

1 John 3:7 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[1 John 3:1](#)
[1 John 3:2](#)
[1 John 3:3](#)
[1 John 3:4](#)
[1 John 3:5](#)
[1 John 3:6](#)
[1 John 3:7](#)
[1 John 3:8](#)
[1 John 3:9](#)
[1 John 3:10](#)
[1 John 3:11](#)
[1 John 3:12](#)
[1 John 3:13](#)
[1 John 3:14](#)
[1 John 3:15](#)
[1 John 3:16](#)
[1 John 3:17](#)
[1 John 3:18](#)
[1 John 3:19](#)
[1 John 3:20](#)
[1 John 3:21](#)
[1 John 3:22](#)
[1 John 3:23](#)
[1 John 3:24](#)

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

| BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP | | BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP | |
|--|------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Conditions of Fellowship | Cautions of Fellowship | Fellowship Characteristics | Fellowship Consequences |
| Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27 | | Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21 | |
| Abiding in God's Light | | Abiding in God's Love | |
| Written in Ephesus | | | |
| circa 90 AD | | | |

From Talk Thru the Bible

1John 3:7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous:

Greek - Teknia medeie planato (3SPAM) humas o poion (PAPMSN) ten dikaiousunen dikaios estin (3SPAI) kathos ekeinos dikaios estin (3SPAI) ;

ESV - Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

Wuest - Little born-ones, stop allowing anyone to be leading you astray. The one who habitually does righteousness is righteous, just as that One is righteous.

- **Make sure** - 1Jn 2:26,29 Ro 2:13 1Co 6:9 Ga 6:7,8 Eph 5:6 Jas 1:22 2:19 5:1-3
- **The one who practices** - Ps 106:3 Eze 18:5-9 Mt 5:20 Lu 1:75 Ac 10:35 Ro 2:6-8,13 Ro 6:16-18 Eph 5:9 Php 1:11 1Pe 2:24
- **Just as** - 1Jn 3:3, 2:1 Ps 45:7 72:1-7 Heb 1:8 7:2 1Pe 1:15,16
- [1 John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DO NOT BE DECEIVED! YOU DO WHAT YOU ARE!

Spurgeon - The test of a man's real character must be what he does, not what he professes; not what he boasts of, but what is really the manner of his life.

Little children ([5040](#))(**teknion** diminutive of **teknon**) is literally My "born ones", the diminutive expresses affection accounting for some of the translations as "my dear children." Teknion designates a little child and is used by John with "fatherly firmness" to warn those who are true followers of Jesus. From John's repetitive use of **teknion** in this epistle, one might say it is an epistle for little children! But the subjects with which John deals are not "child's play," but have serious implications regarding one's spiritual life, now and in the life to come! The Apostle John used **teknion** in warning his readers of spiritual dangers. Clearly the 8 NT uses of **teknion** strongly infer that the recipients of this title are genuine born again ones.

Spurgeon - Because you are *little*, you are apt to be deceived. There is a great blessedness in being little children, but there is also some danger connected with such a condition, so we must beware of those who would deceive us.

As **Westcott** says "The tenderness of the address is called out by the peril of the situation."

