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“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (I John 3:9).

Abstain From Sin

Central Truth: A Christian’s nature makes him want to avoid sin.

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Topic: Sanctification; Sin: Abstaining from.

What causes a pig to seek out the mud puddle and the cat to shun it? It is the difference in their natures.

What causes the non-Christian to be attracted to sin and to seek opportunities to practice it while the Christian is repulsed by sin and flees from it? It is the difference in their natures.

It is as unnatural for a Christian to sin as it would be for Jesus to sin. Each Christian can truthfully say, “*Christ liveth in me*” (Galatians 2:20). If Christ is his life, he will live the life that Christ would live.

Can you imagine Jesus lying, lusting, stealing, envying, coveting, gossiping, or committing other such sins? Then neither should a person in whom Jesus is living the life of God.

The lesson title is “Abstain From Sin.” It is a command, not a suggestion. It is God's requirement, not man's recommendation. God requires nothing that He does not enable His dear children to do.

Let the Christian quit saying, “I am just a sinner saved by grace.” That is looking backward. Let him rather say, “I am a saint of God in whom He lives daily by His grace.” He is no longer to live the life of a sinner (not even a saved sinner), but he is to live as a saint in whom God's life is lived. That is the major emphasis of this week's study. Remember whose you are and rejoice in your birthright.

I. THE NATURE OF SIN

“Sin is the transgression of the Law” (I John 3:4).

A. There is a standard of right and wrong by which each person is to measure his life. It is called “*law*” in Holy Scripture. More than the Ten Commandments are implied in that Bible term. It includes the whole revelation of God.

God gave the law in order to show man that he had sinned (Romans 3:20). If there were no speed limit signs you would not know when you were driving at an illegal speed. If the Bible did not say, “*Thou shalt not covet,*” you would not know it was a sin against God to do it (Romans 7:7). Do not be bound to trying to keep the law in order to be saved, for no person can ever be justified before God by obedience to the law. Let your failure direct you to Jesus Christ that you might be forgiven by grace.

B. One can rebel against God's standard. When he does, he is said to transgress the law (break over the limits set by God's law). It can be a wrong act or the neglect of the right act, but either way one becomes a lawbreaker. That is what constitutes a person as a sinner who needs forgiveness. The only hope for the sinner is to receive the forgiveness of God which is given freely because Jesus died and rose again to save sinners.

II. THE SAVIOR FROM SIN

“He was manifested to take away our sins. . . . The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:5, 8).

A. The Savior's nature is that of the Son of God. Think about that! God's only begotten Son, immaculately pure in absolute holiness, came into a sin-cursed world to die as a guilty sinner (having taken our sins upon himself) on behalf of guilty sinners. The Bible makes that truth so emphatic that it has become the foundation stone of our faith. (See such passages as I Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10; John 3:17.) The saving of sinners was not entrusted to men or angels, but God himself did it in the person of His eternally begotten Son.

B. The Savior's method was the sacrifice of himself. Who can grasp the scope of grace and the magnitude of love in these words? Jesus himself, “*bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed*” (I Peter 2:24). He died in our place. He died on our behalf. The only way sinners can be saved is through His death and resurrection. He was not a helpless victim but a willing sacrifice. He knew our need and met it at a terrible personal cost. Have you thanked Him for dying for you!

C. The Savior's mission is to save us from our sins. He did not ask

for mankind to serve Him. He came to serve us. When He gave His life a “ransom” (Matthew 20:28), He bought us out of slavery to sin and brought us into the family of God. That price is effective to every sinner who turns from sin and trusts God to forgive him on the basis of what Jesus has done. He removes “as far as the east is from the west” the sins of one who trusts Him (Psalm 103:12). He gives eternal life to one who trusts Him. He takes away the guilt and the penalty of sin. That was the reason He came into the world.

D. The Savior's accomplishment was to destroy the work of the devil (I John 3:8). The work of the devil is, in part, to keep you enslaved in sin. Even after you trust Jesus, the devil tries to get you to continue in sin. But Jesus put an end to that. He has broken the power of Satan. He has neutralized his influence in the life of a true Christian. Jesus is Lord over the devil as well as over all other beings in the universe. Colossians 1:13 says you are delivered (already delivered!) in Jesus Christ. Believe it and rejoice. That is guaranteed by the power of the shed blood of Jesus.

