We need to stop being ok with that. We need to stop settling for living in a way that does not completely honor God and conform to His purity. We need to recognize the falsehood of our claims to be in fellowship with God when our lives do not match this claim. We should beware of trusting ourselves, because we often lie to ourselves.

Sometimes we are too hard on ourselves, but often, we are too easy on ourselves.

Because the standard is God’s perfection. God is light with no darkness at all. And here John is protecting us from the error of letting ourselves be comfortable with any hypocritical disconnect between our claims and our lifestyle. That does not mean that we should stop making claims or confessions about our relationship with God. It means that we should strive to match our character to our claims. If we claim to be in fellowship with God, our lifestyle should be in conformity with God.

At this point, all of John’s readers should be panicking, because none of us are free from this hypocrisy at all times. Our lifestyle is not pure like God. As is John’s style, he stated the truth in black and white, all or nothing contrasts. And he was fencing off two opposite errors. So, we should wait to hear the other side of the story before we give in to despair. But we should not use an awareness of John’s exaggerated style to let ourselves off the hook too easily. We should all take this warning seriously and examine ourselves. But we should not automatically conclude that if we are not perfect, then we are not a genuine Christian. That would be to overreact into an opposite error, which John will get to later in this passage. Neither should we give up in despair over our lack of perfection, which would also be an opposite error, which John addressed in the next verse. We should not be hypocritical about our character, but we can, and we should, strive to live a lifestyle that reflects our claims to know God.

2. Pos: Live a lifestyle that proves it (7)

This is the positive side of the first implication. This is the alternative to being hypocritical about our character, claiming to be in fellowship while walking in darkness. And this is also in a conditional “if/then” format.

a Condition: If we live in God's light (7a-b)

1) But if we would walk in the light (7a)

This refers back to verse 5, where God is light, with no darkness. And it is in contrast to walking in darkness, from the previous verse. Throughout the New Testament, living in the light describes a godly lifestyle as opposed to a sinful lifestyle (see Jn. 3:19-21, Eph. 5:8-14).

John wrote that we should walk *in* the light, not walk *as* the light. In other words, John is not here saying that we need to be perfect. He is not saying that we need to live a lifestyle on our own initiative and strength as a condition for something to happen.

Rather, we are to walk in the light, as He is in the light. We are to walk in conformity with Him, on His initiative and strength. Just as walking in darkness means to live a lifestyle influenced by darkness and opposed to God's character, walking in the light means to live a lifestyle influenced and empowered by God's character.

In John's time, this meant to stay faithful to the church, and to John's teaching, instead of going along with the false teachers. In our time, this means to stay faithful to Christ and the Christian lifestyle instead of going along with the many voices tempting us away from Christ to other worldviews and lifestyles.

2) As this One is in the light (7b)

And the standard is Jesus Himself, not our culture or other Christians. The standard is perfection, even though we walk in the light imperfectly. We should aim for perfection, but not despair if we fail to be perfect. Because the quality of our walk is not the issue, it is whether it is in the light. Are we walking on the side of darkness, or on the side of light? Are we living in the environment and mindset where God is absent, and of no consequence? Or in the environment and mindset where God is present and Christ is central to everything?

b Result: We would find fellowship and cleansing from sin (7c-d)

1) We are having fellowship with one another (7c)

There is a question about what John meant when he wrote "fellowship with one another." Does that mean that we each have fellowship with God? Or that we have fellowship with other believers? The answer is "yes." As we saw in v. 3, earlier in this chapter, the fellowship is among believers, because it is mutual relationship with the Father through the Son. Those who walk in darkness may *claim* to have fellowship with God. But those who walk in the light *actually do* have fellowship with God.

2) And the blood of Jesus, His Son, is cleansing us from all sin (7d)

This is more evidence that a perfect lifestyle is not a requirement for walking in the light. It is the aim, but not the prerequisite. The cleansing from sin is the result of coming to the light. It is not the way that we earn our way into the light. We don't cleanse ourselves; we just go to the One Who does. We are cleansed by the blood of Jesus, God's Son. The blood of His violent death on the cross is the means of our forgiveness and spiritual cleansing. There is no other way for us to be clean, but for our penalty to have been paid by Him.

