

# The Elephant in the Room

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning I want you to take your Bibles and open them to 1 John chapter 3 and our text for this morning will be verses 4 through 10.

! You can be looking at your Bibles as I read 1 John 3 starting with verse 4. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness and sin is lawlessness.

And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins and in him there is no sin. Whoever abides in him does not sin.

Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous just as he is righteous.

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.

[ 1 : 28 ] 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.

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifested. Manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is he who does not love his brother.

Now, as you've noticed on the screen up here, I've entitled my message this morning, The Elephant in the Room. Which I think is an appropriate title.

Of course, that's a very common, very well known, often used expression. It just really means literally the existence of a very large issue that everyone is aware of and nobody wants to talk about.

The elephant in the room. And that fits our subject perfectly. I mean really, because as you have surely discovered after reading the passage, after I read the passage, our subject is sin.

[ 2 : 36 ] Sin. And I think you would agree with me that sin is an elephant in the room issue. It always has been. An issue of which, about which everyone is acutely aware, but almost no one wants to talk about.

And I say almost no one because preachers certainly like to talk about it. But almost no one else does. It's the elephant in the room.

But really, it's worse than that. Worse than just being a subject we don't like to talk about. It is a subject or the very existence of sin is something that is denied by many in our world.

And if not denied, called something else. Redefined. Renamed. If sin exists, they say, then it is merely a weakness.

Not a weakness, it's a sickness. It's a weakness, a sickness, a mistake. Just a bad thing.

[ 3 : 53 ] You messed up. Flubbed up. Made a mistake. Or sin is caused by poor self-esteem.

In fact, there are those who have defined sin that. It's simply a poor self-concept. That's really the only sin that exists.

Or that it's caused by an economic injustice. And we can name it many different ways. And it is named many different ways in our world today.

Maybe it's a deficiency in education. You know, the ignorant sin. But it's not really sin. It's just that they don't know better. You know, they're not educated. Or perhaps it is a glandular imbalance.

Or a problem with blood sugar. You know, you eat a Snicker bar and get sugar high and do things that you shouldn't do. I'm kind of poking fun at it, but it's no laughing matter really.

[ 5 : 01 ] There are those who really believe that. Or it's just, it's not really sin. It's just an anger problem. Anger management problem. I mean, that could be it.

Or maybe on the broad scale, and many would define it under this umbrella, it is simply that you're a product of your environment.

Whatever your environment has been. You know, your upbringing and family. And maybe it's just the fact that you have red hair. You know. Little red hair out there. And on and on it goes, you know. And this is how the world defines sin. And how do they define it? They just simply rename it. Call it something else. You know. But you know, if a dog has four legs and you call its tail a leg, how many legs does it have? Just four. [ 6 : 03 ] It doesn't make any difference what you call the tail. It's still a tail. No matter what you call sin, it's still sin. And for those in the world who still have some concept of sin, and there still are those who have some kind of a concept of sin, there is, in our world today, virtually no set standard for sin.

Certainly not the Bible. A timeless, unalterable Bible. Certainly not that. Rather, sin is relative. All right, you know this, don't you? It's relative. I mean, it's sin to you, but not necessarily to me. It's kind of relative. Or, if not relative, it's situational. I mean, there are just a certain set of circumstances that justify sin. And so, therefore, it's really not sin. It's sin in certain circumstances, not sin in other circumstances. It's situational. It's okay to lie under a certain given circumstances. Sin if the circumstances are different.

[ 7 : 19 ] You know what I'm talking about. It's situational. Or sin is just simply subjective. Not objective, but subjective. I am the one who defines sin for me.

Or the culture defines it. And so, when the culture changes, the definition of sin changes. I'm not telling you something you don't know and something you're not aware of. Something you've not observed. We see this all over the place. And this is the unregenerate world. It's their view of sin. But I would remind you that John is not addressing the world here in this passage.

John is addressing the church. The church. And this is a letter to the church. And let's just be honest with one another. Sin is the elephant in this room. It's in this room. Sin is not really something most Christians today want to have a serious discussion about. You know? Oh, we don't mind hearing about it from time to time.

