

IS IT OCCASIONAL OR HABITUAL?

1 John 3:4-10

In **chapter** two John told his readers how “not to be ashamed at his (Christ’s) coming” in **1 John 2: 28** and if they really believe He is coming, then they should be actively purifying themselves even as Christ is pure **1 John 3:3**.

In the verses to be considered in this study, we will find John is both loving and bold enough to set truth before his readers, which is not always easy to do. I am reminded about how Jesus dealt with the rich young ruler in **Mark 10:17-22** when he approached Jesus about eternal life. Mark tells us Jesus loved him. In fact, He loved him enough to tell the rich young ruler the truth. To me, **verse 21** of that passage is amazing. It reads: “Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come take up the cross and follow me.”

Unlike the Gnostics of that John’s day, both Jesus and John were more concerned about speaking the truth than they were about winning disciples. We need to remember in that day there were individuals who thought they possessed some type of super-knowledge. They promoted what is known as “Gnosticism” which held and stated that matter was essentially evil and that only the spirit is good. Gnosticism despised the body and held that the spirit within the body was like a seed in dirty soil. They held the idea sin was a natural part of the body and since it was natural there was no problem giving in to its desires.

Aren’t we hearing this philosophy being espoused and seeing it exercised in this day of the great apostasy that is to precede the second coming of Christ according to **2 Thessalonians 2:3**? Aren’t we seeing the creeps of **Jude 4** the “certain men” Jude said would creep into the Church and promote the idea of turning “the grace of God into lasciviousness...denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”? I think so.

As J. Vernon McGee said “I believe in the security of the believer, but I also believe in the insecurity of the make-believer” I believe John would concur with his thinking.

There has been and there continues to be questions about sin in the life of a believer, and rightly so. But if we remember in **1 John 1:9** and in **1 John 2:1** the writer has addressed the fact of sin in God's family to some degree. It is a fact that although Christians have a perfect salvation they are not themselves perfect. In fact, in our study we will learn a Christian actually possesses two natures completely opposite to each other. One is given to sin and the other cannot sin.

1 John 3:4 says: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Here the Apostle states "whosoever" without specification. It is an inclusive word: a word he will use three more time in this brief passage. He is saying anyone guilty of practicing or committing sin is guilty of going beyond a boundary established by God. To transgress means to go beyond the bounds set by God intentionally and not accidentally. I'm afraid man is all too familiar with this process. In reality, John is simply defining what it means to transgress God's law. Again, a transgression is not accidental, it is intentional.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said "God is love but just because He is love and manifests that love liberally does not mean He has no rules or expectations for His children." I think Dr. Wiersbe is spot on.

Verse 5 continues with one of the greatest statements found in the Word of God! "And ye know that he was manifest to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." That statement ought to make a Baptist shout!

As I was studying for this study I learned something I did not know about this verse. What it is saying is, when Jesus died on the cross at Calvary, He not only died to save us *from the penalty of sin* but also *from the practice of sin!* That is to say He not only died a redemptive death for us who were sinners by nature, but also a releasing death from the power of sin. For the believer, in light of what Jesus did at Calvary, sin no longer has power over those who trust Christ as Savior. Once they are saved, they discover sin no longer has power over them.

Please note John said "and in him is no sin" referring to our Lord. You see Jesus' death was redemptive. The only way it could have been redemptive is for Him to have been sinless. The Scriptures teach us: "For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" in **2 Corinthians 5:21**; they also informs us He: "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" in **1 Peter 2:22**; and in our text passage we learn "and in

him is no sin” **1 John 3:5**. Have you ever wondered why we read of the Temptation of Christ as it is found in the synoptic Gospels? It is recorded for a special purpose. In those Gospel accounts we find Jesus was not tempted to **see if He would sin, He was tempted to prove He could not sin**. The reason He could not sin is because He had no sin nature in Him and, yet, the temptations He experienced were as real as those we face. (see **Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13**)

In **verse 6** John uses the word “Whosoever” once again. What this means is, it does not matter who this may be referring to, the Holy Spirit is setting forth truths applicable to all. Truths by which one’s testimony may (and should) be examined. John says: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not...” Here, John is identifying a certain kind or type of individual.

