

1 John 3:4 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN

Click chart to enlarge

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			

STUDY GUIDE

1 JOHN 3

What is this? On the photograph of the Observation Worksheet for this chapter you will find handwritten 5W/H questions (Who?

What? Where? When? Why? How?) on each verse to help you either personally study or lead a discussion on this chapter. The questions are generally very simple and are stated in such a way as to stimulate you to observe the text to discern the answer. As a reminder, given the truth that your ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, begin your time with God with prayer such as Psalm 119:12+ "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." (you can vary it with similar prayers - Ps 119:18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171, etc) The questions are generally highlighted in yellow and the answers in green. Some questions have no answers and are left to your observations and the illuminating/teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some qualifying thoughts - (1) Use "As is" - these are handwritten and will include mistakes I made, etc. (2) They may not be the best question for a given verse and my guess is that on some verses you will think of a far superior 5W/H question and/or many other questions.

Dr Howard Hendricks once gave an assignment to his seminary students to list as many observations as they could from Acts 1:8. He said "So far they've come up with more than 600 different ones! Imagine what fun you could have with 600 observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that?" (P. 63 [Living by the Book](#) - borrow) With practice you can! And needless to say, you will likely make many more observations and related questions than I recorded on the pages below and in fact I pray that the Spirit would indeed lead you to discover a veritable treasure chest of observations and questions! In Jesus' Name. Amen

Why am I doing this? **Mortimer Adler** among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Over the years I have discovered that as I have practiced reading with a 5W/H questioning mindset, it has yielded more accurate interpretation and the good fruit of meditation. In other words, consciously interacting with the inspired Holy Word of God and the illuminating Holy Spirit has honed my ability to meditate on the Scripture, and my prayer is that this tool will have the same impact in your spiritual life. The benefits of meditation are literally priceless in regard to their value in this life and in the life to come (cf discipline yourself for godliness in 1Ti 4:8+.) For some of the benefits - see Joshua 1:8+ and Psalm 1:2-3+. It will take diligence and mental effort to develop an "inductive" ([especially an "observational"](#)), interrogative mindset as you read God's Word, but it bears repeating that the benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest! Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of [inductive Bible study](#) and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures and living them out in your daily walk with Christ.

Although Mortimer Adler's advice is from a secular perspective, his words are worth pondering...

Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading. (Adler's classic book [How to Read a Book is free online](#))

[John Piper](#) adds that "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three verses and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20+ and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.... (John Dewey rightly said) "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful."

"Asking questions is the key to understanding."

--Jonathan Edwards

That said, below are the [5W/H questions](#) for each verse in this chapter (click page to enlarge). This is not neatly typed but is handwritten and was used for leading a class discussion on this chapter, so you are welcome to use it in this "as is" condition...



1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness:

Greek - Pas ho poion (Present Active Participle) ten hamartian kai ten anomian poiei (Present Active Indicative) kai e hamartia estin (Present Active Indicative) e anomia .

KJV 1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

BGT 1 John 3:4 Πς ποι ν τ ν μαρτ αν κα τ ν νομ αν ποιε , κα μαρτ α στ ν νομ α .

NET 1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; indeed, sin is lawlessness.

CSB 1 John 3:4 Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law.

ESV 1 John 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

NIV 1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

NLT 1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.

NRS 1 John 3:4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

NJB 1 John 3:4 Whoever sins, acts wickedly, because all sin is wickedness.

NAB 1 John 3:4 Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.

YLT 1 John 3:4 Every one who is doing the sin, the lawlessness also he doth do, and the sin is the lawlessness,

MIT 1 John 3:4 All who practice sin are also implicated in lawlessness; sin violates the law.

GWN 1 John 3:4 Those who live sinful lives are disobeying God. Sin is disobedience.

BBE 1 John 3:4 Everyone who is a sinner goes against the law, for sin is going against the law.

RSV 1 John 3:4 Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

NKJ 1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

ASV 1 John 3:4 Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

DBY 1 John 3:4 Every one that practises sin practises also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

NIRV 1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, breaking the law is sin.