[ 8 : 31 ] And talking about it, at least in generalities. And we certainly love talking about it within the context of sin out there somewhere. But what about sin in here?

In here? And really, on a more personal plane, sin in us. In me.

In you. Personally. What about that? And in the context of the church, what about sin in the Lord's body? The local body.

Sin in the church. What about that? And so when sin hits close to home. Whether it's close to your own heart, your own life. Or whether it's family.

Or whether it's church, family. When sin hits close to home. Do you have a tendency to soften its seriousness? I mean, ask yourself that question.

[ 9 : 37 ] Or refuse to deal with it scripturally. Or overlook it altogether.

You know, there seems to be a difference in how we respond to sin, react to sin, think about sin when it's somebody else's sin.

Than when it's our own sin. Or sin out there, as opposed to sin in here. We have a tendency to overlook it.

But sin is such a serious thing. You know that, don't you? Serious.

Very serious. With God. Very serious thing. And according to John, actually, how one views sin. And how one deals with sin.

[ 10 : 33 ] And how one relates practically to sin. That is, the practice of sin. According to John, that's the test of the authenticity of one's salvation.

I mean, the gospel, or excuse me, the letter, this letter of John is just full of tests. About the authenticity of your faith. Of your relationship with Christ.

Of course, his primary goal is to give you assurance that your faith is true. It's genuine. But he can't argue that point without also presenting the other side of it.

There are tests that test one way or the other as to whether or not you are a true believer. And so this is a test here.

And it's an interesting test, isn't it? What does John say? Well, let me remind you. Verse 6.

Whoever abides in Jesus does not sin.

[ 11 : 33 ] Verse 8. He who sins is of the devil. Verse 9.

Whoever has been born of God does not sin. I mean, have you ever heard of anything so black and white in your life?

Well, you say, I have. I've read this before. I mean, how are we to take this? How are we to understand this?

And we think, surely John doesn't mean this exactly the way that he says it or wrote it. And we'll sort all of that out as we go along.

But here really is John's main idea. Every passage in the Bible has a main idea. The author has a main idea in mind.

[ 12 : 29 ] Here's what it is with John. And then we'll try to explain, work out all of the details of what he says here that are troubling to us.

Okay? But here's the main idea. Sin is a serious thing with God. And how you view sin, how you deal with sin, and what the practice of sin looks like in your life reveals something definitively about the reality of your salvation.

Now, looking at the passage here in 1 John 3, there's a lot to explain, a lot to clarify. And since this passage is not new to you, perhaps you have, you know, over the years received some clarification on the meaning of a lot of what John is saying here.

But I want to assume that we don't know. And let's walk through this. To begin with, I want you to notice, and this may not be just really apparent on the surface, but I want you to realize that John's lesson, his treatment, kind of his approach to the subject of sin is what we would call Trinitarian. It's Trinitarian. What do I mean by that? Well, all three members of the Holy Trinity are involved in this. To put it another way, sin is contrary to every member of the Divine Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[ 14 : 14 ] And John then connects the issue of sin to all three here in the passage. All three are mentioned either directly, two of them directly, the third one implied in what is said.

So all three are here. Your sin, and here's the bottom line, your sin, my sin, is an offense to every member of the Trinity, of the Godhead.

And so let's see this. I mean, there are three members of the Trinity, hence the word Trinity. And so there are three points to my sermon this morning.

First, what about sin and God the Father? What about sin and God the Father? And it's very clear from the passage. Here's number one.

Sin is rebellion against the sacred law of God the Father. The law of God. Sin is rebellion against it.

[ 15 : 17 ] It's rebellion against the sacred. That means holy. Law of God. Very basic. I mean, this is very basic, and we should all know this.

Verse 4, whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness. Lawlessness. And then he adds this. Sin is lawlessness.

Lawlessness is what sin is. Okay? That's what it is. It's lawlessness. It's disobedience to the law of God that he has given to us in his word.

And there are more than 10. Okay? In fact, someone has, some scholars have tried to count them up, all the laws in the word of God, and they've come up with well over 700 of them.

That's not important. God has given us his law. And sin is lawlessness. That's what sin is.

