



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Sin? What About It? (1 John 3:4-10)

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, April 16, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, April 16, 8:30 PM in Office #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

INTRODUCTION

The authors of the Old Testament used at least 13 different Hebrew words or phrases in making a reference to sin—each carrying a slightly different nuance than the others. Some of these include the following ideas:

- To turn aside, moral wonderings (Jeremiah 17:5)
- A spiritual rebellion or moral mutiny (Ezekiel 2:3)
- To supplant, especially by deception (2 Kings 10:18-19)
- An epidemic of wrongdoing, such as what the world was like before the flood (Genesis 6:11-13)
- Being evil or bad; opposite of good (Genesis 2:9, 17)
- Wickedness, evil-intent, injustice, morally crooked

A couple of terms employ familiar word pictures. One is found in the description of “crack-shot” stone slingers. Judges 20:16 says of these men, “Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not *miss*.” The figurative use of the word translated “miss” is used in reference to one who has failed to hit God’s holy mark (Leviticus 5:5; Joshua 7:20—to list a couple out of many). God has set a righteous target which people must hit. And when they do not hit, they miss or sin against God and his target.

All these “misses”, whether intentional or unintended, need the precious grace of a merciful God to be removed.

Another word picture comes from the word which means to “pass through” or to “cross over”—like crossing a river or boundary. When used metaphorically in the realm of morality, it refers to “crossing over the boundary of right and entering the forbidden land of wrong.”¹ The Sovereign Creator God is the one who has the authority to draw the moral boundaries and He has. In one instance, God “drew a line” around the

destroyed city of Jericho and told the people of Israel not to take any of the fine goods in the ruins. But Achan did. And he was to be punished with death “because he has *transgressed* (crossed over) the covenant of the LORD, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel” (Joshua 7:15b).

The New Testament writers also used 13 different words or phrases, only in Greek, as they reference sin. These words and phrases mirror many of the references found in the Old Testament. A couple of notations stand out. One is the word that carries the meaning of “impiety” or “flagrant opposition to God.” This word describes a “disregard for, or defiance of, God’s laws” similar to “the same attitude towards God’s person.”² These people and their actions are labeled as “godless” and “ungodly” (Romans 5:6; 1 Timothy 1:9; Jude 4).

The second New Testament term comes from the banking and commerce world which refers to “debt” or to owe something. When figuratively used in Scripture it something owed, a moral debt has been incurred, due to a person’s sin. In what is commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught to pray “...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). This moral debt, though, is so deep that one cannot make payments which will suffice. Only the blood of the sinless (debt-free) Christ is payment acceptable unto God.

Along with the various descriptions that define “sin”, the Bible also discusses the numerous consequences that have come throughout history because of sin’s invasion into the Garden of Eden. First of all, God’s good creation was altered. The serpent, the woman, the man and even the earth had huge, painful changes due to the sin of mankind (Genesis 3:14-18; Romans 8:19-22). And one of the biggest alterations was the introduction of physical death into the world.

Also altered was man’s relationship with God. John Stott noted “Even if we do not realize the fact now, the most terrible result of sin is that it cuts us off from God.”³ People were created to be in a relationship with a holy God; but now people are not holy, but rather quite sinful. Thus, a deep chasm was formed separating God from the pinnacle of His creation and mankind from His Creator.

A further change in mankind is that we all now have a sin nature. Romans 5:19 explains that through the one man Adam all were made sinners (cf. Romans 5:15, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 3:23). The very being of men

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became evil when Adam & Eve sinned. So, now all people in all of time carry this same nature.

One consequence of man's sin nature is the truth that man is "totally depraved." This does not mean that every person is as evil as he or she could be. Nor does it mean that they never do anything "good" or "nice" toward others (although these "good" things can do nothing to merit "credit" before God). This description is in reference to the depth and breadth of humanity's sin. Every aspect (depth) of every person (breadth) is altered by sin. The will, emotion, mind and action of every man and woman is affected by the evil within them.

While many passages of Scripture could be referenced, one verse illustrates this doctrine well. Before the flood, "Then the LORD saw that the **wickedness of man was great** on the earth, and that **every intent** of the thoughts of his heart **was only wicked continually.**" (Genesis 6:6, emphasis mine—cf. Psalm 14:1-3; Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 53:4-6; Matthew 12:34; Romans 1:18-32).