Ligon Duncan - In 1Jn 3:7-9 John is saying, 'You do what you are. Your deeds reveal your heart. Your actions reveal your character. It's the same thing that Jesus said to His disciples in the presence of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:11, 18. Do you remember when the Pharisees were arguing about the disciples' obedience of the ceremonial law? They were questioning issues about unclean food and various other ceremonial observances, and in Matthew 15:11, Jesus says to His disciples, "It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; it's what comes out of your mouth that defiles you." Now, later on, He explains that in verse 18. He says, 'What comes out of the mouth has come out of the heart.' In other words, in this case the things that a person says are a reflection of what is already in the heart, and that is what makes you unclean. Jesus is saying that our actions are a public display of what we are like on the inside. And so, He says, you do what you are. And John is saying the same thing, "The one who practices righteousness is righteous." John is not saying that we are saved by being righteous. He's not saying, 'If you practice righteousness, God will accept you as righteous.' He's not saying that 'if you practice righteousness, you will be saved.' Nor is he saying, 'You must both believe and practice righteousness, and then you will be saved.' No, what he is saying is this: if God has done a work of grace in your heart, if you have truly believed on Christ alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel, if by faith alone you have rested in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins—then this is the way you will live. The evidence of God's grace working in your heart will be seen in your life. Your righteousness wrought by the Holy Spirit will be evidenced in what you do, in how you talk, in how you live. "The one who practices righteousness is righteous." So it's not that God will accept us as righteous as long as we make ourselves to be righteous, nor that God will accept us as righteous if we will both believe and do works, but that when we believe on Christ and are accepted by God, declared right because of what Christ has done, then it ushers forth into a life of righteousness.' (**1 John 2:29-3:10 The Test of Righteousness**)

Make sure no one deceives you (leads you astray) - The present imperative (see below) with a negative can imply that they in fact were being deceived, but see Hiebert's explanation below. And I would add, let no one deceive you with the false teaching that you can profess faith in Jesus and then spend the remainder of your life living like the devil! This is a lie from the pit of hell and it will take those who fall for it to that destination! John is abundantly clear that "the one who practices righteousness is righteous." This is a mark of a true believer. **Lenski** says the idea is "Let no one engage in deceiving you, i.e., even try it!" "They would be led astray if they were to think that righteousness need not find its expression in righteous conduct such as they saw in the life of Jesus himself (1 John 2:6; 1 John 3:5)." (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series)

Hiebert however explains that "The warning, "let no one deceive you" calls on them to be alert constantly to the danger from the false teachers, apparently those who had left their assemblies (1Jn 2:19) but were aggressively promulgating their false views. While the negative (me) with the **present imperative** generally calls for cessation of an action already in progress, John did not mean that his readers were already being deceived. He called on them to be alert against the danger. In 1Jn 2:26-**note** the warning was

against doctrinal deception; here the warning is against moral deception. John well knew that "the false teachers with their sophistry were capable not merely of condoning sin, but of making it seem virtuous." To avoid deception they needed to discern the moral identity of the individual. The criterion for a true believer is stated in the words, "the one who practices righteousness is righteous". **The test is not the believer's performance of an occasional righteous deed, but rather his habitual practice of "righteousness," literally, "the righteousness" which is the product of the new birth** (cf. 1Jn 2:29-note). The practice of righteousness does not make him righteous but reveals his inner nature. It is the test of Matthew 7:16-note, "you will know them by their fruits." It refutes any claim by the heretical teachers to be righteous because of their professed esoteric knowledge." ([1 John 2:29-3:12 Online](#)) ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

Wuest - Smith comments: "An affectionate warning against Nicolaitan Antinomianism. The apostle cuts away vain pretences by a sharp principle: a righteous character expresses itself in righteous conduct. Christ (ekeinos = "that One") is the type. He was 'the Son of God,' and if we are 'children of God,' we must be like Him."

Deceives ([4105](#))(**planao** from **plane** which describes "a wandering" > English "planet"; same verb is used in 1Jn 1:8-note and 1Jn 2:26-note) means literally made to wander and so to go (active sense) or be led (passive sense as of sheep in Mt 18:12-13) astray. In spiritual terms, planao means to be made to err from the right way, the highway of truth and holiness. Straying in the spiritual sense occurs when one does not adhere to the truth (James 5:19) and/or forsakes the right way (see 2Peter 2:15-note) Planao is in the **present imperative** which calls for this to be our continual practice (to not be led astray), something that ultimately can only be accomplished as we rely on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. John aware of the penchant for false teachers to lead the sheep astray counters their erroneous teaching with truth - the need for obedience, the need for love, and the need for a proper view of Christ. Truth always trumps a lie.

