

TITLE: OBSTACLES TO LIVING AS CHILDREN OF GOD

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:4-10

INTRO: John uses several phrases that are equivalents (keep his commands = in the light, know him, abide in him, born of him, etc.). In 3:4-10, he focuses on two commands that are also equivalent, and to do one is to do the other. These two are “renounce sin” and “do righteousness.” Cf. **Matt 7:19** – “*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit....*” There’s no difference between bearing bad fruit and bearing *no* fruit! Same idea in “renouncing sin” & “doing righteousness.”

I. ENCOURAGEMENT TO RENOUNCE SIN (v. 4-6):

A. How Sin Is Defined (v. 4): *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. Lit: All that are doing sin are doing lawlessness* (violation of law), *and sin is lawlessness.*

1. Definition of sin – “violating God’s law.” Anyone who commits sin violates the law of God. This is done by doing something God forbids, or by *not* doing something that God has commanded (cf. **Jam 4:17**–“*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*”).
2. This definition disproves the false teaching of original, inherited sin. How can someone inherit someone else’s violation of a law? You automatically commit every sin your father committed? It must mean that your father’s sins are held to your account (you’re guilty for his sins; you inherit his guilt). And since *God* assigns guilt, this view makes God unjust!
3. This definition of sin is also very important in understanding the world’s problem (& its solution).
 - a. The problem is sin (**Isa 59:2** –separation from God).
 - b. When we see the simple definition of sin – violation of law – we can easily see what God expects: sorrow for your violation of God’s law (**2 Cor 7:10**) & fix the problem by stopping the violation (**Mt 3:8**).
 - c. We see how much easier these things are if we’ll let the Scripture define our terms!
4. This statement is supposed to be a simple reminder of what we already know – that when we commit sin, we break God’s law – the same God that has bestowed such amazing love on us by adopting us, calling us His children (**v. 1**), and giving us the promise of **v. 2**! This is great motivation **not** to sin!
5. Continuing from v. 3, the Christian who sins is contrasted with the grateful child of God who purifies himself, as He is pure.

B. How Sin Was Defeated (v. 5): *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

1. John is reminding Christians of the **fact** that Jesus came to earth to take away our sins (**2:2**–“propitiation”). This was His purpose for coming – to provide a way for sins to be forgiven. In the 1st century context, Gnosticism taught a **very** watered-down definition of sin. Sin only affects the flesh, not the spirit. Jesus was *not* God in the flesh; He was just a man who sinned like the rest of us. So sin is nothing to worry about; you can be righteous & accepted by God even as a sinner.
2. John says otherwise – “*in Him is no sin*” – and that His purpose was to take away our sin. And it cost Him His blood (**Heb 9:22**–“*without shedding of blood is no remission*”). He did this for the whole world (2:2), but how many respond in obedience?
3. If He took away our sin, how does He feel about our continuing in sin? Again, this is encouragement for us to follow His sinless example.

C. How Sin Is Denied (v. 6): *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

1. Two ways of looking at “sin” in this verse: **1)** *any* sin, or **2)** continuous, habitual sin.
2. Many teach that this is referring to habitual sin – that it **doesn’t** mean we’re never supposed to sin, it simply means we aren’t supposed to **live in sin**. Guy N. Woods–“Whosoever continues to abide in him, does not keep on sinning’ – habitually.” This is true, but it waters down the real point John is making, as expressed in **1:7, 3:3, & 3:7**!
3. **Sin Denied (Refused):** *The one abiding* (present participle, happens at same time as main verb) *in him does not sin* (main verb).
 - a. When you are not sinning, you’re abiding in Him. *Never* sinning at all? Yes! When you are abiding in Him, you will not sin at all! How can we say otherwise? John has already made this clear: **1:7**–*walk in the light as He is in the light*.
 - b. Abiding in Him = keeping His commands (**3:24**), & sin = *not* keeping His commands (**3:4**). Therefore, “abiding in Him” & “sinning” are **opposites!** You can’t sin (once *or* habitually) & be abiding in Him!
 - c. This is not to say you can’t be forgiven (**1:8-2:2**).
4. **Sin Denied (Not acknowledged):** *Whoever is sinning* (present participle – happens at the same time as main verb) *hasn’t seen him or known him* (both main verbs are perfect tense). The one who is sinning (not “has sinned” in the past, but “is presently sinning”) doesn’t see Him or know Him (in the past or now, because he’s sinning).
 - a. Can this be referring to a Christian who sins once? One might say “if so, he isn’t a Christian? How can he be if he’s never known Christ?” The answer is in the present participle “*whosoever is sinning*.” It is happening at the **same time** as the main verbs, which are perfect tense (showing something past *and* present). So the “sinning” is also something this Christian has done in the past & is still doing in the present. As long as a Christian (or non-Christian) is sinning, he has not seen Him & does not know Him.
 - b. Again, this all changes when he confesses (& repents), and the blood of Jesus cleanses him again.

CONCLUSION: God hates sin (“*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*”–**Hab 1:13**). To say that John is simply discussing the problem of *living* in sin (habitually) is to diminish the seriousness of sin, and to miss the point of what he really is saying. Christians are called to live sinless lives! We are **never** to accept sin! This call to such a holy, pure lifestyle is difficult, and this is why we **MUST** understand why John opened the letter by letting us know that we *do* sin, and that there *is* a remedy for it (**1:8-10**)!