III. THE PRACTICE OF SIN

Here is a passage of Scripture that many people find very difficult to accept. Read it and let it say what it says. “*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. . . . He that committeth sin is of the devil. . . . Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God*” (1 John 3:6, 8, 9). We have a problem with that passage because it seems to contradict our experience. We believe in Him, yet we sin. Or do we?

The text can be summarized in two statements. (1) Sin is not practiced by the true Christian. (2) Sin is practiced by the non-Christian. And the key word in both statements is practiced.

The grammar of the verbs in 1 John 3:6-9 is the key to the passage. The words “commit,” “sin,” “remaineth,” and “abideth” are in a grammatical form which indicates continuing action. A lifestyle is under consideration. So the statement of verse 6 means, “Whoever continually abides in Him does not habitually sin. Whoever lives in sin has neither seen Him nor come to know Him,” The obvious meaning is that the person who makes sinful practices his lifestyle has not been saved, regardless of what his experience or testimony might be. “*Sin no more*” is God's word to each one who is saved from sin (John 5:14; 8:11). Sin does not reign in the physical body of anyone of God's born-again children (Romans 6:11-14).

IV. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SIN

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). Where does that leave the person who, though confessing faith in Christ, says, “I’m a sinner saved by grace; I just sin every day”? The passage says it leaves him lost in sin. Examine the elements of the text.

A. The Christian does not sin. Some say he does not ever sin because the nature of God is within him and that divine nature does not sin even though the body does. The Bible does not make that distinction (unless that is what Romans 7 means). Again, look at the grammar. The verbs indicate continuous action. The Christian does not live in sin, does not practice sin, does not live a sinful lifestyle, even though he may sin occasionally.

B. The Christian has been born of God. That is what made him a Christian (John 1:13; 3:3). That means that God has made him a new and different person. He is no longer a sinner but is now a saint. He no longer is a child of the devil bound to do whatever his father desires but is now a child of God indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit. That changes everything about his life as if he were a new creation, which he is!

C. The Christian has God's “seed” remaining in him. That “seed” is the very nature of God himself. It is the divine nature which is given to each believer at his conversion (II Peter 1:4). That nature of God within keeps the Christian from living in sin. That would be contrary to his nature, like the cat wallowing in the pig's mud hole. It would be a surprise if one with the new nature were to live any way except in holiness.

D. The Christian cannot sin, because he is born of God. John is so certain of that fact that he says that is how you can know whether a person is born of God (1 John 3:10).

Suppose a person who lies, cheats, practices moral perversion, and is sold out to sin professes to become a new creation in Jesus. What do you expect of his conduct? You expect it to change. Why? Because he says he is born of God, and he claims to be a new creation in Christ Jesus. What if it does not change? You doubt that he has been truly born again. A change of nature will produce a change of lifestyle. Believe it.

V. THE TESTIMONY OF SIN

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil” (I John 3:10).

A. The absence of sin testifies that one is a child of God. *“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:2). Freedom from sin is the birthright of every child of God, not of a unique few. John wrote this first epistle to tell us how to be sure we are saved. A lifestyle which is not marked by the practice of sin is one of the evidences that we are truly saved.

B. The presence of sin testifies that one is not a child of God. As the Ethiopian cannot change the pigmentation of his skin, or the leopard the spots of his coloring, neither can the sinner keep from sinning (Jeremiah 13:23). It is no surprise that if a sinner makes a profession of faith in Jesus, but is not truly born again, he will continue a lifestyle of sin. The lifestyle is a testimony that he is not saved.

Has our generation become too lenient in our attitudes toward Christian conduct? Yes! God's Word is very specific and clear. There is a separation between the saved and the unsaved. *“The good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one”* (Matthew 13:38). So has it always been. So shall it ever be. We may excuse and try to explain away the unworthy lifestyle of a professed Christian. First John 3:4-10 explains it very simply: he is not saved. Jesus delivers from the guilt and the government of sin. Be sure you are saved.

Questions for discussion

1. How does Galatians 2:20 explain the Christian lifestyle?
2. What is the nature of sin according to I John 3:4?
3. How does Jesus take away our sins?
4. In what way did Jesus destroy the works of the devil?
5. What does I John 3:6-8 say about the Christian's lifestyle?
6. How can we say the Christian does not sin, as in I John 3:9?
7. How does God's seed keep the Christian from sinning?
8. What does one's lifestyle say about his profession of conversion?
9. How does this study give you assurance of your salvation?