

The Sin Test
1 John, 3:4 – 10
The Laurel Center
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Main idea: It is clear that God’s children have nothing to do with regularly practicing sin.

Introduction

There is a lot of confusion in our day and age concerning sin in Christianity. While people like Paul talk about if we sin grace increases all the more and the fact of the changed life, we look at the Old Testament and see a God who punishes sin with the death penalty. Many perceive a marked difference between the God of the Old Testament in the God of the New Testament. Some see a God of judgment in the Old Testament and the God of grace in the New Testament.

Especially the idea of sanctification weighs heavily into the situation. We are immediately justified when we turn from our ways and follow Christ. And yet, Christians still have a problem with sin. Despite the way that God sees us, when we sin, we are told that we are still Christians, and that all we need to do is ask for forgiveness. But John presents the sinner in a completely different light. As we will see, John makes a distinction between stumbling over sin and walking sin. And it all squares with the whole of the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament teaching on sin.

Text –1 John 3:4–10

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6** No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. **7** Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **8** 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. **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. **10** 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, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

I. A lifestyle of sin negates Jesus’ sacrifice (vv. 4 – 6).

A The regular practice of sin is without Jesus.

1 After beginning to talk about the children of God, John begins to make some distinctions that we don’t normally make today. Having the title “child of God.” Meant something very specific to John.

- 2 John equates sin to lawlessness, but it is not just a practice of one sin every once in a while. It is the practice of sin. Today, we would say it this way: anyone who has a behavior or lifestyle of sin is a lawbreaker.
- 3 This idea of sin breaking the law is not new to John or even to any of the writers of the New Testament. The Old Testament is replete with examples of this concept.
- 4 Everyone knows that sin breaks God's law. But in the day and age where grace is talked about so much, the reason it is talked about so much is because it is greater than sin.
- 5 Sin's ability to break the law and bring death has not changed between the Testaments. It is still just as potent even today as it was the day that Moses received the tablets of the law from God on Mount Sinai.
- 6 People misunderstand that things have not changed in God has not changed from one Testament to the other. Therefore, sin has the same dangerous outlook it has always had.
- 7 God's grace has not changed either. The penalty of sin is not changed and God has not changed. What has changed between the covenants is the way in which God is redeeming. The requirement of each covenant has always been faith, but faith has been exercised in different ways.
- 8 John ties the issue of behavioral sin, continuing and constant, to the issue of knowing Christ and abiding in him. To abide in Jesus means to remain and stay within relationship with him.
- 9 **Application:** John makes the claim that anyone who walks in sin, practices, constant and continuing sin, does not know Jesus and does not walk with him. This person is not saved. Sin separates in every relationship, whether it is human or divine. We must make sure that we do not make a behavior or habit of sinning against the Lord. This sin will not separate us with just one or two stumblings, but regular and constant sinning will break our relationship with Jesus. We can lose our salvation. But it must be our choice.

B Jesus came to free us from sin.

- 1 In verse five, John reminds the believers and us why sin is so egregious to God. Jesus paid a heavy and high price to free us from sin. Our love for Jesus should make us think twice before we sin against him.
- 2 In the previous paragraph, John use the word "appearing" a lot to refer to the second coming of Christ. In this section, he refers to Jesus' first appearing, his incarnation.

- 3 One of the reasons that Jesus left his throne in heaven, and became a human being like us was to eradicate the problem of sin in his creation. Setting us free was the primary reason that Jesus came.
- 4 When we sin against him, even just once, we trample upon the sacrifice that he made for us. If we regularly sin as a lifestyle, we so continually trample on his sacrifice that we do not demonstrate his salvation in us.
- 5 Jesus came to take away sin from the human race. His goal was to completely destroy it in us. The price was so high because the goal was so lofty.
- 6 The way Jesus removes sin in us is by washing us in his blood. His blood as the power to make our sins completely disappear. It is better than any household cleaner you can find on the market. It is better than any cleaner a human being can make.
- 7 As John has already mentioned, Jesus is sinless. There is no sin in him. In chapter 1 of the same book. John has already mentioned that there is no darkness in God. God is light.
- 8 The question is, “is John saying that Jesus is sinless or is he saying that those who walked in Jesus do not sin?” If we were reading one of Paul’s letters right now, I would tell you that the second interpretation is proper. But John is making a reference, as did Peter and the writer of Hebrews, that Jesus is sinless.
- 9 **Application:** because Jesus is sinless, he can offer righteousness to us. But it is only because of Jesus that we can live without sin for any amount of time. It is because of our relationship with him, our abiding in him, that we have this opportunity. But he expects of us that we only stumble over sin and not walk in it.

