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**A0438 -- Sept. 19, 2004 -- 1 John 3:6-9 – Sin: Absolute or Habitual?-Part 2**

Let's review 1 John 3:6-7 and then we will finish up this first section of the main body of John's letter. Last week we reviewed the basic *structure* and *purpose* of this epistle, both of which are often misconstrued. The basic *structure* is found in the four phrases that begin with the words ***these things I have written***. These are found in 1:4, 2:1; 2:26; and 5:13. Each of these sections is geared toward one basic *purpose* of the epistle: **To Promote Fellowship in the Congregation by Avoiding Sin**. I reviewed this because it is John's *purpose* that gives us the proper orientation to understanding this epistle. If we miss John's *purpose* then we are going to be disoriented when we approach the epistle. And this is what many have done. They have assumed a wrong *structure* and a wrong *purpose* of John's epistle and therefore concluded that John's *purpose* is "Tests of Life"/"Tests of Salvation," tests for those who CLAIM to believe to check themselves to see if they really are believers. This misses the total point of John's letter. If we take that approach, then we miss out on the fact that John is trying desperately to **Promote Fellowship in the Congregation by Avoiding Sin**. If Satan can get us on the wrong track in this book, then what is the result? Well, if we approach this book as a series of "tests" to see whether we really are believers or not, then where is our focus? Is our focus on Christ or is it on ourselves? It is on ourselves. What they are telling us is that our assurance of salvation comes from passing these tests. So, we have to look within ourselves and make sure we are not habitually sinning. Therefore, if we are not sinning habitually, that means we are saved; and if we are sinning habitually, then we are not saved. But let me ask you a few questions. Don't Christians sin daily? Wouldn't daily sin be considered habitual sinning? And if Christians habitually sin, then that would mean no one is really saved! So, what is happened is Satan has taken our eyes off of Christ and turned them in on ourselves. We are looking to our works to find assurance rather than the finished work of Christ. When this happens, two dangerous things take place: 1) We have no assurance of our salvation, we begin to doubt our salvation; and 2) The result is that fellowship in the congregation is stunted. These were two of the goals of the Revisionists. They wanted to create doubt and they wanted to

stunt the fellowship of the congregation. So, I highly recommend that you do not take that approach to the book of 1 John.

Next, we looked at the controversial 1 John 3:6. We had to grapple with what many commentators grapple with, and that is the question that 1 John 3:6 brings to mind. Can 1 John 3:6, 9 really be teaching that the abiding one is “sinless”? You can see from the question why many commentators are unwilling to accept this conclusion. We still sin so it cannot be teaching sinless perfection. John already told us in 1 John 1:8 that if we claim to be without sin, we are deceiving ourselves. So, which is it, John? Do we sin or do we not sin? Well, it is both. When the believer is looked at as a total person, he can never claim to be without sin. He would be deceived if he came to that conclusion (1 John 1:8). However, when the believer is abiding, he enjoys a sinless experience (1 John 3:6) because the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Now, you are probably hoping I will provide a mechanism for how we operate in a sinless state of perfection. I cannot give you all the details you may like to hear, but I can give some parameters. Many teachers like to work out detailed mechanisms for deductive doctrines and they get into all this complex speculation about how it works. And although they may be within the parameters, they are speculating as to how it might work when the Scriptures do not back it up. Now, I want to do this very badly too with this concept, but it is not wise to go beyond Scripture. Turn to 1 Cor. 4:6. I want you to see a very important Scriptural principle. *“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”* As a Christian, you have to be content with what is written and not go beyond what is written. That means that when you are looking at a deductive teaching and you start getting into all these highly complex mechanisms of how it all works, you risk becoming arrogant and causing division. Now, you want to go as far as Scripture goes, but you do not want to go any further. You want to be creative in your application of Scripture, but in your interpretation, you do not want to go beyond Scripture. That is what Paul is talking about. Here, when we deal with this concept of the sinless experience of abiding, I can only give you parameters for how this works. I cannot fill in all the details because they are not revealed. So, we have to be content with the things that the Bible does tell us even though it is not a complete picture.

1. You have to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Upon becoming a believer, you received from God the volitional capacity to abide or not abide in Christ.
3. When you exercise your volition by choosing to abide in Christ, you do not sin because you have activated the divine nature to operate through you.