The logical outcome from man's depravity is that man has "total inability" to choose spiritual good from evil (as defined by God). Adam was created with a "free will"; that is, he was not under a natural compulsion to choose sin. But through Adam's fall, his nature came under that compulsion to follow after sin. This same nature was passed along to those who came after him.

Two passages highlight this teaching. Jeremiah 13:23 reads, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (NIV). And 1 Corinthians 2:14a states, "But a natural man (i.e. one not redeemed by Christ) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolish to him..."

Man, in himself, cannot choose God and God's ways for he does not want God or God's ways. This is because sin has so affected his will and motives that he despises God (Romans 3:10-18). Man's choice is determined by that which is most desirable to him. And God is not desirable to man; therefore, he cannot and does not choose Him.

So, if not for the deliverance of God's sovereign and amazing grace, man would have no hope.

So what does all this instruction on sin have to do with today's passage? In 1 John 3:4-10, the Apostle John referenced sin or lawlessness 12 times.

1 John 3:4-10 *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that He appeared in order*

to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Without a proper understanding of sin, this passage may seem harsh. Society and even some churches have such low and unbiblical thoughts about sin (that is, if they use the word in their conversation or sermons), that it has practically been reduced to being a mental disorder or simply a "mess up" or mistake.

But John has a proper understanding of the sinfulness of sin. Thus he has a few things to say about it in light of a person's relationship with God.

WHAT DID JOHN WRITE ABOUT SIN?

Before looking at specifics in John's passage, attention needs to be given to the grammar. It is clearer in the Greek text that each verb "related to sin are all in the present tense indicating continuous, habitual action."⁴ This is why the New American Standard Bible translates it as "practicing sin" (3:4, 8, 9), "sins" (3:6) and "practicing lawlessness" (3:4). John is not talking about occasional acts of sin but of patterns of sin. "Believers will sometimes sin (Romans 7:14-25)—even willfully—but they will not and cannot sin habitually, persistently and as a way of life (cf. Romans 6:4-14; Galatians 5:24; Ephesians 2:10)."⁵

SIN IS LAWLESSNESS (3:4)

John concluded the last section discussing the hope and purity found in the true children of God. Then he turned right around to discuss the rottenness of sin. "Sin is lawlessness" is the English translation. A fuller understanding would be "Missing the mark is "a willful rejection and an active disobedience against God's moral standard."⁶ The Apostle does not mess around with

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niceties. He gets to the point: the one who is in a continual pattern of missing the mark is living a life of rebellion to God. A biblical understanding of sin reinforces the depravity of this rebellion and lays a foundation to the force of John's statement.

SIN HAS BEEN REMOVED BY CHRIST (3:5,8)

The horribleness of sin is also seen in the good news of verses five and eight. The Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, had to come to earth to deal with this rebellion. He did so, not by removing all the rebels, but by removing sin from those rebels who became God's children.

Through the cross, the "missed marks" of God people were removed. By doing so, God's people were made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21) and the relationship with their Creator was not one of animosity, but love, adoration and worship. The heart once set on defying God, now strives to glorify God.

And in removing sins, Christ destroyed the work of the devil in the lives of God's people (3:8; Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 2:14). The final destruction and defeat of Satan is still in the future (Revelation 19). But his reign of rebellion, sin, false ideas, temptations, and the terror of death have been dismantled in the life of the child of God—they have been delivered from his kingdom and have been transferred into the Kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13).

Jesus could remove the sins of people through His death because He never "missed the mark." He lived a sinless life (1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26) and thus needed no one to cover for Him.

NO SIN IN THE ONE IN CHRIST (3:6,9)

As has been discussed in past studies, the Apostle John is not teaching that Christians will never sin. If that was his intent, then he is contradicting himself in the things he wrote earlier in this letter. John is discussing the new nature of the one who is born of God (3:9).

The person who has been "born again" has been given a new nature. The old nature, as discussed before, is filled with rebellion, hatred toward God and sin. The new nature is one which is given to a child of God by God Himself. This new nature cannot sin. But children of God still have remnants of the old nature which rears its ugly head and sin can still be committed by those born again (Romans 7:14ff).

