

Significance of Sin Revisited

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Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0:00] Last week we did an extended review of 1 John to reacquaint ourselves with the book.

! We talked about how John tends to alternate between presenting a test or warning and then! providing encouragement. And last week's new material was one of those encouraging passages.

! We'll just go ahead and read that again to remember where we were. That's 1 John 2, 28-3. 1

John 2, 28-3 says, And now, little children, abide in him, that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.

Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

[1:10] And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. So, being a child of God stirs within John a sense of wonder, awe, and amazement.

And the expression carries both a qualitative and a quantitative force when he says, What glorious, measureless love is essentially how you can explain that when he says, what manner of love.

So, this love, of course, originates from God, and it always seeks the true welfare of those being loved. So, it is amazing indeed when we remember the personal destitution of those he loves, including us.

Remember that God's love is a love that works visible, transforming results in the life of its recipients. So, when we live in the reality of Christ's return, it makes a difference in our behavior. Because Christians will someday be like Christ, a desire should grow within the Christian to be more like him now. Tonight, we start a larger section that runs from 3-4 through 24, and although it is a new section, it still ties in with purifying ourselves just as Christ is pure.

[2:17] And the primary aim of this section is to combat the false teachers who are corrupting the fundamentals of the faith. So, these verses will amplify, reiterate, and emphasize the test that we have already seen from John.

So, verses 4-10 convey that genuine believers practice righteousness, and verses 11-24 will show us that genuine believers practice love toward the brethren.

So, John was very concerned that Christians know how to tell the true from the false, and the genuine from the artificial. And also, of course, that means true believers from false ones.

So, the test that we will see recapped again here in this longer passage will help us determine the validity of anybody's claim to be a true Christian. I already said that John tends to alternate between encouraging sections and then test or warnings.

And I already told you that last week was an encouraging section. So, what do you think we are going to look at more this week? John is going to go back to warning his readers in the first part of this larger section.

[3:22] And we will cover verses 4-10a tonight. We will only get through the first half of verse 10. And in these verses, John will revisit the significance of sin.

And then next week, we will look at verses 10b-15. And John will revisit the significance of love. So, we will hear a lot of the same things that we have already heard in 1 John.

But John will give us a little bit of review. 1 John 3-10 is the key verse because it ties those two sections together. 1 John 3-10 says this.

It says, 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, only two kinds of children exist in the world from John's viewpoint. And that is children of God and children of Satan. No one can belong to both of those families simultaneously.

[4:19] Either somebody is in God's family and exhibits God's righteous character. Or that person belongs to Satan's family and exhibits Satan's sinful nature. So, with that introduction, let's go ahead and read the verses we will cover tonight.

Again, that is 3-4-10a. And starting in 3-4, John says,

We need to deal with something that stands out in this passage. The King James starts the verses by saying, Whoever commits sin. And just a few words later, it says, Whoever abides in him does not sin.

Then it says, Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. And then the next paragraph gets even more disconcerting when it says, He who sins is of the devil. And whoever has been born of God does not sin.

Think about this next question without answering it out loud. Do you sin? So, as you are pondering that answer, Remember what John said in 1-1-8 and 1-1-10.

[6:17] Verse 1-8 said, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And then 1-10 said, If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Nearly every time we do this study in 1 John, we remind ourselves of John's primary purpose. And that of course is stated in 1 John 5-13, where John says, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Right now you may be thinking, How does this help me know that I have eternal life? Because John says in tonight's text that he who sins is of the devil, and we've just reminded ourselves that everyone sins, and if we say we have not sinned, we make God into a liar, and his word is not in us. So on the surface, it sounds like a rather hopeless situation. Without any explanation, it could be enough to make some folks break into the chorus of gloom, despair, and agony on me from that theological show, He-Haw.

I can tell Mike remembers that. Anybody else remember that besides Mike? I'll give you a few seconds to get that chorus out of your head before we go on. But this may be the only lesson in the world tonight where you hear Buck Owens and John MacArthur quoted in the same lessons.