“If we were able to abide in Christ without interruption, we would never sin.” Unfortunately, this is not possible. “The sinless nature of Christ controls the abiding Christian, whereas, the sinful human nature controls the non-abiding Christian.” The result is that “abiding in Him” is in and of itself a sinless experience. This does not mean you as a total person are sinless. 1 John 1:8 already taught that the believer, looked at as a total person, can never be without sin. But when you as a believer is abiding in a sinless Person, you do not sin because it is the sinless Person living in and through you. Such an experience is totally free from sin because as we abide, God continually cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7). Therefore, we can say with confidence that sin never finds its source in the abiding life. This is not the teaching of “perfectionism,” which I taught against in 1 John 1:8. The teaching of “perfectionism” is the idea that the Christian, when looked at as a total person, can reach a state of sinless perfection in his present earthly life. To make that claim is to only reveal that the Christian is deceived. The Christian can never claim to be without sin. So, I have tried to give you basic mechanistic parameters to operate this way in your daily life. Once again, those parameters are the following:

1. Christian – You have personally trusted in Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation.
2. You have received volitional capacity to abide or not abide.
3. You choose to abide.
4. Divine nature is activated.
5. This results in the abiding experience, which is sinless.

This makes perfect sense, because if it is Christ living through you and if Christ is without sin, then when He is living through you, then the product can only be said to be sinless; and that is why it is considered fruit-bearing. Now we can understand v. 6b that “*no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.*” Sin is the product of blindness and ignorance of God. When a person sins, that sin can never be said to find its source in the abiding life. “Thus, when we ***abide in Him***, the positive *obedience* is what God takes account of and recognizes. The sin which still remains in us is not *in any sense* sourced in the abiding life, and that sin is cleansed away in accordance with 1:7.”<sup>i</sup> This verse has nothing to do with distinguishing between a believer and an unbeliever! The Greek perfect tense here of seen and knows Him does not mean that the person has never seen Him or known Him, but simply that at that point in time, he has not seen or known Him. If he had, he would not have sinned. He is, therefore, blind and ignorant of God at that time. So, following the command to ***abide in Him*** amounts to walking in light of what you know of God, walking in obedience to God’s commandments (1 John 2:3ff).

In v. 7, John warns his readers not to be deceived. He clearly has the Revisionists in mind in vv. 4-6. Apparently, the Revisionists were teaching that one could continue to abide in Christ while committing sin; that sin could find its source in the abiding life. This was probably built on the claim that God Himself could experience good and evil and so those who knew God could do so as well. This is contrary to the nature of God. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). So, when we abide in Him, it follows that we do not sin. Sin cannot come out of abiding. It is when we fail to abide that we sin, manifesting that at that time we are blind and ignorant of God. It, therefore, follows that the *one who does righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous*. At the point where we do *righteousness*, that *righteousness* is not contaminated with sin at all. We are as *righteous... just as He is righteous*. Now we can understand John's radical contrast in v. 8.

poiw/n th.n a`marti,an evk tou/ diabo,lou evsti,n( o[ti avpV avrch/j o` dia,boloj a`marta,neiÁ eivj tou/to evfanerw,qh o` ui`o.j tou/ qeou/( i[na lu,sh| ta. e;rga tou/ diabo,louÁ

*the one doing the sin is out of the devil, because from the beginning the devil sins. For this reason, the Son of God was made manifest, in order that He should destroy the works of the devil.*

Righteousness and sin cannot mix. The one who does righteousness is righteous—completely so—just as He is righteous. Sin, therefore, has no connection with God at all, but it is *totally* connected with *the devil*. Those who take this to mean that these people are not saved totally miss John's point. Even John admits that Christians can and do sin (1 John 1:7-10). If the one who sins is *unsaved* then everyone is *unsaved*! The fact that the one who sins is *of the devil* means that the sinner's actions find their source in the devil. This seems obvious because John follows up with the reason for this, namely, *because the devil has sinned from the beginning*. The devil is therefore the source of all sin and his career extends all the way back to the beginning. *The beginning* does not refer to eternity past, since the devil is a created being and not eternal. *The beginning*, therefore, refers to the time after the original creation when Satan introduced sin into the creation (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-15). To be *of the devil*, therefore, means to do the devil's work!

