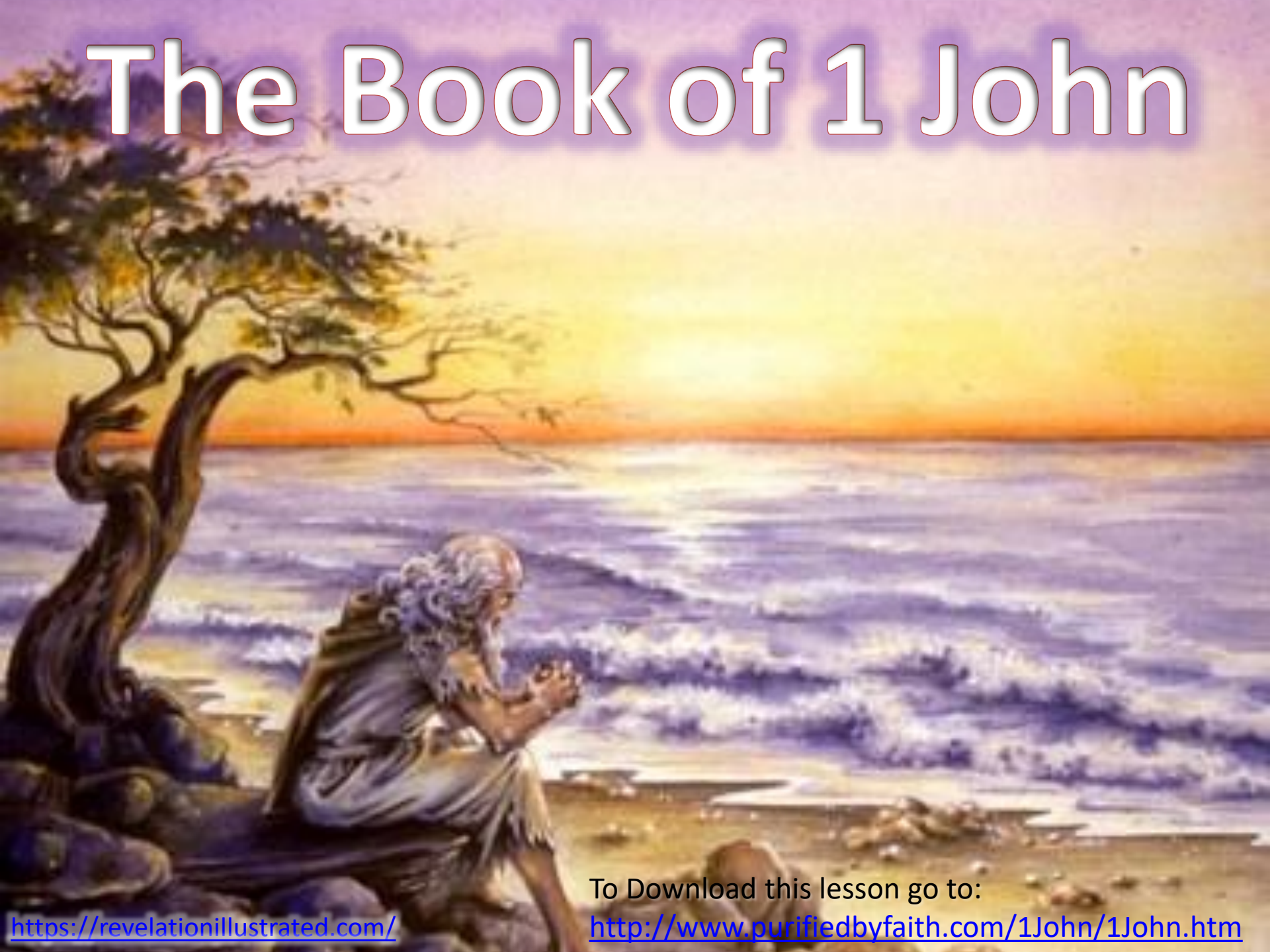


# The Book of 1 John



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# Outline of 1 John

- 1:1-4 - *Prologue: John Introduces the Major Theme of the Letter - **FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD***
- 1:5-2:28 - *The First Presentation of the Three Tests of FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD: **RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE and BELIEF** in Jesus*
- 2:29-4:6 - *The **Second** Presentation of the Three Tests of FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD: **RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE and BELIEF** in Jesus*
- 4:7-5:21 - *The Third Presentation of the Three Tests of FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD: **RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE and BELIEF** in Jesus*



## 2:29-4:6

# *The **Second** Presentation of the Three Tests of **DIVINE SONSHIP: RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE and BELIEF** in Jesus*

