

The Saint and Sin

I John 1:7-2:2

What happens when a Christian sins? What is the relationship between God and others when Christians sin? Why do Christians sin? What is God's answer for the Christian who commits a sin?

Read Text

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

When the word "Saint" is mentioned to most people today, even in the church, immediately there often conjures up an unbiblical idea of its definition. Maybe it's a picture of some ancient man with a long beard and a halo around his head; it could be a woman with angels singing praise unto her; maybe it's the picture of pilgrims venerating, almost to the point of worship, someone with 'St' before their name. In some circles you can adopt your own Saint, depending on perhaps your personal disposition, or your occupation and livelihood. Some have adapted the religious practice of praying to them, believing that they will intercede for them before the throne of God. Generally speaking the erroneous perception of a saint is someone who is transcendent above normal ordinary humanity. They're like super spiritual human beings, and though they are admittedly below God, or below Jesus, there's something special about them, and it's very hard for people to conceive of a saint sinning.

Those misconceptions are the inventions of man. Anyone who reads the word of God, particularly the New Testament, will know that true saints are down to earth people; they are people like you and me, because Christians are saints in scripture. We live in the real world with real temptations and a real struggle with sin. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul said to those ordinary Christians, *"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,*

with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” KJV

If you know anything about the church at Corinth, you will know that they certainly were not squeaky clean as far as morality and spirituality was concerned. In fact, Paul calls them 'carnal' at one point. The point is that we are in Christ, and we are Saints in Christ, yet we still battle the old nature.

So we now have a dilemma of reconciling how saints relate to sin. You remember that we established last week that 1 John has a theme running throughout of fellowship: our fellowship, as we see from verse 1:3, is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We saw last week that you cannot claim to have fellowship with God if you walk in darkness, or you could put it 'if you walk in sin'. So we're coming to the question this week: what happens when a Christian sins? What is the relationship, after conversion, of the Christian and sin?

This is an important subject because new converts can and often get confused about the old passions that they once knew in their pre-converted days raising their head again. They feel the struggle that they had in their past, and they start to ask themselves, “Am I truly saved? Surely people that have been forgiven of sins, and experienced the new birth, and are a new creature in Christ shouldn't be feeling or acting like this.” Then there are those believers who have been on the road much longer than the new lambs in Christ, and in an attempt to walk a deeper path of holiness with God attempt to rid themselves of all sin, and to achieve some kind of sinless perfection. Then there are others who believe, but die of frustration and disappointment because they can never achieve the standard that they're seeking and are searching after. Then others are seeking some sort experience from God that 'zaps' their sin nature and eradicates it. Even those who believe it is possible to be without sin and achieve sinless perfection know all too well the reality of their own hearts.

So John answers a number of these practical questions asked in his day, and hence he gives us some answers to some questions that are asked in the church. Let us examine the answers of how to be a saint, yet knowing we will still sin. We will get the answer by examining four questions.

Four Questions

Question #1, Do Christians sin? (1 John 1:8, 10).

The fact of the matter is that the Docetists, who later became the Gnostics, believed that the spirit, that part of the human being that was given by God to relate to Him, was pure; and the flesh, the physical, material realm, was evil. Therefore, they believed the spirit was pure. We can understand how this doctrine started to influence the church. These Docetists were teaching that the spirit, that part that had been created and made alive by God in salvation, was perfect. But they too had to deal with the flesh. They simply allowed the flesh to get its way. So these people were claiming perfection (their souls were pure without sin) and thus claiming to be without sin. However, their lifestyle was of a person living in sin, participating in anything the flesh desired. They were not walking by the spirit but by the flesh. The problem for Christians, those truly wanting to walk in the light and to know God, understand that the perfection the Gnostics were claiming is impossible, yet if we are walking in the light we want to experience it, yet we still sin. For some, the dilemma is, "How can God save me if I sin, and I know I can't be perfect, no matter how hard I try, so I guess I'll try to stop sinning to earn God's grace, even though it is impossible!"

John points out two facts to dispel any such notion from our mind.

The first is found in verse 8, he says: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us', John is saying: **Yes, Christians do sin, because the old nature (the flesh) did not die at baptism.** This is his answer to this denial; these Docetists were encouraging others to say: 'We have no sin'. John is saying: 'If you say that you have no sin, you're deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you'.

This dilemma has plagued God's people from the beginning. How do we explain why Christians sin?

Let us start at the beginning (see the diagram on the last page). God created us as a dual natured being. We are both flesh and spirit. The spirit is from God when He breathed the spirit into man at creation. The Spirit desires the things of God. The flesh also has desires.