Wuest - Everyone who **habitually commits sin**, also habitually commits lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

- **Practices** - 1Jn 3:8,9 1Ki 8:47 1Chr 10:13 2Co 12:21 Jas 5:15
- **Practices lawlessness** - Nu 15:31 1Sa 15:24 2Ch 24:20 Isa 53:8 Da 9:11 Ro 3:20 4:15 Jas 2:9-11
- **And sin is lawlessness** 1Jn 5:17 Ro 7:7-13
- 1 John 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [1 John 3:4-10 The Believer and Sin](#) - Steven Cole
- [1 John 3:4-10 Why Christian's & Sin are Incompatible - Study Guide - see link in dropdown](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 John 3:4-10 The Christian's Incompatibility with Sin, Pt 1](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 John 3:4-8 The Christian's Incompatibility with Sin, Pt 2](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 John 3:4-9 The Christian's Incompatibility with Sin, Pt 3](#) - John MacArthur
- [What does it mean that believers do not continue to sin \(1 John 3:6; 5:18\)?](#) - John MacArthur
- [What does it mean that believers do not continue to sin \(1 John 3:6; 5:18\)?](#) - Gotquestions
- F B Meyer Devotional on 1John 3:4

GOD'S DEFINITION OF SIN AND SINNERS

Dear reader, this is a very important verse to interpret correctly which is why I go into such depth to emphasize the correct interpretation, the one which is accepted by the vast majority of conservative Christian writers. There is a minority interpretation in evangelicalism which is potentially dangerous and misleading and it will be discussed.

I like the **ESV translation** - "Everyone who **makes a practice** of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." (Bolding mine)

In the same way, the both the ESV and the NIV translations of 1Jn 3:6 says "No one who lives in Him **keeps on sinning**," while the NAS says "No one who abides in Him sins." Clearly the ESV and NIV more accurately bring out the sense of the Greek tense in both of these passages (the significance of which will be discussed below.)

Here is **Kenneth Wuest's** paraphrase of 1Jn 3:4-10 -

"Everyone who **habitually commits sin**, also **habitually commits** lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And you know absolutely that that One was manifested in order that He might take away our sins; and sin in Him does not exist. Everyone who in Him is **constantly abiding** is not **habitually sinning**. Everyone who is **constantly sinning** has not with discernment seen Him, nor has he known Him, with the result that that condition is true of him at present. 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. The one who is **habitually committing sin** is out of the devil as a source, because from the beginning the devil has been sinning. For this purpose there was manifested the Son of God, in order that He might bring to naught the works of the devil. Everyone who has been born out of God with the present result that he is a born-one of God **does not habitually commit sin** because His seed remains in him. And **he is not able habitually to sin**, because out of God he has been born with the present result that he is a born-one of God. In this is apparent who are the born-ones of God and the born-ones of the devil. Everyone who is **not habitually doing righteousness** is not of God, also the one who is **not habitually loving his brother** with a divine and self-sacrificial love. (1Jn 3:4-10) (**Bolding** added to emphasis translation of John's uses of the present tense).

Daniel Akin ([Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John - Page 64](#)) sums up 1 John 3:4-10 by asking "**Why Did the Son of God Invade Planet Earth?**"

Main Idea: Jesus Christ came to redeem and renew sinners by paying the penalty of sin and defeating the Devil.

- (I) He Came to Deliver Us from Sin (1Jn 3:4-6).
 - (A) Christ appeared and dealt with sin (1Jn 3:4-5+).
 - (B) Christians abide in Christ and do not live in sin (1Jn 3:6+).
- (II) He Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil (1Jn 3:7-8).
 - (A) The Devil is a deceiver, so pursue righteousness (1Jn 3:7+).
 - (B) The Devil is a sinner who has been defeated (1Jn 3:8+).
- (III) He Came to Demarcate the Children of God (1Jn 3:9-10).
 - (A) God's children have experienced a new birth (1Jn 3:9+).
 - (B) God's children do not practice sin (1Jn 3:9+).
 - (C) God's children love one another (1Jn 3:10+).