- **2:29-3:10a** - *Divine Sonship* tested by **RIGHTEOUSNESS**
  - God is righteous therefore everyone who “*does what is right*” is “*born of Him*” (2:29)
  - The present status and future hope of the “*children of God*” (3:1-3)
  - **Divine Sonship** is utterly contrary to all sin (3:4-10a)
- **3:10b-24a** - *Divine Sonship* tested by **LOVE**
  - Anyone who does not obey the command to “love one another” is not a child of God (3:10b-11)
  - Cain as the model of murder and hate - whose example is followed by the world (3:12-15)
  - Christ as the model of love – whose example we must follow in order to have confidence in our relationship with God (3:16-24a)
- **3:24b-4:6** - *Divine Sonship* tested by **BELIEF** in the Spirit’s Message

# 1 John 3:4-10a

## Divine Sonship is Utterly Contrary to All Sin

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*



An aerial photograph of a city, likely Chicago, showing a dense urban area with green spaces, roads, and a large body of water (Lake Michigan) in the background under a cloudy sky.

# 1 John 3:4-10a

## Divine Sonship is Utterly Contrary to All Sin

### High Level Overview

# 1 John 3:4-10a – Overview

- In the *previous* section (1 John 2:29-3:3) John argues that ***we should live holy lives now*** because we expect that when we see Jesus “*as he is*” at his ***second coming*** we shall become *like* Him.
- In ***this*** section, John shows that for a believer to ***continue in sin*** is to oppose the whole purpose of Christ’s ***first coming***!

	1 John 3:4-7	1 John 3:8-10
The Introductory Phrase	<i>Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness (3:4a)</i>	<i>Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil (3:8a)</i>
The Theme	The <b><i>Nature</i></b> of Sin is <b><i>Lawlessness</i></b> (3:4b)	The <b><i>Origin</i></b> of Sin is the <b><i>Devil</i></b> (3:8b)
The Purpose of Christ’s Appearing	<i>He appeared to take away sins (3:5)</i>	<i>The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (3:8c)</i>
The Logical Conclusion	<i>No one who abides in him keeps on sinning (3:6a)</i>	<i>No one born of God makes a practice of sinning (3:9a)</i>



In **contrast** to those who **practice righteousness** (2:29) and purify themselves (3:3), John **now** turns his attention to those who **continue in sin**.

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

1 John 3:4-10a



In the last part of verse 4, John equates sin to **lawlessness**.

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; **sin is lawlessness**. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

1 John 3:4-10a

# “*sin*” – ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*)

- Failing to hit the mark
- A bad action, evil deed
- In the New Testament it is always used in an ethical sense.

# “*lawlessness*” – ἀνομία (*anomia*)

- In 1, 2, and 3 John, the word translated “lawlessness” (*anomia*) is found **only** in this verse.
- When the author of 1 John says that “*sin is lawlessness*” he does not mean that sin is the violation of the Mosaic law, but rather that sin constitutes ***opposition and rebellion against God***, like the opposition and rebellion of Satan.



“**sin**” – ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*)

versus

“**lawlessness**” – ἀνομία (*anomia*)

- *Hamartia* means a **missing of the mark**, a failure to hit that at which one aimed. It is the **general** word for sin of any kind.
- *Anomia*, however is a **stronger term** referring not only to the **absence** of law, but to the **purposeful disregard of law**.
- Sin, then, is not merely a failure to measure up or a weakness; it is **active and purposeful refusal to conform to law**... no particular code of laws is in view here.
- The crucial point at which John is aiming was the insistence of the false teachers that the Gnostic could be **indifferent** to acts of sin... He asserted that sin is **not** a matter concerning which one can be indifferent. Sin is actual revolt against the revealed will of God... **In the context of 1 John 3:4-10a, sin is rebellion, it is to take one's stand against God, it is to side with God's enemy, the devil.**

“**sin**” – ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*)

versus

“**lawlessness**” – ἀνομία (*anomia*)

- The heretics seem to have taught that to the enlightened Christian, questions of immorality were a matter of **indifference**, just as today the truth about sin is concealed by euphemisms, and our sins become mere “peccadilloes”, “temperamental weaknesses” or “personality problems”.
- In contrast to such **underestimates** of sin, John declares that it is not just a negative failure (*hamartia*, sin, means literally ‘missing the mark’) but essentially **active rebellion** against God’s will and a violation of His holy law.
- It is important to acknowledge this because the first step towards holy living is to recognize the true nature and wickedness of sin.