A person’s character is the result of their, continual, habitual actions. The writer is saying everyone that abides in Christ is a saved person. The habit of a Christian is to walk in the light and to have continual fellowship with Christ. It is true that sin may enter into a believer’s life on occasion, but when it does, it is an exception and not a practice. The one who is truly in Christ does not habitually sin, although he may, on occasion, commit sin. In the next verse, we find the person who is truly in Christ does righteous or right things as a habit of life.

On the other hand, John continues, “whosoever sinneth (meaning to practice sin or have a life-style of habitually sinning) hath not seen him, neither known him” meaning, Christ. What is being stated here is the fact that if the life of someone is wholly turned towards sin, they are unsaved, they have not seen Christ, and they do not know Him as Savior. They are in darkness and not light. Isn’t this what our Lord taught in His Sermon on the Mt. in **Matthew 7:20**?

A true believer does not practice sin. On the other hand, a counterfeit Christian cannot do anything but practice sin, seeing he only possesses a sin nature.

Please note what is said in **verse 7**: “Little children...” As we study this letter, we must never lose sight of the fact God is addressing His family, His little children. John says: “Let no man deceive you” about who is and who is not righteous. It is determined by recognizing this fact: “he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he (referring to the Father) is righteous.” Take note that the word “doeth” speaks of continual action. It is akin to the words “abideth” and “committeth.”

They all speak of a past action or decision that has continuing effect in the present. The tense, in which all three words are written, speaks of an action which once begun continues as a habit of life or is a manifestation of their character.

I have heard: “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

May I say again, John does not deny that a Christian, on occasion, sins. That is not ever questioned in this epistle! In fact, John, as we have already seen, admits not only the possibility that a Christians sins, he instructs his readers on what they are to do as a child of God when they have sinned. What John does deny here, though, is the life of a Christian is *not turned towards the habit or life-style of sin as is the life of an unsaved individual*. A Christian may sin occasionally, but not habitually.

Remember the caution given by John is: “don’t be deceived!” Some are saying in our day what they were saying in John’s day and that is one can be saved while they continue to sin or practice sin as a habit of life or as a life-style. The aged Apostle says, emphatically, that that is impossible! No child of God can sin successfully. If a person who professes to be saved can sin and not suffer any type of chastisement from the Father, then that person is not a child of God. In fact **Hebrews 12:8** says he is an illegitimate child.

Listen to how plain John states this in **verse 8**. “He that committeth sin is of the devil;” Wow! “For the devil sinneth from the beginning.” In this verse the author begins to consider the nature of a saved and an unsaved individual. He does so by stating, in essence, since the Devil began his diabolical career, he has not ceased to sin. John refers to it here as “from the beginning.” He is not referring to the moment of the Devil’s creation by God, as an exalted angel, but rather to the moment he began to rebel against God. He is saying since the Devil began to rebel, transgress, and sin against God he has not stopped doing so since.

That’s the bad news. John goes on to say the good news is: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.” From this we see when Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost” in **Luke 19:10**, part of His mission was to “destroy” or make ineffective the works or power of the Devil. Who Jesus was and what He did in becoming a man and dying for

man rendered or made the power of the Devil impotent. Although we do not have time to consider a great truth set forth in **Luke 11:14-23**, please allow me to say when Jesus came into this world, He entered into the strong man's house and spoiled his goods. I believe it would prove worthwhile for you to take the time to read that passage and see what our Lord was teaching there. (pp. **Matthew 12:22-37**)

As John continues in **verses 9 and 10** we find him emphasizing, to some degree, the difference in the two natures man can possess. One is the fallen nature inherited by every man, woman, boy, or girl which does or has existed on planet Earth as a result of the fall of Adam. The other is the Divine nature which is made available to every man, woman, boy, or girl who will repent of their sins and place their trust in Christ as Savior. This Divine nature is made available as a result of the grace of God which was displayed at Calvary.

