

1 John

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1 John 3:4-10

Vss. 4-8

- These verses may be a bit confusing. Not only do they seem to call for an unattainable morality but on closer inspection seem to contradict some earlier verses. So these are a bit confusing – in English. Fortunately for us John was not writing in English but in Greek, which even 2000 years ago was a much richer language than contemporary English. The Greek verb tenses sort it out for us.
- John was moving to completely tear down the Gnostic teachers who had done so much damage to his churches. The Holy Spirit has seen to it that John is also speaking to false teachers in our own time.
- He begins by bringing sin into focus. The practice of sin is the practice of lawlessness, meaning that the one who practices sin is living outside any moral law, living a lawless life, where they just make up the rules as they go. Today we call lawlessness “freedom of expression”. Never mind that God has set down a moral law, “I will choose my own as it suits me,” people say. The Gnostics argued that what one did with their body was inconsequential. It was the soul that was saved, not the body, which is why they denied the physical resurrection of Christ. They may well say that they too have freedom of expression because it is only the soul that matters, that Christ has freed their soul from a weak body, so old fashioned standards of sin no longer apply, that they are now free to express whatever they wish with their bodies. Yes, it would seem that the world is having a bit of spiritual/moral déjà vu: we’ve seen this all before.
- But John lays down the Way of Christ next to the way lawlessness. Christ came to take away sin. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Those who practice lawlessness, sin, whether in

John's time of ours, always seek to make their way "normal" and acceptable.

- The difference is whether someone abides in Christ or not. Those who abide in Christ practice the Way of Christ, the way of righteousness. Those who do not abide in Christ simply cannot practice the righteousness of Christ, because it doesn't come from us, but from Christ abiding in us. So, you know that the one practicing the righteous of Christ is in Christ, for he could not practice Christ's righteousness any other way. We practice righteousness because He is righteous and abides in us and we in Him.
- Now to clarify. In 1:8 John says if we say we have no sin we are deceiving ourselves and the Truth is not in us. And then in the next breath, in 2:1, he says, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." So, to be clear, John is NOT saying that to be a saved follower of Jesus, to be Christian, one has to live a morally perfect life where you never step on a crack, where you never sin. No. What he is talking about is the Way, the lifestyle of the saved follower of Jesus. For the person living in the Way, sin is not the primary characteristic of their lives. That is to say that SELF is not the primary characteristic of their lives, "for it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). We still live in a sinful world and failures will come, but spiritual/moral failures do not define our lives. Rather it is the redemptive power of Christ by which our lives are defined.
- Thus the one who does practice sin, whose life IS dominated by selfish, lawless desires, is a slave of Satan, is "of the devil." But the Son of God came to take away the sin of the world and destroy the works of the devil.

Verses 9-10

- John goes on to illuminate the idea that a saved follower of Jesus cannot live a life where he "practices sin" because he is "born of God" and God's "seed abides in Him." Generally, when used this way in Scripture, "seed" refers to procreation. In a sense that may be true here, for we are "born of God" and "children of God". But I think William Barclay may be closer to

what John is getting at here. Twice in the New Testament, in James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23, it is the word of God that brings rebirth. In James we are “brought forth by the word of truth” and in 1 Peter we “have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and enduring word of God.” Here too it seems John means that the saved follower of Jesus cannot live a life defined by sin because he has the strength and guidance and power of the word of God within him as Christ Himself abides in Him. In this we see that we will intuitively see the false teacher for who he is and recognize the false teaching for the lie that it is, for we have the word of truth with in us. “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Psalms 119:11).

- BF Westcott, in his commentary on 1 John, said, “Life reveals the children of God. They bear characteristic marks which stamp their action and their feeling, their conduct and the motive of their conduct. They embody righteousness in deed. They acknowledge the ties which Christ has established among Christians and so potentially among men. They practically realize the law of man’s original constitution, and the law of man’s redemption.”
- Add all this up, John is saying, and the difference between the slave of Christ and the slave of the devil “are obvious!” And it should always be so. The person who puts themselves first at the expense of others does not love his brother, does not lay down their life for their brother, whereas the saved follower of Jesus does those things as second nature, does those things without thinking. And it’s not just a one-time thing. The one who is the child of God lives out the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount every day. They go the second mile. They give their coat and then their shirt as well. They love their enemies and pray for them and do good to those who would do them ill. A life such as this is so clearly different then is surely “obvious” that they are indeed a child of God.