[7:37] All the more reason we need to get the pastor to come back because who knows where we'd go from here. But there is a better explanation though than singing gloom, despair, and agony on me, and we'll go ahead and talk about that now.

Here is that better explanation. John is not suggesting that the child of God will never commit a single act of sin. Instead, John is describing a way of life, a character, or a prevailing lifestyle. So in other words, a believer will not live a life that's characterized by sin. From John's earlier statements, it's obvious that the Christian, while enjoying a position or standing of sinlessness because of our identification with Christ, will still sin on occasion and the Christian will need to seek God's forgiveness.

But what we also know from John's writings is that a genuine believer won't live in continual sin. Let me say that one more time just to make sure we get it. John is not suggesting that the child of God will never commit a single act of sin.

Instead, he's describing a way of life or a character or a prevailing lifestyle. So the believer won't live a life that's characterized by sin. And of course, we know that we are sinless in God's eyes because of what Christ has done for us.

[8:52] We're cloaked in the righteousness of Christ. But even with that, we'll still sin on occasion and we'll still need to ask God's forgiveness. But we need to make sure we realize that genuine believers won't live in continual sin.

So I think Tom probably has the English Standard version back there. Does anybody have the English Standard version besides Tom? I gave my own way to Scotland. Okay. Well, the ESB users, if there were any here tonight, would probably be wondering why we spent so much time on what we just talked about on continual sin.

Because the ESB gives a much better sense of John's meaning. Listen to the same verses from the ESB. It says, Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

Sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins. And in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

[10:00] The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 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.

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. So do you hear the difference in the translations?

The ESV better illustrates that John is talking about habitual ongoing sin when he uses phrases like makes a practice of sinning or keeps on sinning. Of course most of us tonight probably have either the King James or New King James.

So we will go back to the New King James as we look at the verses in detail. But always keep in mind that when the New King James talks about sin here, it is referring to habitual sin.

And we will talk about that a little bit more as we get into the verses themselves. So as we dig deeper into 4 through 10a, we will see that John gives us four reasons why true believers will avoid habitual sinning.

[11:03] And those reasons come straight out of the text. And they also will help us distinguish true believers from false ones. And the first reason why true believers avoid habitual sin is that sin is lawlessness.

So here is where your handout finally comes in. Sin is lawlessness. Look at verse 4 again. Verse 4 says, whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness.

And sin is lawlessness. I told you the points would come straight out of the text tonight. And that one literally is word for word. Lawlessness there is activity that is bereft of God's guidance and in violation of God's law.

So lawlessness is not the absence of law, but active rebellion against the law. So in other words, it's a willful rejection and active disobedience against God's moral standard, which is characteristic of a child of the devil.

So John's emphasis here is vital to his argument against the false teachers. Because from all indications, the apostle is dealing with individuals who are indifferent to sin.

[12:22] They believe that they can engage in any and all kinds of sinful activities and still be in fellowship with God. In their line of reasoning, their acts were neither moral nor immoral.

Sin, however, is not something to which we can be indifferent. Instead, sin is a willful disregard for God and his commandments. So it's a rebellious revolt against God's will.

And no one is excluded from the obligation to obey God. Therefore, those who differed from the apostles' teaching were placing themselves by their sinful acts in their direct opposition to God.

And we know that sin in its very nature is synonymous with being of the devil. To live a life of sin, then, is to align oneself with the world and the devil and be at enmity with God.

So it's the very opposite of what righteousness entails. And, of course, John likely is thinking of the same people that he mentioned back in 1 John 2.19, when he said, They went out from us, but they were not of us.

[13:22] For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were with us. And we just talked about how the ESV translates tonight's passages better than some of the older translations.

But rather than just taking my word for it, here's some proof from the original Greek. John starts the verse by saying that whoever commits sin, and the word commits there, is literally does.

So you could say whoever does sin, if you go back to the original text. So it's a matter of continual behavior, and you can tell that by the present continuous tense.

You also need to think about how it's possible to have sin, even if there is no law. Because sin was in the world between the time of Adam and Moses. And this was before God's law had even been given.