It may stun you to know that a Christian can do the devil's work. However, you might recall our Lord rebuking Peter with the words, "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's*" (Matthew 16:23; also cf. Mark 8:33). Peter was clearly a believer at this point in time and yet our Lord called him *Satan*. This is because Peter's interests were not God's interests, but man's

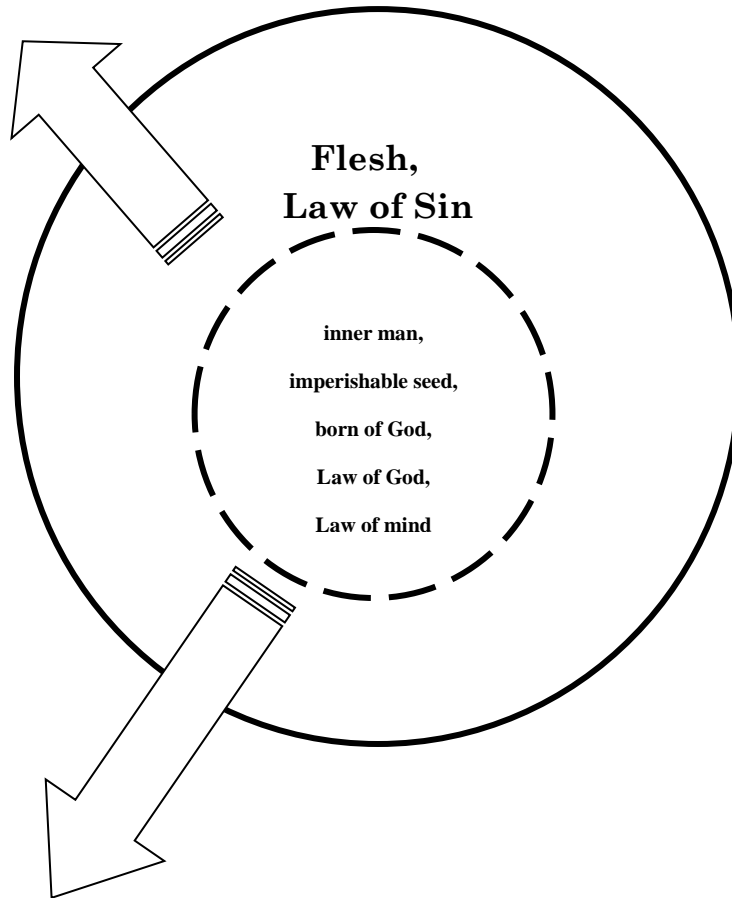
interests; he was, therefore, a stumbling block to our Lord's work. At this point, Peter could be said to be *of the devil*. If, however, you try this on your wife sometime and call her Satan, it probably won't go over too well, trust me! Nevertheless, it is true. Christians can and do perform the work *of the devil*. Of course, a Christian cannot be demon possessed, but a Christian can be demon influenced and thereby be performing the work *of the devil*.

If that isn't bad enough John goes on to say that when we sin, we are performing the very thing that Christ came to destroy. At our Lord's First Coming, He came not only to take away sin (3:5) but to destroy the *works of the devil* (3:8), since the devil is the source of all sin. The ultimate goal of our Lord's First Coming is not just the temporal removal of sin, but the total termination of all sin. This will be a reality in the New Heavens and New Earth. Now, for the center of the controversy 1 John 3:9.

**Pa/j o` gegennhme,noj evk tou/ qeou/ a`marti,an ouv poiei/( o[ti spe,rma auytou/ evn auytw/| me,nei( kai. ouv du,natai a`marta,nein( o[ti evk tou/ qeou/ gege,nnhtai**  
***Everyone who is born of God does not sin, because His seed abides in him, and he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.***

This statement should be taken at face value although it may appear puzzling. It means nothing more than what v. 6 taught. The person who is born of God has God's seed in him and therefore he is not able to sin because of his new birth from God. The principle is "like begets like." Dogs make more dogs, cats make cats, and likewise, God's seed begets God's seed. Since God's seed is sinless, it follows that God's seed in us is sinless. It would destroy John's argument to step in and say that the child of a sinless Parent can sin a little bit! The habitual solution totally misses John's point. Of course, many people wonder how such a claim squares with reality, because Christians know that they do sin. John even says in 1:8 that no Christian can claim to be without sin. So how can Christians both sin and not sin? The answer is simply that in 1:8, John has the total person in mind. As a total person, no Christian can claim to be without sin. However, in 3:9 John is only looking at the *born of God* self, the regenerate aspect of our being, what Paul called the inner man (Rom. 7:22; 2 Co. 4:16; Eph. 3:16) and Peter called the imperishable seed (1 Pe. 1:23).

