

# 1 John 3:9 Commentary

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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 3:9 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:**

**Greek:** Pas o gegennemenos (RPPMSN) ek tou theou hamartian ou poiei (3SPAI) hoti sperma autou en auto menei (3SPAI) kai ou dunatai (3SPPI) hamartanein (PAN) oti ek tou theou gegennetai (3SRPI).

**ESV** - No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

**ICB** - When God makes someone His child, that person does not go on sinning. The new life God gave that person stays in Him. So he is not able to go on sinning, because he has become a child of God.

**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. {is born: or, has been born}

**NIV** - No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

**Wuest** - Everyone who has been born out of God, with the present result that he is a born-one (of God), does not habitually do sin, because His seed remains in him. And he is not able to habitually sin, because out of God he has been born with the present result that he is a born-one (of God).

- **Born** - 1 Jn 2:29 4:7 5:1,4,18 John 1:13
- **Because** - Job 19:28 1Pe 1:23
- **He cannot sin** - Mt 7:18 Ac 4:20 Ro 6:2 Ga 5:17 Titus 1:2
- See comments on Born Again in John 3
- [1 John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BORN OF GOD: BECAUSE HIS SEED ABIDES**

**No one who is born of God practices sin** - Practitioners of sin are not of God! They are not regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit as indicated by their unholy lives! They are not born from *above* as shown by their pattern of living like those from *below*!

**Daniel Akin** reminds us that "the false teachers of John's day, **as well as those of our own**, will teach that it is possible—somehow, somehow—to be righteous without doing what is right. God's Word says, "No way!" Those abiding in Christ will not, indeed they cannot, go on living in sin as the consistent and prevailing pattern of their lives. "Impossible," says the Bible. It simply is not in the realm of reality. Conversion changes everything. Regeneration does not produce invisible or rotten fruit. ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary](#))

**Ligon Duncan** continuing the thought of "*You do what you are*," calls us to notice "again how he says this: '**No one who is born of God practices sin**.'" The child of God bears the marks of whose child he is in his life... The one who practices sin shows that he is not of the heavenly Father; he is not born of God. And so you *do* **whose** you *are* as well. What you *do* reveals **whose** you *are*. Our lives show **whose** we are, whether we are of Christ or of Satan. Now we need to pause right there and say that it would be very easy to read this passage and think that John is teaching something like **sinless perfection** or that you must be perfect in order to be a Christian, and John is teaching neither. He's already addressed in 1 John 1 people who taught that Christians could be sinlessly perfect, and he has contradicted that (false teaching). He said, 'No, Christians cannot be sinlessly perfect.' He has also addressed the issue of sin in the Christian life: **Does a sin in the Christian life mean that one is not really a Christian?** No. 1 John 1:9-note: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us." No, sin in the Christian life is not the issue that he is addressing; he is addressing fundamentally the issue of a person who **claims to be a Christian** but the bent or habit or characteristic of his or her life is one which is not in accordance with God's word. That person is not living in accordance with the grace of God, the truth of God, is not following in the way of righteousness. That's what John is dealing with here. **Do Christians sin?** Yes. **Do Christians sin more than once?** Yes. **Does that make them not Christians?** No. But John is asking about the **bent**, the **habit**, the **characteristic** of a life, and he's saying that our **lives** reveal who we **are**." (Bolding added) (**1 John 2:29-3:10 The Test of Righteousness**)

**Vine** on "**Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin**" (KJV),—this is set in contrast to the beginning of v. 8. The phrase rendered "is begotten" is in the perfect tense, "has been begotten"; in other words, "has become and therefore remains a child of God." The phrase "to be begotten of God" is, in the New Testament, confined to the writings of the apostle John. The statement here again conveys the thought of sinning as a practice, a habit. The better and accurate rendering would be "doeth not sin." "Doeth no sin" states what is not a fact, for it suggests that no sin is committed by such. What is here taught is not that the divine nature in man does not sin, and that it is only the old nature, the flesh, that sins; the fact is that the apostle is still distinguishing between the child of God and the unregenerate.

**Born of God** - Regenerated. Believers. New creations in Christ, possessing a new inner nature. Ultimately believers have a new indwelling Source of power, to motivate and enable one to NOT practice sin. Paul was clear when he wrote

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a **new (kainos)** creature (**ktisis**); the old things passed away (**parerchomai** and in **aorist tense** = at a point in time = day of our salvation!); behold, new things (**kainos**) have come. (2Cor 5:17-note)

**Born of God... born of God** - Both uses of the verb **born (gennao)** are in the **perfect tense** which signifies past completed action at a point in time (the moment of our new birth) with continuing effects of that new birth. The perfect tense speaks of the complete and final and forever nature ([eternal security](#)) of our new birth!

**Born** (begotten, father of, conceived) (1080)(**gennao**) figuratively refers to the spiritual new birth. To be regenerated. Note the passive voice (action from outside the subject - i.e., the Holy Spirit - Jn 3:6) which in this context would be a so-called **divine passive**."

**What does it mean to be born of God?** Most authorities see the new birth and regeneration as essentially synonymous terms. The **Baptist Faith and Message 2000** says...

**Regeneration (Ed: Greek word study - paliggenesia = literally a birth again)**, or the **new birth**, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. **Repentance** is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. **Justification** is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God. **Sanctification** is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life. ([Baptist Faith and Message 2000](#) )

**New Bible Dictionary on regeneration** - We may define regeneration as a **drastic act** on fallen human nature by the Holy Spirit, leading to a change in the person's whole outlook. He can now be described as a new man who seeks, finds and follows God in Christ. ([New Bible Dictionary- I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman](#))

**Manser** defines **regeneration** as "The radical renewal of a person's inner being by the work of God's Spirit."

#### Related Resources:

- See comments on Born Again in John 3
- Regeneration - multiple articles and quotes
- [What does it mean to be a born again Christian?](#)
- [What is regeneration according to the Bible?](#)
- [What is the meaning of spiritual rebirth?](#)

**Daniel Akin** comments on the **new birth** - Without the new birth it is impossible for us to live like new people. Sin will dominate us. Satan will have his way with us. Hate and not love will fill our hearts. However, as a result of the new birth, the Bible says we cannot make "a practice of sinning" and we "cannot keep on sinning because [we have] been born of God" (1Jn 3:9ESV). These are words that should impart both comfort and humility to us. We are comforted to know sin cannot and will not win, ultimately, in our lives. We may stumble, even fall on occasion, but we know "the One who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world" (1Jn 4:4). Our Lord will pick us up and get us moving again in the right direction. We are destined to be like Jesus (1Jn 3:2; cf. Ro 8:29-30)! Neither sin nor Satan will have the last word. These words also humble us because if it were not for Christ, His atonement, His advocacy, and His victory, we would forever be enslaved to Satan and sin. Any righteousness we do flows from the righteousness of Christ poured into our lives by means of the new birth. ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary](#))

**John Piper** - The practice of sin is the evidence and confirmation that one is not born of God. Doing confirms being. Not practicing sin is the evidence and confirmation of being born again. ([No One Born of God Makes a Practice of Sinning](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - **Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin!** Why? Because he has a new nature within him, and that new nature cannot sin. John called this new nature God's "**seed**." When a person receives Christ as his Savior, tremendous spiritual changes take place in him. He is given a new standing before God, being accepted as righteous in God's sight. This new standing is called "justification." It never changes and is never lost. The new Christian is also given a new position: he is set apart for God's own purposes to live for His glory. This new position is called "sanctification," and it has a way of changing from day to day. On some days we are much. (Bible Exposition Commentary) (**ED**: See [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#))

**Wuest - Is born** is a perfect participle in the Greek text, speaking of the past completed act of regeneration, namely, the impartation of the divine nature (2Pet 1:4-**note**) or divine life, and the present result, the fact that the person who has been made the recipient of divine life is by nature, and that **permanently**, a spiritually alive individual.

