

32 - 1 John 3:4 - 2018-01-06

Call to Worship: Isaiah 25:1

Scripture Reading: Psalm 32

Sermon: "Sin Is Lawlessness"

Benediction: Micah 7:18-19

## INTRODUCTION

The disciples of Jesus Christ the Son of God have hope in His return; we have a sure hope that when He is revealed at His return, we shall be like Him, raised immortal, incorruptible, to be with Him forever. That hope leads us to purify ourselves. We know He will purify us finally and completely when He comes back, but as He has always been pure, and is already pure now, we are not content to live in impurity awaiting His return; instead, we purify ourselves now, as He is pure; all disciples of Jesus Christ have this hope and do this work of purifying.

You know that was our study last week. As we go on in 1 John, we will see that theme of purifying ourselves contrasted with those who live a life of sin, not purifying themselves. But before leaning heavily on the term "sin," the apostle John defines sin for us, that we can think about it rightly. So, as we study today's verse,

**Let us rightly understand sin as lawlessness, and receive the good news of Jesus Christ in those terms.**

## TEXT

1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

## BODY

**Let us rightly understand sin as lawlessness, and receive the good news of Jesus Christ in those terms.**

## I. Understand Sin As Lawlessness

### A. From the words of this verse

1. I worked up a literal translation of this: Everyone who does the sin also the unlawfulness does, and the sin is the unlawfulness.
  - a) sin is a noun here, not a verb; the main verb is “to do” or “to commit” or “to practice” or “to make;” everyone who “does sin” or “commits sin” or “practices sin”
  - b) the word containing the root “law” is the Greek *anomia* un + lawfulness; so “unlawfulness” or “illegality” but we don’t really use those words that way in English; our word for this is “lawlessness”
  - c) so: does unlawfulness; or commits illegality; or practices lawlessness
  - d) so, literally: Everyone who does the sin also the unlawfulness does; and the sin is the unlawfulness
  - e) But as literal as possible and still read as actual English: Everyone who does sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.
2. When I looked through the various translations, I found that the YLT and the RV/ASV were very similar to what I had come up with as a literal translation; while the ASV was very similar to what I had come up with that actually makes good English:
  - a) YLT: Every one who is doing the sin, the lawlessness also he doth do, and the sin is the lawlessness.
  - b) ASV Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.
3. If you are working from the Geneva or KJV, please grasp this:
  - a) as far as I can tell, “lawlessness” was a very obscure word at the time, not suitable for use in an English translation; so the translators substituted “transgresseth the law,” which communicates the concept, but is not literal, because the word “transgression” is not in the Greek
  - b) the biblical phrase is literally “does lawlessness” rather than Gen/KJV “transgresseth also the law;”
  - c) so the Gen/KJV rendering is conceptually accurate, but have in your mind also the more literal rendering “does lawlessness”
  - d) there is a reason why we need the more general “lawlessness” instead of the more specific “transgresseth the law,” which I will explain in a minute
4. Similarly, if you are working from the HCSB, please grasp this:
  - a) the word “break” is not in the Greek
  - b) the biblical phrase is literally “does lawlessness” rather than “breaks the law”

- c) there is a reason why we need the more general “lawlessness” instead of the more specific “breaks the law,” which I will explain in a minute
  - 5. the reference to “law” or *nomos* in the word “lawlessness” or *anomia* is to the law of God; to whatever commands from God are in force for the person in question; primary reference is to the natural-moral law, that which applies to all people of all time, but including also whatever positive law applies to a person, but NOT including whatever positive law does NOT apply
    - a) e.g. baptism
    - b) e.g. circumcision
    - c) e.g. Sabbath vs. sabbaths
- B. From our catechism’s reference to this verse as the primary place in the whole bible for defining sin
  - 1. Baptist Catechism (same as Shorter Catechism Q14)
    - a) Q18: What is sin?
    - b) A: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. (1 John 3:4; Romans 5:13)
  - 2. put forth by Westminster Assembly 1647; scripture references added 1648
  - 3. put forth by Baptists 1693 “Keach’s Catechism,” same language, same reference to 1 John 3:4
  - 4. put forth by Charleston Association 1813, same language, same reference to 1 John 3:4
  - 5. put forth by Spurgeon 1855, same language, same reference to 1 John 3:4
  - 6. notice how our forefathers, during the Puritan period, saw fit to explain that not only transgression of the law of God, but any want of conformity unto it, is what is meant in 1 John 3:4 by *anomia* or “lawlessness;” that’s part of why the GEN/KJV rendering of “transgression of the law” or the HCSB rendering of “breaking the law” leaves us with a bit of a problem; because we need the more general term “lawlessness” to take in both aspects of sin: 1) actual transgression, and 2) any want or lack of conformity
- C. As correction to any wrong ideas we may have about what sin is
  - 1. I have heard sin defined countless times as “missing the mark”
    - a) this has its origin in something true, that both the Hebrew and Greek words for sin are forms of a verb for “to miss;” apparently the Greek word for “sin,” *hamartia*, has some relation to missing the target in archery
    - b) but, on that basis, it has been put to me in sermons that to sin is like being an archer who shoots at a distant target, but misses, coming up short
    - c) so, a sinner is like an archer who takes up the right instruments, uses basically the correct procedure, follows the rules of the

