

Going Deeper: Crime and Punishment 1 John 2:1-6

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We live in a society where crime is expected to be punished. We hear about people in the news who break the law, go to trial, and then receive the punishment their crimes deserve. Sometimes we feel the punishment is too harsh for the given infraction. Other times it appears as though the criminal got off too easy. We argue about capital punishment and whether or not the justice system is doing enough to reform prisoners. Our justice system looks at crimes as felonies and misdemeanors. Some crimes are worse than others. Even murder is graded as manslaughter, 1st degree or 2nd degree. Some prisoners are sent to minimum security prisons while others go to maximum security prisons with razor wire fences and armed guards in towers. Some prisoners get parole or time off for good behavior while others get life with no chance for parole. Criminals are separated from the rest of society until such a time when they are deemed reformed enough to rejoin society. Our measuring stick for crime varies depending on who is doing the measuring.

One thing is certain, we don't view crime the way God does. God has an even higher standard than we do. God has a specific name for crime...sin. And all sin is bad. In fact, we've all broken the law. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." God's required punishment for any sin is capital punishment. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death..." Wow. It kind of makes our justice system seem weak doesn't it? So what hope do we have? Jesus! John writes to believers to warn them about the consequences of sin and to encourage them to live lives that reflect a love for Jesus.

John wrote this letter to address an early form of Gnosticism which was being spread through the church. Gnostics falsely believed that matter was entirely evil and the spirit was entirely good. The body, being matter, was evil and until the spirit was separated from it holiness could not be achieved. They did not believe that holiness came from faith in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice. Therefore sin had no consequence. Gnostics believed that, once separated from the body, all spirits were holy. John wanted believers to have a clear understanding of sin, consequences, and Jesus. He didn't want the heretical teachings of some to confuse people.

Read 1 John 2:1-6.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) In view of Romans 3:23, how is it possible to not sin according to 1 John 2:1?
- 2) How does Jesus speak in our defense?

- 3) What would happen if we didn't have Jesus as an atoning sacrifice?
- 4) In verse 2, John says that Jesus atones for the sins of the whole world. Does this include other religious faiths? How about other denominations? How does it work? Are there any limitations?
- 5) What does v. 3 tell us about knowing Jesus?
- 6) Which commands is John referring to? Is that even possible?
- 7) What do you think John means by God's love being made complete in us?

Life Application

- 8) In what areas of your life are you not walking as Jesus did?
- 9) What should you do about it?
- 10) Are there any consequences for not doing something about it? What are they?
- 11) What is God calling you to do?