So it's not really accurate to say that sin is a transgression of the law. And that's why John says sin is lawlessness. It's really insubordination to God and wanting one's own way, and refusing to

acknowledge the Lord as being rightful sovereign.

[14:32] So in essence, it's placing our own will above the will of God. And so that makes us in opposition to the God who has the right to be obeyed. So you can see that sin definitely is lawlessness.

And that brings us to the second reason, then, why believers avoid the lifestyle of sin. And that is that Jesus came to take away believers' sin. Jesus came to take away believers' sins.

Listen to verses 5 through 7 again. It says, 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.

So the first part of verse 5 says, And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins. Now, a Christian cannot go on practicing sins because that would be a complete denial of the purpose for which the Lord Jesus came into the world.

[15:39] To go on in sin is to live in utter disregard for the reason for Christ's incarnation. We know that Christ died to sanctify or make holy the believer.

And to sin, then, is contrary to Christ's work of breaking the dominion of sin in the believer's lives. Remember the words of 2 Corinthians 5.21.

That's where Paul said, For he, which is talking about God there, made him who knew no sin, which of course is Jesus, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

So once again, For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Then going back to our first John text, looking back to the opening words of verse 5 one more time, We get a reminder that every word of the text in the Bible is important.

Because he says, Jesus was manifested. So Jesus was manifested or made visible. And when he talks about Jesus being made visible, that implies his pre-existence even before the incarnation.

[16:50] John uses the manifested word to refer to both the incarnation of Christ and his manifestation at the second coming. It's the same word that he used in 228 and 32 that we looked at last week when he talked about Christ's return.

So this self-disclosure of God and his son for the purpose of dealing with human sin stretches from the pre-existence of Christ all the way to his exaltation in glory.

And we talked about how Christ came to take away individual sins and the tense denotes the finality of his sacrificial act. And that should remind us of the proclamation of John the Baptist in which the same word is used when he said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And of course that comes from John 1:29. So one of the goals of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice was the effective removal of human sins. And Christ came to remove the individual acts of sin that were committed by his children.

The word order is even significant here because the word order of John's added phrase, And in him is no sin emphatically declares the sinlessness of Christ.

[18:08] Because literally that could be translated, And sin in him there is not, with the emphasis falling on sin. So John is saying, sin in him there is not.

John's statement is more than the fact that Christ did not commit sin. He argues that Christ does not possess a sinful nature and therefore could not commit sin. And John uses the present tense verb to assert that sinlessness is an eternal part of Christ's nature.

His sinlessness wasn't limited to his pre-existence. It wasn't limited to his incarnate life in the flesh.

And it's not limited to his present status either. Instead, Christ is sinless past, present, and future.

So you could say that sinlessness then is just essential to his very personhood. That's why Jesus can be both our atonement and our advocate. And of course, he's also the supreme example for us and the pattern for what his children should aspire to be.

And of course, the only way we can be a good example of that is to keep abiding in him, Which we continually hear from John as well. And that's why John says in verse 6, Whoever abides in him does not sin.

[19:20] Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. Because Christ came to take away sin, and because there's no sin in him, And because the believer is to pattern his life after Christ, The one who remains in Christ will not live a life of sin.

And John asserts that the one abiding in Christ cannot keep on sinning, as the EFV puts it. We see that John distinguishes between two groups in this verse.

The first class is characterized by their abiding relationship with Christ. And for this group, abiding in Christ is the grounds for their abstinence from sin. The second class John mentions are those who continue in sin.

And of these, John says that they have neither seen him nor known him. In contrast, remaining in Christ is tantamount to seeing him and knowing him. And those verbs are important there too, because seen and known are both in the perfect tense.

To see him entails spiritual vision that's brought about through a personal saving relationship with him. And the writer of Hebrews, who might be Paul, identifies this spiritual eyesight as faith.

[20 : 31] He says, Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. That's Hebrews 11.1. Earlier, John referred to a literal seeing of Jesus in the flesh.

That was all the way back in chapter 1, verses 2 and 3. But here John's emphasizing seeing the true nature and purpose of why Christ came to earth. And the one who sees Christ for who he is and embraces his redemptive work is the one who truly abides in him.

