

## 1 John 3:4-10 (NKJV)

**4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**

**5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.**

**6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.**

**7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.**

**8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**

**9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

**10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.**

Why is it important that we live godly lives? **Why does it matter?**

Remember that John is countering a false teaching in this book. And the false teaching, in some way, allows those who **proclaim** to be **most spiritual** to live in blatant sin. The false doctrine these false teachers were spreading separates what the **flesh** does and what the **spirit** does. So these false teachers are **posturing** a greater spirituality that does **not obey God** in the fleshly areas of their lives.

We must also remember that John is telling us **how to have joy**. He is getting at the root of those things that **must be in place** for us to **have joy** and those things that **cannot** exist along with joy.

Along with this is the necessity of **abiding fellowship**, of continued **dependence** upon our relationship with God.

Now John is going to lay out the relationship between Christ's coming and godly living. He is laying out a logical argument for **why it is impossible** for a believer to get comfortable with sin.

When we look at this passage it is easy to see that a very similar argument is made in verses 4-7 and 8-10. Let's look at that.

**We have the introductory phrases:**

Vs 4- Whoever commits sin.

Vs 8- He who sins

**We have the theme**

Verse 4 The **nature** of sin is lawlessness

Verse 8 The **origin** of sin is the devil

**We have the purpose of Christ's appearing:**

Verse 5 He was manifested **to take away our sins,**

Verse 8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might **destroy the works of the devil.**

**And we have the logical conclusion:**

Verse 6

Whoever abides in Him **does not sin.**

Verse 9

Whoever has been born of God **does not sin,**

So we have 2 powerful arguments about the necessity of godliness based on the purpose of Christ's coming.

I don't have much time to read what some of the popular preachers preach, so I don't keep up on the errors that are current. But I have experienced some teachings that lean in the direction that **godly living** is not nearly as important as **doing evangelistic works**. That thinking usually results in lots of human manipulation to get people to go through certain motions. It also results in very shallow and unpredictable living.

John MacArthur wrote 2 much needed books to dispel the myth of a gospel that does not affect the whole believer. His expert use of scripture systematically destroys the false messages of salvation. The books are "**The Gospel according to Jesus**" and the "**Gospel according to the Apostles.**" Those books are excellent resources if you ever encounter someone presenting an easy believe-ism gospel that demands nothing from the responders but praying a simple prayer.

John is doing the same thing here with much less detail. He is laying out how true Christianity **really** works.

**4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**

We have in front of us what appears, at first glance, as a **glaring contradiction**. First, John tells us in Chapter 1 that if a person says they don't sin, they are a liar. Now he tells us that if a person is a Christian, they won't sin and even in verse 9 that he CANNOT sin. If we take that at face value we would have to conclude that no one, then, is a Christian.

There have been a lot of attempts by various scholars over the years to work out the apparent contradiction. **Something** has to be done with it. We must work through what it means. It means what it says. But it might not mean what we would first understand it to mean.

Some teachers have come up with the theory that a Christian can reach a perfection in this life. So they say that real Christians are expected to reach this state where a person does not sin. Those who go this route are normally coming from an Armenian mindset.

Some say it refers to willing-full and intentional sin, meaning that a Christian is **incapable** of committing willing-full and intentional sin. Yet that falls flat when you look at some people in scripture like David who sinned such a dramatic sin.

Some mystify sin to such a degree that we are never really committing it. There are a lot of mental gymnastics used.

It makes for interesting reading to look at all the conclusions that scholars have reached. But it seems to me that these people are working too hard. I think the Greek verb tenses bring all the clarity we need. And it fits the context well, without having to do mental gyrations or slight of hands.

In this passage the verbs related to sin are all in the **present tense**, indicating **continuous, habitual action**. In other words, John is not referring to occasional **acts** of sin, but to **established and continual patterns of sinful behavior**. Believers will sometimes sin ([Rom. 7:14-25](#))—even willfully—but they will not and cannot sin habitually, persistently, and as a way of life (cf. [Rom. 6:4-14](#); [Gal. 5:24](#); [Eph. 2:10](#)).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - 1-3 John.

Now if you are **like me**, and I have some **sympathy** for you if **you are**, when I read passages like this **I am frightened**. And I am frightened because I have a bad track record. I have failed more times than I can count, even in known sins. **I did what I did** because **I wanted what I wanted** more than I wanted **what God wanted**. It is pretty simple. And if a Christian is incapable of committing a known sin, then I am not a Christian.

So the question comes down to this. What is **that sin** of sin that a Christian cannot do? When we consider this question we walk a very thin tight rope. If we expand this truth **too broadly**, we can get to the place where our behavior can be just like the world's but we know that deep in our hearts we intend better. So we are just fine.