John was very concerned that Christians know how to tell the true from the false; the genuine from the artificial; true believers from false ones. He presents tests here and throughout this letter to help determine the validity of anybody's claims to be a Christian. Although genuine Christians have a sin nature (1Jn 1:8+), and do commit and need to confess sin (1Jn 1:9+; 1Jn 2:1+), that is not the unbroken pattern of their lives. A genuinely born again believer has a built-in check or guard against habitual sinning due to a new nature ("born of God" = 1Jn 3:9+; cp Ro 6:12+).

Children of Whom?

Fruit Reveals Roots

Everyone who practices ([poieo](#) - present tense - habitually) **sin** ([hamartia](#)) **also practices** ([poieo](#) - present tense - habitually) **lawlessness; and sin** ([hamartia](#)) **is lawlessness** ([anomia](#)) - Note the pronoun "**everyone**" leaving no exceptions regarding this description of those who sin habitually as their lifestyle. They are guilty of flagrant lawlessness against God. John will later explain that these sin practitioners are dead in their trespasses and sins, are not born again and do not know God or His Son. Do not let anyone try to tell you that a person can profess Christ at one moment and spend the remainder of their life living like the devil, thinking they will go to heaven when they die, for that is a lie (from the pit of hell!) In the next verse (1Jn 3:5) John will explain what a lifestyle of sin is not even logical because of the fact that Jesus came to take away sins. To practice sin and lawlessness goes counter to the very reason God sent His Son to earth!

Warren Wiersbe points out that "There are several definitions of sin in the Bible: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Pr. 24:9). "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). But John's epistle defines sin as *lawlessness* (1 John 3:4). It views sin as *defilement* (1 John 1:9-2:2), but here it views it as *defiance*. The emphasis here is not on sins (plural), but on sin. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Paul Apple cuts to the chase in 1 John 3:2-10 titling this section "Children of Whom? Fruit Reveals Roots" Big Idea: Our lifestyle reveals our family identity. 1Jn 3:4-7 All Men will live in one of two lifestyles. **A.** (1Jn 3:4) A Lifestyle of Lawlessness - "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness". **B.** (1Jn 3:5-6) Aside: Christ Has Conquered Sin. **1.** (1Jn 3:5) The Relationship of Christ to Sin. **1a.** His Mission - "And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins"**1b.** His Character - "and in Him there is no sin" - **Therefore, those who are in union with Him cannot be practicing sin 2.** (1Jn 3:6) (ED: COROLLARY - IF YOU ARE CONTINUOUSLY PRACTICING SIN WITHOUT ANY CONFESSION OR REPENTANCE YOUR PROFESSION OF

CHRIST IS A [SHAM!](#)) The Relationship of Believers to Sin. **2a.** Practicing Sin is Incompatible with Abiding in Christ "No one who abides in Him sins." **2b.** Practicing Sin is Incompatible with Knowing God "no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him." **C.** (1Jn 3:7) A Lifestyle of Righteousness - "Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." ([1 John - Tests of Eternal Life - A Devotional Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

*No flabby substitutes, no sleazy imitations, no cocky parodies,
no grim copies, no slimy counterfeit, will be accepted.*

Ray Stedman - He says that the secret of doing right is to possess and experience within yourself the life of the Righteous One. There is only One Who is righteous, or Who ever has been righteous, the Lord Jesus Himself. His life must be lived again in you in order for you to be righteous (**ED:** SEE [Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)). There is no other basis (**ED:** Of course he is alluding to the Spirit of Jesus - Ro 8:9 - Who now lives in every believer -- He is holy and He energizes a holy walk in those He indwells. See Php 2:13NLT+ where "at work" = [energeo](#) in present tense = continually supernaturally "energizes" us! Note we are not talking about "perfection" but about the general "direction" of one's life). No flabby substitutes, no sleazy imitations, no cocky parodies, no grim copies, no slimy counterfeit, will be accepted. There is only one basis for righteousness and that is to reproduce, in the plan and purpose of God and **by means of the Holy Spirit** the life of the Son of God in you (**ED:** cf Gal 2:20+). Nothing else than that is righteousness. ([One or the Other - 1 John 3:10](#))