And John wrote that His blood cleanses us from *all* sin. When we are justified by His blood, every sin is covered. Not just the easy ones, not just the small ones, not just the ones we have stopped doing, not just the ones we have made restitution for. And we are being sanctified and cleansed from every sin. Not just the easy ones. The salvation which Christ does is comprehensive and complete, even as we live in the already/not yet tension for a while. The blood of His Son is cleansing us from every sin. As we walk in the light, we are being cleansed, and our lifestyle is being conformed to His.

B. Don't deny you sin, but rather confess it (8-9)

Once again, the implications of God being light are given in a negative/positive contrast, each containing a conditional statement and its results.

1. Neg: Don't deny you sin (8)

a Condition: If we deny that we sin (8a-b)

1) If we would say: (8a)

Just like 6a, this is a formula to introduce a hypothetical attitude expressed in speech, of which John will then show the consequences. This is another example of the confess/deny theme in First John. In this case, the hypothetical speaker is denying something is true, which John will argue is indeed true. So, like verse 6, the content of what is denied is important, but the emphasis is also on the fact that the speaker is denying the truth of what is stated.

2) That we are not having sin (8b)

If we say that we don't have sin. If we deny that sin is still a part of our lives. This is more than just denying that we do specific sinful acts. It is denying that sin is part of us. This denial can come in many forms. In our own day, it often comes in various excuses put in psychological language: "I'm just a product of my upbringing." "I'm just a victim of society." "I act this way because of various systemic forces beyond my control." And in the church, it can often take the form of a naïve perfectionism. This is to forget the already/not yet tension that we live in. It is to think that we already have the perfection that waits for us in the "not yet." That is, thinking that somehow, "I have arrived, because I no longer do those major sins that I used to do." Or "I don't do those 'gross' sins that other people do. Therefore, they are sinners, but I am not." We make categories of "acceptable" sins, which 'just happen' to be those sins which we still do. And we think they are not as sinful as other people's sins. And by these mental gymnastics, we start to think that we have attained a level of sinlessness that others do not have. And there are many other possible forms of this denial of sin that we could fall into. But John simply said that if we deny that we have sin, then certain things are true of us.

b Result: We would prove we don't know the truth (8c-d)

1) We are deceiving ourselves (8c)

All our psychological excuses for our behavior are just that – excuses. Yes, your background and society has influenced you. These things influence everyone. But they do not determine you. Augustine once observed that the same sun makes wax melt and clay harden; the same shaking makes perfume smell sweet and rotten water stink. We all have good and bad circumstances to various degrees. But the way that we respond to them demonstrates the state of our heart, more than these circumstances determine the state of our heart.

And our redefinition of sin is just a dodge, refusing to acknowledge the truth. Sin is sin, even if it is not the same kind of sin as someone else. And if we don't honestly own it, especially to ourselves, we are not just deceiving others, we are lying to ourselves. We deceive ourselves if we think that we are sinless or that our sins don't matter. Sometimes it is easy to spot when other people lie to us, because we know their bad motives. But when we lie to ourselves, we agree with our motives and believe them to be pure. And we have learned various self-defense mechanisms to shelter ourselves from harsh realities. So, it is very difficult to spot our own lies. Therefore, don't trust yourself to judge yourself. That is why we need John to confront us with the fact that denial of sin is the denial of reality. And the real world will always come back to bite us if we deny it.

2) And the truth is not in us (8d)

Truth and deceit are mutually exclusive. This is a harsh statement – to say that the truth does not reside in us. But if the condition above is true, then this statement is true. And it is meant to shock us into change. John said, in essence, if we deny our sin, Christ is not in us. The presence of Christ in our life makes us more conscious of our sin, not less. Because God is pure and will not allow us to continue in sin. God is light, and His light shows all the darkness still in our life. And Christ confronts sin, not to condemn us, but to cleanse us.

2. Pos: Confess your sin and find forgiveness (9)

This is the positive side of the contrast – we should not deny our sin, but rather confess it. And once more, John communicated this in the form of a conditional statement.

a Condition: If we would confess our sins (9a)

The condition is that we confess our sins. But that brings up the question “What does it mean to confess our sins?”