Well that is exactly the error that John is confronting. So we don't want to make that mistake. We don't want to make the passage mean less than what it says. We don't want to divide our lives up so the **bad part** of us is **sinning** but the **good part** of us is **intending not to**. Scripture tends to refer to sinning as something that we, the **me that is me**, is doing. And **the me that is me** gets all the blame. There is no second party living in me that I can blame. The soul that sins will die is scripture's way of describing it.

Then we have the other side of this chasm. We can create a view that **Christians never commit a sin**. If we fall off that side of the boat, there is no assurance of salvation in sight. Only those who are dishonest will have assurance. But those of us who tell the truth about **what we do** and **why we do it** are damned. **We know we sin** and we know we sin because we **want to do it**. And we know that we **do not have to do it but we do it anyway**. If we go too far in one direction, all the honest Christians will get discouraged and give up and figure this Christianity might be wonderful, but I am not good enough for it.

We are not the first generation to face the implications of this verse. I would like to read some quotes from some of the dead guys, those scholars who struggled with this question in past ages.

Although the believer **sometimes sins**, yet not **sin**, but the **opposition to sin**, is the **ruling principle** of his life. (Plummer)

The Christian's whole life is one of "**truceless antagonism to sin**" (Law)

The seed with the believer's spirit fills it with an **irreconcilable hate against every sin**, and **urges it to an unceasing conflict against all unrighteousness**. (Alford)

It is not that Christians are **wholly free from all vice**, but that they **heartily strive** to form their lives in obedience to God. (Calvin)

Sin does not **reign** in them, for the Spirit does not **let it flourish**. (Calvin)

We are children of God, and sin is **abnormal** and **unnatural** to us. (Dodd)

The believer may **fall** into sin, but he will not **walk in it**. (Smith)

So you might say, I get the idea. But where are the lines? When am I actually walking in sin like only a non believer can?

There are a few questions that have helped me in this consideration.

First, if a sin is becoming habitual or has become habitual in a Christian's life, first- Have I **exposed it**?

**1 John 1:7-9 (NKJV)**

**<sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

**<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

**<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Look at the disclosure in these verses. If we are walking in the light we call stuff what it is, and we make it known to whoever we have to, to break its power in our lives.

It is pretty simple.

If you want sin to grow, **hide it**. Cover your tracks. Develop support systems that will **enable it** and **not expose it** for you. Excuse it. Make it some kind of normal behavior. Read the worldly experts and label it like they label it, as an illness or a personality trait. Then treat your sin's exposure by another as betrayal. If you follow those guidelines you are assured to continue in your sin.

If you want it to stop, shine your flashlight on it. Expose yourself. And then call others to shine their light on it so, on those bad days when you might want to hide it, they won't let you. Keep calling people in until it ends.

If you take these kinds of steps you are showing evidence that you are more committed to stopping the sin than enabling the sin. Why in the world would you expose your sin, if in your heart of hearts you are committed to doing it. Here is another verse that is helpful, another test.

#### **Romans 13:14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**

We learn a lot about ourselves by what we make provisions for. Can your sin be avoided by simply removing the provisions? Will you remove the provisions? What can you do to undermine the provisions?

If you could remove all the provisions for your sin, would you? That is an important question. Sometimes we cannot. But sometimes we can and should. If we will not remove the provision for sin when that is feasible, not removing the provision is the equivalent of living in sin. If you make provisions for it, you are planning to do it.

Now look at this again. Why in the world would you try to remove provisions for the flesh if you are not a believer? Oh, maybe you can come up with a reason, but it is highly unlikely that you would fight against sin if you love it. The problem with these questions is that they are not totally objective. And we can think we are just lying to ourselves. But many times I think we forget what being apart from Christ was really like. Some of us have never lived long outside of Christ. So we don't have a strong frame of reference for **before** and **after** Christ. There is encouragement to be had if you are actively fighting sin. The world might fight the consequences of some sins, but their objection is not to fight sin because it is sin. They don't fight sin because God hates it and

because you love God you hate it. No, they fight sin because it is humiliating and has consequences they don't want.