II. ENCOURAGEMENT TO DO RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 7-10):

(v. 7) *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

- A. Interesting that John urges them not to be deceived in this. Gnostics said you could be righteous *without* doing anything. John refutes this clearly! And yet, people today hold to the same false belief (Calvinism)! They're told that there's nothing you do to contribute to your salvation, or you're once-saved-always-saved regardless of what you do or don't do! "Let no man deceive you!" You must **do** righteousness, and do it as **He is righteous** – sinlessly! (Cf. v. 10 also)
- B. God commands righteousness. **Matt 5:6**–"Blessed are they that hunger & thirst after righteousness"; **Matt 6:33**–"Seek ye first the kingdom of God & his righteousness"; **1 Tim 6:11**–"But thou, O man of God, flee these things & follow after righteousness..."; **2 Tim 3:16**–"All Scripture is...profitable for...instruction in righteousness."

(v. 8) *He that committeth sin (present participle –is doing sin) is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

- A. The one doing sin is of (out of; source) the devil. The devil is his source; the sinner is doing Satan's will by sinning.
- Most say that this is speaking of habitual sin. But it's true of *any* sin. When a person (Christian or not) sins, he does so because he has chosen *not* to do righteousness but to disobey God's law.
 - When we understand this properly, and stop assuming that John is *just* talking about habitual sin, then we can more accurately see sin for what it is – disobeying God's law & doing the work of Satan (whether it's one sin or continual sin)!
- B. *For the devil sinneth from the beginning*. This is not about Satan's origins. John says Christ was manifested to destroy Satan's works, which refers to Satan's works on earth, the purpose of which was to destroy human souls. From the beginning of time he's been the one to tempt us to sin (**Gen 3**). Christ was manifested to destroy Satan's efforts. Because of Satan's temptations, sin entered the world & brought spiritual death to all, "because all sinned" (**Rom 5:12**). Jesus' death brought salvation from sin, thereby destroying Satan's efforts! But, as John is saying, in order to take advantage of this salvation, we must continually renounce sin & do righteousness!

(v. 9) *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

- A. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin:*
- Those who have been born/begotten of God (perfect participle –were & still are) do not commit sin (present tense). Again, one sin or continual, habitual sin? Either!
 - Barnes says, "This passage must either mean that they who are...true Christians, do not sin habitually & characteristically, or that everyone who is a true Christian is absolutely perfect, & never commits any sin." These aren't the only two options! Notice that the first option is true, but the 2nd is not. One who is born of God does not commit sin – this includes *any* sin, habitual or not! But this does *not* mean that "a true Christian is absolutely perfect, and never commits any sin." This isn't what John is saying. It means he *strives* for absolute perfection, *walking in the light as He is in the light* (perfectly), & then **when he sins (1:8-10), purifies himself even as He is pure (3:3)**. See **2:1!**
 - Do you want to be born of God? In **2:29**, he that "doeth righteousness is born of God." Here, he that "doth not commit sin" is born of God. So when you do commit sin, you are no longer doing righteousness and you aren't born of God! Is this true just when you commit habitual sin or when you commit *any* sin? Any sin! How can you commit just one sin & still be doing righteousness/born of God?
 - A huge reason why those who are born of God don't commit sin is because they *are* doing righteousness! How can you sin when you're doing righteousness? The two are opposites (just as we saw in v. 6 regarding "sinning" & "abiding in Him")!
- B. *For his seed remaineth* (same word as "abide") *in him* – this is further reasoning for why a child of God doesn't commit sin.
- What is his seed? "Seed" is used in different ways in Scripture. Obviously he's not talking about a literal seed; he's talking about offspring. Whose? God's –Jesus Christ, called the seed (**Gen 3:15**), the *only* begotten (**4:9**).
 - Why is "seed" used here? John is probably continuing the "offspring" analogy (**3:2** –we're *spiritually* begotten of Him). It's this "seed" (Jesus) that abides in the child of God (**3:24; 4:13**). How? Through the Word (**Lk 8:11**–seed=word) – when we keep his commandments (**2:3**)!
- C. *And he cannot sin, because he is born of God*
- Commentators (e.g., G.N.Woods) say that since this can't mean that a Christian doesn't have the ability to sin at all, it must be talking about habitual sin. So he doesn't have the ability to sin habitually? So once saved, always saved (Barnes)?
 - John didn't say "a Christian"; he said, "born of God." And he has defined being born of God as "doing righteousness" & "sinning not." The person that does these cannot sin. How can he sin when he's doing these things (present tense)?

(v. 10) *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

- A. Are you a child of God? If so, it will be manifest, just as it will be if you're a child of the devil. How?
- B. If you do not **do righteousness**, you are **NOT** of God (out of, source; i.e., NOT a child of God)! Can this be any clearer? And yet so many say that it doesn't matter what you do...it's all *God's* doing, etc. This is another verse that clearly refutes O.S.A.S.! How can someone (Christian or not) who clearly doesn't do righteousness be a child of God?
- C. Again, "doing righteousness" & "not sinning" are the same thing. If you're doing righteousness, then you're not sinning.

CONCLUSION: Two extremes: 1) God *expects* sinlessness; if I sin, I'm lost (without hope)! This is false because of **1:8-10**. 2) The knee-jerk reaction to #1, that this just means we aren't supposed to **live** in sin. This is false based on **1:7, 3:3, & 3:7** – be like Him: as *He* is in the light, as *He* is pure, as *He* is righteous! This is why **1:8-10** is so important!

This is clearer when we compare the figurative with the literal. What things has John said we must do? Abide in Him (fig.), be a child of God (fig.), keep His seed in you (fig.), walk in the light (fig.), **keep His commands** (lit.), sin not (lit.), love your brother (lit.). The figurative things are accomplished by the doing the literal things!