**Wuest** says **practices** - is poieō in the present tense which always speaks of continuous action unless the context limits it to punctiliar action, namely, the mere mention of the fact of the action, without the mentioning of details. The translation reads, "Every one who has been born out of God, with the present result that he is a born-one (of God), does not habitually do sin."

**Spurgeon on practices sin** - That is to say, he does not live in it, it is not the tenor of his life. He is not outwardly so that others could convict him of it, or inwardly so that his own conscience could chide him with it, a man who loves sin... Immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin (Ed: I would add "as a lifestyle"); the new-born life within us keeps us holy. We have our imperfections and infirmities over which we mourn; but no child of God can live in sin, and love it. He hates it; he is like a sheep that may fall into the mire, but he will not wallow in it, as the swine do. As soon as possible, he is up again out of the mud and the filth. He goes sorrowing, with broken bones, when he perceives that he has grieved his God. His life as a whole is a holy life."

**Practices (poieo) sin - present tense** = as the general direction of their life. Jon Courson "Because Jesus came to take away sin and to destroy the works of the devil, he who is truly born again doesn't practice sin."

**Wuest** on **practices** - Poieo (is) in the present tense which always speaks of continuous action unless the context limits it to punctiliar action, namely, the mere mention of the fact of the action, without the mentioning of details. The translation reads, "Every one who has been born out of God, with the present result that he is a born-one (of God), does not habitually do sin."

**MacDonald** feels that John "is contrasting the regenerate man with the unregenerate, and is speaking of constant or habitual behavior. The believer does not have the sin habit. He does not defiantly continue in sin."

**Henry Mahan** - He that is regenerated by the Spirit of God, in whom Christ is formed, who is a new creature in Christ, **does not make sin his practice and course of his life**. He is not without the motions of sin within, nor free from thoughts, words and deeds of sin in his life, but he does not give himself up to sin, excuse it, nor continue in it as a **servant** of sin. God's nature and the grace of the Spirit abide in him and **he cannot practice a life of sin; he is born of God! A life of sin is distasteful to him** who pants after holiness and desire to be like Christ. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**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. First 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. ([Signs of the New Birth](#))

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## THE NEW BIRTH: ITS EVIDENCES AND RESULTS 1 JOHN

The Apostle John does not point out in this Epistle how regeneration can take place, because that he had already done in his Gospel, particularly John 1:12, 13+, and the whole of chapter 3. Here in his Epistle he points out the proofs whereby we may know we are born from above.

I. **Faith** is both the condition and the proof of regeneration. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1+).

II. **Love**. "Every one that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4:7+).

III. **Life**. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit (margin, "practice") sin; or as W., "No one who is a child of God is habitually guilty of sin" (1 John 3:9+). This is to say, one of the clearest proofs of the new birth is to be found in the fact that a new life is begun. Not a life of sin as before, but a life of victory—there may be, there usually is, especially in the early days, lapses into sin, but not a life of sin. By and by we learn the secret of full victory.

IV. **Overcomes**. "For whosoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4+).

V. **Kept**. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but He that was begotten of God (i.e., the Lord Jesus) keepeth him" (1 John 5:18+, R.V.). The begotten one is kept by the only Begotten of the Father. And the result?

VI. **Holiness**. Personal holiness. "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29+).

([James Smith - Handfuls on Purpose](#))

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## LIKE FRUIT TREES BEARING FRUIT AFTER THEIR KIND

(Ge 1:11)

**Because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God**- Seeds bear fruit trees after their kind and if the seed of the tree is holy, the fruit of the tree cannot be unholy. Sinners with God's seed, cannot continually commit sins and still claim to be born of God! As Jesus taught "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." (Mt 7:18-**note**)

**Because** - Another **term of explanation. What is John explaining?** Clearly, he is explaining what a believer cannot habitually practice sin, not because they have an inherent ability of their own, but because they have been born of God's seed and have His indwelling Spirit Who is continually working in them giving them the desire and the power to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, walking in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him in all respects. (Php 2:13-**note**, Php 2:12-**note**, Col 1:10-**note**)

**His seed abides in him** - In short, he is eternally secure! This is not an excuse to wantonly commit sins. Rather it is a guarantee that he will not go on habitually sinning. As MacDonald says "This divine relationship precludes the possibility of continuance in sin as a lifestyle."

Peter explains "you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, [that is,] through the living and abiding 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 ABIDES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you. (1Pe 1:23-25-**note**)

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of [the] divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in [your] moral excellence, knowledge. (2Peter 1:4-5-**note**)

**Seed** (04690)(**sperma**) refers to seed sown as containing the germ of new fruit, originally used of plants as seed (Mt 13:24, 27, 32, 37, 38; Mk 4:31; 1Co 15:38; 2Co 9:10 Ge 1:11; 47:23) In other contexts **sperma** refers to descendants. **Zodhiates** feels that "In 1Jn 3:9 the *sperma* of God denotes the power of God operative through the Holy Spirit working in believers."

**Vine on seed** - the seed signifies the divine principle of imparted life in the believer, and this, once it is imparted, is unalterable; it remains in the believer. The child of God stands eternally related to Christ. The one who goes on doing sin (in other words, lives in sin), has never become a child of God. He has not the principle of life in Christ in him. There are other interpretations, but this seems to be in accordance with the general tenor of the epistle and the immediate context, both preceding and succeeding. (Collected Writings)

### Gilbrant on sperma -

The noun **sperma** means "seed"; see the related verb *speirō* (4540), "to sow." In **classical Greek** **sperma** can refer to the seed of plants or animals, to the basic element of anything, to one's immediate children or further progeny, and to anything that has life-giving force (Schulz, "sperma," Kittel, 7:536f.). In other Greek literature **sperma** has breadth of usage similar to that of the classical period. Philo, for example, used the word both literally and metaphorically, the latter sometimes approaching our use of "germ" (as in the germ of life). As well, he used **sperma** of the starting point of the universe.

**Sperma appears over 200 times in the Septuagint** with a similar variety of meanings including (occasionally) the male "sperm" (semen), as in Leviticus 15:16 for humans and Jeremiah 31:27 (LXX 38:27) for animals. One of the most common uses of **sperma** in the Septuagint is for the seed of plants described in the creation narrative (Genesis 1:11,12,29). Growing out of this, apparently, the Old Testament cultivates a sense of respect and care for seed as God-given and containing a precious, life-giving force (see Leviticus 11:37,38; 26:16; 27:30). Just as seed produces the plant, and the plant produces seed, so a person's immediate offspring or subsequent lineage are his "seed" (posterity). This explains the other most common use of **sperma** in the Septuagint in reference to the seed of Abraham (Isaiah 41:8), seed of Aaron, seed of David, seed of Jacob (Isaiah 45:19), etc. Again, implicit in this is the sense of a God-given, life-giving force that is kept alive from one generation to another and represents its progenitor. Thus the ancients despaired if they had no "seed" (Genesis 15:3). This gives a reason for God's provision for levirate marriage (Genesis 38:9; cf. 19:32,34) and the seriousness of a judgment that "cut off" one's seed (1 Samuel 24:21 [LXX 1 Kings 24:22]).