The flesh has appetites, desires, and passions.

The Spirit desires relationship with God desires to please God and hungers for the things of God.

The Desires of the flesh are not in and of themselves wrong, because God gave Adam and Eve godly ways to satisfy those fleshly desires and needs.

However Satan, as an outside influence, convinced them to try another way to satisfy those needs, thus sin entered into the world. Through Jesus and God's Holy Spirit, we now have in us a power to help us to overcome those strong influences that battle within us that try to satisfy those fleshly desires outside of God's will. However, we must remember that we are ultimately in charge as to which voice we listen to. Satan cannot take control, he can only tempt. And in the same way, the Holy Spirit will not take control; he too only tries to influence our decisions. Remember, the scriptures teach and we can quench, or override the Spirit's will.

I Thess. 5: 19 *...do not put out the Spirit's fire;*

God does not override our will; he still leaves us with the freedom of choice.

So we establish right away from John that conversion is not the eradication of the sinful nature. Growing into the new nature of Jesus starts at the new birth. It is like a baby being born into a family. It takes years of training, discipline, love, patience and lots of pain before that child can grow into an adult. The new birth gives an implantation of a new nature, and it gives us the power to live victoriously over sin but don't believe the lie that in some way your old sinful nature disappears. You can reckon it dead through the cross, the power of it has been extracted through the blood of Jesus, but it's still there. We are sinners by nature, John says, don't deceive yourselves. Paul admitted this struggle in Romans 7:14-25. He also addressed the fact that the sinful nature will always be a struggle within the Christian, but in Romans 8 he reminds us that we are to live by, (Follow) the Spirit. So yes, Christians sin because the old nature is not yet dead, and will not be dead until we leave our body.

Then secondly, he says in verse 10: we are sinners by practice. If the nature is the root of sin that's in all of us, the practice is the fruit of sin. 'If we say', verse 10, 'that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us'. This is the third denial that these Docetists were implying within this church by their false doctrine. They were saying that they had not sinned. What they were saying was, "we do not do things that are wrong". John was telling them: "If you say that,

you're making God a liar", because God clearly teaches through His word that you do things that are wrong. Romans 3:23: *'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'*. God's word says that we have all sinned - and not only that, but the Bible and the Gospel teaches that it's because we have all sinned that Jesus had to go to the cross and die for sin. So if we deny our fruit of sinfulness in our lives, we're actually denying the reason why Christ had to go to Calvary. His word is not in us, John says - how could it be, if His word teaches the opposite that we claim if we say that we have not sinned?

To say anything else or claim anything else, God's word categorically states, is to deceive yourself, not to practice truth, to call God a liar, and God's word does not nor cannot dwell in you.

Question # 2, "Should Christians sin?"

Since we answered the first question with a "Yes, Christians do sin", someone might say: "Well, if you're saying Christians do sin, are you not encouraging us?" It's the implication of Romans 6:1: *"Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* These Docetists were guilty of what some call "anti-law", because they believed that the spirit was the only pure thing, and the flesh didn't matter because it would be burned up by God in the judgment day. Therefore they thought: "Well, just use the flesh in whatever way you want! You don't need to obey the law in the physical sense". So they were committing all sorts of sin, that's what this "dualism" lead to - the spirit was holy, but the flesh was weak, and so they were sinning. John says categorically: "This is the reason for my writing", if you look at verse 1 of chapter 2: *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not"*. It doesn't say 'that you sin just a little bit', but 'that you sin not'.

We need to get the balance: while we do not in any way claim that we can be sinlessly perfect, there may seem to be a contradiction, but let us make clear: God is a holy God, and God says "Be ye perfect, for I, the Lord your God, am perfect". Don't take any consolation out of your sinning from the message, because sin should be the exception rather than the rule. So, answering the question: "Should Christians sin?" John says, "No, that's the reason I'm writing this letter", but he says, "If any man sin" - sin should be an exception in the life of the believer, certainly not the rule or the lifestyle. If a believer's lifestyle is a lifestyle of habitual sin, they're not a believer. We will not be completely free from sin until we are free from these bodies of death. We will not be free from the sinful nature until we are redeemed body, soul and spirit in the presence of the Lord, but the

implication of Scripture to all of us is that our responsibility is to seek after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Do Christians sin? Yes. Should Christians sin? No.

