

# **The Epistle of First John**

## **Lesson Seven**

### **A Discerning Life (1 John 2:18-4:6)**

#### **Part Two (Sin and Lawlessness – 1 John 3:1-9)**

##### **Introduction:**

- I. In 1 John chapter two the apostle stressed the importance of abiding in Christ.
  - A. It is a positive and uplifting message.
    1. Abiding in Christ gives us confidence about our eternity (1 Jn 2:28-29).
    2. John countered the false teaching of those (whom John called "antichrists") who created doubts in the minds of some Christians.
      - a. He wanted all to be confident about their present state of salvation and the future state of eternal life.
      - b. This confidence comes from knowing we have been "born of Him."
    3. John made extensive use of the phrase "born of Him" or "born of God" – a reference to the "new birth" (cf. Jn 3:3, 5-7; 1 Jn 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

##### **Discussion:**

- I. In 1 John chapter 3, the apostle connects the thoughts from the previous verses with the added assurance that those who are "born of Him" also become "sons of God."
  - A. Being "children of God" is how God demonstrates His love toward us (1 Jn 3:1a).
    1. The apostle Paul described the depth of God's love in similar terms (Rom 5:6-11).
      - a. God displayed His love for us through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ despite our unworthiness as sinners and enemies.
      - b. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been "justified," "saved from wrath," and were "reconciled to God."
      - c. The fellowship with God lost through sin is restored through the blood of Jesus.
  - B. The word does not understand the joy we have of being called "children of God" (1 Jn 3:1b).

1. The world cannot understand our commitment to God and Jesus Christ because the world does not know God (cf. Rom 1:12-22, 28).
  - a. Jesus explained why the world will turn against us (Jn 15:18-19).
  - b. John explained why the world does not want to know us or the Christ we serve (Jn 3:19-20).
  - c. We must prepare for this the same way first-century Christians prepared (Eph 6:10-12).
- C. Despite this opposition and hardship, we have a future no one can take from us (1 Jn 3:2-3).
  1. Consider what Paul said about his vision of heaven (2 Cor 12:3-4).
  2. One thing we know, "when He (Christ) is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."
    - a. We shall be changed – transformed (1 Cor 15:51-57; 1 Thes 4:16-18).
  3. Therefore, to prepare ourselves for that day we must live pure, holy, and righteous lives (1 Jn 3:3).
    - a. A righteous life is the evidence that we have been born of God.
    - b. But the proof of that conversion is seen in the kind of life we live – righteousness is the evidence that we have truly been "born again."
- II. Unfortunately, false teachers downplayed the need to live a godly, moral, and righteous life.
  - A. Holy, righteous living is taught throughout the New Testament.
    1. Examples:
      - a. Paul (Eph 1:3-6).
      - b. Peter (1 Pet 13:16).
    2. Therefore, according to John, "everyone who has this hope" – the hope of being transformed into the image of Christ at His second coming – "purifies himself, just as He (Christ) is pure."
      - a. John affirms the purity (sinlessness) of Jesus Christ.
        - (1). Jesus "is pure" (present tense).
          - (a). Always has been pure, and always will be pure.

(2). And in Him "there is no sin" (present tense).

(a). Never has been sin in Him, and never will be sin in Him.

B. Therefore, "children of God" must avoid sin and lawlessness.

1. We must see what sin really is – spiritual anarchy (1 Jn 3:4).

a. Sin is lawlessness.

III. To cure the ills of society we must preach Christ.

A. He came as the sinless sacrifice to free us from the bondage of sin (1 Jn 3:5).

1. Two reasons why sin and lawless are incompatible with the life of the Christian:

a. Jesus was "manifested" or "appeared" to take away sin – He came to fulfill God's eternal plan of redemption (1 Pet 2:24).

b. Jesus is sinless – "in Him there is no sin" (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22-25; Heb 4:15; 7:26-27).

IV. There is only one logical conclusion regarding sin and the sinner.

A. Those who habitually sin and practice lawlessness have nothing in common with holy and righteous God (1 Jn 3:6).

1. Those who are truly children of God – those who abide in Christ – will not defiantly and persistently continue to practice sin and lawlessness.

