

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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He Who Cannot Sin

First John 3:9-10

by

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SUBJECT: THE TRUTH ABOUT SIN

TITLE: HE WHO CANNOT SIN

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:9-10

INTRODUCTION. The little boy had been picked up by neighbors for Sunday School and the morning worship service. His parents held up Sunday dinner until they dropped their son off. During the meal, his mother asked, AJimmy, what did the preacher talk about today?@

ASin.@

After a pause for reflection, she asked, AWell, what did he say about it?@

ASaid he was agin= it.@

That is a solid Scriptural position to take. That was an issue in John=s day, though not the only issue. The budding Gnosticism of John=s day had influenced many people who were coming into the church. The primary concern with which John and others had to deal was the person of Jesus Christ. Some of those who were coming into the church refused to leave all their old pagan beliefs behind. They taught that spirit is good and matter is evil. Therefore, they claimed, Jesus could not have become flesh and blood without becoming contaminated by that which is material. They came up with various theories to explain Jesus, including the theory that He just seemed to be human. Another view held that he was spirit until baptism, at which time he became spirit. According to this theory, he became flesh and blood again before the crucifixion - spirit could not die.

John had an answer for that heresy in the Fourth Gospel, which had been written a few years earlier:

AAnd the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth@ (John 1:14).

John, the lone surviving Apostle, was the most reliable personal witness in the whole world to the humanity of Jesus. After all, was he not the one who was closest to the Lord, the one who leaned against His chest at the Last Supper?

There were others who professed faith in Jesus Christ in John's day who taught that once you are saved, the spirit is redeemed and nothing the body did could effect the spirit. These heretics flaunted their sinful, lifestyle as if their indulgence in sin proved that their spirit was totally insulated from the sins committed in, or by the body.

God had an answer to those false claims in John's day, just as He has an answer to the ungodly claim of postmodern America:

AIIt may be a sin for you, but that does not mean that it is a sin for me.@

AWho are you to call me a sinner@ I am not a sinner.@

AI may have done something stupid, but that does not mean it is a sin.@

Let's see how John deals with the subject of sin in the life of the believer.

I. WHOEVER HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD DOES NOT SIN, 3:9.

A. This May be a Shocking Claim to Many People.

1. Jeremiah wrote that the heart is Adesperately wicked@ (Jer. 17:8).
2. Paul wrote that AAll have sinned and come short of the glory of God@ (Rom. 3:23).
 - a. AAll have sinned@ is in the past tense.
 - b. ACome short@ is in the present tense.
3. John says that if we say he have no sin we make God a liar, 1:8, 10.
4. This seems to stand in sharp contrast to the statement made in 2:10.

The Gnostics either denied sin, or insisted that sin did not effect them. We have already seen in the first chapter of this epistle that anyone who denies that there is a sin principle that is alive and active in the heart of believers is ignorant of the truth. Because of the sin principle - the sinful nature - people will commit acts of sin, obviously some more than others. If you say that you never commit any sins at all you are a liar, and you are making God out to be a liar.

What we need to do every day is to confess the sins of which we are convicted, and God will Aforgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness@ (1:9). Sin grieves the Holy Spirit, blocks prayer, and hinders our comprehension of Scripture. Obviously, sin is serious.

Then, how can John, after all that, turn around and state here that AWhoever has been born of God does not sin@? And there is no getting around it; that is exactly what he is saying. First, he says that if we say we have not sin we are a liar; and then he says that if we are Christians we Acannot sin.@ If there was ever a contradiction, this sounds like one.

Actually, there is no contradiction at all, and the sooner we understand what he is saying the sooner we will understand the doctrine of sin and sanctification - and the sooner we will be blessed with greater victories in our walk with the Lord..

B. The Believer Does Not Habitually Sin (see also, 2:6-8).

1. The believer has a sinful nature.
2. The believer will commit acts of sin.
3. The born again believer will not habitually sin so as to make it his lifestyle.
4. You cannot live in Christ and live in sin at the same time.

C. The Reason We Cannot Practice Sin Is That His Seed Remains in Us.

1. This applies only to those who are born of God.

ANo one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God@ (NASB).

2. Habitual actions indicate one's character.
3. You cannot habitually practice sin and habitually practice righteousness.
4. His Aseed@ denote the divine nature He gives us when we are born again.

This is the result of spiritual regeneration. AThis life is vitalized by the Spirit and removes an individual from the dominion of Satan@ (BSB). This nature prevents the Christian from habitually sinning. In the Fourth Gospel, John writes of those who are born, Anot of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God@ (John 1:13).

5. This testifies to the supernatural nature of the new life in Christ.
 - a. This cannot be said of one who just knows about God.
 - b. This cannot be said of every church member.
 - c. This cannot be said of everyone who has been baptized
 - d. This cannot be said of one who subscribes to a system of ethics.
 - e. This cannot be said of one who embraces New Age religions.
 - f. This is true only of those who are born of God.
6. We cannot habitually sin because His seed Aremains@ us.

- a. ARemains@ implies permanent residence.
- b. Paul writes of those who are in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi (Phil. 1:1).