- contest, takes careful aim at the correct target, and and makes his best effort to hit the target, but somehow misses
- d) that is NOT a good picture to help us understand ourselves as sinners! it is not true to what the bible teaches us, and it is NOT a biblical description
  - e) here is the biblical picture: a sinner is like a gardener who has been told by the owner of the garden to eat anything he pleases from the garden while he does his work, except the fruit of one certain tree; the gardener thinks about it, and, knowing he is disobeying the express will of the owner, steals a piece of the fruit and eats it anyway
  - f) I urge you, if you have been told that sin is “missing the mark,” please replace that faulty notion with the words of the scriptures: “sin is lawlessness,” along with the interpretive words of the catechism: sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God
2. we had an incident in this church a few years ago where a guest very forcefully warned one of the young men that if the Lord were leading him to become a police officer, or to go into some other career, not do do so would be sin
- a) we have encountered that before, too; young people, typically are told that the thoughts they have in their mind are God speaking to them; when He speaks inside their minds, they are obliged to do what those words have told them
  - b) that system is false; what is sin and what is not, God already has made known to us in the bible; He does not do so privately to each person individually; sin is NOT disobedience to what you think God is telling you inside your spirit; sin is disobedience to God’s law, which is revealed in the bible
3. whatever other false definitions of sin there may be, that you may have thought of yourself or been taught, correct with this correct definition of sin as lawlessness

Understand Sin As Lawlessness

II. Hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ Regarding Sin as Lawlessness

- A. When sin is put to us in this way, specifically being equated with lawlessness, the good news of God's dealing with this sin for His people is proclaimed along with it
- B. Let me mention here that in these two places, the Greek *anomia*, "lawlessness" is translated in the Geneva and KJV as "iniquities"
  - 1. as I mentioned already, the word "lawlessness" was not available to those translators in the 1500s and early 1600s
  - 2. "iniquitatum" was the well-known Latin term from the Vulgate; the translators used "iniquities"
  - 3. so in these two verses I am about to show you, understand that where you see "iniquities" the Greek is actually "lawlessness"

C. In Romans 4, quoting Psalm 32

Romans 4:7-8 (quoting Psalm 32:1-2) "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE **LAWLESS DEEDS [G548 *anomia* plural *anomia*]** ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE **SINS [G266 *hamartia*]** ARE COVERED; (8) BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD SHALL NOT IMPUTE SIN."

- 1. see that here, in the OT style where two lines express the same concept in different words, we see *anomia* and *hamartia*, that is, lawlessness and sins, set down as equivalent
- 2. and see that the good news regarding sin as lawlessness is proclaimed
  - a) there is a blessing from God on some people
  - b) their lawlessness, their *anomia* is forgiven!
  - c) their sins, their *hamartia*, are covered!
  - d) so, for such a blessed person, the Lord does not count his sin against him!
  - e) see above what Paul is writing about
    - (1) Rom 4:3 Abraham was counted righteous through believing God
    - (2) Rom 4:22-25 the record of Abraham having righteousness imputed to him through faith was not written primarily for his sake, but for ours, so we can know that for those who believe in Jesus as having been crucified for our offenses, and raised up for our justification, sin, which is lawlessness is not counted against us, but instead the righteousness of Jesus Christ is counted for us!
  - f) what love from God, who would send His own Son to live a man and die on the cross to procure salvation for the very creatures who had so blatantly transgressed His own perfect law!
  - g) how great a Savior the Son of God, Jesus Christ must be, if in Him the very sinners who refused to follow the perfect law of love, He can personally save by His life and death and resurrection!

- h) our sin is lawlessness, but for those in Christ Jesus, God does not count it against us, because it is forgiven and covered by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ!