[ 16 : 19 ] Now, at this point, I think it would be a good time to clear up something. Something that probably you already know. Again, this is not the first time you've heard a message or received a lesson taught on this particular passage.

And so you probably know much of what I'm about to say. But let's just make sure we're clear on all of this. About what John is talking about. When he says, whoever commits sin, commits sin.

The committing of sin. And that phrase or those words and sometimes used in different wording appears throughout this passage.

This idea of committing sin. Whoever commits sin. What does he mean by that? Well, first of all, the word translated sin. Is the Greek word hamartia.

Hamartia. You probably have heard that word before as well. Preachers like to throw in a little Greek every once in a while. Hamartia. Hamartia.

[ 17 : 26 ] And that is the primary word. The common word for sin in the New Testament. There are other words translated sin or transgression or whatever. But the word sin primarily, almost always, not always, but almost always, is a translation of this Greek word hamartia.

And perhaps the most famous use of it is found in Romans 3.23. Romans 3.23. And you know that passage for all have sinned.

Hamartia. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All right. Very key passage of scripture to use in sharing the gospel.

I think it's very, very useful. Number one on the Roman road. Okay. For all have hamartia. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And this word comes into the Bible from the secular world. As is, by the way, the case with all of our great theological words. You know, they didn't begin to be in the Bible.

[18:36] They began in the secular world. They were used in different contexts with different meanings and nuances. And this word hamartia comes to us from the context of archery.

Archery. And its basic meaning is to miss the mark. Hamartia. To miss the mark.

That's the meaning of the word. And you can kind of imagine that in the context of archery. You know. The typical target. Archery target.

Had one mark on it. Just one. I mean, we always have this picture in later developments. You have the circles, you know, of the target. But the archery target had one mark on it.

Right in the middle. The bullseye, as it were. And it represents the perfect shot.

[19:38] Okay? On the target. I mean, when you're shooting and you want to hit the mark. It's the perfect shot. And so, you know, the archer would take his bow. And then he would take an arrow.

And he would string that arrow and pull that arrow back. And he would take careful aim. And then he would release it for that arrow to hit the target. And if his aim was true, taking into, you know, consideration all the variables.

Wind and distance and all of that. And things I don't know anything about. I've never been very good at shooting an arrow at anything. And he takes into consideration all that.

And if his aim is true, then his arrow will hit the mark. It'll hit the mark. And if not, then hamartia.

Missed the mark. And that's the idea behind this word. That is in its secular use. To miss the mark. Now, God in his sovereignty and through inspiration, inspiring the Bible writers, the New Testament writers.

[20:51] He inspired them to use that very term as a term to identify sin. Really to define what sin is.

It's to miss the mark. But you have to ask the question, what is the mark? Well, the mark in the context of the Bible, the mark is nothing short of the absolute moral perfection of God.

That's the mark. That's the mark. The mark. And what did God say there in Romans chapter 3, verse 23? He said, all.

How many? All. All have hamartia. Have sinned. Missed the mark.

Missed God's required mark. The absolute moral perfection of God. All have missed it. Have missed it.

[21:57] And the consequence of that is Romans 6, 23. You know. The wages of hamartia. The wages of missing the mark is death.

It's death. And so, you know, no matter how close you get, you've missed it. Right? I mean, maybe perhaps we could argue.

You know, you could argue, well, I got real close. I mean, I'm probably closer than anybody. Closer, certainly, than most. I mean, I try to live a straight and narrow life.

I do a pretty good job of it. And yet, you've missed it. No matter how close you get. And in this, close does not count. It may count in horseshoes.

It doesn't count in this. You've missed it. Now, you know, obviously, this poses a huge problem for us. Right?

[22:55] I mean, an insurmountable problem, seemingly. At least from our side of it. And, of course, that's why Jesus came. Okay. Why he sacrificed his sinless life and shed his spotless blood.

And John says something about that in verse 5, doesn't he? And we'll get to that a little bit later. But let me go ahead and read it. And you know that he, this is speaking of Jesus, was manifested.

He was revealed. He appeared to take away our sins. Because that's the only hope we have.

Because we've all missed it. Missed God's mark.