*1Jn 3:4-8 John states or implies several things about sin.
He tells us what sin is, what sin does, why sin is,
from where sin comes, and how sin is conquered*

David Allen - John further develops his point from 1Jn 3:3+ in 1Jn 3:4-10. This passage has caused confusion because it seems that verses 6 and 9 imply that a Christian cannot sin. At first blush it might appear John has contradicted himself based on what he has already said in 1Jn 1:8-10 and 1Jn 2:1+. However, a closer inspection reveals that is not what John means. Both grammar and context provide the interpretive key to solve the problem. Notice how many times phrases such as "practice of sinning," "keep on sinning," and "practice righteousness" occur here. The use of "practice" and "keep on" in the ESV translators clearly renders the present tense aspect in these verbs. This is the key to a proper understanding of what John is saying. Our attitude to sin as Christians is of vital importance to John. Apparently the false teachers John is combating were indifferent to sin. This is something that should never be true of a Christian. You can be no more indifferent to sin than you could be indifferent to a rattlesnake in your house. **There is an important distinction to be made between a state of purity and a maintained condition of purity.** (**ILLUSTRATION**) Suppose you walked through a dark room with a lighted candle, and upon exiting the room, the room remained lighted because the candle had passed through it. Such a condition is impossible! If this were possible, the room would no longer be dependent upon the candle for its light. It would only be indebted to the candle for its introduction of light into the room. Sin is darkness, and Christ is the light (Jn 8:12, Jn 1:4, Job 33:30, Acts 26:18). What the candle is to the dark room, Christ is to our hearts. By the light of His indwelling presence He keeps sin away. The cleansing we experience is not a state but a maintained condition; a condition that can only exist because of Christ's presence in our life. Light dispels darkness, but the tendency to darkness remains. A room can only be maintained in a condition of illumination by the continual counteraction of that tendency. When we are saved, we do not possess a state of purity. We are constantly dependent upon Christ's presence in our lives to counteract the constant tendency to sin (**ED:** SEE [Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)). In 1Jn 3:4-8 John states or implies several things about sin. He tells us what sin is, what sin does, why sin is, from where sin comes, and how sin is conquered. (See [1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family](#))

George Findlay introduces this section with comments related to the previous passages - THE Church of the first age lived in expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven. At any hour He might "be manifested" (1Jn 2:28+, 1Jn 3:2+), to the shame or glory of His servants. This apokaradokia as the Apostle Paul called it (Ro 8:19+)—the uplifted head and the wistful look of the Bride waiting for her Lord—was the attitude still maintained by the Christian communities amongst which St John labored, toward the close of the first century. The expectation was less vivid and absorbing than it had been at an earlier time—the strain was too intense for continuance—but it remained, and supplied the motives for fidelity and aspiration to which the Apostle John appealed in the previous paragraph of the Epistle. For one who believes in Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, the hope of acceptance at His coming (1Jn 2:28, 1Jn 3:2) furnishes an incentive as powerful and honourable as any that the mind can entertain. This motive St John regarded as well-grounded, and as indispensable for his "little children," though he seldom appeals to it. ([1 John 3:4-9 Commentary - scroll down to page 252](#))

John MacArthur gives an overview of 1Jn 3:4-24 - The primary aim of this section is to combat false teachers who are corrupting the fundamentals of the faith. These verses further amplify, reiterate, and emphasize the moral test already presented by John (see 1Jn 2:3-6, 7-11). 1Jn 3:4-10 teach that genuine believers practice righteousness, while 1Jn 3:11-24 relate that genuine believers practice love toward fellow believers. (See [MacArthur Study Bible 2nd Edition: Unleashing God's Truth](#))

[Jamieson](#) rightly observes that "Sin is incompatible with birth from God (1 John 3:1-3). John often sets forth the same truth negatively, which he had before set forth positively. He had shown, birth from God involves self-purification; he now shows where sin, that is, the want of self-purification, is, there is no birth from God."