2. The defiant and persistent sinner is not of God but is of the devil.

B. Therefore, John once again encourages us to live a discerning life – a life that is so spiritually grounded in truth that we cannot be deceived (1 Jn 3:7-9).

1. Unfortunately, false teachers were "deceiving" believers.

2. But, according to John, the believer has no excuse for being deceived.

a. We have received the benefits of the "anointing of the Holy One" through the divinely anointed and inspired teaching, preaching, and writings of the apostles and prophets.

C. But how can we identify these deceivers?

1. Previously John said we can identify deceivers by simply looking at their unrighteous lives (1 Jn 2:4, 6, 22, 29).
2. John essentially says the same here (1 Jn 3:7-8).
  - a. If the righteous practice righteousness, then it follows that the unrighteous false teachers should be easy to identify because they practice unrighteousness.
3. However, false teachers are masters at deceptive and twisted logic.
  - a. False teachers – or those who twist and pervert truth to fit their own personal agenda – resort to the same tactics.
  - b. They prey on the unlearned and unsuspecting and are highly skilled at tailoring their message to be what some people want to hear.
  - c. Paul warned about this (2 Tim 4:2-4).
4. According to John, those who sin willfully and deliberately – who intentionally smother all doubts and guilt about their actions – are of the devil.
  - a. And that's because willful and deliberate rebellion and sin has always been the devil's most distinguishing characteristic (1 Jn 3:8a).
5. Willful, deliberate, intentional, and persistent sin puts us at odds with Jesus Christ because He came to destroy the destroyer (1 Jn 3:8b; Heb 2:14-15).
  - a. How can the child of God have anything in common with the one whom Jesus came to destroy?

V. John further emphasizes the incompatibility of sin in the life of the Christian in a verse that has been the subject of many theological debates over the centuries (1 Jn 3:9).

- A. Let's consider a few interpretations then talk explain what John actually meant.
1. One view claims this verse means it is impossible for the Christian to commit any so-called "unpardonable sin" (cf. Mark 3:29).
    - a. They claim this verse compatible with 1 John 5:16-18 where John speaks of some sins that lead to death while others do not – and it assumes that sins leading to death are so-called "unpardonable sins."

- (1). We will deal with that passage later.
    - b. However, there is nothing in the context of 1 John 3:9 that suggests the apostle is discussing unpardonable or unforgivable sins – especially since he had previously said the blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin" and that God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9).
      - (1). Any position on forgiveness of sins that contradicts this plain and simple passage is simply wrong.
  2. Another view claims those who have been truly converted do not sin – similar to the Calvinistic teaching of the impossibility of apostasy, who claim that those who sin are not really Christians.
    - a. The problem with this argument is that the concept of "sinless perfection" is totally inconsistent with, and outright denies, what John said previously in chapter one (1 Jn 1:6, 8, 10).
      - (1). Therefore, we can reject the notion of achieving "sinless perfection."
  3. The third, and most consistent interpretation of 1 John 3:9, is that John was once again exposing the fallacies of Gnostic teaching.
    - a. For the most part, Gnostics believed there are basically two reasons why the Christian (one who is born of God) does not sin.
      - (1). Sins committed in the flesh do not affect one's spiritual standing before God – they will not be held accountable for any sins they commit.
      - (2). It is impossible for one born of God to sin because he has been spiritually enlightened and superior to sinners.
- B. The Gnostic believed they were above sin (even though they sinned) because enjoyed a higher status with God since they alone possessed a superior knowledge – a secret knowledge – of the true nature and character of God.
1. John made it clear that God's people (those born of God) practice righteousness, not unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:8-2:2).
    - a. Therefore, it is impossible to live in sin and still claim to be in fellowship with God.