Missed God's moral perfection. And so Jesus came to take it away. Because in him there is no sin. That's what he says. And we'll talk more about that here in a moment.

And yet that still leaves a huge problem for us. Doesn't it? Big problem. And why is that? Because we still sin.

[ 24 : 00 ] You do. I do. We still sin. And we sin every day. And more than once a day.

In fact, a whole lot more often than you know. Than I know. Can't help it. Can't help ourselves. You know, we sin every single day.

And John seems to be. I mean, doesn't he seem to be very dogmatic here? With these absolute statements that he's making in these passages.

Let me read them again. A few others to add to it. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness. Verse 4. Do you commit sin? You already have today.

I don't know what it is. But I know you have. What does he say in verse 6? Whoever abides in him does not sin.

[ 24 : 54 ] That's as dogmatic as you can get. Does not sin. Really. Does not sin. Or how about verse 6?

Whoever sins has neither seen him. Seen Jesus. Nor known him. That's pretty serious, isn't it? What does that do with your profession of faith in Jesus?

Your claim of salvation. And verse 8. He who sins is of the devil. Well, what about you? Have you ever sinned?

Yes. Verse 9. Whoever has been born of God does not sin. Really? Really?

I mean, I'm born of God. That's my testimony. I'm pretty sure about that. I am sure about that. That's my hope. A sure hope. I'm born of God.

[ 25 : 56 ] And I assure you, I sin. Every single day. Just like you. So, what does John say? We want to say, actually ask the question this way.

What does John really say? Well, in the first place, we have to compare what he says here in chapter 3 with what he has already said in chapter 1.

We studied that a long time ago. Do you remember? The subject there was also sin. The subject there was also sin. And I would say to you that John is being just as dogmatic there in chapter 1 as he is here in chapter 3.

Chapter 1, verse 8, speaking of the sin nature. John says, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

As we're not saved. In verse 9, speaking of sin activity in our lives, he says, if we say that we have not sinned, committed any sins, we make him a liar.

[ 27 : 08 ] God a liar. And his word is not in us. Again, you're not saved. Not truly saved. Pretty dogmatic. And so on the one hand, chapter 1, if we claim that we do not sin, we are liars.

We even make God and claim that God is a liar and we are not Christians. That's chapter 1. But on the other hand, chapter 3, if we do commit sin, we don't really know Jesus.

In fact, we're of the devil and we're not actually born again. Huh? I mean, how are we to reconcile this seeming contradiction?

Well, there is no contradiction. Of course. I mean, the Bible never, ever contradicts itself. Never. Jesus said that his word, the word of God is fixed.

There's no contradiction. Contradiction. And so then, based upon that, and we have to always approach God's word in that way, and not just because we decide to, but that is the right way, that there's no contradiction here.

[ 28 : 17 ] And so if there are no contradictions, then there must be some other explanation. See, John is talking about two different aspects of sinfulness in these two chapters.

Two different aspects. Chapter 1, he's talking about the sin nature which we all have, and to deny that we have it means we're not truly saved.

Not only the sin nature, but he's also talking about, there in chapter 1, he's talking about individual acts of sin, sinning, which we all do.

And to deny that, we make God a liar because he says all have sinned. All right, so that's what chapter 1's about, but chapter 3 is a different aspect, a different feature of sinfulness.

He's talking here about the ongoing habitual practice of sin. That is, that sin is the guiding principle, the overruling principle of your life.

[ 29 : 27 ] No matter what the sin is. Now, see, that's quite different, isn't it? It's quite different. You see, all of John's references to sin in this passage, specifically every verb that is connected to the noun sin, and hamarti is not the only noun used in the text, but all of the verbs connected to the

noun, all of them are present tense.

And by now, you should know that that means continuous action, because I bring that up a lot, don't I? Continuous action. All right, so we could translate verse 4 this way.

Now, that's quite an expanded translation, but that's basically the idea.

Let me read that again. Let me say that again. Everyone, anyone who habitually practices sin is living in an ongoing condition of lawlessness before God, regardless of what, specifically, that sin is or sins are.

Alfred Plummer, probably not a name that you're familiar with, although he's still quite red today, even though he lived back in the 1800s.

