

**I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT**  
**III. Discerning True And False Views Of Sin In Believers**  
**(1 John 1:8-2:2)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. John wrote 1 John to counter heretical views (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment, and is thus “filled with contrasts – light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:7-12, 16-21).” (Ryrie Study Bible KJV, 1978, “Introduction to the First Letter of John: Contents,” p. 1770)
- B. We view the epistle for much needed spiritual discernment in our own era, and we study John’s instruction on discerning true from false views of sin in believers in 1 John 1:8-2:2 for insight, application and edification:

**II. Discerning True And False Views Of Sin In Believers, 1 John 1:8-2:2.**

- A. 1 John 1:7 teaches that when we walk in the light of God’s revealed truths in Scripture and in the earthly life of His Son, Jesus Christ, we experience true spiritual fellowship with the Lord. Consequently, some have concluded that having achieved experiential fellowship with the Lord, they have achieved sinless perfection.
- B. This is a false conclusion, and John countered it in 1 John 1:8 (as follows):
1. John wrote that if we claim that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
  2. By “sin” here, John referred to the sin **nature**, the word for “sin” in the Greek text being *hamartian*, the accusative singular form of the noun, *hamartia* that refers to “the indwelling principle of sin rather than to acts of sin.” (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 John 1:8; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 814; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 18) We believers may fellowship with the Lord in practical righteousness, but all the while that we do fellowship with Him, we need the continual cleansing from the effects of the sin nature that is with us until we die or are raptured, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 (with 1 John 1:7b).
- C. Since we believers in Christ still have our sinful natures, we can still commit sin, and doing so obstructs our experiential fellowship with the Lord. John then instructs us on responding to this obstruction in 1 John 1:9:
1. If we confess our acts of sin (*tas hamartias*, literally “the sins,” the accusative plural of *hamartia*) to God, He is both faithful and righteous to forgive us those sins (*tas hamartias* again) and to purify us from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9 NIV. (Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.)
  2. The second article *tas* is likely “the article of previous reference,” so God forgives us of the sins we **name** in our confession, but since there may be layers of unrighteousness piled up behind the sins we confess that we may not know exist, God in grace purifies us of those wrongs when we confess what we know is sin! Thus, there is “no need to agonize over sins of which one is unaware,” Ibid., B. K. C., N. T., p. 886.
- D. If we believers claim that we have not committed acts of sin as believers, “sinned” here being *hemartekamen*, the first person plural perfect indicative of *hemartano*, “to sin” (Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 187, 17), we make God out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us, 1 John 1:10. “Even believers sin; if we deny past sin and present guilt, we are deceiving ourselves, mocking God, and not walking in the light,” Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 John 1:10.
- E. Lest his readers conclude that John’s “insistence on the sinfulness of Christians somehow would discourage holiness,” John added in 1 John 2:1a that the opposite was so, that he desired that his beloved readers **not** sin! Thus, John wrote about sin and believers in 1 John 1:8 and 10 to “put perceptive Christians on guard against” sinning due to the believer’s vulnerability to committing acts of sin, Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.
- F. However, if we **do** commit a sin, we have “One who speaks to the Father in our defense,” Jesus Christ the Righteous One, 1 John 2:1b NIV. Wonderfully, He is the propitiation, or the satisfaction of God’s wrath against our sin, and not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2:2. This verse strongly implies the Unlimited Atonement of Christ’s cross opposite the Limited Atonement view of some Calvinists!

***Lesson:*** *We believers in Christ still possess our pre-salvation sinful natures, so we can still sin as believers. If we DO sin, we should confess it and see God be graciously faithful and righteous to forgive us that sin and to cleanse us from other layers of unrighteousness that may have built up behind that sin to our ignorance. We believers have all sinned, so we can never deny that fact, and we should strive by God’s grace not to sin since we are vulnerable to doing so. Nevertheless, if we DO sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One, our Propitiation, and the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world.*

***Application:*** *May we believers realize that we are vulnerable to committing sin, that we then live carefully by grace.*