**In the New Testament sperma also has a variety of meanings.** In Matthew 13:24ff. it refers to the seed of plants (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:38, of kernels of grain; 2 Corinthians 9:10, etc.). In Hebrews 11:11 the word

denotes the male sperm. Here the phrase “to conceive seed” (KJV) apparently is “the standard and technical term for the projection or deposition of the semen virile into the womb” (Lenski, Epistles to the Hebrews and James, p.393). Elsewhere sperma refers to natural posterity (Matthew 22:24,25, “seed” and “issue” in the KJV; John 7:42; 8:33,37; Hebrews 11:18) or spiritual posterity (Romans 4:16,18; 9:8; cf. Revelation 12:17). The usage in Galatians 3:16,29 is significant. In 3:16 Paul cited the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 13:15; 17:7,8) to make a point that Jesus, in the truest sense, is the (singular) “seed”—posterity—promised to Abraham. Then, in 3:29, he affirmed that all who are in Christ are therefore Abraham’s “seed.” (Compare Psalm 22:30 where sperma identifies the spiritual “progeny” of the Messiah.) The meaning of 1 John 3:9—“his seed remaineth in him”—is debatable. It might mean that God’s children, His “seed,” abide in Him. More likely it means that the “germ” of spiritual life implanted in the believer remains in that one as a child of God. “Sperma signifies the divine principle of life (the Spirit?) in the believer, which renders continuance in sin incongruous” (Demarest, “Seed,” Colin Brown, 2:524). Weiss believes it is the Word of God (cf. Bauer). (For a full discussion see Smalley, Word Biblical Commentary, 51:172-175.) Romans 9:29 (quoting Isaiah 1:9) describes survivors from which grow a new nation. Lastly, Jesus identified sperma with the Word of God, which served as a symbolic proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom. Many of the New Testament uses are in parables of Jesus using this comparison. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Sperma** - 43x in 40v -- children(7), conceive\*(1), descendant(4), descendants(16), posterity(1), seed(10), seeds(4).

Mt 13:24, 27, 32, 37 38; 22:24f; Mk 4:31; 12:19, 20, 21; Lk 1:55; 20:28; Jn 7:42; 8:33, 37; Acts 3:25; 7:5f; 13:23; Ro 1:3; 4:13, 16, 18; 9:7f, 29; 11:1; 1Co 15:38; 2Co 11:22; Gal 3:16, 19, 29; 2Ti 2:8; Heb 2:16; 11:11, 18; 1Jn 3:9; Rev 12:17.

#### **Sperma in the Septuagint -**

Gen. 1:11; Gen. 1:12; Gen. 1:29; Gen. 3:15; Gen. 4:25; Gen. 7:3; Gen. 8:22; Gen. 9:9; Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:15; Gen. 13:16; Gen. 15:3; Gen. 15:5; Gen. 15:13; Gen. 15:18; Gen. 16:10; Gen. 17:7; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 17:9; Gen. 17:10; Gen. 17:12; Gen. 17:19; Gen. 19:32; Gen. 19:34; Gen. 21:12; Gen. 21:13; Gen. 21:23; Gen. 22:17; Gen. 22:18; Gen. 24:7; Gen. 24:60; Gen. 26:3; Gen. 26:4; Gen. 26:24; Gen. 28:4; Gen. 28:13; Gen. 28:14; Gen. 32:12; Gen. 35:12; Gen. 38:8; Gen. 38:9; Gen. 46:6; Gen. 46:7; Gen. 47:19; Gen. 47:23; Gen. 47:24; Gen. 48:4; Gen. 48:11; Gen. 48:19; Exod. 16:31; Exod. 28:43; Exod. 32:13; Exod. 33:1; Lev. 11:37; Lev. 11:38; Lev. 15:16; Lev. 15:17; Lev. 15:18; Lev. 15:32; Lev. 18:20; Lev. 18:21; Lev. 19:20; Lev. 20:2; Lev. 20:3; Lev. 20:4; Lev. 21:15; Lev. 21:21; Lev. 22:3; Lev. 22:4; Lev. 22:13; Lev. 26:16; Lev. 27:30; Num. 5:13; Num. 5:28; Num. 11:7; Num. 14:24; Num. 16:40; Num. 18:19; Num. 21:30; Num. 23:10; Num. 24:7; Num. 24:20; Num. 25:13; Deut. 1:8; Deut. 3:3; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 11:9; Deut. 14:22; Deut. 22:9; Deut. 25:5; Deut. 28:38; Deut. 28:46; Deut. 28:59; Deut. 30:6; Deut. 30:19; Deut. 31:21; Deut. 34:4; Jos. 24:3; Ruth 4:12; 1 Sam. 1:11; 1 Sam. 2:20; 1 Sam. 2:31; 1 Sam. 8:15; 1 Sam. 20:42; 1 Sam. 24:21; 2 Sam. 4:8; 2 Sam. 7:12; 2 Sam. 22:51; 1 Ki. 1:48; 1 Ki. 2:33; 1 Ki. 2:35; 1 Ki. 11:14; 1 Ki. 18:30; 2 Ki. 5:27; 2 Ki. 11:1; 2 Ki. 14:27; 2 Ki. 17:20; 2 Ki. 25:25; 1 Chr. 16:13; 1 Chr. 17:11; 2 Chr. 20:7; 2 Chr. 22:10; Ezr. 2:59; Ezr. 9:2; Neh. 7:61; Neh. 9:8; Est. 9:27; Job 5:25; Ps. 18:50; Ps. 21:10; Ps. 22:23; Ps. 22:30; Ps. 25:13; Ps. 37:25; Ps. 37:26; Ps. 37:28; Ps. 69:36; Ps. 89:4; Ps. 89:29; Ps. 89:36; Ps. 102:28; Ps. 105:6; Ps. 106:27; Ps. 112:2; Ps. 126:6; Prov. 11:18; Eccl. 11:6; Isa. 1:4; Isa. 1:9; Isa. 14:20; Isa. 14:22; Isa. 14:29; Isa. 14:30; Isa. 15:9; Isa. 17:5; Isa. 17:10; Isa. 23:3; Isa. 30:23; Isa. 31:9; Isa. 33:2; Isa. 37:31; Isa. 41:8; Isa. 43:5; Isa. 44:3; Isa. 45:19; Isa. 45:25; Isa. 48:14; Isa. 48:19; Isa. 53:10; Isa. 54:3; Isa. 55:10; Isa. 57:3; Isa. 57:4; Isa. 58:7; Isa. 59:21; Isa. 61:9; Isa. 61:11; Isa. 65:9; Isa. 65:23; Isa. 66:22; Jer. 7:15; Jer. 22:30; Jer. 23:8; Jer. 31:27; Jer. 35:7; Jer. 35:9; Jer. 46:27; Jer. 50:16; Ezek. 17:5; Ezek. 17:13; Ezek. 20:5; Ezek. 31:17; Ezek. 43:19; Ezek. 44:22; Dan. 1:3; Dan. 1:12; Dan. 1:16; Dan. 2:43; Dan. 9:1; Dan. 11:6; Dan. 11:31; Mal. 2:15

**John Piper** - the reason the new birth inevitably changes the life of sinning, John says, is that when we are Born Again, “God’s seed” abides in us, and we “cannot keep on sinning.” That’s how real the connection between the new birth and daily physical life is. The seed may be the Spirit of God or the Word of God or the nature of God—or all three. Whatever it is specifically, God himself is at work in the new birth so powerfully that they cannot keep on practicing sin. God’s seed cannot make peace with a pattern of sinful behavior. These false teachers who think they can separate who they are spiritually from who they are physically do not understand either the incarnation or regeneration. In the incarnation, the pre-existent Christ is really united with a physical body. And in regeneration, the new creation in Christ has real, inevitable effects on our physical life of obedience. ([No One Born of God Makes a Practice of Sinning](#) - read the entire sermon for his excellent subtopic - How Do the Born Again Deal with Their Sin?)

**Criswell** - God’s **seed** represents the new life which results from spiritual regeneration.



**Ryrie** on **seed** - The divine nature given the one born of God (cf. John 1:13; 2Peter 1:4-note). This nature prevents the Christian from habitually sinning.