**SIN**



**RIGHTEOUSNESS**

This is taught elsewhere by Paul. Turn to Romans 7 where Paul is struggling with sin. Paul comes to the conclusion that there are two laws at work: The Law of God and the Law of Sin.

**Romans 7:17-25** So now, no longer am I [inner man] the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me [flesh].<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me [inner man], but the doing of the good *is* not.<sup>19</sup> For the good that I want [in my inner man], I do not do [in my flesh], but I [in my flesh] practice the very evil that I [in my inner man] do not want.<sup>20</sup> But if I [in my flesh] am doing the very thing I [in my inner man] do not want, I [in my inner man] am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me [in my flesh].<sup>21</sup> I find then the principle that evil is present in me [in my flesh], the one who wants to do good [in the inner man].<sup>22</sup> For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,<sup>23</sup> but I see a different law in the members of my body [here body = flesh], waging war against the law of my mind [inner man] and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members [in my flesh].<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am!

Who will set me free from the body of this death [my flesh]? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind [inner man] am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

So, there are two principles at work in the believer. There is this struggle between what the inner man wants to do and what the flesh does. Your inner man wants to do good; it wants to conform to the Law of God; but the sin dwelling in your flesh is waging war with your inner man, making your inner man a prisoner of your sinful flesh. This is why I drew the diagram the way I did in your bulletin. I am trying to give you a general picture of the total Christian that John and Paul give us. Both are saying that sin never finds its source in the regenerate self (the *born of God* self, the inner man). Sin always finds its source in the flesh. Righteousness, on the other hand, never finds its source in the flesh. Righteousness always finds its source in the regenerate self (the *born of God* self, the inner man). Turn over to Galatians 2:20 for another example of this in Paul. *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* Again, we have an odd saying, “What do you mean, Paul, that you no longer live? You’re writing this aren’t you? How can you say you no longer live?” The answer lies in the fact that Paul is talking about the regenerate self and that is where Christ lives in a believer. If Christ is the one living in the regenerate self, then what kind of life does Christ live there? A sinful or sinless life? Obviously, a sinless life. Sin never finds its source in Christ. “Put into Johannine terms, since Christ is eternal life (1 John 5:20), the one who possesses that life **cannot sin because he is born of God**. The divine **seed** (Greek: *sperma*) of that life **remains** (or, “abides,” “stays” [Greek: *meno*]) **in him** who is born again, making sin an impossibility at the level of his regenerate inward self.”<sup>ii</sup>

Much discussion has revolved around exactly what *His seed* is referring to. It may refer to either the life-giving word of God or to a divine sperm which creates a sinless life in the one born of God. I think John, being a Jewish theologian, is speaking concretely here. How many of you were with us when I taught the second lesson on 1 John, “The Seed of the Woman”? What I taught began in Genesis 3:15 where two seeds are mentioned. These two seeds are at enmity. One is the seed of Satan and the other is the seed of the woman. The seed of Satan refers ultimately to the Antichrist. The seed of the woman ultimately refers to Christ. Women do not have seed (Greek: *spermas*) and so the virgin birth is intimated here in Genesis 3:15. It is the first pronouncement of good news (*protoevangelium*) that a sinless Redeemer would come forth from a woman. Then I went on to show you that the seed of a woman (that is, her ovum) does not contain the sin nature. When the male sperm