So in other words, those (like the false teachers) who live a life of **habitual** (present tense) **sin** are in **active rebellion** against God.

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a **practice of sinning** also practices lawlessness; sin is **lawlessness**. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

1 John 3:4-10a



*“He appeared”* refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ (which the Gnostics denied). In the Greek, John uses the **aorist tense**, meaning that Jesus appeared at a **point in time**. (Burdick, p.237)

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

1 John 3:4-10a

- John now gives the ***purpose*** for which Christ appeared: “*to take away our sins*”. Again, John uses the Greek ***aorist tense*** to convey the idea that our ***sins*** were taken away ***at a point in time*** (Burdick, p. 237)
- Compare this with what it teaches in Hebrews 10:10:
  - *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**.*

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared **to take away sins**, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

*John thus makes it clear that acts of sin are not compatible with being born of God. And this is true because Christ's purpose in coming was to remove such acts. (Burdick, p.237)*

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1 John 3:4-10a



*[John] can say to his readers that 'you know' these things because they stand at the heart of the gospel message which they heard from the beginning. (Kruse, p. 119)*

*<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*

1 John 3:4-10a

*“And in him [Jesus] is no sin”* - This echoes what John has already said about Jesus in:

- 1 John 2:1b – *Jesus Christ, the righteous*
- 1 John 3:3b – *He [Jesus] is pure*
- And what is taught in **all** of scripture: (John 8:46; Acts 2:27; 3:14; 4:30; 7:52; 2Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1Pet 1:19; 2:22)

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1 John 3:4-10a

*The declaration of verse 6 is a logical deduction from the statements of verse 5. Since Christ came to remove sins and since there is no sin in Him, it is obviously true that the one who dwells in him will not engage in habitual sin (Burdick, p.238)*

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**1 John 3:4-10a**



# Is John Teaching That Christians Never Sin?

- There are a number of statements in 1 John 3:4-10a which, if interpreted in isolation and understood in an **absolute sense**, would seem to imply that a true Christian never sins:
  - 1 John 3:6a – *No one who **abides in him** keeps on sinning.*
  - 1 John 3:6b – *no one who keeps on sinning has either **seen him or known him**.*
  - 1 John 3:8b - *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is **of the devil***
  - 1 John 3:9 - *No one **born of God** makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and **he cannot** keep on sinning because he has been **born of God**.*
- If we read this verse carelessly, it could almost seem as if John were saying in 1 John 3:4-10a that a **true Christian** (one who “*abides in Him*”, “*has known Him*”, is “*born of God*”) **never sins**! That if a person commits even one sinful act, he proves that he is not a Christian (i.e., “*of the devil*”) and therefore it’s impossible (“*he cannot*”) for a Christian to ever sin.



# Is John Teaching That Christians Never Sin?

- But you'll remember that **earlier** in this letter, John teaches that Christians **do**, in fact, sin:
  - 1 John 1:8 - *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
  - 1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
  - 1 John 1:10 - *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*
  - 1 John 2:1 - *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*
- So, how do we **reconcile** what John says in 3:4-10 with what he said in 1 John 1:8-2:1?
- **Some** who read what John says in 3:4-10 conclude that Christians **can**, in fact, stop sinning altogether!
- This view is called **Perfectionism**.

# Perfectionism

- Those who hold to this view would need to give some explanation of what John teaches in 1 John 1:8 – 1 John 2:2 where he says things like “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves*”.
- What **some** who hold to Christian Perfectionism do with those verses is say they refer to **immature Christians** (i.e., Christians who have not yet **reached** sinless perfection)!
- But this does not adequately deal with **their interpretation** of what John says in:
  - 1 John 3:6b – *No one who keeps on sinning has either **seen him or known him***.
  - 1 John 3:9 – *No one **born of God** makes a practice of sinning...*
- To be **consistent**, they would have to say that anyone who has not “*seen*” Christ (through the eyes of faith), “*known*” Christ, or been “*born of God*” is **not** just an **immature** Christian, they’re not a Christian **at all**!

# Perfectionism

- But when we examine what John **says** in 1 John 1:8-2:2, it clearly seems that he is speaking to **Christians**:
  - 1 John 1:8 - *If we [including John] say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
  - 1 John 2:1 - *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*
- The fact that true Christians **do** sin is taught, **not only** in 1 John, but **throughout** the New Testament.
  - Luke 17:3-4 - *If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," you must forgive him.*
  - 1 Corinthians 3:1,3 - *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ... For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*
  - 1 Timothy 1:15b - *Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I [Paul] am the foremost.*
  - James 5:16a - *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*



# Perfectionism

- Therefore, while someone holding to a Perfectionist point of view might ***seem*** to make a strong case for their view when interpreting 1 John 3:4-10a, they cannot give an adequate explanation of all the other clear passages (even in 1 John) that teach that, ***contrary*** to the claim of the Perfectionists, ***all*** Christians do, in fact, sin from time to time as long as they remain on this earth.