**David Allen** on the meaning of **seed** - There are four possibilities. The "seed" could be the Word of God itself (James 1:18). A second option is the Holy Spirit. The third view is that "seed" refers to both the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The final interpretation is the best option given the context. John is referring to the fact of the divine nature in us by virtue of the new birth. This new birth prohibits a lifestyle of sin in one who is truly born again. Christians may sin as John has already confirmed in his letter (1Jn 1:5-10). But genuine Christians don't want to sin. Sometimes people assume that the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer becomes a license for Christians to sin with impunity. Have you ever heard someone say something like, "If I believe such a doctrine, I would do as I want to since I would be saved regardless." W. T. Conner, professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in a bygone era, had a good answer to such an egregious slur on God's saving grace: "That's right. I do what I want to do, but in regeneration Christ did something to my 'wanter.' I just don't want to do the things that you are talking about." ([1-3 John- Fellowship in God's Family Preaching the Word](#))

**Abides** ([3306](#))(**meno**) in simple terms means to remain in the same place or position over a period of time. It means to reside, stay, live, lodge, tarry or dwell. **Meno** describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, or endures. John uses the **present tense** which in the context of God's seed abiding in us would serve to emphasize the [assurance of our salvation](#). Indeed, John's description conveys the picture of the permanence of our new birth, a regeneration which cannot be reversed.

The classic description is Paul's declaration that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2Cor 5:17-note). In Gal 6:15 Paul again refers to "a new creation." And in Eph 2:10 he says we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works." (Eph 2:10-note).

**John MacArthur** explains that "The New Birth involves the acquisition of a **seed**, which refers to the principle of God's life imparted to the believer at salvation's New Birth. John uses this image of a planted seed to picture the divine element involved in being born again."

**David Smith** on the **seed** abiding in us - The germ of the divine life has been implanted in our souls, and it grows—a gradual process and subject to occasional retardations, yet sure, attaining at length to full fruition. The believer's lapses into sin are like the mischances of the weather which hinder the seed's growth. The growth of a living seed may be checked temporarily; if there be no growth, there is no life. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**He cannot sin** (**dunamai** = able) (**hamartano** = sin). Note that both verbs are in the **present tense** which speaks of the general direction of one's life. As discussed above, believers can and do still commit individual acts of sin, but John is not describing our occasional sins, as abhorrent as those are! Nor is he describing sinless perfection as some have falsely interpreted it (1 Jn 1:8-note, 1Jn 1:10-note both negate "perfectionism"). What John is saying is that an individual who is truly Born Again, who has God's seed, **cannot continually live a lifestyle of lawlessness**. Notice that John uses the Greek negative "**ou**" (not "me") which signifies absolute negation. In other words he is saying that there is **ABSOLUTELY NO WAY a genuine believer can continually live in sin**! This is in contrast to the [teaching of Zane Hodges](#) which states that a person can "believe" and then live the rest of their life in sin! In a sense such an aberration is supernaturally impossible! Why? Because believers have a new nature (cf God in us, the Spirit, continually "energizing" us giving us the desire and power to live pleasing to God - see Php 2:13NLT+) that pursues (however imperfectly) righteousness and not lawlessness.

**David Smith** - "He cannot keep sinning," as the seed cannot cease growing. ([Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Vine** on **He cannot sin** - here again, not the committal of an act is in view, but **continuance in sin**. It is not a case merely of moral impossibility, relationship to God, once it is established, not only abides forever but precludes the possibility of **continuance of sin as a practice of the life**. This difference between the **children of God** and those who are not is categorically stated in the next verse (1 Jn 3:10+). (Collected Writings)

**Wuest** - "**Cannot sin**" is **dunamai**, "I am not able," and the present infinitive of **hamartano**, "to sin." The infinitive in the **present tense** in Greek **always speaks of continuous, habitual action**, never the mere fact of the action, since the aorist infinitive which refers to the fact of the action, may be used at will if the writer wishes to speak of the mere fact without reference to details. The translation therefore is, "**He is not able to habitually sin.**" The Greek text here holds no warrant for the erroneous teaching of sinless perfection.

**Ryrie** on **cannot sin** - I.e., cannot sin habitually. See note on verse 8. Habitual actions indicate one's character.

**Robertson** considers "cannot sin" a wrong translation because it means the believer cannot commit sin "as if it were Kai ou dunatai harmartein or hamartesai (second aorist or first aorist active infinitive). The present active infinitive hamartanein can only mean "**and**

**he cannot go on sinning,**" as is true of hamartanei in 1Jn 3:8 and hamartanon in 1Jn 3:6. For the aorist subjunctive to commit a sin see hamartate and hamartei in 1Jn 2:1. A great deal of false theology has grown out of a misunderstanding of the tense of hamartanein here. Paul has precisely John's idea in Ro. 6:1 hamartiai... in contrast with hamartesomen in Ro. 6:15.

**Stephen Smalley** on **he cannot sin** - John concludes this section by reminding his readers that the true child of God is (like the Father himself) opposed to sin. Whereas the determined sinner (the heretic in John's church, perhaps, as opposed to the orthodox Christian) belongs to the devil (1Jn 3:8), the spiritually reborn believer, being a member of God's family, **cannot as a settled policy act lawlessly** (cf. 1Jn 3:4). In other words, we reproduce in our lives a "family" likeness depending upon our spiritual parentage; and those who are "born of God" do not sin (cf. 1Jn 3:7, 8, 10).

**John Piper** - When 1 John 3:6 says, "No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him," and when verse 9 says, "No one who is born of God practices sin," the key is to realize that the present tense verbs used here in Greek for "sins" (verse 6) and "practices" (verse 9) imply ongoing, continuous action. This probably means that, in John's mind, what is impossible for the Christian is a life of unchanged continuation in sin the same as when he was not born of God. In view of all his insistence that Christians do sin, we can't take these verses to mean Christians don't sin at all. We should take them to mean that Christians don't go on sinning without conflict and confession. Christians see it, hate it, confess it and fight it. And they do so with increasing vigilance as they grow up into Christ. ([The Son of God Appeared to Destroy the Works of the Devil - December 20, 1998](#))

**William Barclay** - What John is saying may be put down in four stages. (a) The ideal is that in the new age sin is gone for ever. (b) Christians must try to make that true and with the help of Christ struggle to avoid individual acts of sin. (c) In fact all men have these lapses and when they do, they must humbly confess them to God, who will always forgive the penitent heart. (d) In spite of that, **no Christian can possibly be a deliberate and consistent sinner; no Christian can live a life in which sin is dominant in all his actions. John is not setting before us a terrifying perfectionism; but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way but the abnormal moment of defeat.** **John is not saying that the man who abides in God cannot sin; but he is saying that the man who abides in God cannot continue to be a deliberate sinner.** ([1 John 3 Commentary - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

**Because** - Another **term of explanation**. **What is John explaining?** He is explaining why a believer cannot live a life of sin and lawlessness.

**Born of God** - Repeated for emphasis. His new nature gives him new desires.

**John Piper** - Now anybody can sin who wants to sin. So when John says that a person born of God cannot sin, he must mean that a person born of God has new wants, new desires. It's like a birth; something new has come into existence. Paul calls it a new creation (Ephesians 2:10; Eph 4:24). Jeremiah calls it a new heart (Jer 24:7). Ezekiel calls it a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). Being born of God is being changed by God so that the dominion of sin is broken. How is it broken? 1Jn 3:9 says that when a person is born of God, God's seed abides in him. That's why he cannot sin. The image is taken from ordinary human birth. When a father begets a child, the father's seed abides in the child. Something of the father is in the child and it makes him like his father. God's character is the very opposite of sin, therefore the child of God will be like his Father—he will not be able to sin. I know this sounds like John is teaching sinless perfection. But there are several reasons we know he isn't. One is that the Greek verb "commit sin" or "sin" in 1Jn 3:9 implies continuous action. It would be well translated, "No one born of God is content to keep sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot be content to keep on sinning because he is born of God." The most obvious reason (even if you don't know Greek) we know John isn't teaching sinless perfection is what he says in 1Jn 1:8 and 1Jn 1:10, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us ... if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." So John goes so far as to tell Christians that it is a sin to say you are sinless. ([The Son of God Appeared to Destroy the Works of the Devil - December 23, 1984](#))