unites with the female ovum and begins to divide, if the offspring is a female, then the cell division occurs in such a way that early on, before totipotency is lost, the female sex cells are set apart and protected so that they are untainted by the sin nature. They are harbored by a protective barrier and we can observe this phenomenon biologically using electron microscope technology. Therefore, because these sex cells avoid the sin nature, the female ovum is immortal. That is the only aspect of a female that is immortal. In a female, her body cells carry the sin nature just like a male's body cells. Males and females are both equally sinful and in need of salvation. But what we have is the fact that the sin nature is passed on from father to child, father to child, and so on from generation to generation, while the female sex cells move from house to house (body to body) being protected from generation to generation so that Mary, the mother of God, could give birth to a true human. The Holy Spirit provided the male side at conception, while Mary provided the sinless immortal ovum that resulted in the Christ. Jesus Christ had to be born of a virgin; if Joseph was His biological father, then Jesus would have received a sin nature from him. So, God planned this whole thing in advance in a very complex and special way so that, and here's the main point, Christ could implant His seed in us. I think that is what John is talking about here in 1 John 3:9. Why do I think this? Well, not only does it sound logical, but turn over to **1 Peter 1:23** "*for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*" All believers have been born again, not of another perishable seed like the one you received from your earthly father, but of the imperishable seed of Christ. Christ, who is eternal life (1 John 5:20), has been deposited in you. Notice that it is imparted to you through the living and enduring word of God. Now, if you still doubt this turn over to **2 Peter 1:4**: "*...or by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*" Notice, you have become a *partaker of the divine nature*. And this divine nature resides in the inner man that Paul talked about in Romans 7. Where does this divine nature come from? It comes from the immortal seed of the woman which grew into Christ who is eternal life and which Christ imparted to you the moment you believed so that His seed is now living in you. Now you have eternal life (John 5:24).

Interestingly, there is more to this seed thing. Thinking agriculturally here: once a seed is deposited in the proper medium (soil) and given nutrients (light, minerals and water), it grows. If it is the seed of a tree, it grows into a full-grown tree. Now, if this is the seed of Christ in our inner man (the proper medium), then we would expect that it can grow in us under the right conditions (abiding and intake of nutrients which is Bible doctrine). Turn to Eph. 3:16. Here Paul tells us that the inner man can be strengthened. "*...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His*



*Spirit in the inner man.*” The only point I want to make here is the observation that the inner man can be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. That seed of eternal life in the inner man grows while the believer is abiding and taking in Bible doctrine in the quest to comprehend Christ and His salvation more fully.

So, 1 John 3:9 is really quite simple to understand. It means just what it says, except the NASB has to go and mess it all up by adding the word *practices*. The Greek word is *poieo* and it means “to do.” It is in the present tense and this is where many commentators rest their argument. The present tense can have an ongoing nuance, but the addition of words like *practice* or *continue* require more than a nuance in the Greek tense. If John had wanted to communicate the idea of *continual* sin or *practices* sin, then there were Greek words available for this (e.g., *diapantos* = continual). If we translate this *practices* sin or *continues* to sin, then we create more questions than we answer. Do not all Christians continue to sin until the day they die? Do not all Christians sin daily? Isn’t daily sin a continuation of doing it? How can anyone claim to not continue to sin? Does the Christian come to some point in his life when he stops sinning? So, the proposed translation solves nothing! In fact, it creates a contradiction with 1 John 1:8. Let’s look at this for a moment. I want you to see that the present tense solution does not work because it creates a contradiction. In both 1:8 and 3:9, John uses the exact same word for *sin* and in the exact same case. In both texts, the word **sin** is controlled by a present active indicative verb. Now, if we do a mechanical translation of these two verses and we translate both present tense verbs as continual, what do we come up with?

1 John 1:8 would read: If we say that we have no *continual* sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 3:9 would read: No one who is born of God *continues* to sin,

Do you see the contradiction? 1 John 1:8 is saying that no believer can ever claim to be without continual sin, whereas, 1 John 3:9 is saying that no believer continues to sin. This is a direct contradiction. So, we have got to find another solution besides the present tense. That just does not work. That is why both of these passages have to be translated as absolute. The solution lies in what I have been showing you; namely, that 1 John 1:8 shows that when the believer is looked at as a total person, he can never claim to be without sin. He would be deceived if he came to that conclusion (1 John 1:8). However, when the believer is looked at in terms of his born-again self, he cannot sin because that is where Christ’s sinless seed dwells in and through the believer (1 John 3:9). Whatever Christ

produces is sinless. From a good tree comes good fruit, from a bad tree comes bad fruit. Both of these principles are presently at work in the total believer.

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<sup>i</sup> Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 135.

<sup>ii</sup> Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 141.

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