

CHRISTIANITY (*defined*)
A Study of 1 John
“God’s Solution for our Sin Problem”

1 John 3:2-9

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INTRODUCTION: We all struggle with sin. I heard a funny story about the three Baptist preachers from the same little town that went to a convention in New Orleans. They were sitting in the hotel lobby, and one of them said, “You know, confession is good for the soul, and I've got a confession to make to you guys. When I get away from my church at a place like this, I like to go to the bar and have a nip or two.” The second preacher said, “Well, you know, since we're confessing these things, when I get away from my church and get to a place like this, I like to go down to the casino and play a little blackjack.” They both looked at the third preacher and wanted him to confess. “Yes,” he said, “I have a sin that I must confess also. I'm the world's worst gossip, and I can't wait to get back home!”

The passage we'll look at this morning, carries a real meaning to me. I can recall when I was a senior in High School, I had committed my life to Christ, and I was really trying to live for Him. Then I came to 1 John 3:9, and I was confused. it hit me like a ton of bricks that maybe I wasn't even saved in the first place. At that time I only had a King James Bible, and this is what it says in the KJV, **“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”** (1 John 3:9) When I read those words I came to a real crisis. Based upon the fact that there was still some sin in my life, I thought, “Maybe I haven't truly been saved.” Or “Maybe I need to be saved again.” I thought that this verse taught that if I was walking with God I would never ever sin again.

I had already surrendered to preach at that time, but after I read that verse, I thought that I was disqualified from being a pastor because there was lingering sin in my life. I went and talked to my pastor in South Alabama, and he kindly explained to me that the King James Version didn't really distinguish between the tense of the verbs that spoke about

sin. He basically explained that even the best Christians sometimes fall into sin, and the only perfect man who ever walked the earth was Jesus. That really helped me. And then when I got to college and took New Testament Greek, I realized that the message of this passage in the original language was different than the way I understood it in the KJV. There is a verb tense in Greek called the **present continual tense**. It means to do something and to keep on doing it. And as we read it today in the Christian Standard Bible, you can confirm in the footnotes this tense of the verbs. As we read it, I'll insert the correct tense of the verbs and it will make more sense.

So let's get a running start and begin reading in 1 John 3:2: **"Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.**

Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed so that he might take away sins, and there is no sin in him. Everyone who remains in him does not sin (*keep on sinning*); everyone who sins (*keeps on sinning*) has not seen him or known him.

Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who commits (*practices*) sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works. Everyone who has been born of God does not (*practice*) sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin (*keep on sinning*), because he has been born of God.

Pastor Michael did a great job last Sunday talking about how we will all be transformed when Jesus appears. He said we will be like Jesus in three ways. We'll have a purified character; a glorified body; and a satisfied heart. But none of us are there yet – we still struggle with this sinful nature. But we can have daily victory once we understand how God has solved our sin problem. There are three important truths that we

learn from this passage. There's a truth about the Savior; a truth about sin; and a truth about salvation. First, I want us to consider.

1. THE WORK OF JESUS. Have you ever wondered WHY Jesus came from Heaven to visit planet earth? You can find the answer in the chorus of an old song by Andre Crouch that says, **“He left His mighty throne in glory. To bring to us redemption’s story. Then He died and He rose again. And I’m glad, so glad He did!”**

In this passage we see at least two things Jesus accomplished in His work of redemption:

(1) He came to deal with sin. You need to understand the difference between sin singular and S I N S plural. God has provided the solution for our sin problem by sending Jesus. In John 1:29 when Jesus came on the scene, John the Baptist said, **“Look! The lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”**

In the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement, there were two male lambs called rams. The priest would take one of those rams, cut his throat on the altar, and dip a hyssop branch in the blood. And on this one day a year, he would go into the Holy of Holies behind the curtain to sprinkle that blood on the Ark of the Covenant. If you've seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, that's a pretty fair depiction of what the Ark of the Covenant looked like. Two cherubim were on either side of the box with a gold top. The people thought God's presence was there. This process was to deal with the sin problem of the Israelites.

But then the same priest would come out of the Holy of Holies, and he would take the other ram. He would place his hands on the head of that ram, and he would symbolically confess the sins (plural) of the nation of Israel. And then a priest would take that ram out into the wilderness far away, and he would leave it there. And that ram would never come back because he would take it so far away it could never find its way back. That was a picture of their sins being taken away. And that's what Jesus did. He came to deal with the sin problem and to deal with sins.

(2) He came to destroy the devil. In verse 8 we read that the Son of God was revealed to destroy the devil's works. At the cross Jesus destroyed the devil's works – but one day, He will ultimately destroy Satan. With all the violence and hatred in the world, people think the

devil must be doing well. But actually the devil is in real trouble. He received a mortal wound at the cross, and he is in retreat from the attack of the those in God's Kingdom. In 1944, the Nazis were in retreat from the advancing allied troops. Hitler ordered a scorched earth policy. They Nazis burned and destroyed all the infrastructure they could as they retreated. That's what Satan is doing now. He was beaten at the cross, and he's leading a scorched earth policy as he retreats from the advance of the global church. But Jesus promised that in His power, even the gates of hades will not stand against the onslaught of the church of the Living God.