**Stott** - the new birth involves the acquisition of a new nature through the implanting within us of the very seed or life giving power of God. Birth of God is a deep, radical, inward transformation. Moreover, the new nature received at the new birth remains. It exerts a strong internal pressure towards holiness. It is the abiding influence of God's seed within everyone who is born of God, which enables John to affirm without fear of contradiction that he cannot go on sinning (cf. 2Cor. 5:17; 2Pe 1:4). Indeed, if he should continue to sin (**Ed**: Referring to habitual sin), it would indicate that he has never been born again. It was this conviction which enabled John to assert that the heretics, who not only persisted in sin but had seceded from the Christian fellowship altogether, were not true Christians at all (1Jn 2:19). ([The Letters of John by John R. W. Stott](#))

**Wuest** - "**His seed**" refers to the principle of divine life in the believer. It is this principle of divine life that makes it impossible for a Christian to live habitually in sin, for the divine nature causes the child of God to hate sin and love righteousness, and gives him both the **desire** and the **power** to do God's will, as Paul says, "God is the One who is constantly putting forth energy in you, giving you both the desire and power to do His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13NLT-note). **Smith** comments: "The reason of the impossibility of a child of God continuing in sin. The germ of the divine life has been implanted in our souls (**Ed**: Read what God does for us in Ezek



36:27-note), and it grows (**Ed**: i.e., progressive sanctification or growth in holiness)—a gradual process and subject to occasional retardations, yet sure, attaining at length to full fruition (**Ed**: cp Php 1:6-note, 1Th 5:24-note). The believer's lapses into sin are like the mischances of the weather which hinder the seed's growth. The growth of a living seed may be checked temporarily; if there be no growth, there is no life."

**What is the seed which abides within believers?** One cannot be dogmatic but here are several possibilities - (1) Christ, (2) the Gospel message (1Jn 2:24-note), (3) the anointing, i.e., the Holy Spirit (1Jn 2:27-note), (4) God Himself (1Jn 3:24; 1Jn 4:12,15,16), (5) the new nature imparted through regeneration (Titus 3:5-6-note, 2Pe 1:4-note), etc.

**Jon Courson** offers a more limited list writing that "The seed spoken of here in 1Jn 3:9 could either refer to the life of Christ within the life of the believer (John 1:13) or to the Word of God (1Peter 1:23-note). Which is it? I believe it's both. When the Spirit of Christ comes into a man and when the Word of God stirs within him, he cannot continue sinning indefinitely. Oh, he might struggle with sin. He might even be ensnared at times by sin. But he's not comfortable in sin. That's why a Christian involved in sin is the most miserable person in the world. He has too much of the Lord to enjoy sin, and too much sin to enjoy the Lord. The seed—be it the Person of Christ, the Word of God, or both—does not allow a person to habitually, continually practice sin."

While believers can sin and even become ensnared at times in sin Thomas Manton warns that ""One sin let alone and allowed, is Satan's nest-egg in our hearts, that he may come thither again and lay more." Manton added that "Faith makes us hate sin." The upshot is that if you find yourself loving sin more than loving God, then you need to read and ponder 2Cor 13:5-note "Test yourselves [to see] if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" Peter says we need to "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." ( 2Pe 1:10-note)

**Chris Benfield** on **he cannot sin** - This ought to bring great comfort to the heart of every believer. Again we must emphasize that John does not speak of sinless perfection. He does reveal an eternal truth that we must grasp. Those who are born of God through Christ the Son will never revert back to the old man. We are saved and secure in Christ. I will certainly miss the mark on occasion, and hinder my fellowship with the Lord, but I will never be separated from Him because of sin!

**John Stott** - In this whole section John is arguing rather the incongruity than the impossibility of sin in the Christian. If even isolated sins are incongruous, what is utterly impossible is persistence in sin, 'a character, a prevailing habit, and not primarily an act' (Westcott). ([The Letters of John by John R. W. Stott](#))

**Steven Cole** - Verse 9 has generated a lot of confusion and controversy. It's one thing to say that no one who is born of God practices sin, but then John goes farther and states that he is not able to sin! I'm sure that my experience is like yours: I feel quite capable of sinning and years of walking with the Lord have not lessened my ability! So what does John mean? **Here are some principles to guide us.**

**(1)** we must assume that John did not contradict himself or any other New Testament writer. He has said (1Jn 1:8), "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." He said that he is writing so that we may not sin, but then he adds (1Jn 2:1), "and if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He would not have written those words if believers were incapable of sinning.

**(2)** John's main concern is not to delve into some deep theological discourse, but rather to be pastorally practical. He does not want his flock to be deceived by the heretics, whose errors lie behind the apostle's words. **1Jn 3:10 is crucial to understanding the entire passage: John wants us to be able to identify the children of God and the children of the devil by observing their behavior. To do that, he again paints in black and white, with no gray areas. His point is that those who are truly born of God practice righteousness; those who are of the devil (the only other category) do not practice righteousness.** There have been many different attempts to explain 1Jn 3:9 (([John R. W. Stott](#) lists seven; these are a few from his list. - Ed: See also [1 John 3:9 Special Study on Ways it Has Been Interpreted](#)) **(a)** Some have said that John means that believers cannot commit terrible sins, such as murder or what the Catholic Church labels "mortal" sins. But, clearly, John does not specify sins, and besides, believers are capable of committing such sins. **(b)** Others draw a distinction between the old and new natures of the believer, and argue that the new nature is incapable of sinning. While this may be true, it clearly is not John's meaning here. The heretics could have used this to argue, "I'm not sinning; only my old nature is!" But in 1Jn 3:10 John says that by observing the person's behavior, we can tell whether he is a child of God or of the devil. He is talking about a whole person sinning, not just his nature. **(c)** Some holiness teachers think that the verse is teaching the possibility of attaining sinless perfection. They say that if you learn the secret of abiding in Christ, you will live without sin. While that may be so, John does not attribute the believer's not sinning to the **abiding life**, but to the fact that he has been born of God. **This is true of every believer, not just those who have attained it** **(d)** Some say that John means that believers cannot sin willfully or deliberately. But, both experience and Scripture show that believers are quite capable of willful, deliberate sin! **The key question in interpreting this verse is whether John is speaking about committing individual acts of sin, or is he talking about sin as a way of life?** John uses the **present tense** throughout this section, and while

the Greek present tense does not necessarily emphasize continuous action, it certainly allows for it. In 1Jn 3:8, when John says, "the devil has sinned from the beginning," the verb is **present tense**. Clearly he means, "From day one and persisting ever since, the devil is characterized by sinning." Thus when John says that those born of God do not practice sin and that they cannot sin, he means that it is impossible for a child of God to persist in a lifestyle marked by sin. **The reason for this is not only that he has been born of God, but also that God's seed abides in him.** This refers to the new life that God imparts to those He begets as His children. That word picture is helpful in understanding John's meaning. When you plant a seed in the ground, it does not sprout, grow and bear fruit in a day. It takes time, cultivation, water, and sunshine. Or, to use the human analogy, when a husband's sperm unites with his wife's ovum, new life begins. But it takes nine months before birth, and after that it takes years to grow to maturity. But, if life is present, it affects everything. It is impossible for a normal child not to grow. **So John is not talking about sinless perfection, but rather about the direction of the life of a believer.** If God has imparted new life to you, so that you have become His child, you cannot go on living in sin. (Ed: But I don't recommend you test the veracity of this immutable principle!) When you do fall into sin, you will recognize that you cannot go on in it. God will convict you of it and you will repent and walk in righteousness. (Ed: Great illustration) **A pig and a sheep may fall into the same mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that's its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature. If God's seed abides in you, you cannot wallow in the mud. If you like it in the mud and don't want to get out, you may need to ask whether you truly have been born of God.**