Ask yourself this- if you knew that **no one would ever find out about your sin but God**, if it would never have a **consequence** in this life, and it was not **robbing you of something you want** in this world, would you **still hate it and fight it?**

While I am sure we could easily lie to ourselves about this, I think most of us probably have a good idea about what we would do. A Christian would continue to fight it because he despises it. It bothers him in a way that he cannot escape, even if no one else ever knew it. It bothers him because it violates his relationship with God. A non believer would be glad to be able to continue it with no consequences. Where do you stand on that question? Scripture makes it very clear that the Christian life is going to be a struggle. It never presents the **best Christians** as those who no longer have to struggle. And if it is a **battle**, there will be wins and losses. Now we have **no excuses**. None. Humans do what they do because, at the end of the day it is what they want to do. Our life decisions, as a whole, display what **we love most**. But failures will happen. We need not have our faith shaken because of failure. But we must **walk in the light**. We must tell the **truth about failure**. We must call sin, sin. But there is forgiveness with the Lord. And then we start all over again with the **new mercies every morning**. We do not need to be forlorn. We must repent. But we do not need to lose our hope. Our God is a forgiving God to those who are His children.

Another evidence to look at is, when you resist a sin, do you attribute success to your pride or your God? A Christian who is in the struggle may be pleased that he or she had victory over a sin, but they will find themselves thanking God because they know it is a result of God's work in them. When a non believer resists sin, some addiction or an embarrassing behavior, he has no one to thank but himself.

Another thing to consider here to see if you are in the faith or not is, what happens when you read the Word of God? Is it like a breath of fresh air as you read it? Do you feel challenged, invigorated, convicted, thrilled, depending on what it is saying. Is it a solace to your soul? Or is it some kind of tool to use for your pride or for controlling other people? Is it a drudgery to read it? Scripture tells us that believers will **love the word of God**. Yes, that will lead to **obeying the word**. It must. But sometimes, even when we have failed to obey, we are drawn back to the Word. It is where we run to... in our guilt and shame. While that cannot be used as an evidence on its own, it is still an evidence that tells us something about our hearts.

And as a last point on this topic, I guess it must be said, the greatest encouragement and assurance comes when **you stop the sin that you are struggling with**. And that is one of the many wonderful reasons to commit to winning, to commit to overcoming, to commit to putting off that sin and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I intend this to be encouraging to you if you are struggling in an area of your life with a particular sin. I think we all have assurance to the degree that we obey. But we can find some encouragement, even in our failure, that we are showing some attitudes about our sin that are not natural to this world. We cannot **stay** in that place. But we must find a reason to **press forward**.

Sometimes we really need an external perspective. We need someone who knows us who can say, Man there are things in your life that have all the fingerprints of God. You show many signs of being a believer. Don't give up. Press on. You can do this by faith in our resurrected Lord.

Okay, back to our text.

**<sup>4</sup> Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.**

Let's look at this word lawlessness.

**Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)**

**<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.**

**<sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'**

**<sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

It isn't hard to figure from this passage that lawlessness is a very bad thing. When a person continually practices lawlessness, they show themselves to be condemned.

Now John is saying the same thing that Jesus said. Whoever practices lawlessness is condemned. They show that Christ is not in them.

Any person who habitually practices sin and is not making steps to see that this way of life ends, is living in a state of lawlessness. This is essentially a state of lostness. It is anti-Christ-ness.

**<sup>5</sup> And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.**

Why did Christ come to this planet? Why was He made known? Why was He sent? The whole project had at **its core** the mission to **remove sin and its required legal penalty**. Now if I travelled all the way to California to talk to a person about their soul, if that person was receptive to me and claimed to be

my friend, would they not assume that their soul must be of great importance to me. And that their soul must be an important topic to deal with.

In a small way this is the point made here. If Christ was **sent to take away our sins**, how could we be His, and heavily involved in relationship with Him, without the removal of sin being of great importance to us?

We are supposed to get the congruence here of a **mission** to remove sin by one who had no sin and the **importance** of the removal of sin to anyone who says they love him.

It is completely incongruent to be in relationship with the **sin remover** and to be **flippant with the issue of sin**. It cannot happen. It is impossible to be in relationship with Christ who **died because of our sin** and to be perfectly ok with **its presence** in our lives. That is the point.

**6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.**

Suppose you had a relative who fought in a war against communism. Suppose that person lost many close friends in that war. And the person really understands communism and despises it as a form of government. If you had a close loving relationship with that person, would you say wonderful things about communism? Would you gladly tell him you are going to communist rallies? No. We wouldn't. Because we know the price that person paid for his belief. We would understand that this person is totally against communism for the harm it does to people.

Well if we abide in Christ and understand the Gospel at all, it has a similar effect in us. We cannot abide **in the one, or with the one**, who died for sin and treat sin as **something casual**. We can **love sin** or we can **abide in Christ**, but we cannot do both. They are mutually exclusive.

If we can love sin and cling to it and build our lives around it, it is clear that we are not abiding in a relationship with the one for whom it cost Him everything to free us from that sin's penalty and power.

