

“Why Christians Can’t Sin” part 1

October 23, 2011

Text: 1 John 3:4-6

Although it has taken some time for me to come to terms with the internet, I now rely on its encyclopedia site called Wikipedia as a very useful tool.

E.g. take this definition of sin, which is found in Wikipedia=>

“Fundamentally, sin is rebellion against, or resistance to, the direction of supreme authority; and enmity toward, avoidance of, or hatred of, the good.”

W/ just a few changes, that becomes a good biblical definition of sin=>

“Fundamentally, sin is rebellion against, or resistance to, the direction of **God’s Law**; and enmity toward, avoidance of, or hatred of **God’s will**.”

Most of the world today would view sin quite differently, however.

They’d think of it as something that’s only forbidden to religious people—which actually makes it all the more interesting, intriguingly-naughty, even enticing to them.

If/when the concept of “sin” is taken seriously in discussions of morality, worldly people usually view it as a psychological defect related to guilt, or at worst, the expected/excusable moral weakness of human nature.

As the English poet Alexander Pope once wrote=>

“To err is human, to forgive divine.”

Even some Xns feel there is no need to deal seriously with sin in their own lives, because God's gracious pardon is always available to those who confess their sins.

Consequently, they skip over such Scripture texts as

Rom 6:1-2=> "*Are we to **continue in sin** that grace might increase? / May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*"

As we'll see in today's text, the Apostle John took sin very seriously, as an offense against God & disregard for His Law, that creates a moral crisis between God/man.

That makes last week's text sound wonderful to our hearts=>

"See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God" (1 Jn 3:1).

God loves His children, & His anger over their sin is propitiated, because they have put their faith in Jesus X, His only begotten Son.

They are not of the world—which will inherit God's wrath.

They have become a holy people, separated unto Him.

May God keep us separate from the world, responding to His

call to=> "*‘COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST & BE SEPARATE,’ says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. / And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty. ’*" (2 Cor 6:17-18).

As we saw last time, the Xn's great hope is X's return, because when we see Him, we shall be like Him (sinless/pure), for we shall see Him as He is.

Meanwhile, John added (3:3)=> *“And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

So while we wait for X’s return, we are to occupy ourselves w/ removing the sin from our lives, purifying ourselves.

Just as Israel was to slay all the inhabitants of Jericho, we must destroy every evil-thought, or wrong-desire, or sinful-habit in our hearts/lives.

We’re to grieve over it, & resolve to overcome it, intent on growing from glory to glory in God’s grace, and *“perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (II Cor 7:1).

This is the opposite of blithely dismissing sin as an intriguingly naughty defect, or an excusable human quirk/frailty.

One of the Church’s great problems today is that most Xns don’t understand/appreciate the true nature/seriousness of sin.

It’s such a negative subject, they just don’t like to talk about it.

The first step towards purification from sin in our lives, is to recognize what it is, and how evil it is.

Once we understand that, we’ll see why we cannot allow ourselves to fall into a continuing pattern of sin.

John is going to explain in 1 Jn 3:4-10, that sin is=>

* Opposed to God’s Law

- * Opposed to Christ's Person and Work
- * Opposed to the Believer's New Nature.

These are 3 powerful reasons why Xns cannot/must-not allow sin any place in their hearts/lives.

We will consider the first 2 of these reasons today, and the third one next time.

*** Reason #1—Sin Is Opposed to God's Law**

[1 John 3:4]=> *“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”*

For a Jew like John, “lawlessness” could only refer to violation of God's Law.

“Everyone” is all-inclusive, because John is stating a universal principle, that allows for no exceptions.

In this epistle, he has been providing tests for true Xnity.

1 Jn 5:13 says=> *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know [with certainty] that you have eternal life.”*

So John's primary purpose in writing this letter was to enable his readers to examine themselves, to determine whether/not their faith is truly saving faith.

But in addition, there were false teachers in the churches to which he was writing, teaching an early version of Gnosticism that allowed for Xns to live just as sinfully as non-Xns, and yet still consider themselves born again.

John is saying you can identify true Xns by their righteous lives.

Today's text contains a moral test, in which John says that if a person becomes a true Xn, he won't habitually practice sin, as he did before he was saved.

Anyone who continually violates God's Law, carelessly ignoring/disregarding it, simply isn't born again.