The third question: what happens when a Christian sins? The answer is found in the second half of I John 2:1- 2. Here's the dilemma, we have a sinful nature. He has established that - do Christians sin? Yes, they have a sinful nature, therefore they practice sin. They show the fruit of sin in their daily life, that we have established from John. Some might now say, "But yet you're saying that Christians should not sin - now that just doesn't seem to make sense. What's the answer to this contradictory equation?" We have a sinful nature, we practice sin, yet we're told not to sin. Here are some of the answers that people give to this, and this is where some of the heretics come in here in John's day.

1. They deny the sinful nature - in order to make the equation balance, deny one half of it, and say we don't have a sinful nature. That's what the Gnostics were doing: 'The spirit is pure' - it led to antinomianism.
2. Then a second answer was: if you don't deny the nature, deny the practice, say that you have overcome it completely. That led to an asceticism, monks going away from the world, cutting themselves off from anything like the flesh - whether it was food, whether it was sex, whether it was clothing to warm themselves or even a roof over their heads, deny the practice of sin by harming the flesh rather than giving in to it.
3. Thirdly the implication for some was: threaten the loss of salvation, and then people will stop sinning. Tell them that if you sin, you'll lose your eternal life and you'll be lost forever. Often those that believe in sinless perfection also believe that you can lose your salvation through sin. Now if you're one of those people, I want to ask you a very simple but elementary question: "how big does your sin need to be for you to lose your salvation? The Christian has a sinful nature, he practices sin, yet he is told by a holy God not to sin: how can you explain it? (There is a section at the end of this lesson that will explain how we can walk away from God's grace and lose our salvation).

That reflects the problem with all these answers that the Docetists, and indeed any heretics, give to the problem of sin - because their answer characteristically is: 'To stay saved, to stay sanctified, the emphasis is on you'. In contrast to that, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that John declared unto this church, that Christ

declared unto him, was 'The emphasis is not on you, it is on Christ!'. That is not a simple and meaningless detail that is the fundamental truth on which all error is derived: **emphasizing self rather than Christ**. Now it's not to say that we are not responsible for our own holiness or our own practical sanctification - you could never use 1 John to prove that! But what John is saying is: **the source of any holiness that we may have and our sanctification is not found within us; just as we agree, that our salvation does not rest on our own virtue, neither does our fellowship**.

The real answer to how Christians relate is found in I Jn. 2:1-2. We have an advocate - if any man sin, we have an advocate, an advocate with the Father. A son may disgrace his father, but if he is his son it's a fact of birth, not a fact of behavior. This is parental forgiveness; fellowship is what is in view in 1 John. If we want to continue in fellowship, we need to avail ourselves of our Advocate with the Father.

It's spoken of in Romans chapter 8:34, *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”*.

'Advocate' means literally 'one who pleads for another in a court of justice'. It literally speaks of the counsel for the defense; it is a friend in the court. You've heard the quip: We cannot know enough to save ourselves, we cannot achieve enough to save ourselves, we certainly cannot present any evidence - credible, that is - to save ourselves before God, but if we know the Advocate...! If any man sin, what happens is this 'Paracletos' - this is the sense of the Greek - comes alongside us.

Christ, as a Paraclete, as a Counselor, as a Comforter, as an Advocate comes alongside at the very moment of our falling - He does not leave us, He does not condemn us, but He comes to help us in our time of need. Christ never condemns us. That means in a court of law, if you have Christ at your defense, He is also the only one who is righteous enough to judge you, and He brings no charge to you! Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? He's not bringing a charge if you're in Him by faith. Who is he that condemns? There is no judge, because Christ is the only one worthy. But He's not judging you for there's no condemnation. Who condemns the believer then? This is our promise while we walk in the light. Who then does condemn us? It's not Christ if we are walking in the light! The accuser of the brethren is Satan. That's what “Satan” means: “one who throws at”. He is the accuser of the brethren, throwing mud at the child of

God hoping that it will stick to them. We read in the book of Job that he came before God, and he accused Job before the Divine of being a hypocrite: "If you touch his flesh, skin for skin, he's only serving you because you're giving him produce and wealth". Then he came to Joshua, the High Priest in the book of Zechariah 3:1-9. Joshua stood before the Lord and Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. Satan accused Joshua, but the Lord rebuked the accuser, the Lord pleaded Joshua's cause and told those who stood by to take away his filthy garments and give him pure clean white robes.