7. One who is born of God cannot sin.@

One who remains@ (abides) in Christ cannot remain habitually in sin. This does not say that the believer should not sin - though he shouldn't. In 2:1, John tells he is writing this that we sin not. It is God's desire that we do not sin. It is also His desire that when we do commit acts of sin, we confess those sins and receive His forgiveness. However, that is not what this verse is saying. This verse says that the Christian cannot sin. This is the Word of God - God's inspired, infallible, inerrant Word. It is also consistent with everything else we read in this epistle. The sin principle, or the sin nature, is still operating in the believer's heart, and he will commit acts of sin, but he cannot habitually sin if he has taken up residence in Christ Jesus.

II. YOU ARE EITHER THE CHILD OF GOD OR THE CHILD OF THE DEVIL, 3:10.

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.@

A. The Children of God Practice Righteousness.

- 1. This does not say you get to be children of God by doing good things.
 - a. AThe righteous man shall live by faith,@ (Rom. 1:17).
 - b. No one is justified by good works (Eph. 2:9; Gal. 2:16).
- 2. What it says is that children of God practice righteousness.
 - a. We practice righteousness because of our new nature in Christ.
 - b. AIn Christ@ are the operative words.

ATherefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come@ (2 Cor. 5:17).

- c. The highest attempt of the lost person is as filthy rags.

C. Let Me Stress This One Thing: Christianity Is Not Morality.

- 1. Morality is better than immorality.
- 2. Morality cannot produce Christianity.

3. Christianity will manifest morality.

D. Now Look With Me at Some Principles of Morality.

1. Christianity is much more than a system of ethics.

- a. Religion has to do with people seeking God.
- b. Christianity is about God seeking people.

2. The Christian is moral because he is Ain Christ@ (2 Cor. 5:17).

- a. Morality is a product of a relationship with a Holy God.
- b. Christianity is a higher morality than the world can produce.

There are people who like to bring up the Code of Hammurabi when any system of ethics is mentioned. This is especially so when the Mosaic Law is the subject. If you will excuse the technical theological term, they like to make the stupid claim that Moses drew from the Code of Hammurabi, with the hint that he may have plagiarized it. These claims are made by people who have a problem accepting the authority of the Word of God.

The Mosaic Law, and for that matter the entire Pentateuch is based on a foundation that predates the Code of Hammurabi by centuries. When Noah stepped off the Ark with Mrs. Noah and their three sons and daughters-in-law, they did so with a thorough understanding of the laws and standards of God; and Noah's sons taught them to their sons, who in turn taught them to their sons. This continued until the time of Hammurabi, who wrote down a code of laws and ethics which manifested a devolution from the clear and certain laws Noah taught his sons, yet an impressive one to the world.

The Mosaic Law is superior to the Code of Hammurabi because its Author is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, the Lord God of heaven and earth.

As impressive as the Mosaic Law is, it needed to be fulfilled and perfected. That is exactly what Jesus did. There is nothing in all the history of the world like the Sermon on the Mount. How long has it been since you made a thorough study of the Sermon on the Mount?

3. Morality has no spiritual dynamic.

- a. Human good is better than human evil.
- b. Society benefits from human good.
- c. Morality will never produce the power promised in Acts 1:8.
- d. Morality cannot produce Justification.
- e. Morality cannot produce Sanctification.

4. The filling by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) produces a spiritual dynamic.

5. Morality is absolutely necessary.
 - a. It is necessary for the preservation of the human race.
 - b. It is necessary for the orderly function of the human race.
6. Morality, though essential to an orderly society, cannot produce salvation.
 - a. Morality cannot produce spirituality.
 - b. Morality without spirituality can produce legalism (see Galatians).
 - c. Salvation is by grace through faith, not works or a combination of grace and works.
 - d. Sanctification is by grace through faith, not of works.

E. The Children of the Devil Practice Sin.

1. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
2. The habitual practice of sin identifies one as a child of the devil.

F. The Children of God are Contrasted With the Children of the Devil.

1. The children of the devil do not practice righteousness.
2. The children of the devil do not love one another.
3. The children of God love Him and loathe sin.

ILLUSTRATION:

When the great Chrysostom was arrested by the Roman emperor he sought to make the Greek Christian deny his faith. But he was unsuccessful. So the emperor discussed with his advisors what they could do to this prisoner.

"Shall I put him in a dungeon?" the emperor asked. "No," one of his counselors replied, "For he'll be glad to go. He longs for the quietness where he can delight in the mercies of his God."

"Then he shall be executed!" said the emperor. "No," came the answer, "For he'll be glad to die. He declares that in the event of death, he will be in the presence of the Lord."

"Well, what shall we do then?" the ruler asked. The counselor replied, "There's only one thing that will cause him pain. Make him sin. He's afraid of nothing but sin." CFrom the Bible Illustrator

CONCLUSION. You are either a child of God, or you are a child of the devil. And guess what?

God does not keep you guessing! You can know to whom you belong. If you practice righteousness - if you are committed to righteousness - you are a child of God. If not, you are a child of the devil. That does not mean that if you subscribe to a high ethical code you are a child of God. What it means is that if you **Aremain@** (or **Aabide@**) in Jesus Christ you cannot **Aremain@** in sin; that is, you cannot continue practice of unrighteousness. If you are a child of God you practice righteousness, not in order to maintain a relationship with Him, but because you have received a new nature from Him.