II. A lifestyle of righteousness destroys the devil’s works (vv. 7 – 8).

A The righteous regularly practice righteousness.

- 1 Although it is hard for us to understand the connections between being justified by faith. In an instant at salvation and being sanctified over time through the direction of Jesus’ Holy Spirit.
- 2 John makes the issue crystal clear. But he’s not the only one. Jesus himself made it very clear how to be able to tell one of his followers from someone who does not follow him.
- 3 In Luke 6:43 – 45, Jesus talks about the goodness or evil in a person’s heart using the image of a tree and its fruit. We produce what we are inside.

- 4 If a person is righteous, they will produce righteousness. If a person's heart is wicked, that person will produce wickedness. On a regular basis, we produce what we are inside.
- 5 John starts this truth out with "don't let anyone deceive you." It is so easy to be confused by false teachers in our world. While we are told to live in the world and not of it, some might teach that we are not only to tolerate sin but accept sin.
- 6 While any sinners welcome to be around us and in our groups, those who follow Christ must not be known as sinners. There is a clear distinction between the righteous and wicked, between a Christian and a sinner.
- 7 **Illustration:** all the time you hear Christians who regularly practice and say about themselves, "I'm a sinner saved by grace." This sentence is so permeated our churches that everyone is saying it as a way to rationalize and excuse their sin. While this is a true statement about the way things used to be, we are called saints throughout the New Testament. We are to live as holy people, not as the world.
- 8 Some of the false teaching that John was combating might have been Gnosticism. Gnostics, teach, amongst other things that a person's outward sin or sins done in the flesh do not count against a person. They saw the flesh is evil and therefore all of its output as part of its unchangeable nature. While the spirit never sins, the flesh sins all the time. This was what they taught.
- 9 **Application:** How we live matters to God tremendously. We must not waste Jesus' sacrifice. We must present ourselves to Jesus, one another, and the world as saints. While we love the person who sins and attempt to share Christ on their level, we do not become more like them than like Jesus in our evangelism. We tend to forget that we are giving them something better than what they already have. If we look like them, why do they want what we have?

B The sinner glorifies the devil.

- 1 A sinner is labeled as such because they make practice of sinning. Sin is not a once in a while occurrence for a sinner, rather a regular, continuous, constant behavior and lifestyle choice.
- 2 Anyone who regularly sins against the Lord is against the Lord. There is no such thing as friendly fire when someone keeps firing purposefully at you.
- 3 John makes the battle lines between God and the devil crystal clear. Any behavioral sinner, works for the devil while anyone who lives a righteous life, works for God.

- 4 Continued sin or a lifestyle of sin proves that a person is not on God's side. The devil's influence is more powerful than God's. This influence by the double makes that person one of the devil's workers.
- 5 John interestingly talks about the devil being a sinner since the beginning. What is interesting is that Jesus talked about the devil as well, and called him the father of lies because he's been sinning since the beginning.
- 6 The beginning is most likely referring to the creation narrative. During that time Satan used the serpent to deceive the woman. He used lies and sinned against the Lord.
- 7 As the father of lies in the sinner from the beginning, the devil becomes the father of wickedness and demonstrates it by teaching others to sin against God.
- 8 John, then presents another reason that Jesus appeared during his incarnation. One of these reasons happen to be that he came to destroy the works of the devil.
- 9 The works of the devil happens to include teaching others to send in sinning against the Lord himself. When Jesus came, he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross. His sinless sacrifice brought us new life and righteousness.

III. A child of God demonstrates righteousness (vv. 9 – 10).

A Being born of God changes everything.