But Satan still condemns and accuses the brethren - Revelation 10:12 says he accuses them before God day and night. The law condemns us, for none of us reach the standard of it, and the world can even accuse us as Christians and point the finger - whether legitimately or illegitimately - but do you know what the word of God is saying here? What does a Christian do when they sin or when they are accused of sin? Do they try and contradict the devil, the law, their conscience, or the world? Do they try and satisfy their intellect, their reasoning and rationale? No! John's answer is to do what God's word is saying "Don't argue! Don't make any excuses! Throw yourself on Christ! He is the Advocate; He is the one who makes intercession for the transgressors". Don't try and argue your case! Your Advocate appears.

He has never lost a case yet, and He never will! What happens when a Christian sins? He is the One who has paid for our sins. He pleads our case, and we are forgiven. But this promise is only for those who are walking in the light. This is the basis of our fellowship with God and one another.

Now if you take that away, you take away the Gospel. The Father and the Son and the Spirit were all in agreement and counsel together at Calvary. It was the only way, and it is the finished way!

This verse does not teach 'universalism', that means that everybody will be saved. Our salvation is by grace through faith, and if faith is not exercised it matters not how many men Christ died for, you cannot be saved. John is communicating to us here is that the cross work of Christ is sufficient in its nature to save the whole world, but in order for the whole world to be saved, they must first agree with God concerning Jesus, holiness and self-sacrifice! The work of the cross was done so that the offer can be given to all men!

What happens when a Christian sins? We have an Advocate; He is our propitiation; He has satisfied the wrath and anger of a just God - and thirdly and finally, He is faithful and just to forgive sin and to cleanse. He is faithful, and He is righteous.

The fourth point is: what should a Christian do when they sin?

The answer is found in I John 1:9: confess. The Greek word literally means 'to say the same thing', say the same thing as God says about your sin: sins of omission, things you don't do; sins of commission, things you do; thoughtful sins; volitional sins; your acts, your motives of the heart; secret sins that no one knows about only God; public sins - drag them into the light. Bring them before God! Say the same thing, call them what God calls them, give them the names He has given to them, take sides with God, agree with God - the implication is repentance and forsaking. Proverbs 28:13 says, "*He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy*". Jesus' blood will never cover a sin that you will not uncover. A lot of people confess their sins, but they don't leave them with Christ. They start to worry: 'Am I really saved?' Confess, agree with God that you can't ever measure up while in the flesh with its sinful nature, and then be clean.

There is one catch to all of this concerning the continuing cleansing Blood of Jesus being applied to our lives...our staying in the light. Do not take this passage too lightly, expecting God to immediately forgive as soon as we sin, as a license to stay in sin. A simple example might help us to understand what John is saying. How many of you would think it would be okay to marry someone you truly love only for them to say, right after the honey moon, "Thank you so much for being my spouse, my life is so much richer now because of you. Now if you will excuse me, I must get back my other lovers, because they are such good people also, and even though we are married, and will always live together as a married couple, I want to live as a single and continue dating others."

Would anybody here have a problem with that? Why would we expect God to put up with behavior that we would not put up with?

What is the difference between a perfect spouse and a faithful spouse? There's no perfect spouse! God is not looking for the perfect Christian, because there are no perfect Christians in and of themselves...so how can I be perfect? By being faithful. If we are all honest with ourselves, we can all admit that we are not

perfect spouses. But can we admit that we are faithful spouses? What's the difference?

If I live a life of unfaithfulness to God as a person would live a life of unfaithfulness to a spouse, Hebrews 6:4-6 has a stern warning about such thinking and lifestyle. The Hebrew writer is saying that a person who has embraced the Gospel can decide to live and walk in such a way that it takes them further away for God to the point that repentance becomes impossible, and they will be lost. Remember it was Jesus who said "Without Repentance, there is no forgiveness" (Luke 13:3, 5). Some may say, "Yes, but doesn't God still love the sinner?" The answer is "Yes", but love does not always mean approval of their actions. Also, according to Hebrews 6, the problem is not God's inability to forgive; it is the Christians inability to repent once they have left the light! Think of it this way, a person can start walking towards the Grand Canyon, and as they do they get further and further away from their starting point. They also get closer to the canyon to the point that they take the one fatal step over the side. It is at that point that it becomes impossible for them to turn back! Until they took that last step, turning back (repentance) was still an option. That is why Paul said in Romans 6:1-2, *"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*

When we fall, and we all will, we must acknowledge what we did, agree with God, get up, and start again. Grace is not a license to sin, but it is available when we do, but we must do what says in order to receive it.

Outline

The Saint and Sin

I John 1:7-2:2

Four Questions

1. Do Christians sin?

A. Yes, the old nature did not die at Baptism

B. We are sinners by what we do

2. Should Christians sin?

3. What happens when Christians sin?

4. What should Christians do when they sin?