Most people (even some Xns) aren't really sure what sin is.

So John begins to define it by telling us sin produces lawlessness.

He then explains that lawlessness itself is the essence of sin.

This eliminates a number of misconceptions about sin.

Let me suggest 5 such misconceptions=>

First, for example, this means there are no minor infractions of God's Law (the criterion of what is, and what is not, sinful).

Any violation of God's Law (no matter how insignificant it may seem) is an act of lawlessness, a moral breakdown, which violates God's whole Law.

And because the Law is based on His own character, and sin is a coming short of the glory of His character, every sacred commandment of the Law absolutely must be obeyed.

This includes not only the 10 Commandments, but the two Great Commandments as well=> to love the Lord with our whole heart/soul/mind/strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

If we were being lowered into a deep pit by a chain, any weak link in the chain could spell disaster for us, if it failed.

So it is with each of the commandments in God's Law.

Jms 2:10=> *“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”*

2nd, another common misconception about our sin is that it's essentially against other people.

If a person's sin doesn't harm others, he may think he hasn't really sinned.

But sin is 1st/foremost a violation of God's Law, not man's rights.

So even though 1 man refrains from stealing away another man's wife through adultery, he sins by merely coveting her (the 10th Commandment).

Thus, when David confessed his adultery with Bathsheba, he prayed to God=> *“Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight”* (Psa 51:4).

3rd, sin isn't ultimately against ourselves.

The basic evil of drunkenness isn't that it impairs a person's health, or exposes him to public ridicule/shame.

A drunken person's actual sin is that Scripture forbids drunkenness, & he has violated God's command.

Someone finding a drunk lying in an alley, might shake his head and say with disgust, “Look what comes of such a man!”

But the real issue is that this man has disobeyed God, not what he has done to himself or his reputation.

A 4th misconception about sin is that primarily it is breaking other people's rules/expectations.

So when a person feels guilty because he's done something wrong, his 1st instinct is usually to hide it from others.

The real problem is that he can't hide it from God.

And if he has really sinned, it's God's Law that he has broken.

5th/finally, most people consider sin to be simply the violation of a set of rules/standards like the 10 commandments, but in reality, sin is a violation of God Himself.

It is refusal to give Him homage or to serve Him—the very purposes for which He created us.

Sin is any expression of man's sinful/rebellious/lawless heart, that stiffens itself, digs in its heels, and refuses to obey its Creator.

It says with Lucifer *"I will make myself like the Most High"*

(Isa 14:14), because that person (like Lucifer) doesn't think God is important enough to deserve his obedience.

It says with Pharaoh=> *"Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice?"* (Ex 5:2).

It challenges God's right to rule as Sovereign over His universe, and it questions His wisdom/goodness, just

as Eve questioned His command not to eat the forbidden fruit.

Sin is a lawless attitude that demands to make/break the rules as it pleases, and that refuses to submit to God's commands. For all intents/purposes, it tries to shove God off the throne & grab His royal crown from Him, taking His place, at least in one's own heart/life.

Sin is the selfish assertion of one's own will against the highest Authority of all, challenging God Himself.

Sin is defined in other ways in other verses of the Bible.

* I Jn 5:17=> *"All unrighteousness is sin."*

* Jms 4:17=> *"To one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."*

I.e., sin is calculated/intentional acts of unrighteousness.

* Rom 14:23=> *"Whatever is not from faith is sin."*

Whatever violates a believer's faith or negatively affects his relationship with X, is sin.

But in our own text, John says sin is lawless rebellion against God's Law, God's will, and therefore against God Himself. From my p.o.v., that's the most insightful definition of sin. It's not just deviation from an ideal standard of right/wrong, but lawless, active rebellion against God's own will/Person.

It is a refusal to repent of one's crimes against Him, & refusal to submit to His Lordship.

Lawlessness is the plague that will ultimately spell mankind's doom, because it sets man against God, & God against man.

