

Subject: *Straight Talk about Living in Sin*

Scripture: *1 John 3:4-10*

R. G. Lee, the great Baptist preacher, had preached a message one day about sin, and after the service, a little old lady went to him and said, “Dr. Lee, I didn’t really appreciate that sermon.” The pastor said, “Well, the devil didn’t appreciate it either, so classify yourself.” John is very plain spoken and he is saying, “Classify yourself. See if you are a child of God or a child of the devil.”

A young boy and his mother were visiting someone in the hospital. He noticed the nurse washed her hands every time she entered and left the room. Finally he asked her why she did that. She said, “Well, it’s because I love health and I hate germs.” A Christian loves holiness and hates sin. That doesn’t mean believers always do what is right and never sin, but it does mean that believers have a new heart and desire to love holiness and hate sin.

- ***Psalms 97:10*** *Ye that love the LORD, hate evil*

This passage in First John deals with a believer’s attitude and relationship to sin. Can a Christian sin? Yes. Can a Christian live in sin? No. Sin and salvation are opposites. Christians cannot make sin a habit or live in sin. Being a Christian is not consistent with a sinful life. A Christian is someone with a righteous life. John has already made this clear (2:2; 2:29; now he restates this in 3:7). It is helpful to understand the righteousness that John is talking about here. The Bible mentions three kinds of righteousness:

- **Self-righteousness – based on good morals and good works**
The Bible condemns this kind of righteousness. This kind of righteousness is seen in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk. 18:9-14).
- **Imputed righteousness – given freely in salvation**
This is the righteousness of Christ credited to believers by faith (2 Cor. 5:21). When believers have this imputed righteousness they are “justified” which means “just as if I’d never sinned” and “just as if I’d always done right.”
- **Practical righteousness – doing what is right**
This is how a Christian should live. This is what John is writing about. When a believer is justified he is declared to be right with God. When he is sanctified he does what is right.

In 3:3, John states that a real Christian with the hope of Christ’s return in him purifies himself. Hope and holiness go together. Then in 3:4-10, John states the opposite side of that equation. A person who lives in sin is not saved at all. He gives four reasons why a true Christian cannot live in sin.

1. Sin is contrary to God’s law (vs. 4)

The key to understanding this passage is that John is talking about sin as a way of life, a habit, a practice. The verbs are in the present tense, and need to be understood as an ongoing practice or way of life. Verse 4 literally means, “Everyone doing sin (*hamartia*, missing the mark) is doing lawlessness (*anomia*), for sin (missing the mark, *hamartia*) is lawlessness (*anomia*).

God makes the rules. God has given us some absolute commands or laws. When we violate or disobey those commands we sin against God. We know that all people are born sinners. By nature we rebel and disobey God. We choose to do what we want instead of what

God says. It has been that way since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and then all of us were born with a sinful nature. But when we are saved, God gives us a new heart to love His law and obey His commands. Psalm 119 describes the heart and attitude of a believer:

- **Psalms 119:97** *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*
- **Psalms 119:113** *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*
- **Psalms 119:127-128** ¹²⁷ *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.* ¹²⁸ *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*
- **Psalms 119:140** *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.*
- **Psalms 119:163** *I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.*
- **Psalms 119:167** *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*

And when a believer doesn't obey the Lord, it bothers him.

- **Psalms 119:136** *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

A believer appreciates even bad things in life that drive him into God's Word.

- **Psalms 119:71** *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

A person who lives in sin proves that he has no respect for God or His Word. He is living in rebellion. He resents God's law and disobeys it. John has already addressed this in 2:3-4.

2. Sin is contrary to Christ and His work (vs. 5)

Jesus came to live and die to take away our sins and He is completely pure from all sin. To live in sin is to live in direct opposition to the very life and work of Christ. The fact that Jesus came to take away our sins is not just a future hope but also a present reality. Jesus came not only to save us from the penalty of our sins in Hell, but He came to save us from the power and dominion of sin in our lives. That's why Christians are called "saints." Believers have the ability and desire to obey God's Word.

- **Romans 6:12-13** ¹² *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.* ¹³ *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*
- **Romans 6:17-18** ¹⁷ *But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.* ¹⁸ *Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.*
- **Titus 2:11-14** ¹¹ *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,* ¹² *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;* ¹³ *Looking for that blessed hope,*

and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Jesus came to save us and redeem us from our sins. How could we ever continue to live in sin and to oppose the reason for our salvation?

3. Sin is consistent with the devil and his work (vs. 8)

The devil sinned from the beginning. He was a glorious angel, but he rebelled against God and became the first sinner. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. A person who lives in sin (rebellion and disobedience) reveals that he belongs to the devil. You can't be saved and live like the devil. It is unthinkable that believers would rebel like the devil. Satan is our enemy, not our master. He is our adversary, not our role model.

- **John 8:44** *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

4. Sin is contrary to the new birth (vs. 9)

A person who is born of God has God's nature. He is a partaker of the divine nature. The nature (seed) of God remains in him, so he cannot live in sin. In salvation we tend to focus more on what Jesus did for us than what the Holy Spirit does in us. We appreciate what He did on the cross to forgive us, but we should realize what He did in our hearts to change us. If you are born again, you won't live like the devil. If you are born again you have a new mind to think like Christ, a new heart to love what He love, a new will to do what is right. John says (vs. 7), "Let no man deceive you." In other words, don't be fooled. Don't let false teachers deceive you and lead you astray into thinking that how you live doesn't matter or whether you live in sin doesn't matter. It does matter. Verse 10 is a summary statement. The test is clear-cut: a child of God lives right and a person who lives in sin is not a child of God but a child of the devil.

There is a difference in an unsaved person and a saved person when it comes to sin. Both are capable of sin. No one will deny that. It is the difference between a hog and a sheep. The unsaved person is like a hog that gets in the mud and stays there because he loves it. The saved person is like a sheep that gets in the mud and gets out because he hates it.

The situation we find in the church today is much like the frog in the kettle. It has been proven that you can put a frog in a kettle of water and if you increase the temperature of the water gradually and slowly enough the frog will stay in the water and die instead of hopping out to save his life. This letter of First John turns up the heat so that we will wake up and realize the truth before it's too late.