I mentioned in my Life Support article this week that the Bible says that Satan is like a roaring lion roaming about seeking whom he may devour. But he is a toothless and clawless lion – he was defanged at Calvary. So all he has now is his roar. And the purpose of a lion's roar is to terrify his prey. Fear is Satan's great tool. For many people this past year, Covid has been more of a global panic than a global pandemic. The virus of fear has causes at least as much damage as the actual virus itself. In James 4:7 we are told, **“Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”** The key is to submit to God first, and then resist the devil in the name of Jesus and he will flee from you.

2. THE WARNING ABOUT SIN. God has provided the solution to our sin problem. Jesus died to take away our sins. However, we still have to battle with individual sins in our lives. Even after we come to faith in Christ, we still occasionally sin. But John makes a huge distinction between those who occasionally sin and those who continue to live a life of sinful behavior. In order to understand this distinction, consider these two truths:

(1) God's Child cannot continually practice sin with no remorse.

As a Christian, you've just got to come to grips with what the Bible says. We will stumble and fail at times, but if you continually practice sin and you feel absolutely no remorse about it, the Bible says that you really are not a Christian.

As a pastor I've known many prodigal sons and daughters who allowed sin and rebellion to enter their lives, and they got out of fellowship with their Heavenly Father. But because they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit

of God, this behavior grieved the Holy Spirit, and they experienced a sense of conviction and remorse. That remorse led to repentance and return to fellowship with the Father.

But I've also known people who claimed to be Christians who lived in open and constant rebellion from God without ever feeling any remorse or regret. That is a sure sign that they were never truly a child of God.

I mentioned earlier how I once struggled with 1 John 3:9 which says that a child of God can't sin – it actually means a child of God can't CONTINUE in sin. I like the way Eugene Petersen paraphrased this verse in the Message paraphrase: **“People conceived and brought into life by God don't make a practice of sin. How could they? God's seed is deep within them, making them who they are. It's not in the nature of the God-born to practice and parade sin. Here's how you tell the difference between God's children and the Devil's children: The one who won't practice righteous ways isn't from God.”** (1 John 3:9 MSG)

(2) God's Child will continually practice righteousness. There are two kinds of righteousness in the New Testament. The first is positional righteousness. That's the righteousness that is given to us by God because we are in Christ. I've been asking this same question for thirty years so I hope most of you have gotten it by now. If you are righteous, would you hold up your hand? Now, how many of you are going to heaven when you die, hold up your hand? Well we have a problem because only those who possess the righteousness of Jesus will make it to Heaven. If you didn't raise your hand, you might have misunderstood the question. I didn't ask, “Who is self-righteous?” Or I didn't ask, “Who is perfect?” None of us can raise our hands. But write down this verse and memorize it. It's 2 Corinthians 5:21, **“God has made him, who knew no sin, to become sin for us so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.”** If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, when God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of His Son, Jesus. So let's try it one more time. How many of you are righteous?

I said there are two kinds of righteousness. The first is positional righteousness – you have right standing before God because you are in Christ.

But the second kind of righteousness is practical righteousness. It means daily doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. Your positional righteousness establishes your relationship with God – it can never be broken. But it is our practical righteousness that drives our fellowship with God.

Do you remember when we used to go to movie theatres? Back in 2019, I took my granddaughter, Ada, to see **Frozen 2**. I enjoyed both Frozen movies. No spoiler alert, but Ahnna gets separated from her sister Elsa, and she is lost and afraid. Kristen Bell who provided the voice of Ahnna sings a beautiful song in which she says, **“You are lost. Hope is gone. But you must go on. And do the next right thing.”** Kristen Bell said that this is a mantra that has helped her through some of the darkest times of her life. Sometimes the next right thing may be to get out of bed, or call that person you love. That’s what the Bible calls righteousness. Doing the next right thing. And sometimes the next right thing is just a baby step – or sometimes it’s a giant step. But for a follower of Jesus it means keeping your eyes on Jesus and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit as He leads us to do the right thing.

3. THE WONDER OF THE NEW BIRTH. In 1 John 3:9, we read the term “born of God” twice. What does it mean to be “born of God?” In John 3, Jesus met with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a very religious man, but Jesus told him that being religious was not enough. Jesus said, “you must be born again.” Nicodemus took it literally and asked, “How can I enter my mother’s womb and be born a second time?” Jesus explained that there are two kinds of birth. There is a physical birth, and there is a spiritual birth. Jesus said, “That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is Spirit.”

That Apostle Peter also wrote about this new birth. The Bible says, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”** (1 PETER 1:3)

What does it mean to be born again? Here are two features of the new birth.