Stott - The heretics appear to have indulged in the subtly perverse reasoning that somehow you could 'be' righteous without necessarily bothering to 'practise' righteousness. John roundly denies the possibility. ([The Letters of John by John R. W. Stott](#))

Bruce - The false teachers with their sophistry were capable not merely of condoning sin, but of making it seem virtuous.

John Trapp has a pithy comment - Let no man deceive you] As if you might pass e cœno in cœlum; fly to heaven with dragon's wings; dance with the devil all day, and sup with Christ at night; live all your lives long in Delilah's lap, and then go to Abraham's bosom when you die. These are the devil's dirt-daubers that teach such doctrine, his upholsterers that sew such pillows, Ezek. 13:18.

Steven Cole - Whenever the Bible warns us not to be deceived, we need to perk up and pay attention. Deception is like a fisherman's bait: we think we're going to get what we want (a juicy meal), but we end up getting hooked and becoming the meal! John plainly spells out the truth: "the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." [John Stott](#) observes (p. 124), "The heretics appear to have indulged in the subtly perverse reasoning that somehow you could 'be' righteous without necessarily bothering to 'practise' righteousness. John roundly denies the possibility." The error that John here warns against is rampant in our day. In part, it is the fruit of those that teach that you may accept Christ as Savior without submitting to Him as Lord. Several years ago, I saw a tragic example of how this bad theology works out in people's lives. We were in a motel (which is the only time I watch such TV shows) and there was a show about an up and coming actress. It clearly portrayed her as a sex symbol. Since then, I have seen her picture in sensual poses on many of the supermarket tabloids and the headlines have told about her marital breakup. But in spite of the overtly sensual portrayal in that program, the actress' father assured the interviewer that she was a devout Christian!

A RIGHTEOUS LIFE BEARS THE MARK OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE

The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous - Righteous acts do not make one righteous, but do prove one is righteous before God, "being justified (declared righteous) as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Ro 3:24-note). **Just as** is a **term of comparison**. The children of God (Christ) Who Himself is perfect righteousness will naturally (actually supernaturally) practice righteousness. Just as Jesus walked, so too will His sons and daughters (cp 1Jn 2:6-note, 1Pe 2:21-note). Peter had a similar thought in his exhortation to the saints (1Pe 1:1-note) exhorting them...

Like (cp just as) the Holy One who called you, **be** (aorist imperative) holy yourselves also in all [your] behavior; because (**term of explanation**) it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1Pe 1:15-16-note). **Comment:** And so **just as He is righteous**, so too we should be righteous!

Practices righteousness (present tense = as the general direction of one's life) - As reflected in his good (God) works. Such a practice does not **make** one righteous but **shows** that one is "in" the Righteous One, Christ Jesus, Whose Spirit gives the desire and power to accomplish (supernatural) good works (one of the believer's purposes in Christ - Eph 2:10-note). John is saying in essence

that if one is declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ (Ro 3:22-note), this righteousness will be seen by our righteous lifestyle. Remember the present tense of practice is not speaking of perfection but of direction. This truth begs the question of us all -- "**Do my daily thoughts, words and deeds reflect a life headed generally in the direction of righteousness or unrighteousness?**"

Charles Spurgeon said it well: "The grace that does not *change* my life will not *save* my soul."

David Smith - a righteous character expresses itself in righteous conduct.

Law - Doing is the test of Being.

Sam Storms - Verse 7 simply restates the basic idea of 1Jn 2:29-note with an added refutation of the claim of the false teachers that somehow you could "be" righteous without necessarily "practicing" righteousness. ([Sermon Notes](#))

Daniel Akin writes "John provides a counter-argument to such deception that is quite simple and to the point: "The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous." Deception is defeated by a righteous life that gives tangible, visible evidence that we have been born again through faith in Christ. We will live out who we are. It is inevitable. Now, doing what is right is not what enables us to be righteous, but again, it is proof that we are righteous, just as Jesus, in whom we now abide, is righteous. Christ is my righteousness positionally and experientially—determining what I am in the eyes of God and directing how I act here on earth. He is my redemption and my sanctification. Christ is my pattern (1Jn 2:6) and my power (1Jn 4:4) for righteous living. Galatians 2:19-20-note provides a very helpful insight on this truth: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." **Do not be deceived into thinking you can practice sin and be righteous before God. That is a great, big, satanic lie!"** ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary- Daniel L. Akin](#)) (Bolding added)

Practices ([4160](#))(poieo) means to do something and is in the **present tense** which expresses an action that continues. To reiterate, John is not saying we are "made righteous" by our own righteous acts. Our righteous acts are the fruit of His righteous root!

