



1 John 1.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I have long felt that John nearly perfectly encapsulates the terrible human bind in which we all find ourselves. He admonishes, on the one hand, "that ye sin not."¹ A tall task, indeed. In fact, an impossible one. To quote Jean Calvin, "I call impossible what has never been." Worse still, John energetically charges, "he that committeth sin is of the devil."² Now, no one wants to be accused of being "of the devil"! So, the task is clear. If we wish to avoid being "of the devil," we must avoid sinning. And if by chance we do fall prey to the devil through sin... uhm, uh... I guess we best not admit it. But, the same John who would have us avoid sin, will not allow us to disavow it. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." So, we mustn't sin lest we be characterized as "of the devil," but we mustn't say that we do not sin thus making ourselves "of the devil." Quite the bind, indeed.

Little wonder that acknowledging sin and error is so difficult. We are damned if we do and damned if we don't. I don't know if this particular bind played a role in the Psalmist's unwillingness to acknowledge sin (it could easily have been the result of personal hubris), but unwilling he was. And he paid a steep price for his belligerence.

"When I kept silence,
my bones waxed old
through my roaring all the day long.
For day and night
thy hand was heavy upon me:
my moisture is turned
into the drought of summer."³

Finally, humbled by the Lord's heavy hand of chastisement, the Psalmist made his open confession,

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
and mine iniquity have I not hid.
I said, 'I will confess
my transgressions unto the LORD...'"

And he was immediately rewarded,

¹ 1 John 2.¹

² 1 John 3.⁸

³ Psalm 32.³⁻⁴

“Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”⁴

There can be, then, no refusal to acknowledge sin. Refusal to acknowledge personal sin is not only evidence of self-deception, it is evidence of having been deceived by untruth. Refusal to acknowledge sin is also a violent attack upon God, Himself, making of Him a liar. For it is His own testimony that He is “faithful.” He is devoted and committed to us. He does indeed “forgive us our sins,” thereby rescuing us from the grasp of “that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell.”⁵ His faithfulness is stronger than sin and is responsive to our acknowledgement of sin, however humiliating and incriminating it may be. Indeed, we will find him advocating for us, often against ourselves and our own self-recriminations, for we might just be the most awful monster we ever face.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁴ Psalm 32.⁵

⁵ 2 Nephi 9.¹⁹