



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

1 JOHN 3:4-6 – PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS- PART 1 COLORADO JANUARY 28, 2020

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As we await with great expectation the appearing of our Lord and Savior, may we be about this business of holiness. For us, sin must become the exception and not the rule. As Christians, we are to look like Christ, as John made clear in 1 John 3:1-3. Holiness must be our prevailing lifestyle because a real and radical change has happened inside and out. May our love and longing for a closer relationship with our Lord be a present reality in our lives.

I. 1 JOHN 3:4-6- PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS- PART 1

“(4) Everyone who practices sin, also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. (5) And we know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. (6) No one who abides in Him sins, no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.” 1 John 3:4-6

John begins to give a series of contrasts between righteousness and sin (3:4-10), between love and hate (3:11-18), and then between truth and error (4:1-6). One mark of a true believer will be righteousness that is God honoring living. And John relentlessly drives this point home in this Epistle. He is absolutely clear. How you live reveals if you truly are a Christian, if you have genuine faith.¹ So John confronts us again with the seriousness of sin in these verses.

It will be important to understand with these verses that all the verbs related to sin are in the present tense in the Greek, indicating a continuous, habitual action. John isn't referring just to occasional sin, but rather a continuous, established pattern of sinful behavior, which has become a way of life.² Contrast this with what happens when the Holy Spirit brings sinners to a holy God, regenerates them and gives them salvation with eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, they have been recreated (2 Corinthians 5:17) with a desire to obey God's Word and pursue holiness. Practicing righteousness become the pursuit.

A. THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN- 1 JOHN 3:4

“Everyone who practices sin, also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3:4

Barclay speaks to the seriousness of sin in his commentary as an act of rebellion against God's will and is a violation of His holy law. We must understand the wickedness of sin.³

“lawlessness” Greek **“anomia”** not the state of being without law, rather the individual will against and in defiance of the law of God, and the refusal to live in accordance to the standard of right and wrong.

Sin is the desire to go my own way and have my own way. This is what characterizes all apart from the transforming, sanctifying work of God. Sin is willful rebellion against God.

Now we know that Christians do sin, and can even sin badly. But the difference is that they don't make sinning a practice. It is not the habit of their life. Sin will not dominate their lives, but rather they will have the desire obey God's Word and please Christ. So John again writes to show the incongruity of the attitude of indifference to sin. It is not acceptable for Christians to sin. For us believers, sin must be the exception and not the rule. We must be hating sin and sin fighting. And our new habits of holiness are our prevailing lifestyle. Real and radical change has happened inwardly and outwardly. We have made a decisive break. Our way of life is not characterized by a life of sin, but a life of loving obedience for we practice righteousness and not lawlessness. We are loved by God and saved by Christ's cross. And holiness matters to a holy God. God is our Father and we are a reflection of our Father. Therefore, we live as God's offspring now. Make a fresh effort to pursue holiness.⁴

B. CHRIST'S MISSION: TO TAKE AWAY SIN - 1 JOHN 3:5

“And we know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.” 1 John 3:5

John says first *“that we know”*, or it is obvious and apparent to all that *“He”*, referring to Jesus Christ, *“appeared”*. John is not referring to our Lord's birth, but rather to the fact that Jesus, God's Son, was made visible, manifest, appeared. And Jesus came for the purpose, for the mission to *“take away sins”*. So therefore, if we claim to be a Christian and yet sin habitually, this is not consistent with the sanctifying reality of the mission of Jesus Christ. At salvation, we have been set apart from sin to righteousness.

Christ came to take away sin. The sin and lawlessness that once characterized our lives is removed and now the work of God is to sanctify and make us holy. (Romans 6:1-15)⁵

The only way this could be accomplished is by the perfect, sinless Son of God Who came and bore on Himself the sins of all who would believe on Him, died on a cross, and three days later He came walking out of that tomb a risen and victorious Savior. He ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father where all rule and authority have been given to Him. And He promises to return again. It is this

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One that John refers to here as *“in Him there is no sin.”* The just One for the unjust many. Without His perfect, sinless life, we could never be saved. Jesus was without any sin. And all who would repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ alone can be saved. If you have never done so, turn to Him now. He is the friend of sinners. Run to Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

C. A RADICAL CHANGE, A NEW COURSE - 1 JOHN 3:6

“No one who abides in Him sins, no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.” 1 John 3:6

John makes his point clear, *“no one who abides in Him sins”*. No true believer in Jesus Christ will continue to live habitually in sin. When a person has truly been born again, then something radical has happened. The Christian has received a new life and has been launched on a new course. This is a course of holiness and of pleasing God.⁶ It can only be accomplished by the sanctifying and enabling work of the Holy Spirit to make us like our Lord. Of course, it will also require our participation of obedience along with God’s grace.⁷ For believers, sin must become the exception and not the rule. As Christians, we are to look like Christ. Holiness must be our prevailing lifestyle because a real and radical change has happened inside and out. May our love and longing for a closer relationship with our Lord be a present reality in our lives.

John goes on to drive his point home, *“no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.”* The one who continues in habitual sin, has no real acquaintance with Christ. He doesn’t know Christ. If there is no change in one’s life, if he does not go on in holiness, then he has never been born again.

It is important to understand that John is not saying that Christians do not sin or even that they may not sin badly. We do. Remember King David who committed adultery and then

plotted a murder to cover it up? (2 Samuel 11) Believers can sadly sink into deep depths of sin. But when we sin, we must confess that sin before Jesus Christ and repent. We must seek His forgiveness and turn away from our sin to God. And God promises to forgive our sins. Remember how John began, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) You can read Psalm 51 to gain an understanding of David’s heart as he dealt with his sin and the joy of forgiveness from God.

The parable of the Prodigal son gives us more insight into our Father’s heart when we sin and wander away, sharing in the slop of sin. When the son finally came to his senses, meaning he understood he had sinned and gone astray, he went back to his father with a repentant heart. The father rejoiced that his son had returned. That is the heart of our Father when we return and repent from our sins. He rejoices and gladly forgives.

John stresses that as a Christian, our life must be one of practicing righteousness, of doing what is right. That must be the habit of our life. We cannot make light of sin. James Montgomery Boice said this, *“The man who knows that God is at the end of the road, will make all of life a preparation to meet his God.”*⁸ Holiness matters to a holy God. There has been a radical change in our life because of Jesus Christ and we have been launched on a new course! It is a course of holiness and pleasing God! May we make all of life a preparation to meet our God!

¹ Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 37-38.

² MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 123.

³ Barclay, William, *Letters of John and Jude*. The Saint Andrews Press: Edinburgh, Scotland, 1958, 1974. Pg. 122.

⁴ O’Donnell, Douglas Sean, *Reformed Expository Commentary: 1-3 John*. P&R Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2015. Pg. 99.

⁵ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 124.

⁶ Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg. 89.

⁷ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 118.

⁸ Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg. 91.