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**Octavius Winslow - Daily Walking with God - MARCH 4.** - Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 1 John 3:9

THESE words have received two interpretations, both of which we believe are equally true. **The more general one is, that he who is born of God does not willingly sin, having "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," he cannot sin with the full consent and concurrence of the will. He hates it, he fights against it, he resists it.** But it may be inquired, is not all sin an act of the will? We reply, not the renewed will. The apostle speaks of two wills in a believer, or rather, the same will under two opposite influences. Thus, Rom. 7:15: "That which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Ver. 19: "For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Few will question that Paul here speaks of himself as a regenerate man. And yet he refers to two antagonist principles dwelling in him—the one on the side of holiness, the other on the side of sin. "What I hate, that I do." No man can possibly hate sin, unless he is "born of the Spirit." "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." And still he says, "what I hate," the sin that is so abhorrent to me—"that I do." Is there volition in the act? True philosophy demands that we reply, "Yes." Every sin must be voluntary; if not so, it cannot be sin. Is there the concurrence and consent of the renewed will in the act? True grace demands that we reply, "No." "For what I hate,"—there is the mark of the regenerate man—"that do I,"—there is the act of the will under the influence of indwelling sin... We beg the reader to mark this great evidence of regeneration. "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin." He does not commit it with the total, absolute, and complete assent (abandon) and concurrence of the renewed will. He does not give himself over to sin "with greediness." He "would do good." He hates sin. Grace reigns, not sin. **Sin dwells in him, but does not govern—it has power, but does not rule—it torments, but does not reign with a continued, unbroken supremacy; in accordance with the promise, "sin shall not have dominion over you." (Ro 6:14) It may for a moment triumph, as it did in David, in Solomon, in Peter, and in a host of other eminently holy men; yet still the promise is verified, as we see in the restorings of the blessed Spirit in their spirit and conduct, in their humblings and confessions, and their holy and upright walk with God in after-years.** Reader, have you ever been made sensible of the inward plague? What do you know of the warfare within—of "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh"? Your honest reply will decide the great question, whether you are born of God.

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**H A Ironside** - When I think of justification, I think of a forensic act of God by which I am cleared of every charge of guilt. When I think of regeneration, I think of the imparting of a new nature through the power of the Holy Spirit in which the whole direction of my life is changed. Years ago when I went to California as a boy, the only oranges we knew were the ones with seeds. But then two of the Washington navel orange trees were brought to Riverside from Brazil and cultivated. Cuttings were taken from these parent trees at Riverside, and orange trees were budded with the Washington navel shoots, and their character was completely changed. A man having a forty acre orchard and not wanting to be left completely without fruit, would have the tops of one half of the trees cut off. Twenty acres would go on bearing the oranges with the seeds. But he would cut under the bark of the lopped trees, and put in the navel orange cuttings, and in a couple of years all those trees would have new branches and would be loaded with oranges. I might say to the owner, "What kind of oranges are these?" "Washington navel oranges," he would reply. "Is that the only kind of oranges they bear? Don't they sometimes bear oranges with seeds?" "Oh no," he would say; "A budded tree does not produce seeded oranges." But even as he speaks I stoop down and see a little shoot under the branches coming out of the trunk of the tree, and say, "Look, what is that shoot?" He would snip it off, or taking his knife out of his pocket would cut it away, saying, "That's from below the graft. It must be pruned off." You see what is characteristic of the budded tree is that it bears the navel oranges, but if one does not watch, below the grafting there will be a shoot of the old nature. Likewise as children of God we cannot go on living in sin. If you ever find a Christian slipping into anything unclean or unholy, you know that this comes from below the graft- it is the old nature

manifesting itself! How can you keep the old nature from producing sin? By using the pruning knife of self-judgment. Whenever you find any tendency of rebellion against God, any tendency of self-will, any tendency to think of unclean or unholy things, get out the pruning knife and use it unsparingly on yourself. These tendencies are of the old nature, not of the new, and they must not be allowed to grow and develop, or they will destroy your fellowship with God. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,... because he is born of God." The new life given to him is eternal life. It abides in him, and he cannot continue in sin because he is born of God. ([1 John 3 Commentary - Ironside's Notes on Selected Books](#))

## Sam Storms - Special Study

### 1 John 3:9 (1 John 5:18)

### And the Doctrine of Perseverance

One thing John emphasizes is the reality and gravity of sin. In 1John 1:8 he forcefully labels those who say they have no sin as self-deceived and void of the truth. In 1John 1:10 the claim not to have committed sin is tantamount to calling God a liar, and in 1John 2:1 John clearly implies that Christians will sin (although he writes to help them avoid it). How then do we understand the statement in 1John 3:9 that the one who is begotten of God **"does not do sin"** (lit.) and in fact "is not able to sin"?

Following are the major interpretative options (excluding the suggestion of some that John simply contradicts himself):

- (1) To avoid the difficulty some have narrowed the definition of "sin" to notorious crimes or offences against love (this was the view of both Augustine and Luther).
- (2) It has been suggested that what John means is that a Christian cannot sin because what is sin in the life of an unbeliever is not regarded as such by God when committed by a believer. This is contrary to both John and the rest of the NT.
- (3) One interpretation draws a distinction between the "old" nature in the Christian and the "new" nature. The "old" nature may continue to sin but the "new" cannot. But how do we isolate a "nature" from the "individual" himself/herself? We may speak of "flesh" and "spirit" in a person, but it is always the person who sins or does not sin, not merely a "nature".
- (4) Others say John is speaking about the ideal and not reality. The argument is: Since all anticipate that sinlessness will be characteristic in the age to come, and since John believed that the age to come had come (1John 2:8), he naturally asserted the sinlessness of Christians!
- (5) Some say that John, in the heat of controversial circumstances, breaks forth in holy passion and speaks with apparent exaggeration and over-emphasis.
- (6) One view stresses 1John 3:6 where it is stated that the one who **"abides"** in him does not sin. They contend that this "abiding" in Christ is not descriptive of all Christians but is a condition which only some (those "in fellowship") believers fulfill. The degree of a believer's holiness, then, and his ability to sin or not sin are dependent on whether or not he **"abides"**. When one is abiding in Christ he cannot sin. When one does not abide, one does sin. But 1John 3:9 makes it clear why a Christian doesn't practice sin, indeed, is unable to sin, and it has nothing to do with abiding. It is because he/she **"is born of God"**.
- (7) Others say that the sin of which John speaks in 1John 3:9 is willful and deliberate sin. The Christian, so they say, cannot commit such deliberate sin in the face of the Lord. Oh, really? What of David?
- (8) A few take John quite literally. Hence they believe he is teaching **perfectionism**. 1John 3:9 proves that sinlessness is attainable in this life. The statements in 1John 1:8,10 and especially 1John 2:1 are describing the immature believer who although not yet sinless may still become such through diligent activity and love.

**[I personally find either of the next two options to be the most likely.]**

(9) Some argue that the "sin" which a believer does not and cannot commit is the "sin that leads to death" in 1 John 5:16, namely, hatred of believers and denial of Jesus. I will address this view in great detail when we come to 1John 5:16.

(10) **The view adopted by most commentators is that the sin a Christian does not and cannot commit is habitual, persistent, unrepentant sin.** John is not concerned so much with the momentary, individual acts of sin as he is with the overall characteristic tendencies and inclinations of a person's life. John is looking at the pervasive temper of one's overall experience in life, not at the singular incidents individually. John is not

taking a snapshot, but a moving picture. His repeated use of the Greek present tense appears to bear this out. He focuses on the habitual character of the activity in view.

In 1John 3:6 John says that the believer who abides in Christ "sins not" (present tense). Also, the one who "does sin" (present tense) shows that he has neither seen nor known Him. John nowhere denies that a Christian commits acts of sin. He does deny, however, that the Christian sins persistently, habitually as a reflection of the characteristic inclination of his soul.