First, this verse does not directly address the question of to whom we are to confess. Our confession is primarily to God Himself, acknowledging our sin to ourselves in His presence. Confessing our sins to other people can be helpful for our accountability and healing, but we do not *need* to confess to another person. And the Bible does not teach formal rules and procedures for required confession to church authorities. Confession to church leadership is optional, and often helpful, but not required. We don’t need a mediator for confession. And at best it is secondary follow up to confession before God. And the word “confess” does not primarily mean to describe out loud what we have done, though that may be a part of it. The word which John used primarily means to acknowledge the truth. It means to concede – to grant that something is indeed factual. It means to agree with God, and to agree with reality that what we did is actually sin, and offensive to God. It means to fully admit that what we did was truly a sin, and not just a ‘mistake.’ It means that we agree that what we did was indeed evil in God’s sight, even though our culture may applaud it. To confess means to be accurate and honest with ourselves before God in our assessment of our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. And, by the way, this also means that if we did something which was not actually sinful by God’s standards, then we don’t apologize for it as if it were. To confess our sins is to admit the truth about our sins, first to ourselves, then to God and possibly to others.

b Result: God’s character provides forgiveness and cleansing (9b-d)

1) God is faithful and just (9b)

This is stated as the effect of our confession, described in the previous proposition. Of course, our confession does not make God faithful and just. He has always been faithful and just, and does not need our confession in order to be so. But John wrote this in such a way as to emphasize God’s faithfulness and justice in the way that He responds to our confession of sin. God’s attributes are the main clause, the forgiveness is subordinate, coming from God’s attributes (see Runge, Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 229). This verse is about God’s character, and all the benefits flow from that. This verse is about His faithfulness and justice, and our confession is just the occasion for us to experience it. The effects of our confession flow from His faithful, just nature more than they are the result of our confession. And these benefits come to us through the cross of Christ, which displayed God’s faithful justice and purchased our forgiveness and cleansing. Our confession is just the occasion He uses to display His faithfulness and justice. He is faithful – to His own character, to His promises, and to His covenant provision in Christ. And He is just – He follows through with the verdict of justification provided by Christ on the cross.

2) Specifically: He will forgive our sins and cleanse us (9c-d)

a) So that He will forgive to us the sins (9c)

And the products of God's faithful and just character flow to us in forgiveness of our sins, as we confess them and trust in Christ's provision for dealing with them. We are forgiven. Our sins are left behind, never to come back to us – never to be held against us.

b) And He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (9d)

And not only are we forgiven, but we are also fully cleansed from all unrighteousness. And notice that once again John has used the word "all." We are cleansed from *all* unrighteousness, so that our righteousness is conformed to His righteousness, both in our legal standing through justification, and also increasingly in our experience and actual moral character and actions through the Spirit's work in our continual sanctification.

C. Don't hide your sins, but forsake them and find restoration (10-2:2)

This third implication is also in the form of a negative/positive contrast: Don't hide sin, but rather, forsake it and find restoration.

1. Neg: Don't deny you have sinned (10)

a Condition: If we deny that we have sinned (10a-b)

1) If we would say: (10a)

This is the same phrase as 6a and 8a. See the comments on those propositions.

2) That we have not sinned (10b)

This phrase is similar to 8b. They have the same overall meaning, but also have different emphases. The emphasis in 8b is that we *have* sin – that is, sin is a part of who we are.

The emphasis in this verse is that we have *sinned* – that is, that we actually committed sinful thoughts, attitudes, and activities. And the tense in this verse emphasized that we have done this, and the consequences of our having sinned are a reality.

The condition is that we deny that we have sinned, thereby denying our guilt and the consequences of being in a sinful state. If we deny sin or minimize it, or treat it as if it is not a big deal. If we try to excuse our sin or shift the blame to someone or something else. If we refuse to admit that we have committed intentional acts of selfish, sinful rebellion against God and His standards, then, John wrote, the following statements apply to us.

b Result: We would prove our thinking is contrary to God's revealed truth (10c-d)

1) We are making/claiming Him to be a liar (10c)

This proposition is similar to 6d where John said "we are lying." But in this verse, instead of saying that *we* lie, John said that we make *God* to be a liar. Now, of course, this does not mean that we cause God to actually become a liar. God cannot, and will never lie. Rather, it means that we claim that God is lying. We claim the exact opposite of what God says, which is the opposite of what it means to confess. We claim that we are right, and conclude that God must therefore be wrong. We claim that we are telling the truth, and so if God says different, then He must be lying. We claim God is wrong in order to make ourselves right. We condemn God in order to justify ourselves.