Daniel Akin - Thabiti Anyabwile points out that the apostle John addresses basically four different groups of people in his letters. They are: (1) fully assured Christians; (2) Christians struggling with assurance; (3) falsely assured non-Christians; and (4) known non-Christians (unpublished sermon notes). These verses are, of course, for all of us. But John especially has the third group in his sights here. His goal is to shock them and wake them up to their true spiritual status. (See [Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John - Page 65](#))

Polls consistently indicate that there is virtually no difference in America between those who claim to be born again Christians and the population at large when it comes to sexual morality, materialism, hedonism, and worldview.

Steven Cole introduces this section with a sad observation - As I said last week, polls consistently indicate that there is virtually no difference in America between those who claim to be born again Christians and the population at large when it comes to sexual morality, materialism, hedonism, and worldview. Those claiming to be Christians think and act just as the world does. We may claim to believe in Jesus and the Bible, but our lives don't back up the claims. First John is a much-needed antidote to this current form of Christianity. In combating certain heretics who had left the church and who were recruiting others to join them, John gives three tests of authentic Christianity: the moral test (obedience to Christ); the relational test (love for others); and, the doctrinal test (believing the truth about Christ). From 1Jn 2:28-3:10, John gives the second application of the moral test.

A righteous life is a distinguishing mark of one that truly has been born of God

He makes it clear that a righteous life is a distinguishing mark of one that truly has been born of God. John's overall theme in 1Jn 3:4-10 is: Because sin is serious and it is opposed to the reasons why Christ came, Christians do not and cannot live in sin. Verses 4-10 fall into two sections: 3:4-7 is parallel to 3:8-10 (adapted from [The Letters of John by John R. W. Stott](#) - BORROW). (See [table below](#)) ([The Believer and Sin 1 John 3-4-10](#))

1 John 3:4-7	1 John 3:8-10
1Jn 3:4: Sin is serious because it is rebellion against God.	1Jn 3:8a: Sin is serious because it originates with the devil.
1Jn 3:5: Sin is opposed to Christ's appearing to take away sins.	1Jn 3:8b: Sin is opposed to Christ's appearing to destroy the works of the devil.
1Jn 3:6: A true Christian does not live in sin.	1Jn 3:9: A true Christian cannot live in sin.
1Jn 3:7: A true Christian practices righteousness.	1Jn 3:10: A true Christian practices righteousness and love.

In the preceding context John has just stated that **"everyone** who has this hope (What hope? 1Jn 3:2) [fixed] on Him purifies (present tense) himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:3). **Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones** observes that John "does not say, he **ought** to purify himself, he says that he **does**, and therefore it becomes a very thorough test of what we truly are." ([Children of God- Studies in First John](#))

Then in the next sentence John again identifies the group as **"everyone"** but now introduces a striking contrast. In 1Jn 3:3 the habitual practice was to (continually) purify themselves, but in 1Jn 3:4 both uses of practices are in the present tense. We could argue about many things, but if we come to this passage as a little child, it seems quite plain that this latter group is continually (as a lifestyle) practicing sin and lawlessness. One group pursuing holiness and another group pursuing lawlessness. What does this sound like, just taking it on the plain reading? John surely is describing believers and non-believers. Note that he is **not** saying believers never sin (as some have falsely interpreted this passage), but just that this is not the direction of their life. Nor is he saying that their pursuit of holiness results in **perfection**, but that it does demonstrate the general **"direction"** of their life ("a very thorough test of what we truly are" as **Lloyd-Jones** phrased it above).