Note that in 1John 3:9a he says the one begotten of God "does not do sin." "Again," notes [Stott](#), "it is **not the isolated act of sin** which is envisaged, but **the settled habit of it**, indicated by the verb *poiein*, to do or to practice, which is used of 'doing' sin in 1John 3:4a, 1John 3:8 and 1John 3:9, of 'doing' lawlessness in 1John 3:4b, and of 'doing' righteousness in 1John 2:29, 3:7 and 3:10a" (126).

John also says the one begotten of God **'is not able to sin'**. But again notice that **"to sin"** is not an aorist infinitive but a present infinitive. If the infinitive had been aorist John would be contradicting what he said in 1John 2:1. The present infinitive again indicates that he has in mind **the inability of the born-again believer to habitually live in sin as if it were the prevailing temper of his soul**.

If the Christian "does not" practice sin, indeed, "cannot" practice sin, wherein lies this "impossibility"? That is to say, how does a believer avoid the life of persistent sin so characteristic of the non-believer? Stott's answer is excellent:

"Wherein lies this 'impossibility'? John's answer is given in two phrases: for his seed remaineth in him and because he is born of God... his seed is accurately rendered in the RSV text 'God's nature', or 'the divine seed' (NEB), and ... in him refers to the child of God. In this way the two parts of verse 9 become exactly parallel, each part consisting of a statement that the Christian does not or cannot sin, to which is added the reason for such an assertion. The implication will then be this: the new birth involves the acquisition of a new nature through the implanting within us of the very seed or life giving power of God. Birth of God is a deep, radical, inward transformation. Moreover, the new nature received at the new birth remains. It exerts a strong internal pressure towards holiness. It is the abiding influence of his seed within everyone who is born of God, which enables John to affirm without fear of contradiction that he cannot go on living in sin... **Indeed, if he should thus continue in sin, it would indicate that he has never been born again**" (127).

**When those born of God do sin, conviction, grief, brokenness, misery, sorrow, discontent, all of which lead to repentance, will occur.**

## GREEK WORD STUDY

**Seed** ([04690](#))(**sperma** from [speiro](#) = to sow) means literal [seed](#) (source from which something is propagated) as of plants or of humans (sperm) (Mt 13:24, 27, 37f; Mk 4:31; Jn 7:42; 1 Cor 15:38; 2 Cor 9:10; Lxx - Ge 1:11, 12, 29). By [metonymy](#) sperma refers to the offspring of the "sperm," (product of insemination) the natural [posterity](#), the children (Mt 22:25 = "children"; Mk 12:20, 22; Lk 1:55; Jn 8:33, 37; Ac 13:23; Ro 9:7f; 11:1; Gal 3:16, 19; Heb 11:11 (Lit = *power for the laying down of seed*); Lxx - Ge 3:15+ - [protoevangelium](#); Ge 4:25). Jesus is referred to twice as "Seed" (singular) by Paul in Galatians 3 (Gal 3:16+ and Gal 3:29+).

John 7:42 refers to Messiah "from the **descendants** of David." (Acts 13:23 = "From the **descendants** of this man" that is **David**, cf Ro 1:3, 2 Ti 2:8)

In John 8:33, sperma refers to Jews who professed belief in Messiah but were not truly saved claiming to Jesus "We are Abraham's **descendants**." Yes, these Jews were his physical but not his spiritual **descendants** for they sought to kill Jesus (Jn 8:37, note Paul's contrast of the physical and spiritual **descendants** in Ro 9:7,8).

In the figurative sense **sperma** refers to a surviving remnant or posterity (see remnant = a few survivors) (Ro 9:29).

Figuratively refers to **spiritual posterity** (Abraham's spiritual offspring in Ro 4:13, 16,18; Ro 9:8 = "children of promise"; Heb 2:16 = "He gives help to the descendant of Abraham", Rev 12:17+ = "the rest of her **children**"). In Acts 3:25 "IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED," the "Seed" ultimately refers to the Messiah.

Figuratively **sperma** refers to the principle of life implanted by the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 3:9) and thus speaks of the supernatural power of God available to believers

**BDAG** says sperma can refer to "genetic character, nature, disposition, character, of the divine sperma (the word of God; the beginning or germ of a new life, planted in us by the Spirit of God; the grace that makes us holy) that dwells in one who is and

makes it 'impossible for such a person to sin (ED: continually) - 1 Jn 3:9."

**Gilbrant** - The usage in Galatians 3:16,29+ is significant. In Gal 3:16 Paul cited the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 13:15; 17:7,8) to make a point that Jesus, in the truest sense, is the (singular) "seed"—posterity—promised to Abraham. Then, in Gal 3:29+, he affirmed that all who are in Christ are therefore Abraham's "seed." (Compare Ps 22:30 where **sperma** identifies the spiritual "progeny" of the Messiah.)

**Gilbrant on sperma** in classic use and in the **Septuagint** - In classical Greek sperma can refer to the seed of plants or animals, to the basic element of anything, to one's immediate children or further progeny, and to anything that has life-giving force (Schulz, "sperma," Kittel, 7:536f.). In other Greek literature sperma has breadth of usage similar to that of the classical period. Philo, for example, used the word both literally and metaphorically, the latter sometimes approaching our use of "germ" (as in the germ of life). As well, he used sperma of the starting point of the universe. Sperma appears over 200 times in the **Septuagint** (see passages below) with a similar variety of meanings including (occasionally) the male "sperm" (semen), as in Leviticus 15:16 for humans and Jeremiah 31:27 (LXX 38:27) for animals. One of the most common uses of sperma in the Septuagint is for the seed of plants described in the creation narrative (Genesis 1:11,12,29). Growing out of this, apparently, the Old Testament cultivates a sense of respect and care for seed as God-given and containing a precious, life-giving force (see Leviticus 11:37,38; 26:16; 27:30). Just as seed produces the plant, and the plant produces seed, so a person's immediate offspring or subsequent lineage are his "seed" (posterity). This explains the other most common use of sperma in the Septuagint in reference to the seed of Abraham (Isaiah 41:8), seed of Aaron, seed of David, seed of Jacob (Isaiah 45:19), etc. Again, implicit in this is the sense of a God-given, life-giving force that is kept alive from one generation to another and represents its progenitor. Thus the ancients despaired if they had no "seed" (Genesis 15:3). This gives a reason for God's provision for levirate marriage (Genesis 38:9; cf. 19:32,34) and the seriousness of a judgment that "cut off" one's seed (1 Samuel 24:21 [ LXX 1 Kings 24:22]). ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Vine on sperma** - akin to speirō, "to sow" (Eng., "sperm," "spermatic," etc.), has the following usages, (a) agricultural and botanical, e.g., Matt. 13:24, 27, 32 (for the AV of vv. 19-23, see sow, as in the RV); 1 Cor. 15:38; 2 Cor. 9:10; (b) physiological, Heb. 11:11; (c) metaphorical and by metonymy and for "offspring, posterity," (1) of natural offspring e.g., Matt. 22:24, 25, RV, "seed" (AV, "issue"); John 7:42; John 8:33, 37; Acts 3:25; Rom. 1:3; Rom. 4:13, 16, 18; Rom. 9:7 (twice), 8, 29; Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Heb. 2:16; Heb. 11:18; Rev. 12:17; Gal. 3:16, 19, 29; in the 16th ver., "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ," quoted from the Sept. of Gen. 13:15; Gen. 17:7, 8, there is especial stress on the word "seed," as referring to an individual (here, Christ) in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, a unique use of the singular. While the plural form "seeds," neither in Hebrew nor in Greek, would have been natural any more than in English (it is not so used in Scripture of human offspring; its plural occurrence is in 1 Sam. 8:15, of crops), yet if the Divine intention had been to refer to Abraham's natural descendants, another word could have been chosen in the plural, such as "children;" all such words were, however, set aside, "seed" being selected as one that could be used in the singular, with the purpose of showing that the "seed" was Messiah. Some of the rabbis had even regarded "seed," e.g., in Gen. 4:25; Isa. 53:10, as referring to the Coming One. Descendants were given to Abraham by other than natural means, so that through him Messiah might come, and the point of the Apostle's argument is that since the fulfillment of the promises of God is secured alone by Christ, they only who are "in Christ" can receive them; (2) of spiritual offspring, Rom. 4:16, 18; Rom. 9:8; here "the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed" points, firstly, to Isaac's birth as being not according to the ordinary course of nature but by Divine promise, and, secondly, by analogy, to the fact that all believers are children of God by spiritual birth; Gal. 3:29. As to 1 John 3:9, "his seed abideth in him," it is possible to understand this as meaning that children of God (His "seed") abide in Him, and do not go on doing (practicing) sin (the verb "to commit" does not represent the original in this passage). Alternatively, the "seed" signifies the principle of spiritual life as imparted to the believer, which abides in him without possibility of removal or extinction; the child of God remains eternally related to Christ, he who lives in sin has never become so related, he has not the principle of life in him. This meaning suits the context and the general tenor of the Epistle.