But John is not buying it, and neither is God. And neither should we. It is much more plausible that God is right and we are wrong – that God is telling the truth and we are lying. John stated this in shocking terms in order to shock us into seeing the truth. If we say that we have not sinned, we are contradicting God, and so *we* must be wrong. And we should confess it instead of accusing God in order to cover for our sin and deception.

2) And His word is not in us (10d)

This is similar to 8d, where John wrote “the truth is not in us.” In this verse, “His Word” is parallel to “the truth.” In John 17:17, Jesus equated the two when He said, “Your Word is truth.”

If we contradict God, then it shows that His Word is not in us. We have not yet heard, believed, and internalized the truth from God to the extent that we should have. If God’s Word – His truth – really takes up residence in our minds, hearts, and lives, then we will acknowledge we have sinned in order to embrace the solution to our sin in Christ. Just like Jesus said, “Those who are healthy don’t need a doctor.” (Matt. 9:12, Mk. 2:17, Lk. 5:31). In the same way, we need to admit we have the disease of sin, in order to seek the cure. We need to admit we need Jesus in order to find Jesus and embrace Him for all that He is on our behalf. We need to admit that we are not perfect, quite the contrary. We are sinful and sick and helpless to solve the problem on our own. We need a savior. And until we admit this, the truth is not in us. We are not living in the truth, but in some bizarre fantasy world, which will damn us unless we break free from its deception.

2. Pos: You should not sin (2:1-2)

The positive side of this contrast also contains a positive/negative contrast

a Pos: Don’t sin (1a-b)

1) My children, I am writing these things to you (1a)

This is one of the statements in First John where he told his readers why he was writing – that is, what he was trying to accomplish by writing to them (see also 1:4, 2:26 and 5:13). These statements not only inform the readers of John’s intention, they also serve to highlight the statements he was making as important and to strongly encourage his readers to fulfill the purpose he was intending for them.

2) So that you will not sin (1b)

This is one of the purposes of John writing: so that his readers would not sin. This is an implied command, “Don’t sin!” And we constantly need to hear this, first as a command not to sin. We still sin, and we shouldn’t. Don’t be complacent. Don’t make peace with any sin in your life at all. Don’t get lazy about combatting sin. God is light with NO darkness at all. Therefore, we should no longer allow any darkness in our lives. But this is also a promise and an encouragement that we don’t have to sin. We can overcome. We can *not* sin. We won’t be completely sinless in this life. But we can sin a lot less than we used to. And we can continually progress in our victory over sin. Throughout this letter, John strongly stated that we must, and we will, overcome sin if we are born from God. So, keep fighting sin, never give in. Don’t sin.

b Neg: But if you sin, there is forgiveness through Christ (1c-2)

On the negative side, for those times when we do sin, John reminded his readers that Christ is completely sufficient to take care of it. This comes in the form of one last conditional statement.

1) Condition: And if someone would sin (1c)

Even as we are pursuing perfection in our fight against sin, John is realistic that we will not reach perfection and will need a remedy for our failures. So, he gave us wisdom for those times when we do sin. And this is introduced with another conditional statement, “if someone would sin...”

2) Result: We have an advocate, Who is our propitiation with the Father (1d-2)

If the condition is true, whenever someone does sin, then we have a solution in the person of Jesus. And Jesus is described in two ways, both of which directly address the problem of our sin.

a) We are having an advocate to the Father – Jesus Christ, the righteous One (1d)

First, we have a helper, an advocate before the Father. John used a term that basically means a helper. This term was used for the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John (see Jn. 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7). But here it is applied to Jesus. This term often took on more specific connotations of helping in particular ways, depending on the context. For instance, in that culture, this word would be used for their equivalent of a defense attorney at a trial, or for an influential person working on someone's behalf politically. So, it can have the idea of an advocate using their influence, working to help someone. And that is probably what it means in this verse. Jesus is our advocate, working on our account toward the Father. He stands with us against the legal penalty of our sin. This is emphasized by His description as being Jesus Christ – the Righteous One. His righteousness stands in our place before the Father, so that we are considered righteous (see 2 Cor. 5:21). And the book of Hebrews also mentioned that Jesus continually lives in God's presence to intercede for us (see Heb. 7:25). And part of that intercession is for the pardon of our sin on the basis of the justification accomplished by Christ on the cross.

