

The Practice of Sin

1 John Series

1 John 3:4-10

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INTRODUCTION

A. Illustration

In Alice In Wonderland, Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cat answered, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." Our moral decisions depend on where we want to get to.

-- Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows

B. It seems that like Alice, there are many Christians asking a similar question

1. They are people who have become Christians
 - a. they have come to understand the problem of sin and that they need to be saved
 - b. they have come to believe that salvation is in Jesus Christ, and they have both believed and obeyed the gospel
 - c. they have been born again, freed from sin, risen to walk in newness of life
 - d. they are now in a right relationship with God, his Spirit lives within them, and they are active members of the church
2. Still, it seems that they do not have a clear understanding of "which way" they ought to go
 - a. I'm talking about the life they live and the standard by which it is lived
 - b. too many Christians seem to think a lot like the Gnostics of old
 - 1) they think they're on some kind of higher plane so sin doesn't count
 - 2) they've heard of grace, so they figure it doesn't matter how they live
 - c. they are wrong on both counts

C. 1 John 3:4-10

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the 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. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By 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. NASB95

D. Today, I want to talk about the practice of sin

1. This is a much needed lesson by the modern church
2. There are two extremes that are in common practice today, and each one presents very similar problems
 - a. there is the idea that we just don't sin much at all
 - 1) there are a lot of people who seem to have lost the capacity to be honest with themselves
 - 2) they have the idea that they have risen above sin
 - 3) when confronted with a discussion of sin, they are much more quick to deny any sin than they are to admit to it
 - 4) it's an attitude that often leaves sin entrenched in a person's life
 - b. there is the idea that sin doesn't matter much
 - 1) you won't necessarily find many people openly promoting this idea, but you will find them living it
 - 2) as mentioned earlier, these are often people who misuse the idea of God's grace, and think that it is God who will simply make up for Their lack of effort
 - 3) it, too, is an attitude that leave sin entrenched in a person's life
3. The problem with both extremes is that sin is still the practice of a person's life
 - a. sin is not an aberration or weakness in temptation
 - b. sin remains the standard way of living for these people, despite the fact they may claim to be Christians, and even want to be Christians
4. We need to hear John's words concerning the practice of sin

I. JOHN'S DEFINITION OF SIN AND THE SPECIFIC CONCERN (3:4)

A. The NASB reads: "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness. . . ."

1. Some versions read:
 - a. 1 John 3:4 -- Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. KJV
 - b. 1 John 3:4 -- Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. NKJV
 - c. 1 John 3:4 -- The person who sins breaks God's law. Yes, sin is living against God's law. NCV

2. Others attempt to provide the sense of the Greek verb tense
 - a. 1 John 3:4 -- Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ESV
 - b. 1 John 3:4 -- Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. NASB95
3. It makes a huge difference how you read this passage, because it might seem that John is saying here that it's impossible for a faithful Christian to sin
 - a. we know that isn't true because of what he has already said about sin
 - b. 1 John 1:8-10 -- If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. NASB95
 - c. 1 John 2:1 -- My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; NASB95
4. Immediately, we need to know that John isn't presenting some kind of spiritual super-perfectionism, for if he is, we're all undone and without hope
 - a. he is saying that sin is serious business and we need to pay attention to some things
 - b. it won't do to deny our sins, or to think they don't matter

B. Sin is lawlessness

1. Sin is that which contradicts and disobeys the will of God
2. Essentially, it anarchy – the idea that we don't need authority or established order beyond ourselves
3. Barclay – “Sin is to obey oneself rather than to obey God.”
4. With this life-operating philosophy of life, one will do God's will when it is convenient or advantageous, otherwise, a person will do whatever they want to do, however they want to do it
5. It is not an accidental breaking of God's law, nor even a moment of weakness, it is the way of life for such people
6. That's why the idea of “practice” is important – sin is that which is practiced as a way of life and it violates the law of God

II. JOHN TELLS US THAT SIN IS A TOTAL CONTRADICTION TO CHRIST (3:5)

A. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world

1. John 1:29 -- The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! NASB95
2. 1 Peter 1:18-20 -- knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you NASB95

B. In Christ, there is no sin

1. He was the "lamb unblemished and spotless," (1 Pet 1:19)
2. 2 Corinthians 5:21 -- He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. NASB95

C. Why are we, then, so careless with sin – as if it somehow doesn't matter how we behave?

1. Romans 6:1-2 -- What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? NASB95
2. Sin is simply a total contradiction to Jesus Christ, to the life we are called to live in him, to the position we have been granted as children of God

III. JOHN TELLS US THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM (3:6)

A. The problem rises from a failure to abide in Christ

B. Remember what John has already said about abiding in Christ

1. 1 John 2:6 -- the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. NASB95
2. 1 John 2:10-11 -- The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. NASB95
3. 1 John 2:14 -- . . . I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. NASB95
4. 1 John 2:24 -- As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. NASB95
5. 1 John 2:27 -- As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. NASB95
6. 1 John 2:28 -- Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. NASB95

IV. JOHN IDENTIFIES THE DANGER OF THE DECEPTION (3:7-8)

A. The righteous man is the one who practices righteousness

1. Righteousness is the way of life for such a man
2. This is the man who is patterning his life after Jesus Christ

B. The one who practices sin, on the other hand, is of the Devil

1. The Greek verb tense in 3:8 reveals not just that the Devil “has sinned,” but that he “sins” from the beginning
 - a. it is his nature to sin
 - b. he sins as a matter of principle
 - c. in other words, sin is the Devil’s way of life, it is what he practices
2. The warning is obvious – we must not practice sin as a way of life, else we are just like the Devil
 - a. John 8:44 -- “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. NASB95
 - b. we do not want to be children of the Devil – so don’t act like him

V. JOHN REMINDS US THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO SIN 3:8B-10

A. He came to destroy the works of the Devil

1. It is inconceivable that the very people Jesus came to save should, in the end, be destroyed by the very thing he, himself, came to destroy
2. If we understand what Jesus came to do, why would we ever live like the Devil?

B. No one who is born of God practices sin

1. Do not confuse this with the sinful mistake, or the sin resulting from weakness in a given moment
 - a. we’re talking lifestyle here
 - b. the person who is born of God simply doesn’t have a sinful lifestyle
2. The reason is because the seed of God lives in him
 - a. 1 Peter 1:22-25 -- Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you. NASB95
 - b. James 1:18 -- In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. NASB95

C. Both the children of God and the children of the Devil are obvious by their lives (fruit)

CONCLUSION

A. Illustration (David Jackman records an illustration told by F.F. Bruce)

When a boy goes to a new school, he may inadvertently do something out of keeping with the school's tradition or good name, to be told immediately, "That isn't done here." A literalist might reply, "But obviously it is done; this boy has just done it" – but he would be deliberately missing the point of the rebuke. The point of the rebuke is that such conduct is disapproved of in this school, so anyone who practices it can normally be assumed not to belong to the school. There may be odd exceptions, but that is the general rule, which has been verified by experience.

B. Jackman goes on to say:

Fellowship with a sinless Savior and continuance in our sins (keeping on sinning) are mutually contradictory. No compromise is possible. And the logical conclusion we are to draw is that we cannot expect to be confident on that day when we see Christ, if we are complacent about in our lives here and now.

C. If we but modify that question by Alice in Wonderland just a bit, it might read this way:

"Would you tell me please, which way I ought to (live) from here?"

1. The answer is still the one given by the Cheshire Cat – "It depends a good deal on where you want to get to."
2. Want to get to heaven? – how you live now matters

D. Invitation