- * Mt 24:12 says that during the Tribulation, lawlessness will increase, causing most people's love to grow cold, as devotion to their own will becomes their only religion.
- * II Thes 2:3 says the "*man of lawlessness*" himself (Antichrist) will arise leading the way in such humanistic self-assertion and self-devotion.
- * II Thes 2:7 says the "*mystery of lawlessness*" which will have been restrained until then, will now be turned loose, as each man tries to impose his own claim to be god on everyone else.
- * I Tim 1:9 says God's Law (which will have then been removed from the earth) will no longer restrain the lawless=>
"the ungodly and sinners... the unholy and profane... those who kill their fathers or mothers... murderers / & immoral men, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, & perjurers" (9-10).
Lawlessness will make life so miserable at that time on earth it will be absolutely unbearable.
- * Mt 7:23 says that afterward, X will judge the wicked, saying to those who falsely claim to be His people=> "*DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.*"
- * Mt 13:41 says the angels will gather those who have committed lawlessness, and vs 42 says they=> "*will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and*

gnashing of teeth.”

In last Sunday’s text, John said that in this present

dispensation, a true child of God purifies himself.

Lawlessness is the plague from which he must be purified.

We are the fortunate ones=> *“WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS
HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN”* (Rom 4:7).

At one time we had presented our members as slaves to impurity
and lawlessness, resulting in even worse lawlessness that
was barely restrained by conscience.

But now God commands us to enslave ourselves to
righteousness, resulting in sanctification (Rom 6:19).

In the process, we must disassociate ourselves from Satan’s evil
world-system, not allowing those who are part of it to
entangle us in their wickedness.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians=> *“Do not be bound
together with unbelievers; for what partnership have
righteousness and lawlessness”* (II Cor 6:14).

If your relationships with worldly friends keep you from
purifying your own heart from lawless disregard for the
things of God, either reshape those friendships, to make
them tools for sharing the gospel;

Or escape from them altogether, because 1 Cor 15:33
says=> *“Bad company corrupts good morals.”*

We seek to be agents of purification, not to become
impure/corrupted ourselves.

Why can't a Xn sin?

Reason #1=> Because sin lawlessly opposes God's Law—which means it opposes God Himself—& Xns can't have anything to do with that.

*** Reason #2—Sin Is Opposed to Christ's Work and Christ's Person**

[Verse 5]=> “*And you know [oida—w/ certainty as an axiomatic truth] that He appeared in order to take away sins [the work of X on earth]; and in Him there is no sin.*”

We can't get caught up in sin and remain comfortable with ourselves, because our Lord's whole work/purpose in coming to earth, was to take away our sins.

He didn't set aside His glory in heaven, come to earth & die, just to relieve us of the punishment we deserved for our sins.

Nor did He come merely to eliminate the guilt and condemnation that would have resulted because of our sin.

He came to eliminate our sinning, to save us from our sins themselves.

So if we truly love Jesus as our Lord/Savior, we will abhor sin, not allowing ourselves to get cozy with it.

It is true that the death of X atoned for our sin, propitiating God's anger, and reconciling the elect to Himself.

There's no debate about that.

That's what the OT prophets had said X would do.

E.g. Isa 53:11 (God)=> *“By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.”*

And that’s exactly what the NT Apostles said Jesus did.

Rom 4:25=> *“[He] was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”*

But John’s point in our text is that Jesus came to save us from our slavery to sin, so we wouldn’t keep sinning as we did before we were saved.

Paul makes that same point in Rom 6=> *“Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, & having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (17-18).*

Believers have died to sin so that they might live renewed lives of righteousness (I Pet 2:24).

God has called us to righteousness, He has freed us from our old slavery to sin, He has written His law on our hearts, and He has indwelt/empowered us with His H.S.

He has done all this to change the moral direction and pattern of our lives.

He didn’t intend for our salvation to simply eliminate our condemnation, so we don’t have to worry about where our souls will go when we die;

He intended for it to completely reorient our lives, away from sin, towards righteousness.

Conversion is our own embracing of that reorientation, by faith.

This is undoubtedly discomfoting to Xn minimalists who want nothing to do w/ X but an assurance they won't go to hell.

The fact of the matter is, that God's redemptive plan & His purpose for sending His Son to earth, was to raise up a godly people whose righteous lives would glorify Him.

Eph 2:10=> *“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

Eph 5:8-10=> *“You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light / (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), / trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”*

Sin is opposed to X's own Person, a/w/a His work, of ridding His people of their sin.

John also reminds us that *“in Him there is no sin,”* because if there had been, X couldn't have saved us from our sin.

To remove our sins, Jesus had to be w/o sin Himself, an unblemished Lamb whose precious blood could save/cleanse sinners.