(1) We are born again with a new nature. The Bible says in the book of Ephesians that by human nature, we are all “children of wrath.” All that means is that we are sinners by nature and by choice. Nobody had to teach you how to sin. Nobody has to teach a little child how to lie. That just comes naturally. You and I have a sinful nature. Let’s take another quick survey. How many of you would admit that you have ever stolen something – a dime or a quarter from your mother’s purse, stolen and answer on a test, or stolen by misreporting an expense report? It’s just us here, so let’s be honest. Now how many of you have ever told a lie – any falsehood or deception? It could be a white lie or a full technicolor lie. Raise your hand. Okay, so we’ve established that we are a bunch of liars and thieves -it’s a good thing you’re in church!

The point I’m trying to make is that you aren’t a liar because you tell lies. We tell lies because we are liars. That’s our nature. It comes from our sinful heart. All of us are sinners. We don’t really have a sin problem – we have a heart problem. Adrian Rogers used to say that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. God says through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 17:9, **“The heart is deceitful in all things; desperately wicked. Who can know it?”**

But when you become a Christian, you receive a new nature, because you are born of God. And you ought to start acting like your Father. You know why I'm kind of stocky the way I am? Because my daddy was stocky. If you could have seen him, he had about the same build I have. I have taken on some of my father's nature. And when you become a Christian and you are born from above, you will take on some of the nature of God. And you know what that will mean? You will absolutely hate sin in your life. You'll hate it. You won't laugh about it. You won't joke about it. You will hate it. You'll have a totally new nature.

Many of you have heard of the great Christian named St. Augustine. Augustine lived a very promiscuous kind of life. He frequented prostitutes very often in his city of Carthage in Northern Africa. Then he became a Christian and he was gloriously changed. And not long after he'd become a Christian, he writes about an experience of walking down

the street of his city. And one of the prostitutes with whom he had been dealing in the past saw him and said, “Augustine, Augustine, it is I, it is I.” And he said, “Yes, but it is no longer I.” He said, “I'm different.” You see, Augustine had a new nature.

(2) We are born again with a new desire. Notice verse nine again where it says someone will not “keep on” sinning. They won't practice sin because “his seed remains” in him. And then look at the last part of verse nine where it says he “cannot sin.” Now that's what I used to struggle with. It's saying it's impossible for him to continue in sin. What that means is before I became a Christian, I was running *towards* sin. Now that I'm a Christian, I'm running *from* sin. Before you become a Christian, you want to sin. After you become a Christian, God gives you a new “wanter.” When you need a word and you can't find the word, you just make up a word! And you don't want to sin anymore.

When the Bible says that you cannot sin, it means something like this. If you told me to take a pistol and shoot Mike Parks between the eyes, I would say, “I can't do that. I just can't do that because I love Mike. He's my brother in Christ.” Now, when I say that I can't do that, does that mean physically I couldn't take a pistol and shoot it? No, it means that because of my new nature and my relationship with God, I don't have a desire to do it. And for a Christian, when you are tempted and confronted with sin, because of the new desire that's inside of you, you can say, “I can't do that. No, thank you. I have no desire for that.” Why? Because God's seed remains in you.

CONCLUSION: So since the time I struggled to understand 1 John 3:9 as a teenager, I've come to understand what the Bible says about a Christian and sin. Let me illustrate this by a story from one summer when I was honored to be the camp pastor at the National Fellowship of Christian Athletes Camp in Black Mountain, North Carolina. This was back in the early 90's, and I had the privilege of preaching each evening to about 1,000 High School athletes and coaches from around the nation. That week I got to meet Coach Tom Landry and NFL Defensive Lineman, Reggie White who rapped all 66 books of the Bible. Another former NFL player was there that week that I admired. He was a former All-American lineman at the University of Alabama, John Hannah. He

grew up in Albertville, Alabama which was my father-in-law's hometown. He was drafted in the first round of the 1973 NFL draft by the New England Patriots. He was named All-Pro for 10 of his 13 NFL seasons. He was the first NE Patriot to be inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame and Sports Illustrated named him the greatest Offensive Lineman of all time.

That week at the FCA camp, he was talking about living a pure life. I wrote down his words. He said: **“As an offensive lineman, every time I got down in my stance, I had an assignment I had to accomplish. There were times when I would occasionally miss my block. But it was impossible for me to keep on missing my blocks and still be an All-Pro player. If I had missed my block every time, I would have soon been back working on the farm in Alabama.”**

So as a follower of Jesus, there are times when we occasionally trip up and sin. When we do, the Holy Spirit convicts us, and drives us to confess that sin and repent of our actions, so that our fellowship with God can be restored. So 1 John 3:9 doesn't say that a Christian can't sin, but it teaches that a true Christian can't sin habitually without any sense of deep regret and remorse. To put it another way, God hasn't fixed us so that we can't sin. But He has fixed us so that we can't sin and enjoy it.