A person may make all kinds of claims about how close he is to Jesus. But if he can be perfectly fine with **living for** that which **Christ died for**, he is showing himself to be a liar. That person, no matter how confidently he talks, knows nothing about Jesus and has no true relationship with Him.

**7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.**

Where verse 7 talks about **one deceiving you**, it is talking about deceiving you about **sanctification**. If someone is soft on sin in the life of a believer, he is being deceptive. Known intentional sin is never acceptable in the life of a believer. A person cannot be cozy with sin and be a believer. The equation is



pretty simple. If you live a life committed to doing that which is against God, you are against God. If you live a life committed to the process of doing that which is **right** before God, **you are right before God**. That commitment does not save you. But it displays that you are saved. It displays that God has done a supernatural work in you.

Do you want assurance that you are righteous? Then be righteous. Practice it. Let it be your habit.

**<sup>8</sup> He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**

On this second round, this second argument, we start with another problem with sin. We get another affirmation that we are barking up the right tree. Where it says the **devil has sinned** from the beginning, the verb tense is the same for the **Christian who cannot sin**. We, essentially cannot make the same stance regarding sin as the devil does. We cannot be committed to sin in all its forms **like the devil is** without being **the devil's child**.

We are given insight here to the origin of sin. The devil sinned the original sin. All **sin** traces its roots back to the **devil**. Evil is not a force in the universe. Evil is housed in beings. And the devil is the source of evil. So when we sin, we got that from somewhere. That influence isn't just drifting out in the universe like star wars would have us believe. There is a being called the Devil and he is behind it all. He started a mutiny from God and that sealed his fate. Now he is committed to destroying as many people as he possibly can. Now how can it possibly be that we would live **committed to doing evil** when that evil has its source in the greatest enemy and hater of God? How can we side and be loyal to God's enemy and to God at the same time? If we are to commit to doing the **devil's pleasure**, it is only because we are the **devil's child**.

In fact the evil that the devil does was so bad that it required Christ's death to destroy his works. Christ's mission was to undo the damage that the devil had done to damn all humanity. Christ's main purpose was to undo the work of the devil. So how can we possibly join in wholeheartedly **with the work** that required the death of Christ to **undo**.

It is not difficult to see the reasoning here. We cannot serve two masters at the same time. It is impossible. One came to spread evil. The other came to save people from evil. We cannot choose both. It is impossible.

Now the works of the devil continue. The devil is behind, directly or indirectly, all the evil and faithless things we are tempted to do. He is still up to His work. If we saw for 10 seconds the absolute wickedness and malice of

the destroyer, of the enemy of our souls, I think we would find it far easier to say no to his sensuous offerings. God loves us. The devil hates us. Why would God followers get comfortable with the enemies offerings?

So Christ is at work to undermine the works of the devil in our lives. How can we follow him and join willingly in the works Christ came to destroy? Do you see the problem. It is impossible that we would be abiding in Christ and abiding in the Devil at the same time. We will hate one and love the other. The reasoning John is laying out is very easy to follow and understand. How could it be otherwise?

**9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

Now John adds another angle. John points to the new birth, the new nature. He points out that not only does a believer not commit to sin because it is completely counter to Christ. A believer also cannot live in the world of sin because that person is a new creature. They are born with God's seed. Their very nature is completely changed. They are new. They cannot remain comfortable with the old. It is incongruent.

**10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.**

So we have the children of God, born of God through the Christ who came to undo the works of the devil. These people are born into a new family and a new kingdom and a new nature. They are born of the same God who hates everything about sin.

Then we have the children of the devil, born into the dominion of Satan who is God's enemy and wants to destroy every single child of God and works continually toward that end.

So what is the difference? The acts of the children will be largely congruent with the family they are born into. That is the point. What we truly **are** must come out. It **always does** in time.

The devil's kids will look like him when put to the test. They might practice morality. But they will not practice righteousness, doing the right thing because of their love for God.

The Lord's kids will look like him when put to the test. They might not be impressive, but at the end of the day they want to please their master. And they will also love the rest of His family. That is what abiding does to a person. That is what birth in a family does to a person.

I hope you have found encouragement this morning if you look at your life and you know that you are in a continual battle against sin. Even if you have suffered some losses and acted incongruently, run to the Lord. Expose your sin. Commit to turn from it. And take any step that will aid that process. If you look at your life and you know that you have no intentions of giving up your sin, now is the time to repent. Call upon Christ for salvation, because that is probably what you really need. You will never beat sin when you are in the devil's territory and are his child. Call upon Christ to save you, and He will.