D. In Hebrews 10, quoting Jeremiah 31

Hebrews 10:16-17 (quoting Jeremiah 31:31, 34) "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR HEARTS, AND IN THEIR MINDS I WILL WRITE THEM," (17) then He adds, "THEIR **SINS [G266 *hamartia*]** AND THEIR **LAWLESS DEEDS [G548 *anomia*]** I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.

1. see that here, also, we see *anomia* and *hamartia*, that is, lawlessnesses and sins, set down as equivalent
2. in the days of the Old Covenant made through Moses, not everyone in that covenant was forgiven his sins, his lawlessness; many remained in unbelief and unrepentance, and received the just penalty for their sin
3. but in these days of the New Covenant made through Jesus Christ, everyone in that covenant is forgiven his sins, his lawlessness; which forgiveness is expressed in these amazing words of the God: "Their sins and their lawlessness I will remember no more."

### III. APPLICATION

A. Learn and teach God's law

1. the Ten Commandments
2. expositions of them in catechisms and elsewhere

B. Add this to your conscience alongside the previous lines

1. recall last week's instruction about fortifying your conscience
2. your conscience is strengthened when truths are firmly fixed there, especially when falsehood is replaced by truth
3. so take this truth and place it firmly in your conscience: Everyone who does sin does lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.
4. that will help you when you need to make judgments about people who say that they know Him
  - a) if you need to know if they are just remaining in sin instead of purifying themselves and doing righteousness, you know to define sin as "lawlessness" or "any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God"

C. Be convinced of your need for a Savior

### CONCLUSION

**Let us rightly understand sin as lawlessness, and receive the good news of Jesus Christ in those terms.**

VUL: omnis qui facit peccatum et iniquitatem facit et peccatum est iniquitas

TYN: Whosoever committeth synne committeth vnrighteousnes also for synne is vnrighteousnes.

GENEVA Whosoeuer committeth sinne, transgresseth also the Law: for sinne is the transgression of the Lawe.

KJV Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

YLT: Every one who is doing the sin, the lawlessness also he doth do, and the sin is the lawlessness.

ASV Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

RSV: Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

NKJV Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

HCSB: Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law.

ESV Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

JRY:

Everyone who does the sin also the lawlessness does, and the sin is the lawlessness.

for previous work on “lawlessness” see 13 - Olivet Discourse - 2018-02-11

sin G266 *hamartia* noun

Strong: from G264 *hamartano*; properly to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize)

JFB: literally, “a missing of the mark.” God’s will being that mark to be ever aimed at.

H2403 *chattaah*

from H2398 *chata*

-Strong: A primitive root; properly to miss; hence to sin

commits G4160 *poieo* verb - to make or to do

RWP: The present active participle (*poiōn*) means the habit of doing sin.

lawlessness G458 *anomia* noun

from G459 *anomos* lawless; not subject to law; without law; unlawful

from G3551 *nomos* law

Thayer:

1. the condition of without law
  - a. because ignorant of it
  - b. because of violating it
2. contempt and violation of law; in iniquity, wickedness

Strong: violation of law or (generally) wickedness, iniquity

Barnes: It properly means lawlessness, in the sense that the requirements of the law are not conformed to, or complied with; that is, either by not obeying it, or by positively violating it.

is G2076 *esti* verb - third person “to be”

RWP:

The article with both subject and predicate makes them coextensive and so interchangeable.

JRY:

Evidently it is important for us to identify sin with lawlessness.

1689.6.1

Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof, yet he did not long abide in this honour; Satan using the subtlety of the serpent to subdue Eve, then by her seducing

Adam, who, without any compulsion, **did willfully transgress the law** of their creation, and the command given unto them, in eating the forbidden fruit, which God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

Baptist Catechism (same as Shorter Catechism Q14)

Q18: What is sin?

A: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

(1 John 3:4; Romans 5:13)

Romans 5:13 For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

put forth by Westminster Assembly 1647; scripture references added 1648

put forth by Baptists 1693 "Keach's Catechism," same language, same reference to 1 John 3:4

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put forth by Spurgeon 1855, same language, same reference to 1 John 3:4

Larger Catechism

Q. 24. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.

Chytraci Catechesis Wittenberg 1556

peccatum est quicquid non congruit cum norma legis divinae . . . est defectus vel inclinatio vel actio pugnans cum lege Dei

Romans 4:7-8 (quoting Psalm 32:1-2) "**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS [G548 anomia] ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS [G266 hamartia] ARE COVERED;** (8) **BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD SHALL NOT IMPUTE SIN.**"

VUL: beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates et quorum tecta sunt peccata

GEN: Blessed are they, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sinnes are couered.

KJV: Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

YLT: Happy they whose lawless acts were forgiven, and whose sins were covered.