2. Unfortunately, too many Christians have accepted sin and lawlessness as "normal" and just part of "being human."
    - a. We have grown too comfortable with thoughts, words, and deeds that should make us feel terribly uncomfortable.
  3. Instead, of minimizing or rationalizing sin we need to see sin as God sees sin – spiritual anarchy.
    - a. Sin is selfish, self-centered, self-serving rebellion – willful and deliberate disobedience and rebellion – against God the Father and against Jesus Christ His Son.
    - b. It is not of God.
    - c. It is of the devil.
  4. The more we minimize or rationalize sin, or the more we suppress feelings of remorse and guilt, the more spiritual damage we do to ourselves.
    - a. Done often enough, and the spiritual damage we cause will become irreversible.
    - b. We will be like those who are, "past feeling" (Eph 4:19); whose conscience is "seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim 4:2); and who "cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet 2:14).
- C. Therefore, according to John, willful, intentional, habitual, and repetitive sin is completely incompatible with the life of the Christians (1 Jn 3:9).
1. When the child of God (one born of God) commits sin he repents of his unrighteousness, confesses his unrighteousness, and is forgiven of all unrighteousness.
    - a. The reason is because "His seed remains in him" – the word of God is still actively working within the heart to convict the sinner of sin and motivate him to seek forgiveness and return to practicing righteousness (cf. Ps 119:11).
      - (1). Jesus used the example of "seed" being "the word of God" and the effect the word has on our hearts in His parable of the Parable of the Sower (cf. Luke 8:11; Matt 13:18; Mark 4:14).

- (2). Other passages speak of the power of the word working within us (1 Pet 1:23; Heb 4:12; 1 Jn 2:24).
  - b. There is a clear correlation between avoiding sin and treasuring the word of God in our hearts – of the word "remaining in" us – doing so keeps us from sin, especially habitual sin.
  - c. All this tells us the importance of "His seed" remaining in us – and that can only come by spending time immersed in the word every single day of our life.
2. Furthermore, John said, "he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."
    - a. There is a reason for John using the "perfect tense" of the verb "born" in this verse.
      - (1). The perfect tense is often used to speak of an action that is ongoing – past action that continues to the present.
      - b. John is speaking only of those who entered into a relationship with God by having been "born of God" in the past, and who continue to remain in that same relationship to the present.
        - (1). Obviously, not everyone who has been "born of God" in the past chooses to remain faithful to the Lord to the present – therefore, this is not speaking about all who have been born of God.
        - (2). The term "children of God" is not simply describing a relationship with God, but also describing the godly, god-like character of those who are "children of God" – children of God are like God in their desire to be righteous and holy as He is holy.
      - c. Therefore, those who remain faithful to the Lord cannot sin habitually simply because the seed that is sown in their hearts will not allow their holy, righteous, and godly conscience to ignore sin – they will be compelled to repent of all sin and lawlessness immediately.

**The Summary:**

- I. There is no greater privilege than to be called "children of God."
  - A. Sonship is how God displays His love for sinners like us.

1. The blessing of being "children of God" includes knowing we will be transformed into the same image as Jesus Christ.
    - a. This is the driving force behind our desire to purify ourselves just as He is pure.
  2. We must do our part to avoid the devil's efforts to lead us into sin and rebellion against God.
- B. Therefore, we must see sin as God sees sin – spiritual anarchy against the Creator.
1. Jesus, the Son of God, took upon Himself the form of man to free us from the bondage of sin by being the sinless sacrifice to atone for our sins.
  2. Now that we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ we can avoid deliberate, willful, habitual, persistent sin by abiding in Christ – by walking in the light as He is in the light.
- C. However, we must always take sin seriously – never minimize the gravity of sin.
1. Sin and lawlessness are of the devil.
  2. Since Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, we must avoid sin at all costs.
  3. Fortunately, God has given us the power to win the victory over all forms of unrighteous behavior.
    - a. Those born again do not continue to sin because His seed – the Spirit-given word – is still at work in our hearts.
    - b. God's word teaches and guides us.
    - c. And if we continue to treasure the word in our hearts it will keep our conscience sensitive to all wrongs and move us to immediately correct anything in our life that is not consistent with righteous living.

**Review Questions:**

1. According to John, how has God bestowed His love on us?
2. What will happen when Christ is revealed?

3. What is our motivation for purifying ourselves?
4. What is sin?
5. What did John mean when he said, "Whoever abides in Him does not sin?"
6. Why was Christ "manifested" – why did He "appear?"
7. What is the "seed" that must remain in us?
8. What does this seed do for those who are "born of God?"