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God Himself in Him (II Cor 5:21).

But John also mentions X's righteous sinlessness to remind us that our sin is incompatible with our fellowship, with Him.

John doesn't say, "in Him there *was* no sin";

But rather "*In Him there is no sin.*"

Sinless righteousness is X's eternal character.

So fellowship with Him demands that we deal with our sin, by purifying ourselves thru repentance/confession.

He is "*Jesus Christ the righteous*" (2:1), and He deserves a Bride, who is just as committed to purity as He is.

So it's inconsistent for Xns who share X's love/fellowship to keep living in sin, as we did before we were saved.

It's an unholy offense to the perfect righteousness of our Bridegroom.

Our great hope as Xns, is that X came to take away our sin.

1st, He took away the guilt of our sin by dying for us on the cross.

Think of it: He washed away your sins w/ His blood, if you have come to know Him personally.

Your sin was imputed to Him on the cross, so that when God looks at you now, what He sees is one of His own sinless children.

If you don't have that assurance, because you have never placed your faith in X, I can only hope/pray you will.

But 2nd, X's Spirit in Xns gradually purifies us of our sinful attitudes & habits.

He conquers our evil passions, & causes us to desire
righteousness.

We can say w/ Psa 119:77=> *“Thy law is my
delight.”*

Or with Paul (Rom 7:22)=> *“I joyfully concur with
the law of God in the inner man.”*

Our job is to crucify our flesh with its affections/lusts until
X is perfectly formed within us.

But we do even that, in the power of the Spirit.

Ask the Lord by His grace to sanctify you, body/soul/spirit.

**Because sin is opposed to the Person/work of X, no true Xn
can continue in sin for very long.**

Anyone who can do so, proves he is not really born again.

Ultimately, this is what we mean when we say, “Xns can’t sin.”

[Verse 6] contains an amazing statement=>

*“No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen
Him or knows Him.”*

“*Seen Him*” refers to gaining knowledge of the truth about X and
perceiving w/ eyes of faith that He is truly the Savior/Lord
of God’s people.

“*Knows Him*” refers to a saving knowledge of Jesus which takes
the form of a personal relationship with Him.

**John is saying that sin is incompatible w/ the sinless X;
therefore a relationship or fellowship w/ X is impossible
for unforgiven sinners.**

So a person engaged in the ongoing practice of sin cannot know

X, & he will someday hear Him say, *“I never **knew** you.”*

What does John mean by=> “No one who abides in Him sins”?

This statement has led to a lot of confusion among Xns, who

hold-to at least 5 different interpretations of this verse=>

1) Some say it means that we can become sinless here/now.

W/i Arminianism there is a “Holiness Movement” which teaches they can attain such sinlessness that losing their salvation is no longer possible.

But according to John, sinlessness isn’t possible in this life.

1 Jn 1:8=> *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

2) Some believe this verse teaches a sinless ideal which no one can actually attain, but which every Xn should pursue.

But John’s statements are so definitive, unequivocal, and forceful, they don’t leave much room for that kind of nebulous, wishful thinking.

I John is a book of certainties, not of frustrating uncertainties or impossibilities.

3) Some think John’s words are intended only for super-Xns.

But the very 1st word in our text is *“Everyone,”* because he is stating a universal principle that applies to us all.

He is providing tests by which to determine whether/not we’re even Xns, not dividing Xns into various categories.

4) Catholics explain this verse by dividing all sins into 2 groups=> venial sins (less serious) & mortal sins (soul-endangering).

They interpret John's statement in verse 6 only to mean that Xns don't commit mortal sins (just venial sins).

In reality, the NT says nothing about such a classification.

And both David/Peter would have been excluded from verse 6 because they both committed deliberate, serious sins ("mortal sins" from the Catholic p.o.v.). That would mean they weren't really believers, which is absolutely inconceivable.

A true understanding of John's meaning isn't difficult, once you take the verb tenses into consideration.

"Practices sin" and *"practices lawlessness"* are both present tense verbs, which refer to continuous/habitual action.

**John is saying Xns don't continually/habitually sin.

Verse 6 (again) could very accurately be translated like

this=> *"No one who abides in Him [continually, habitually] sins; no one who [continually, habitually] sins has seen Him or knows Him."*

John isn't referring to occasional acts of sin, which we all commit, but to a life-pattern of sin.