[ 30 : 58 ] He was a clergyman for the Church of England. And here's what he wrote about this. Listen very carefully. Although the believer sometimes sins, I probably take issue with that, with Alfred Plummer, not sometimes.

But although the believer, let's just change it to sins. Although the believer sins, we would all agree with that, we sin all the time. All right, although the believer sins, as in committing sins, he says, yet not sin, but opposition to sin is the ruling principle of his life or her life.

You understand that? We sin, commit sins, but sin is not the ruling principle of your life. Opposition to sin is the ruling principle of your life.

And then he goes on to say, for whenever he sins or she sins, he confesses it, right? According to Scripture, and wins forgiveness and perseveres.

But the habitual sinner does none of these things. Sin is his ruling principle. Ruling principle.

[ 32 : 24 ] And this could not be the case if he had ever really known Christ. I think that's a good way to put it. Very clear.

Now, John actually gives us the opposite condition, doesn't he? In verse 7, look at it. The opposite condition. Little children, let no one deceive you.

He who practices righteousness, and this too is in the present tense. Continuous action. And we could insert the word habitually. So he who habitually practices righteousness is righteous.

That is, he's saved. Just as he is righteous. That is, Jesus is righteous. All right, so that's first. Sin is rebellion against the sacred law of God the Father.

This is first and foremost what sin is. It is rebellion. Rebellion. I heard about a little boy who had been bad.

[ 33 : 28 ] Disobeyed his mother. And so his mother locked him in the closet. Now, moms don't do that. Locked him in the closet.

Left him there for a while. But after a while, she noticed that he wasn't making any noise. And, you know, not even a peep.

She couldn't hear anything. And so being the good mother that she was. She unlocked the closet door and opened the door and checked on him.

And she said to her little boy, what are you doing? And he said, well, I've spit on your coat. I've spit on your dress. I've spit on your shoes.

And now I'm waiting for some more spit. A little sinner. Rebelliousness.

[ 34 : 25 ] And that's what sinners are. Rebellious. That's what sinners are like. That's what we all once were. And we still lapse into from time to time.

But the difference is that rebellion is not the guiding principle of our lives. And if it is for you, then you're not saved. You're not saved.

But if it is the guiding, that is, rebellion is not the guiding principle for you, but rather righteousness is, then it is a proof of genuine faith.

The habitual obedience to God's law. In fact, if you will remember, John has already taught this in his letter. We go back to chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, where John wrote in, And by this we know that we know him.

We know that we know. We know we're saved. By this we know it. If we keep his commandments. And guess what? There's another present tense. Continuous action.

[ 35 : 31 ] That is, if we practice the habitual keeping of his commandments. That's how we know that we know him. He who says, I know him and does not habitually practice the keeping of his commandments is a liar.

And the truth is not in him. Not saved. So number one sin is rebellion. Rebellion against the sacred law of God the Father.

Rebellion against the sacred law of God the Father. Number two, sin is rejection of the saving love of God the Son.

Sin is rejection of the saving love of God the Son. You know, the saving love of God the Son comes to us through the gospel. His sacrifice for us.

And, you know, really when you think about it, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed around the world right now as we speak.

[ 36 : 45 ] In fact, every day, all day, 24-7. Thousands and thousands, countless of thousands of people are hearing the gospel. And with it, its plea, I would even say, demand, demand to repent of sin and believe on Jesus Christ.

And there are countless thousands of people who are hearing that right now as we speak. And it happens all day and every day, 24-7. Either it's a gospel tract or a Bible they picked up in a hotel room or it's some preacher on the radio or on television or maybe it's a friend or a family member or one-on-one type of gospel presentation.

Countless thousands are hearing it right now today. Countless thousands are hearing it right now. They don't have to say a word of rejection or no or I don't need that or no thanks for that or I'll think about it and get back with you.

They don't have to say anything to reject. I mean, you do, of course, but everyone who rejects the gospel rejects it through sin.

[ 38 : 27 ] Sin and more sin. They just simply go on in their rebellion against God's sacred law and they go on in their rejection of Christ's saving love.