b) Specifically: He is a propitiation of sins (2)

(1) And this One is a propitiation concerning our sins (2a)

The previous proposition is reinforced in this verse, where Jesus is called a propitiation concerning our sin. "Propitiation" is sometimes translated "sacrifice of atonement." And this word means the thing or action which turns aside God's wrath. It is the sufficient sacrifice that actually satisfies God's wrath against our sin, so that we are no longer under God's displeasure. Before propitiation, God was justly angry with us; and after propitiation, He is now benevolently disposed toward us. Propitiation brings about the change from God's enmity toward us to His favor toward us.

If we sin, Jesus is the One Who made atonement – Who made propitiation for our sin. And so, our sin was covered by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Therefore, Jesus has made sufficient provision for our every sin, not only our past sins, but also our present and future sins. Therefore, Jesus is the solution for whenever anyone sins. The obvious inference is that we should go to Christ for the atonement and forgiveness of our sins, whenever we do sin. We should not sin, but when we do, Christ has fully provided the sufficient remedy.

(2) Not concerning ours only, but also the whole world (2b-c)

(a) But not concerning ours only (2b)

(b) But also concerning the whole of the world (2c)

John went on to clarify that He is not only the propitiation concerning ours, but also concerning the whole of the world. This passage is often brought into a wider theological debate, which goes beyond this passage. Two cautions need to be made, based on what this verse says, and on the reason why John included this statement in this passage:

First, we should not make this too wide. Because we know from the rest of the New Testament, that not everyone in the world will be saved. And this term "propitiation" means that which actually turns aside wrath. So, John probably did not mean to imply that every individual in the world receives the benefits of this propitiation, or God would be unjust in punishing anyone.

Rather, John is probably addressing the mindset of the false teachers. That is the mindset that “we are the right ones and everyone else is wrong.” “We are the ‘holy few’ and the rest of the world is out of luck.” And that is the second caution, that we don’t make this too narrow. John is probably saying that Jesus is not just for our little remnant, our little group. But Jesus is the propitiation for all genuine Christians of all times around the world. God is doing more than what we see in our community. And Jesus has this worldwide mindset, which is greater than just *our* community, greater than just *our* sin. If we fall into the mindset that Jesus only exists to deal with ‘my’ personal sins, our Jesus is too small. Yes, Jesus is the propitiation for our sins – that is the point of these verses. But John also emphasized that He is the propitiation, not *only* for just ours, but for the whole of the world. He is not just *our* savior, but the savior of the world.

Summary:

In this passage, John was trying to protect his readers from two opposite errors regarding their sin. He went back and forth protecting from one error and then giving the opposite warning and correction so that his readers would not rebound into the error on the other side. And the two dangers he addressed were: not taking their sin seriously enough, and taking their sin too seriously – that is, forgetting the hope of atonement and forgiveness.

The first error is minimizing of sin, either by denying that we sin or by denying it is a big deal. Sometimes we minimize our sin by trying to redefine God’s Law so that His standards are low enough that we can satisfy them. This is like when Jesus said to the Pharisees, “you set aside the Law of God and replace it with rules made by men.” (see Mark 7:9). And these man-made rules usually emphasize the things that we can easily keep and things that other people don’t keep, so we can feel superior to them. John addressed this by challenging his readers that we are lying whenever we deny our own sin. And his ultimate solution to this danger is to remind us that God is light, with NO darkness at all. God’s standard is perfection. So, we cannot live up to His standard. Neither can we justify ourselves when we fail to do so. God’s perfection is too perfect for us. Therefore, we need to take sin very seriously, because it brings us under God’s just wrath.

And John also protects us from the opposite error of falling into despair and hopelessness on account of our sin and failure to live up to God’s standards. The solution is that God has provided Christ to cover our sin. God is light, but Christ has overcome the darkness. Christ is our advocate and propitiation before the Father. Therefore, when we confess our sin, He forgives us and cleanses us because of His faithfulness and justice. When we walk in the light, as He is in the light, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Sin is a huge problem, but Christ is an even greater cure. And the implications John gave in this passage force us to live in light of both of these realities – fighting against sin and growing in our victory over it, but also going to Jesus for His covering whenever we do sin.