Righteousness ([1343](#))(dikaioσune from **dikaioσ** [word study] = being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense **dikaioσune** conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm and in Biblical terms the "standard" is God and His perfect, holy character. In this sense righteousness is the opposite of hamartia (sin), which is defined as missing of the mark set by God. Practically one who **practices righteousness** does what is right, in relation to both God and man. Righteous acts initiated and carried out in our own fleshly energy and calculated to impress others, do not impress God! Righteousness before men to be noticed by them is self righteousness. Righteousness that God accepts is His character reproduced in and through us by His Holy Spirit for His good pleasure. In sum, righteousness of God could be succinctly stated as all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves, all that He provides through Christ ([Click Ray Pritchard's interesting analysis of righteousness in Matthew](#)).

Spurgeon on the one who practices righteousness - That is the sign of it. Works are the fruits of grace. "He is righteous," not in himself; for mark how graces come in here—"He is righteous, even as HE is righteous." It will not allow our righteousness to be our own, but it brings us to Christ again. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous," not according to his own works, but "even as HE is righteous." Good works prove that; have perfect righteousness in Christ; they do not help the righteousness of Christ, nor yet in any way make me righteous. Good works are of no use whatever in the matter of justification: the only use they are, is, that they are for our comfort, for the benefit of others, and for the glory of God. "He that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil."... He is practically righteous, he is truly righteous; but let no man talk about being righteous before God while he is willfully indulging in sin. This cannot be; thou must be divorced from sin, or thou canst not be married to Christ. The gospel demands and also creates holiness of character; and wherever it works effectively upon the heart and conscience, it produces purity in the life... You must judge a tree by its fruit; if it brings forth good fruit, it is a good tree, and if it brings forth evil fruit, it is an evil tree. Do not be deceived about that matter, for there have been some, who have dreamed of being righteous, and of being the children of God, yet they have lived in sin as others do. They have been self-deceived; it has been a mere dream on which they have relied. Practical godliness is absolutely needful to a true Christian character, and a man is not righteous unless he does that which is righteous.

Henry Mahan - Do not be deceived by false prophets and wicked persons who preach that it does not matter how a person lives, provided he believes the gospel, or that knowledge of theology is sufficient without obedience to the lordship of Christ in conduct. This is not true. One cannot separate faith and conduct. As Christ our Lord showed himself to be a righteous man by doing good, obeying the Father and demonstrating love and compassion, so those who are united to him by faith, justified by his grace and regenerated by his spirit will seek to imitate their Lord. As a tree is know by its fruit, so a righteous man is known by his works. Good fruit does not make a tree good, but shows it to be good; so good works do not make us righteous (only Christ can do that), but show us to be so (James 2:14-20; James 2:26). ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

Jackman comments on John's uses of the definite article ("*the*" = "*ten*") - "the righteousness" (tēn dikaioσunēn) indicates that a

particular righteousness is in view. It emphasizes the completeness and unity of this righteous quality. Obviously the reference is to that righteousness that is characteristic of Christ. **It is a distinguishing trait of God's family and is a product of regeneration** Notice that the practice of righteousness is not what makes the individual "righteous" (dikaios), but it reveals the inner nature of the one who is practicing righteousness. **One practices righteousness because of his righteous character.** "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Mt 7:16-note). The individual's conduct is certain evidence of his nature. The one who practices righteousness does so because he has been granted the righteousness of God... John warns against the deception of the false teachers, who claim to be righteous based on some avowed esoteric knowledge but whose lives are marked by continual sin. (Ed comment: **Which is exactly what some so-called "evangelical" commentators of our day say -- that you can live habitually in sin and still be saved! Do not be deceived! Instead be a Berean! See comment by Scofield below as an example of the necessity to always be a Berean.**) ([The Message of John's Letters Bible Speaks Today- David Jackman](#))