And to know him is to enter into a personal dynamic relationship with him. It's more than just intellectual comprehension or intellectual assent of who he is. It's a knowledge based upon experience.

So it's the understanding of who Christ is and what he has done for sinful humanity. And this knowledge is obtained rather than being naturally possessed. It's coming to know him more and more in a personal way as we continue throughout the sanctification process.

Those who abide in Christ then live a life marked by habitual righteousness and purity instead of lawlessness or rebellion or disobedience.

[21 : 44] So while the unbeliever lives in sin and is neither seen nor known Christ, the believer has terminated a life of sin for a life of abiding in Christ. The child of God then has to experience a decisive break with sin and sin no longer controls our lives.

Although we may slip into sin occasionally and do slip into sin occasionally, it's not the controlling factor in our lives. John's been beating the drum hard against sin, but in verse 7 we see the pastoral side of John come out again as he gives his readers a gentle but critical reminder.

He says in verse 7, Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous just as he is righteous. The word deceive there means to lead astray.

False teachers were attempting to pervert the fundamentals of the faith. John was concerned that some Christians might be fooled into accepting what they were advocating. And to prevent this deception from occurring, John repeatedly emphasized the basics of Christianity.

Those who are truly born again reflect the divine nature of the Son and they behave like him, manifesting the power of his life in them. And the genuine believers' habitual lifestyle of righteousness should stand in sharp contrast to those false teachers who practice sin.

[23 : 08] Because Christ died on the cross to transform sinners then, those truly born again have replaced the habit of sin with the habit of righteous living. You notice there that John says just as, when he says little children let no one deceive you.

He who practices righteousness is righteous just as he is righteous. But when he says just as there, he doesn't mean that the believer's righteousness is righteous to the same extent that Christ is righteous.

Instead, what he's saying is that Christ is the standard and the motivation for the Christian's righteousness. As a child of God, believers seek to live a life that's consistent with Christ-like righteousness.

In other words, every believer will seek to be like Jesus. We also need to notice something else here because the practice of righteousness is not what makes the individual righteous.

Instead, the practice of righteousness reveals the inner nature of the person practicing the righteousness. In other words, righteousness is the result, not the cause, for being a child of God.

[24 : 18] John warns against the deception of the false teachers who claim to be righteous but whose lives are marked by continual sin. Righteousness is the inner quality that displays itself outwardly.

And the one who is truly righteous is the one who practices righteousness. And that's a righteousness that's provided and displayed by Christ, who is the eternal righteous one. So we

always have to be careful to remember that when we are behaving well enough to be righteous, that righteousness doesn't come from us.

It comes from outside of us through him. And that brings us to the third reason why believers avoid habitual sin. And that is that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. We see that in verse 8. Verse 8 says, 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.

Believe it or not, this is the first time in 1 John that John refers specifically and directly to the devil.

[25 : 32] Here John is contrasting the one who practices righteousness and is of Christ with the one who does what is sinful and is of the devil. And he's going to use the word devil four times in this letter, including this first time.

And all of them are in this section. They're going to be in 3.8 and 3.10. And the word translated devil there means slanderer or accuser. So the devil instigates sin and those who live in sin are his children.

And of course he stands as direct opponent of God and God's righteousness. And Satan's sinful nature is shown through the life of those who belong to him. And we know that Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to destroy the devil's works.

So as before, John's use of the present active participle there indicates a continual state of sin where he talks about the sin of those who are of the devil.

So if one's life is a life of sin, it refers to a habitual lifestyle of sin, not just individual acts. Even though individual acts all put together may reveal the inner character.

[26 : 41] So according to verse 8, how long has the devil been sinning? It says the devil has sinned from the beginning. And the beginning is that period when the devil introduced sin through his own sinful rebellion.

It's he who introduced sin to the human race. And thus all who are sinning are his spiritual offspring. We should be glad that John is indeed talking about an habitual lifestyle of sin here.