**Sperma** in the NT 43x in 40 verses - children(7), conceive\*(1), descendant(4), descendants(16), posterity(1), seed(10), seeds(4).

(Matthew 13:24) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good **seed** in his field.

(Matthew 13:27) "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good **seed** in your field? How then does it have tares?'

(Matthew 13:32) and this is smaller than all other **seeds**, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

(Matthew 13:37) And He said, "The one who sows the good **seed** is the Son of Man,

(Matthew 13:38) and the field is the world; and as for the good **seed**, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;

(Matthew 22:25) "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no **children** left his wife to his brother;

(Mark 4:31) "It is like a mustard **seed**, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds



that are upon the soil,

(Mark 12:19) "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP **CHILDREN** TO HIS BROTHER.

(Mark 12:20) "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no **children**.

(Mark 12:21) "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no **children**; and the third likewise;

(Mark 12:22) and so all seven left no **children**. Last of all the woman died also.

(Luke 1:55) As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his **descendants** forever."

(Luke 20:28) and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP **CHILDREN** TO HIS BROTHER.

(John 7:42) "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the **descendants** of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

(John 8:33) They answered Him, "We are Abraham's **descendants** and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free '?"

(John 8:37) "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

(Acts 3:25) "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.'

(Acts 7:5) "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM.

(Acts 7:6) "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.

(Acts 13:23) "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

(Romans 1:3) concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,

(Romans 4:13) For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

(Romans 4:16) For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

(Romans 4:18) In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

(Romans 9:7) nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

(Romans 9:8) That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

(Romans 9:29) And just as Isaiah foretold, "UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

(Romans 11:1) I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

(1 Corinthians 15:38) But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

(2 Corinthians 9:10) Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;

(2 Corinthians 11:22) Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.

(Galatians 3:16) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

(Galatians 3:19) Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

(Galatians 3:29) And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

(2 Timothy 2:8) Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel,

(Hebrews 2:16) For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

(Hebrews 11:11) By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life,

since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

(Hebrews 11:18) it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."

(1 John 3:9) 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.

(Revelation 12:17) So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

#### **Sperma in the Septuagint -**

Gen. 1:11; Gen. 1:12; Gen. 1:29; Gen. 3:15; Gen. 4:25; Gen. 7:3; Gen. 8:22; Gen. 9:9; Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:15; Gen. 13:16; Gen. 15:3; Gen. 15:5; Gen. 15:13; Gen. 15:18; Gen. 16:10; Gen. 17:7; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 17:9; Gen. 17:10; Gen. 17:12; Gen. 17:19; Gen. 19:32; Gen. 19:34; Gen. 21:12; Gen. 21:13; Gen. 21:23; Gen. 22:17; Gen. 22:18; Gen. 24:7; Gen. 24:60; Gen. 26:3; Gen. 26:4; Gen. 26:24; Gen. 28:4; Gen. 28:13; Gen. 28:14; Gen. 32:12; Gen. 35:12; Gen. 38:8; Gen. 38:9; Gen. 46:6; Gen. 46:7; Gen. 47:19; Gen. 47:23; Gen. 47:24; Gen. 48:4; Gen. 48:11; Gen. 48:19; Exod. 16:31; Exod. 28:43; Exod. 32:13; Exod. 33:1; Lev. 11:37; Lev. 11:38; Lev. 15:16; Lev. 15:17; Lev. 15:18; Lev. 15:32; Lev. 18:20; Lev. 18:21; Lev. 19:20; Lev. 20:2; Lev. 20:3; Lev. 20:4; Lev. 21:15; Lev. 21:21; Lev. 22:3; Lev. 22:4; Lev. 22:13; Lev. 26:16; Lev. 27:30; Num. 5:13; Num. 5:28; Num. 11:7; Num. 14:24; Num. 16:40; Num. 18:19; Num. 21:30; Num. 23:10; Num. 24:7; Num. 24:20; Num. 25:13; Deut. 1:8; Deut. 3:3; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 11:9; Deut. 14:22; Deut. 22:9; Deut. 25:5; Deut. 28:38; Deut. 28:46; Deut. 28:59; Deut. 30:6; Deut. 30:19; Deut. 31:21; Deut. 34:4; Jos. 24:3; Ruth 4:12; 1 Sam. 1:11; 1 Sam. 2:20; 1 Sam. 2:31; 1 Sam. 8:15; 1 Sam. 20:42; 1 Sam. 24:21; 2 Sam. 4:8; 2 Sam. 7:12; 2 Sam. 22:51; 1 Ki. 1:48; 1 Ki. 2:33; 1 Ki. 2:35; 1 Ki. 11:14; 1 Ki. 18:30; 2 Ki. 5:27; 2 Ki. 11:1; 2 Ki. 14:27; 2 Ki. 17:20; 2 Ki. 25:25; 1 Chr. 16:13; 1 Chr. 17:11; 2 Chr. 20:7; 2 Chr. 22:10; Ezr. 2:59; Ezr. 9:2; Neh. 7:61; Neh. 9:8; Est. 9:27; Job 5:25; Ps. 18:50; Ps. 21:10; Ps. 22:23; Ps. 22:30; Ps. 25:13; Ps. 37:25; Ps. 37:26; Ps. 37:28; Ps. 69:36; Ps. 89:4; Ps. 89:29; Ps. 89:36; Ps. 102:28; Ps. 105:6; Ps. 106:27; Ps. 112:2; Ps. 126:6; Prov. 11:18; Eccl. 11:6; Isa. 1:4; Isa. 1:9; Isa. 14:20; Isa. 14:22; Isa. 14:29; Isa. 14:30; Isa. 15:9; Isa. 17:5; Isa. 17:10; Isa. 23:3; Isa. 30:23; Isa. 31:9; Isa. 33:2; Isa. 37:31; Isa. 41:8; Isa. 43:5; Isa. 44:3; Isa. 45:19; Isa. 45:25; Isa. 48:14; Isa. 48:19; Isa. 53:10; Isa. 54:3; Isa. 55:10; Isa. 57:3; Isa. 57:4; Isa. 58:7; Isa. 59:21; Isa. 61:9; Isa. 61:11; Isa. 65:9; Isa. 65:23; Isa. 66:22; Jer. 7:15; Jer. 22:30; Jer. 23:8; Jer. 31:27; Jer. 35:7; Jer. 35:9; Jer. 46:27; Jer. 50:16; Ezek. 17:5; Ezek. 17:13; Ezek. 20:5; Ezek. 31:17; Ezek. 43:19; Ezek. 44:22; Dan. 1:3; Dan. 1:12; Dan. 1:16; Dan. 2:43; Dan. 9:1; Dan. 11:6; Dan. 11:31; Mal. 2:15;