- 1 John has mentioned being born of God. In the previous section, when he talks about being God's children. But what does it mean to be born of God?
- 2 One of the chief places we can go is in John's Gospel. As he begins to tell us about Jesus, he talks about those who were born children of God. In John 1:12 – 13, he explicitly mentions the children of God. They were not born by any means, usually known to humans.
- 3 The children of God are born again, according to Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. But what does it mean to be born again? John mentions God's seed specifically.
- 4 To become a child of God, all one needs to do is receive Jesus and his sacrifice. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, not done by any human being. This being born again is the same idea as Paul's imagery of the new creation.
- 5 John makes the case in verse nine, that those who were born of God are children of God, and they do not act as they used to. This implies that there is a new creation in these children now born of God's seed rather than human methods.

- 6 Because there is such a change, and it is no longer that of human nature, but of God's power and re-creation means, the child of God can act completely different than those who are born of human beings instead.
- 7 This means that the child of God can deny the temptations of this world and can choose to be righteous, rather than to sin. The Duke creation, or the born again nature of the child of God makes him/her able to live a sinless life.
- 8 This is similar to Paul's terminology of the one who is dead to sin and alive in Christ from Ephesians chapter 2. What most Christians are not taught when they come to Christ is how sin becomes an issue of the mind and the will.
- 9 **Application:** when you become saved or born again, you become different. You are now a child of God, a new creation, that the sin and alive in Christ. You can for the first time choose to not sin. It becomes a matter of your mind and will. If you sin, it is not your nature, but a choice you make to go back into your old lifestyle. You have the power as a born again new creation to resist sin and live righteous, sinless lifestyle. Just as Jesus did. The power is yours. We spend so much time trying to get away from sin and talking about the lure of sin that we don't spend enough time talking about the power we have to not sin at all. The challenge is to use that power and live out the righteousness that Jesus has given to us.

B Sin shows whose child each person is.

- 1 Righteousness and brotherly love. Go hand-in-hand in the life of the child of God. These are both demonstrated in the born again believer in Jesus. We do not practice sin regularly.
- 2 Sin then becomes a stumbling block as we walk with Jesus. It is not a regular lifestyle, but a momentary blip on the radar screen. Sin for the Christian is a rare occurrence.
- 3 John, then states the case that if this is how Christians normally act like Jesus, abstaining from sin, then those who sin on a regular basis habitually as a lifestyle are clearly doing the works of the devil and are his children.
- 4 This gets back to Jesus' teaching about the tree and its fruit. You can tell which child each person is by their works and their output. The only principle to remember is that it must be regularly repeated behavior.
- 5 John has already mentioned hating your brother or sister in Christ in some of the earlier passages of the book. Loving one another is a key feature of the Christian life.
- 6 When someone hates their brother or sister in Christ they go against the characteristics of a Christian. John then equates the same issue of sinning

regularly with hating one's brother or sister in Christ. These two actions on a regular basis prove that a person is not walking with Christ.

- 7 These two issues are primarily examples of how someone says they are following Christ. But are not really following him at all. It is clear which side each person is on with their lifestyle is observed regularly.
- 8 One thing that we must avoid is the idea that this is judgment. I would like to call it an evaluation rather than judgment. It is a clear understanding of who someone is when we evaluate their lifestyle.
- 9 Judgment would happen if we then treat them differently because of her evaluation. Judgment is taking our evaluation and punishing someone based on our decision about them.
- 10 **Application:** Paul talked about judgment, beginning with the house of God. We cannot allow sin to continue in the lives of our beloved brothers and sisters. If we do not evaluate one another and address sin issues in love, then we do not understand the danger of living in sin and the wrath of God that sin brings. True love for one another, means that we tell the truth in love. If a brother or sister is living in sin, we must warn them of the dangers without punishing them for what we think they are doing. This fellowship pulls us together so that we can help one another. The consequences of ignoring sin inside of this fellowship are more dangerous than addressing these issues outright and biblically. Don't let sin fester in your fellowship.

Conclusion

There can be no confusion about sin in our fellowship. When we gather together, it is easy to have fellowship because we are children of God. And we live like children of God. We must not allow a lifestyle sin to separate us from one another or from Jesus. We must be careful not to judge one another and punish each other for any possible sin in our lives. We must approach from another and present the truth while we love one another.

Because the sin issue makes it very clear who is a child of God, and he was a child of the devil, it is easy to recognize when someone is rationalizing their sin in our fellowship. Let us not allow sin to remain. Let us follow Christ with our whole heart and not give any advantage to the devil. Keep free from sin and walk in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can live without sin if we choose to do so.