

Sin Less, Not Sinless (1 John 2:28-3:10)

Summary:

1. *He walks in the light as God is in the light, and is the light (1:5-7)*
 2. *He sees his sin, confesses it, and repents of it (1:8-10)*
 3. *He abides in Jesus and walks as He walked (2:1-6)*
 4. *He loves the brethren (2:7-11)*
 5. *He does not love the world (2:15-17)*
- 6. He practices righteousness considering Christ's return (2:28-3:3)**
- The apostle John, in affectionate words ("little children"), is encouraging the saints to look forward to the return of Christ with confidence, not shame.
 - Since nothing is hidden from God's sight (Lk. 8:17; Heb. 4:13), John wants his readers to have the assurance of salvation not because of their profession alone, but along with it their practice. He will use the theme "you know" (2:29; 3:2, 5) and "abide" (2:28, 9) to encourage that assurance.
 - This "knowing" is more than just intellectual assertion but intimate belonging with an outward manifestation of righteousness. John also intends his readers to interrogate themselves and reflect on whether they truly "know."
 - They should know because they have the anointing of the Holy One (2:20).
 - This "knowing" is yoked to action, for doctrine demands duty, and revelation mandates responsibility.
 - Knowing God equates to practicing righteousness because God's seed abides in him (v.9). John is not focused on justification but on progressive sanctification and will give a holistic approach.
 - "If" (2:29) you "know" Him (2:3-4), abide in Him (2:6), are in the light (2:9), and practice righteousness (2:29), you can be assured that you have been born of Him.
 - The practice of righteousness is contradistinction to man's righteousness.
 - While man's righteousness is a polluted garment (Isa. 64:6), there is a righteousness from God that He works out through regenerated sinners (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 21, 25, 26; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:29). It is only when we are born again through regeneration that God's righteousness can be in us (2 Cor. 5:17, 21), not according to works (Titus 3:5) but through faith alone (Rom. 4:6, 11).
 - While John does not provide additional details to the timeline or events surrounding the return of Christ, he wants the recipients to know that Jesus is returning, and when He returns, they will be like Him (Phil. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:11-13).
 - This hope (3:3) will motivate the believer to cleanse himself so that he can look forward to Christ's return, having nothing to be ashamed about.
- 7. He sins less, not sinless (3:4-7)**
- False teachers had infiltrated the infant churches in Ephesus. They encouraged a life without the law of God (antinomianism) through what we would call "free grace."
 - To combat this pretense, John reminds his readers that whoever "practices" sin is practicing lawlessness (v.4).
 - John is speaking of the carnal person - the one dominated ("practice") by sin capacity. A true believer has God's law written on his heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10-16). As a result, he will not be dominated by sin.
 - One of the purposes of the incarnation, including Jesus of Nazareth's life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, is to "take away the sins" (3:6):
 - This alludes to the scapegoat sent into the wilderness, representing the people's sins being "carried away" (Lev. 16:1-34; Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24).
 - The sin imputed to Jesus Christ was not intrinsic to Him nor committed by Him (1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Jn. 3:5).

- While sin may rebel against the new creature in Christ, it cannot reign.
 - John is not focused on sinlessness but on the "bent, habit, and character" of one's life. He has already noted that believers will sin, and when they do, they can confess their sin to God (1:6-10).
 - John prudently acknowledges that a believer will sin, yet at the same time, is not encouraging sin. He is focused on the direction of one's life, not perfection (2:1).
- 8. God's seed abides in him, not the devil's (v.8-10)**
- Another purpose of the incarnation was to destroy the works of the devil (v.8)
 - The verb "destroy" means to break the power or dominion of something. The works of the devil (v.8) are the operations of his influence and godlessness upon the fallen human heart, which man willingly yields to.
 - While the devil does not give birth (v.10), John is focused on the theme of abiding (seed).
 - The one who is of the devil (v.8, 10) draws his ruling principles from the devil, who has been sinning from the beginning (v.8).
 - John again is focused on "practicing," which indicates a habitual lifestyle of lawlessness, rebellion, and willful defiance of God's commands.
 - The work of Satan is to tempt man to reject God's authority.
 - John is presenting two "fathers" or two "parents" who cannot have "shared custody."
 - The seed is the divine principle that is imparted through faith. The seed can mean the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23), the Spirit of God, and the nature of God (John 1:18). It remains fixed.
 - John is placing apostolic, authoritative pressure on the recipients of his letter to reflect on their "practice" (2:29; 3:4, 7, 8, 9, 10).

Questions:

- A. What "categories" of sin can a professed believer commit that are not grievous enough to warrant doubt in the assurance of their salvation?
- B. What is the frequency of that sin which a professing believer can commit before the assurance of salvation is called into question?

*Both of these questions emerge from a cold and calculating heart that inquires how much sin the professed believer can "get away with."

Instead, a healthy assurance test is:

- A. What is the time gap between when you sin and when you know it is a sin?
- B. How long does it take you to confess your sin to God after you discover it (1:9)?
- C. When you sin, is there contrition, remorse, and regret?
- D. How quickly do you trust that Jesus is your righteousness (2:1)?
- E. Do you live in loving gratitude to God for the permanency of your adoption into His family (3:1)? Is that gratitude evident?

The one born of God's seed cannot habitually sin (v.6, 9). It is not an issue of inability but unwillingness.

Since Jesus Christ was sinless and took away sins (v.5), anoints with the Holy One (Holy Spirit; 2:20; 4:13) while simultaneously disarming Satan's works and influence (3:8), then for a professed believer to live in habitual, unrepentant sin with no direction of righteousness is to prove he/she is still dead in their sins, and unregenerate. While Christ may be on their lips, a willing rebellion against God is energized from a stony heart (3:10).

How can a supposed believer abide in sin and Christ simultaneously?