But does that mean we just should be cavalier with our attitude about sin? We should still try to avoid sin whenever possible. Because all sin, regardless of the kind or degree, is satanic in nature. So to take part in that sin at all is to take part in the devil's activity. And of course to take part in sin is also opposing the work of God who sent his son to destroy that sin.

So even the smallest sin runs counter to the work of Christ. And believers instead are to overcome the evil one, here call the devil, and not participate in what the devil has to offer.

[27 : 48] And not to participate in what he is. So given all that we've just discussed about sin being of the devil and sin being in opposition to Christ, how should believers react when we do sin?

Well that's where we need to remember the promise that we first studied back in chapter 1. Listen to what John said in 1 John 1, 8 through 2, 1.

He said, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin, and if anyone sins.

And remember when we talked about the verse, we said you could almost insert, and we all do.

And if anyone sins, and we all do, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

[28 : 48] That last sentence is very important. Once again it says, and if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. So everything the devil has done or will do was destroyed on the cross.

And it will be on the very basis of Christ's finished work that all of the devil's works will ultimately be destroyed at the final judgment. In the immediate context, the reference is to the removal of sin from the individual's life.

Because Christ came to loose the sinner from the chains of sin, we always need to remember that there's liberation on the cross. And the liberance can be obtained through the work of the incarnate Son of God.

It's the characteristic of the devil to sin, and of Jesus to save. So listen to that last line again. We always should remember that when we do fall into sin.

It is the characteristic of the devil to sin, and of Jesus to save. And that's why when we do sin, we need to remember that we have an advocate with the Father who will still stand in for us.

[29:53] So far we've seen three reasons why believers avoid habitual sin. We've seen that sin is lawlessness. We've seen that Jesus came to take away believers' sins. And we've seen that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil.

Verse 9 has the fourth reason why believers avoid habitual sin. And that is that sin is incompatible with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sin is incompatible with the work of the Holy Spirit. Verse 9 says, 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 verse you may have noticed that John includes the phrase born of God twice. He's talking about the new birth. And that's the same new birth that John wrote about in the Gospel of John, back in John 3, verses 5 through 8.

And of course these verses are when Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus. Listen to John 3, 5 through 8 and hear how Jesus answered Nicodemus. Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[31:08] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. When people become Christians, God makes them new creatures with new natures. Of course we know that from 2 Corinthians 5, 17.

Believers then have God's characteristics because they have been born into God's family. And this new nature exhibits the habitual character of righteousness that's produced by the Holy Spirit.

The new birth involves the acquisition of a seed, which refers to the principle of life of God imparted to the believer at salvation's new birth. John uses this image of the planted seed to picture the divine element involved in being born again.

And Peter also used a similar picture of a seed. 1 Peter 1, 23-25 sounds very much like something John would write.

[32:16] We'll go ahead and start reading that cross reference in verse 22 to get more of the context. 1 Peter 1, 22-25 says this, 2 Peter 1, 23-25 says this, 2 Peter 1, 23-25 says this, 2 Peter 1, 23-25 says this, 2 Peter 1, 23-25 says this, Then he says, Then he says, Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

Thinking about this 1 Peter cross reference in relation to 1 John 3, 9, we can summarize 1 John 3, 9 like this. Because the word is present in the believer's heart through the work of the Spirit, the believer cannot keep on sinning.

The hearts of genuine Christians, of course those who truly are children of God, have been transformed so that they cannot live in a pattern of continual sin.

So the hearts of genuine Christians, those who truly are children of God, have been so transformed that they cannot live in continual sin. So in the verses tonight, we've seen the four reasons why believers avoid habitual sins.

All of those were straight from the verses. We saw that sin is lawlessness. Jesus came to take away believers' sins. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. And sin is incompatible with the work of the Holy Spirit.

[34:07] And all of these add up to the obvious point of the passage. And that's that lifestyle differentiates true believers from unbelievers. Lifestyle is what differentiates true believers from unbelievers.

The person who lives in sin is of the devil. And the person who does what is righteous is of God. For as John put it in the first half of verse 10, In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. The person who lives in sin is of the Messiah.

The person who lives in sin is of the Messiah. The person who lives in sin is of the Messiah. The person who lives in sin is of the Messiah.