Robert Young 1862, revised 1887 and 1898

ASV: Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, And whose sins are covered.

RSV: Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered

NASB: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered.

NKJV: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

HCSB/CSB: whose lawless acts

ESV: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

Hebrews 10:16-17 (quoting Jeremiah 31:31, 34) "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR HEARTS, AND IN THEIR MINDS I WILL WRITE THEM," (17) then He adds, "THEIR **SINS [G266 hamartia]** AND THEIR **LAWLESS DEEDS [G548 anomia]** I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

VUL: et peccatorum et iniquitatum eorum iam non recordabor amplius

LUTHER: und ihrer Sünden und Ungerechtigkeit will ich nicht mehr gedenken

BIJBEL: En Ik zal niet meer denken aan alles waarin ze Mij ongehoorzaam zijn geweest

TYN: and their synnes and iniquities will I remember no moare.

GEN: And their sinnes and iniquities will I remember no more.

KJV: And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

YLT: and their sins and their lawlessness I will remember no more.

ASV: And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

NASB: And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

NKJV: then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

ESV: then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Romans 2:11-16 For there is no partiality with God. (12) For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (13) (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; (14) for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, (15) who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) (16) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Romans 5:12-14 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned-- (13) (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

ISBE:

ISBE: A fairly exact definition of sin based on Biblical data would be that sin is the transgression of the law of God (1Jo\_3:4). Ordinarily, sin is defined simply as "the transgression of the law," but the idea of God is so completely the essential conception of the entire Biblical revelation that we can best define sin as disobedience to the law of God.

Geneva:

The rule of this purity can from no where else be taken but from the law of God, the transgression of which is called sin.

A short definition of sin.

JFB:

definition of sin in general. The Greek having the article to both, implies that they are convertible terms.

Spurgeon:

This is the best definition of sin that can be given; let none of us ever tolerate any other idea of sin but that it is "the transgression of the law."

Barnes:

The object of the apostle is not so much to define sin, as to deter from its commission by stating what is its essential nature - though he has in fact given the best definition of it that could be given.

As a definition of the nature of sin. It teaches.

- (a) that there is a rule of law by which the conduct of mankind is to be regulated and governed, and to which it is to be conformed.
- (b) That there is sin in all cases where that law is not complied with; and that all who do not comply with it are guilty before God.
- (c) That the particular thing which determines the guilt of sin, and which measures it, is that it is a departure from law, and consequently that there is no sin where there is no departure from law.

The law is the expression of what is the will of God as to what we shall do; and when that is not done, there is sin.

The law determines what we shall love or not love; when our passions and appetites shall be bounded and restrained, and to what extent they may be indulged; what shall be our motives and aims in living; how we shall act toward God and toward people; and whenever, in any of these respects, its requirements are not complied with, there is sin.

This important verse, therefore, may be considered in two aspects - as a definition of the nature of sin, and as an argument against indulgence in it, or against committing it.

With such views of the law and of sin - of his obligations, and of the evils of disobedience - a Christian should not, and will not, deliberately and habitually violate the law of God.

Ellicott:

The very object of Christ's coming was to take away our sins by atonement, and their power in us by reformation. He is Himself sinless. Those who really rest firm in Him cannot be habitual sinners, nor, on the other hand, can habitual sinners be really in Him.

The fact that Christ is perfectly sinless is dwelt on because He is the vital element of the Christian's being, and if present in him must produce a result like Himself.

Gill:

his, in connection with what follows, is true of any sin, great or small, but here designs a course of sinning, a wilful, obstinate, persisting in sin:

the law of God, and that not the ceremonial law, which was now abolished, and therefore to neglect it, or go contrary to it, was not sinful; but the moral law, and every precept of it, which regards love to God or to our neighbour, and which may be transgressed in thought, word, and deed

JRY:

Is sin not doing the will of God? Yes, but how do we know what is the will of God? the law!

Prelude: ~~Trinity 734 Psalm 7 Jehovah, My God~~

Trinity 735 Psalm 17 Hear, O My Lord

Anna - piano

Camille - flute

Jimmy - rhythm

~~Trinity 669 Wonderful Love~~

Trinity 677 "Nothing But the Blood"

Camille - piano - transpose to Db

Jimmy - rhythm

~~Trinity 735 Psalm 17 Hear, O My Lord~~

Trinity 734 Psalm 7 Jehovah, My God

Anna - piano

Camille - flute

Grace 70 How Great Thou Art

Anna - piano

Jimmy - rhythm

Camille - sing

Grace 82 In Christ Alone

Camille - piano - transpose to Db

Anna - clarinet or sing