# So What *Does* John Mean in 1 John 3:4-10 When He Seems to Say That Christians Don't Keep on Sinning?

- I believe the best understanding of what John is saying in these verses is not that a true Christian never sins, ***ever***, but that a true Christian does not make a ***regular and consistent practice*** of sinning.
- One of the clues that this is what John has in mind is his repeated use of the ***present tense*** Greek verbs and participles throughout this section – a grammatical construction that in Greek that indicates ***habitual, continuous action***.
- Our ESV translation has been very helpful in conveying this present tense idea by the way it translates many of the verbs in this text:
  - *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning* (3:4, cf. 8, 9)
  - *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning* (3:6, cf. 9)
  - *Whoever practices righteousness* (3:7)

# So What *Does* John Mean in 1 John 3:4-10 When He Seems to Say That Christians Don't Keep on Sinning?

- *Although the believer sometimes sins, yet not sin but opposition to sin, is the ruling principle in his life.*  
(Plummer)
- *His whole life is one of truceless antagonism to sin.* (Law)
- *The 'seed' within the believer's spirit fills it with irreconcilable hate against every sin, and urges an unceasing conflict against all unrighteousness.* (Alford)
- *It is not that Christians are wholly free from all vice but they heartily strive to form their lives in obedience to God. . . Sin does not reign in them, for the Spirit does not let it flourish.* (Calvin)
- *The believer may fall into sin but he will not walk in it.*  
(David Smith)

Both the [Greek] present tense and the meaning of the verb *meno* ["lives"] speak of **continued** dwelling. . . . John does not say that the Christian does not commit a **single act of sin**. That idea would be represented by the [Greek] aorist tense. Instead he declares, "No one who is dwelling in Him is **continually sinning**". (Burdick, p.239)

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> **No one who abides in him keeps on sinning**; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...



As in the first half of the verse the [Greek] verb hamartano ["continues to sin"] appears in the present tense describing the **habit** of sinning. A **single act of sin** does not indicate that a person has not seen Him or known Him, but **continual sinning** does. (Burdick, p.240)

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; **no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.** <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...

1 John 3:4-10a

Note that we who have “seen” Jesus, will not see him **physically** until he appears again (cf. 1 John 3:2). We “see” Him now through the eyes of faith.

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1 John 3:4-10a



In verse 7, John gives another warning concerning the **false teachers**. The false teachers were not only **living** sinful lives themselves, but they were **teaching others to do the same**. In 2:26 John warned his readers about those who would deceive them. In **that** case the warning was related to a denial that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In **this** context, the warning relates to **moral behavior**.

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1 John 3:4-10a



Here again, as in 2:29, it is the **continued practice** of righteousness (poion, present tense) that is indicated, rather than **one righteous act**... The practice of righteousness is not said to **make** one righteous. If that were true, the Greek would read "becomes righteous," rather than "is righteous." Righteous conduct is a **sign** of righteous character. (Burdick, p.241)

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. **Whoever practices righteousness is righteous**, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10a</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...

*[The Greek word] kathos [translated “as”] does not indicate that the Christian is righteous to the **same extent** as Christ; this would be impossible for finite man. Instead the believer is said to be righteous in the **same manner** as Christ is. In the family of God, the children of God are like the Son of God. (Burdick, p.241)*

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# Class Discussion Time





# \*Class Discussion Time

- We have seen the terminology that John uses of those who habitually practice sinful behavior (“lawless rebel”) indicates that he has a **very strong** view of the **seriousness** of sin. What do you think John would say to those today who claim to be Christians but insist on participating in an LGBT “lifestyle” that scripture clearly condemns?
- Have you ever met a Christian who believed he has achieved sinless perfection? Did he use the texts that we looked at today in 1 John 3:4-10a to support his case? After hearing today’s lesson, do you believe you could show such a person how they are mishandling that text?
- In 1 John 3:5, John uses a Greek tense (aorist) to convey that Christ appeared and took away our sins at **a point in time in the past**. (cf. with Hebrews 10:10 where it says that “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*”) Roman Catholic dogma denies this teaching and insists that Christ is re-sacrificed over and over by the priest during the Roman Catholic mass. Do you believe this is a serious error? Why or why not?