But with a new nature, the child of God can keep the old nature in check by not giving into the things of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). One is not under compulsion to sin, as is the natural man. Instead, with a new heart and nature, one can desire to please God and seek to stay away from the rebellious acts of sin.

Once again, the Greek verb tense is helpful as both of the verbs in verse 6 ("sins") and verse 9 ("practices sin") are in the present indicative form meaning a continual pattern of actions. The person who has been born of God cannot live in a continual pattern of sin; or in other words live a lifestyle of sin.

THOSE WHO PRACTICE SIN ARE OF THE DEVIL (3:8,10)

But to those who do live in a continual pattern or lifestyle of sin, John does not hold back or mince words. If those who do not live in a pattern of sin are born of God, then who is the "father" of those who continue to live a lifestyle of rebellion and disobedience to God? John said that it is the devil.

It was Satan who rebelled in the beginning and has been opposed to God ever since. He was created by God as a perfect, glorious angelic being. But pride drove him to attempt to usurp God from His heavenly throne (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-17). This rebellion failed. But, the devil is continuing his rebellious ways and is now ruling the sinful world system (Ephesians 2:2). Therefore, those who practice sin are, in this sense, concluded to be a child of the devil. The sinful pattern of their lives is a reflection of the sinful life of Satan (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Ephesians 2:1-3).

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE CHILDREN OF SATAN (3:10)

There are only two types of people in the world: those who are children of God and those who are children of the devil. There is no third category. There is no mixed group such as labeled today by some as a "carnal Christian"—that may be defined as ones who have made Christ their savior but have not taken Him as Lord (in other words, they want to be saved, but they do not want to obey).

John said there are two groups, and that the differences are obvious. The practice of righteousness shows that one group is to be considered the

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children of God. The practice of sinful living is the trademark of the children of Satan.

Today's society would think this is quite a harsh stereotype held by John. It may be seen that people like Hitler, Lenin, Pol Pot and their like who murdered millions of people are obviously sons of Satan. And obviously, a number of the horrific killers and criminals are, as well. But one must remember that God looks at sin as it has been revealed to us in Scripture. He does not view sin in the fluctuating way that people on earth view sin. God sees it as rebellion, turning aside, missing the mark, a moral mutiny attempting to usurp His authority over His creation.

In other words, He sees a familiar resemblance in those who live such lives and the one who from the beginning has been living in rebellion against Him.

But those who have been born of Him, He has redeemed, purified and given new hearts. They can be observed practicing righteousness and caring for the needs of their brother (1 John 2:7-10; John 13:34-35). They are known for doing the works He has created them to do (Ephesians 2:10). Yes, they still fall to temptation and sin on occasion, but they are not known to live in this type of lifestyle. And when they do sin, God, their Father, is ready to forgive when they confess their sin to Him (1 John 1:9).

CONCLUSION

The very character of sin—missing the mark, turning aside, moral mutiny, crossing the line—makes it totally incompatible with anything that is of God. This is something found throughout the whole of Scripture. It is highlighted in the death of the Son of God which took place so this horrible thing called sin may be removed from God's people. John reminded his readers at the end of the first century of the incompatibility of sin with the things of God.

John reminds us today that this truth has not been changed, even though the thought of sin has been changed by society. Sin is still sinful. It is still a heinous thing in the eyes of God. And His children, whom He has redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ, have been washed of this evil rebellion and are called to stay far from it.

And those who are still living in sin, regardless of what they say, are still under the tutelage and control of their father, the devil. They are in rebellion to the things of God and still under His condemnation; just like their father.

But one does not have to stay in that state of condemnation. Through Christ, God can truly forgive all your sins and adopt you as His child—are you interested?

¹ George J. Zemek, quoting Robert B. Girdlestone in *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace* (Little Rock, Ark.: BTDSG, 2002), 51.

² Zemek, quoting W.E. Vine, 75.

³ John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 71.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, *1-3 John* The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 122.

⁵ MacArthur, 122.

⁶ Daniel L. Akin, *1,2,3 John* The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2001), 140.