As **Pastor Robert Rayburn** emphasizes John is speaking "not of a sin here or there, one sin or another **Ed**: Of which believers are clearly guilty), but a life which is habitually, continuously sinful, a life which is dominated and characterized by sin." (Sermon

- ['Christians cannot sin?'](#)

*Genuine believers are not "sinless,"
but they should "sin less!"*

THOUGHT- So these contrasting pictures beg a crucial question for all of us -- Is my life generally headed "toward Heaven" or "toward Hell," as shown by my habitual behavior? Don't misunderstand and claim "This is teaching works based salvation." Our **behavior** per se neither saves or condemns. We are saved by grace through **faith** alone in Christ Alone or we are condemned because we **refuse to believe** in Jesus (Paul is very clear men are judged because of unbelief in 2Th 2:12+, 2Th 1:8-9+ [note critical verbs "know" and "obey"], cp Jesus' words in Jn 3:18+, Jn 5:38+, Jn 10:25-26+, Lk 8:12+). **John Piper** ([see sermon](#)) adds that genuine "Christians see it (sin in their life), hate it, confess it and fight it. And they do so with increasing vigilance as they grow up into Christ." As someone once well said, genuine believers are not "sinless," but they should "sin less!" I am not your judge, nor you mine. We are judged by God's Word and John seems to be quite clear.

David Smith entitles 1Jn 3:4-8 "The Incompatibility of Sonship with Continuance in Sin."

Johann Bengel - There is an antithesis to this in, he that doeth righteousness, 1 John 3:7+.

Practices sin in 1Jn 3:4 presents a striking contrast with **practices righteousness** in 1Jn 2:29+ where one's righteous lifestyle was a marker of one "born of Him." (A genuine believer). Both uses of practices are in the present tense.

Jamieson on **practices sin** - (This stands) in contrast to 1 John 3:3+, "Every man that hath this hope in Him (present tense - continuously) purifies himself"; and 1 John 3:7, "He that does righteousness."

Henry Alford - (In 1Jn 3:3+) God's essential purity formed a law, according to which the child of God, having hope of ultimate complete likeness to Him, purifies himself. Here we have it declared that the sinner goes counter to (this and all other) law.

John Gill on **practices sin** - This, in connection with what follows, is true of any sin, great or small, but here designs a course of sinning, a wilful, obstinate, persisting in sin

Practices (4160)(**poieo**) is primarily translated with the idea of to **DO** (to bring to pass, to carry out, to bring about, to accomplish), to **MAKE** (to construct or fashion something out of existing material) to **PERFORM**. Here in the present tense **practices** expresses an action that continues or is habitual. This stands in striking contrast to the continual purification (1Jn 3:3+) and the continual practice of righteousness (1Jn 3:7+).

*John shows the incompatibility of being
a child of God and yet continuing in sin.*
-- Kenneth Wuest

Thabiti Anyabwile suggests that the apostle John addresses basically four different groups of people in his letters. They are: (1) fully assured Christians; (2) Christians struggling with assurance; (3) falsely assured non-Christians; and (4) known non-Christians (unpublished sermon notes).

As **John MacArthur** says commenting on this verse "John's description allows for no exceptions or dual standards. Everyone who **habitually practices sin** is living in an ongoing condition of lawlessness (James 2:10–11; cf. Ro 4:15), which marks all who are outside the kingdom of God (cf. Ro 1:32; Gal. 5:19–21; Rev 21:8). (See [1-3 John - Volume 5 - Page 123](#)) (Bolding mine)

Hiebert - Again John made a statement that allows for no exceptions: "everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness". It pictures a class that is the opposite of those practicing righteousness (1Jn 2:29). The articular **present** participle portrays an **individual characteristically engaged in the practice of sin**. Burdick notes that "the KJV translation, 'committeth,' is misleading in that it suggests a point of action rather than the continuing practice. (Bolding added) ([1 John 2:29-3:12](#))

NLT Study Bible (borrow) - Being born into God's family demands purification; a life of sin—a **continual lack of purity**—is evidence that someone is not really God's child. Sin is incompatible with the new nature derived from the new birth. John wants believers to do what is right, and thus demonstrate that they are joined to Christ and his righteousness. Those who are children of God do not make a practice of sinning, but this differs from the sort of "sinlessness" that the false teachers claimed. (Emphasis mine)

William MacDonald on **practices** - It is a matter of continual behavior, expressed by the **present**, continuous tense. (BORROW [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