As an aside let me make a comment on **C I Scofield's** comment (Scofield's Study Notes) on 1Jn 3:7. **Scofield** wrote "**Righteousness** here, and in the passages having marginal references to this, means the righteous life which is the result of salvation through Christ. **The righteous man under law became righteous by doing righteously**; under grace he does righteously because he has been made righteous Rom 3:22." Question: Is what Scofield said true? Did a righteous man under law become righteous by doing righteously? Clearly this statement is erroneous, for the **ONLY** way a sinner ever became righteous is by grace through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Scofield's statement is clearly in opposition to Paul's statement that "by the works of the Law no (absolute negation) flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." This example is given only to remind the reader to always maintain a Berean mindset (Acts 17:11), even in the notes that you are currently reading. Only God's Word is inerrant!

Related Resources:

- [What does it mean to pursue righteousness?](#)
- [What is righteousness?](#)
- [Why does Christ's righteousness need to be imputed to us?](#)
- Torrey Topical Textbook [Righteousness of God, the Righteousness Imputed Righteousness](#)
- American Tract Society [Righteousness](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Righteousness](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Righteousness Righteous, Righteousness](#)
- Hawker's Poor Man's Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Righteousness](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Imputed Righteousness Righteousness](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Righteousness](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Righteousness](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Crowns of the Righteous Right and Righteousness](#)

John MacArthur - The genuine believer's habitual lifestyle of righteousness stands in sharp contrast to those false teachers who practiced sin (cf. 1Jn 3:4, 6). Since Christ died on the Cross to transform sinners, those truly born again have replaced the habit of sin with the habit of righteous living (Ro 6:13, 14-note).

William MacDonald - There should be no confusion on this point—a man cannot have spiritual life and go on living in sin. On the other hand, a man can only practice **righteousness** through having the nature of Him Who is righteous ("just as He is righteous.").

Spurgeon - That is the sign of it. **Works are the fruits of grace.** "He is righteous,"—not in himself; for mark how graces come in here—"He is righteous, even as **HE** is righteous." It will not allow our righteousness to be our own, but it brings us to Christ again. **"He that practices righteousness is righteous,"** not according to his own works, but "even as **HE** is righteous." **Good works** prove that I have perfect righteousness in Christ; they do not help the righteousness of Christ, nor yet in any way make me righteous. **Good works** are of no use whatever in the matter of [justification](#). Their only use is for our comfort, for the benefit of others, and for the glory of God.

Nelson's NKJV Study Bible - God's righteousness is revealed in His children through their conduct. Righteous conduct does not produce righteous character, but reveals its presence in us.

John Calvin - Here the apostle shows that newness of life is testified by good works. The likeness of which he has spoken (that is, between Christ and his members) appears only by the fruits they produce. It is like saying, 'Since it behooves us to be conformed to Christ, the truth and evidence of this must appear in our life.' Many people would gladly persuade themselves that they have this righteousness buried in their hearts, while iniquity evidently occupies their feet and hands and tongue and eyes.

Cole notes that "There should be a period at the end of verse 7, because verse 8 is parallel to verse 4. It begins the second section.

Oswald Chambers - "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." (1 John 3:9.) Do I seek to stop sinning or have I stopped sinning? To be born of God means that I have the supernatural power of God to stop sinning. In the Bible it is never - Should a Christian sin? The Bible puts it emphatically - A Christian must not sin. The effective working of the new birth life in us is that we do not commit sin, not merely that we have the power not to sin, but that we have stopped sinning. 1 John 3:9 does not mean that we cannot sin; it means that **if we obey the life of God in us, we need not sin.**