The cross. The provision of salvation. They just go on with sin. and so therefore do you know then what living according to the principle ongoing living according to the principle of sin you know what that says about your view your your reaction to the gospel the cross the sacrifice of Jesus you know what that says about verse 5 says and you know that he was manifested he appeared to what take away our sin he left heaven for that Jesus left heaven for that set aside the free autonomous use of his glory and power and sovereignty can set that aside the prerogatives of his of his deity set that aside took on human flesh came to this earth suffered as a man endured the shame of the cross sacrificed his life to take away your sin what love is that and to live on in a pattern of sinful behavior i mean that is the most flagrant rejection of the gospel that you could imagine and those who live according to that principle verse 6 have neither seen Jesus nor known him that is they've never come to the place where their eyes were open to his true identity the true Jesus and they have never known him personally savingly in fact quite the opposite isn't it just like the devil just like the devil verse 7 and 8 let no one be deceive you starts out there in verse 7 and skipping on he says he who habitually sins is of the devil of the devil for the devil has sinned from the beginning that's why Jesus came that's why he had to come that's why Jesus died that's why he had to die verse 8 says that he might destroy the works of the devil and here's the point an ongoing habitual sin is open rejection of that love man that makes sin sin the worst kind of sin the worst definition that's what makes sin sin is this open rejection of the love of Jesus Christ who gave his life see this would never will never be the case with a true born again believer in Christ

John says the true believer abides in him and does not habitually practice sin verse 6 doesn't go on in it rather the true believer John says habitually and I'm constantly needing to bring in the continuous action of the verb the true believer habitually practices righteousness what is right by God just as he is righteous verse 7 so it's still challenging so let's wrap this up this morning sin is a serious thing that's why it's the elephant in the room that few people like to talk about and you might be wishing I wasn't talking about it right now and why is it because sin is rebellion against the sacred law of God the Father and sin is rejection of the saving love of God the Son and then one more sin is refusal is refusal of the sanctifying life of God the Holy Spirit look at verse 9 whoever has been born of God and that's the implication is this is the work of the Holy Spirit born of the Spirit that's where he brings that third member of the Trinity into the discussion whoever has been born of God does not sin or habitually practice sin and why is that?

for his seed God's seed remains in him or her and therefore what? he, she, cannot sin again cannot habitually practice sin do you understand this?

the believers birthing into the family of God the new birth is primarily as I've said a work attributed to the Holy Spirit regeneration the Holy Spirit regenerates brings to life the repentant sinner who is believing brings them to life regenerates them births them from above this is the born again experience the Holy Spirit then also and we've talked about this implants the very nature of the

Father into the believer we become chips off the old block we have the very nature of God in us that's the work of the Holy Spirit and that's what John is talking about when he speaks of this seed remaining in him or remaining in us remaining in the believer and it is that life of God in us that sanctifies us it is separating us from sin sets us apart from sin the principle of sin and at the same time and this is glorious glorious thing of this the other side of the coin sets us apart also for him sets us apart from sin the principle of sin and sets us apart for him to take us from being children of the devil and making us children of God children of the Father sets us apart from sin and for himself and the result is we do not habitually practice sin indeed we cannot we don't stop sinning we still sin but we don't continue on in it aversion to sin hatred of sin has become the operating principle of our lives which is the very nature of God we cannot habitually practice sin but again to live according to the principle of sin is to refuse that wondrous work of the

[ 46 : 31 ] Holy Spirit of God separating us from all that is sinful and separating us unto all that is holy and good and righteous and that is God and then as we draw this to a close brings all of this together in one defining statement there in verse 10 and the challenge is or the thing you ought to do is to see where you fit here use this kind of defining statement as as a diagnostic for your life your spiritual life verse 10 in this as all I've said here in this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest children of God children of the devil those are the only two types in the world I'm sorry there's no in between you're either one or the other children of God or children of the devil and John says in this in this how we relate to sin our practice of sin our view of sin in this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest they are made obvious evident and what is it whoever does not practice righteousness habitually practice that's the guiding principle of your life whoever does not do that is not of God not of God nor is he who does not love his brother that's added on there which is a segue actually and John's next subject which we'll take up next week