John begins this verse by saying: "Whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" which is a clear and definitive statement. Please take notice of the phrase "is born of God..." This speaks of an act of salvation or regeneration which has taken place in the past when a part of the God's Divine nature was imparted to the individual repenting of their sins and placing their faith and trust in Christ as Savior. It speaks of a past act that was still producing present results. It is in **2 Peter 1:4** that we learn a believer becomes a "partaker(s) of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world..." as the result of the work of regeneration. Also, please take notice the Apostle says such a person "doeth not commit sin:" which means an individual that has become a partaker of the Divine nature does not sin as a practice or habit and does not make sin a life-style.

"His seed" which "remaineth in him" is a reference to that part of the Divine nature which becomes resident in the life of the believer at the time of the new birth. The fact it is ever present in the Christian makes it impossible for that individual to habitually sin. A Christian may sin on occasion, but they will not habitually. It is that indwelling Divine nature that causes a saved individual to hate what he used to love and to love what he used to hate. We find that truth set forth according to **2 Corinthians 5:17** after someone has "become a new creature" in Christ Jesus. The imparting of the Divine or new nature not only enables the believer to hate the sin he used to love, but also produces the desire and power to do God's will.

Please take note of one more important truth here. John says that any person who has become a partaker of the Divine nature “cannot sin.” But, what does that mean? We know John has told us a child of God can and on occasion does sin. In fact, he has told us what to do as one of God’s children when we do sin. So, is John contradicting himself here? I don’t think so. The fact John says a person who has become a partaker of the Divine nature “cannot sin” means he cannot sin as a habit or practice of life. He cannot make sin a life-style. That is simply an impossibility!

As we briefly consider **verse 10** and bring this study to a close, we find John continuing to make reference to the only two different natures known to man. One is, as I have already said, a nature inherited from fallen man and the other is a Divine nature imparted to a believer by a God of grace upon the work of regeneration.

Verse 10 explains the difference between “the children of God” and “the children of the devil” and the language is plain. It does not matter what a deceiver may say, a true believer cannot sin habitually, but will actually live a life of righteousness. On the other hand: “whosoever doeth not righteousness *is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*” (emphasis mine) If you remember, I said early on in this study that the proof is in the pudding. Anyone can say anything they like, but the proof is in the doing and not just in the saying. I didn’t know just how that truth would follow us on into this study, but it has.

The Bible is consistent in its teachings on this. **James 3:11-12** asks and states: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren bear olive berries? either a vine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” Remember Jesus’ teaching near the end of the Sermon on the Mt. I made reference to earlier in **Matthew 7:20**? Please take the time to read **verses 15-20** and you will find in **verses 17-18** that: “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

It does not matter what a person may profess or who he may be. If a person is not trying to live for God, if they are not trying to live righteously in a fallen world, he is not a child of God. It’s just that clear. It’s just that simple.

One other quick thing before I close and we move on, John highlights an issue he

has already addressed. He reminds us that if a man “loveth not his brother” he is not of God. What does it mean to love the brother? It doesn’t mean we are expected to go on vacation with him or even to take him out to dinner. In fact we can love the brother even though we do not enjoy the things which interests him, his ways, or the conversation he has. Nor does it mean we have to throw your arms around him and embrace him when we see him or get near him. But it does mean we will not harbor negative thoughts in our heart towards him and that we are concerned for his well being and success and will help him if the need and opportunity arises.

Wasn’t it Jesus who said in **John 13:35**: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.” Doesn’t it stand to reason that since God is love, those who are partakers of His Divine nature will love as well? I think so.

I hope you have gleaned something new and positive from our time together in this study. In our next study as we continue in **chapter three**, we will find John enlarging on his idea of what proper love for a believer is.

Tom Price, 2020