Believers do sin, whenever they start walking in the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

But we still joyfully concur with the Law of God in our inner man, & because we are no longer lawless, we

actually join God's law in condemning ourselves
whenever we do sin.

We drop to our knees before our Lord & say with David=>

*"I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before
me... So Thou art justified when Thou dost speak,
and blameless when Thou dost judge"* (Psa 51:3-4).

Having confessed our sins, we find once again that X is

faithful/just to forgive us our sins, & to cleanse us from all
unrighteousness.

Sin is opposed to this One who so freely/faithfully forgives
us of it, making it impossible for us to mock/tread-on
His grace, by constantly indulging in the sin, He died
to save us from.

Those who can do, so w/o qualms, are the apostates Peter
described in II Pet 2:22=> *"It has happened to them
according to the true proverb, 'A DOG RETURNS
TO ITS OWN VOMIT,' and, 'A sow, after washing,
returns to wallowing in the mire.'"*

Apostates can return to the moral filth of their old lives and
be content.

True believers never can.

**My friends, our Lord is too good to us, for a Xn to knowingly
& continually grieve Him, by living in unrepented sin.**

And the Law of God, which He has written on our hearts, which
represents God's own character, and which (as Psa 119:127

says) is “*above gold, yes, above fine gold*” is too good, for us to live in constant defiance of its precepts.

That’s why, if you are truly born again, you can’t/won’t live in sin, as an on-going, habitual way of life;
But will purify your heart from it.

“Why Christians Can’t Sin”

October 23, 2011

Text: 1 John 3:4-6

1. The Apostle John took sin very seriously as an offense against God and disregard for His [8 Law] that creates a moral crisis between God and man.

Rom 6:1-2; I Jn 3:1; II Cor 6:17-18; I Jn 3:3; II Cor 7:1

2. The first step towards purification from sin in our lives is to recognize what it is and how [10 evil] it is.

John explains in 1 John 3:4-10 that...

*** Sin Is Opposed to God’s Law**

[1 John 3:4]

I Jn 5:13

Most people (even some Christians) aren’t really sure what sin is; so John begins to define it...

- * 3. There are no [12 minor] infractions of the Law.

Jms 2:10

- * 4. Another misconception about sin: It is essentially against other [people].

Psa 51:4

- * 5. Sin is not ultimately against [22 ourselves].

- * 6. A fourth misconception: Sin is primarily breaking other [18 people’s] rules and expectations.

- * 7. Most people consider sin the violation of rules and standards, but in reality sin is a violation of [8 God].

Isa 14:14; Ex 5:2; I Jn 5:17; Jms 4:17; Rom 14:23

8. Lawlessness is the plague that will spell mankind’s doom because it sets man against God and [8 God] against man.

Mt 24:12; II Thes 2:3; 2:7; I Tim 1:9-10; Mt 7:23; 13:41-42

9. In last Sunday’s text John said a true child of God purifies himself; lawlessness is the scourge from which he must be [20 purified].

Rom 4:7; 6:19; II Cor 6:14; I Cor 15:33

*** Sin Is Opposed to Christ's Work and Christ's Person**

[Verse 5]

10. We can't get caught up in sin and remain comfortable with ourselves because our Lord's whole work, and His purpose in coming to earth, was to take away our [10 sins].

Isa 53:11; Rom 4:25

11. Jesus came to save us from our slavery to sin so we wouldn't keep [16 sinning] as we did before we were saved.

Rom 6:17-18; I Pet 2:24; Eph 5:8-10; II Cor 5:21; I Jn 2:1

12. Our great hope as Christians is that Christ came to take away our sin: first, He took away our guilt; second, Christ's Spirit gradually [18 purifies] us of sinful attitudes and habits.

[Verse 6]

13. Sin is incompatible with the sinless Christ; therefore fellowship with Christ is [24 impossible] for unforgiven sinners.

I Jn 1:8

14. "*Practices sin*" and "*practices lawlessness*" are both present tense verbs, which refer to continuous, habitual action; John is saying Christians don't continually, [22 habitually] sin.

Psa 51:3; II Pet 2:22

15. Our Lord is too good to us for a Christian to knowingly and continually grieve Him by living in unrepented sin; and the Law of God is too good for us to live in constant [18 defiance] of its precepts.

Psa 119:127