Simon Kistemaker - Although the believer seeks to live in obedience to the will of God, he knows that his deeds are tainted by sin. This does not mean that sin controls him. On the contrary, the Christian valiantly opposes sin, because he wants to do that which is

right (1Jn 2:29+; 1Jn 3:7+). Should he stumble, then the child of God flees to Christ to plead for remission. However, the person who continues to live in sin ought to know that sin is the same as lawlessness. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. This epistle of John is marked by contrast. John first depicts the child of God who purifies himself (1Jn 3:3+) and then portrays the person who continues to live in sin and practices lawlessness. **The child of God, therefore, cannot continue to sin; and the unbeliever who indulges in sin cannot be a child of God...** The **present tense** of the participle denotes continuative action. ([New Testament Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

[A T Robertson](#) 1 Jn 3:4 "*The present active participle means the habit of doing sin.*"

THOUGHT - Sure, Christians still commit sins, but this is no longer the natural direction (or better "the supernatural direction") of our life! Paul wrote that "if any man is in Christ, [he is] a new (brand new) creature; the old things passed away; behold, new (brand new) things have come." (2 Cor 5:17+) Beloved, the point is that if you have (or know of someone who has) made a profession of Christ and this has made absolutely no difference in your (their) life, then you are not a believer!

I am not sure why some seem to be so resistant to this sobering truth, although there is a false teaching in Christian circles that says if a person claims to have made a decision for Jesus they are saved forever, regardless of whether they live the rest of their life pursuing sin rather than the Savior (See "[The Unusual and Troubling Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)"). This is a deadly and deceptive teaching and one which passages like 1 John 3 strongly refute (if one let's the text simply say what it says!).

John Stott gives us a wise perspective - If Christ appeared first both to "take away our sins" and to "destroy the devil's work," and if, when he appears a second time, "we shall see him" and, in consequence, "we shall be like him," how can we possibly go on living in sin? To do so would be to deny the purpose of both his "appearings." (BORROW [The Letters of John, 132-33](#))

*No true Christian will deliberately and repeatedly
defy God's Word and disobey Him*

As respected Bible teacher **Warren Wiersbe** rightly remarks "**Every Christian sins**, perhaps without knowing it (Ps 19:12); but no true Christian will deliberately and repeatedly defy God's Word and disobey Him." (Bolding added for emphasis) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

W A Criswell writes that "In this section, the author focuses on three signs of authentic Christianity: righteousness (1Jn 3:4-10a), love (1Jn 3:10b-18), and orthodox doctrine (1Jn 4:1-6). These elements are sometimes called the moral test, the social test, and the doctrinal test, respectively. The failure of the false teachers in each of these areas indicates their true spiritual condition. (1Jn 3:4-10) As the author presents the moral test, he considers three major issues: (1) the people involved in sin -- they do "lawlessness" (1Jn 3:4) and are "of the devil" (1Jn 3:8); (2) the work of Christ -- He came to take away sin (1Jn 3:5) and destroy the work of the devil (1Jn 3:8); (3) the differing responses to sin -- **those who sin do not know Him** (1Jn 3:6); **they are children of the devil** (1Jn 3:10). By contrast, those who abide in Him do not sin (1Jn 3:6); they are children of God (1Jn 3:10). ([The Believer's Study Bible](#)):

Here is an example of a somewhat unusual interpretation by **Dr. Grant Richison** ([CAVEAT EMPTOR](#) with some of his comments on [soteriological](#) issues! Acts 17:11+) who writes "A Christian is still a Christian even though he **disowns** the Lord." My question would be why would such a one even want to be a Christian if he truly disowns Jesus? Richison goes on to say that says 2 Ti 2:12+ ["If we deny Him, He also will deny us"] means "He can deny us *reward*," but that is **NOT** what the text says (See warning of adding to Scripture in Pr 30:6). **Ryrie** writes "Those who **deny** are professing people who will in turn be **disowned** by Him." (Mt 10:33; 2Jn 1:9) In 1Jn 3:4 **Grant Richison** simply does not let the text say what it says, instead writing that **Lawlessness** is another way to describe carnality. A carnal person is a believer dominated by his sin capacity. He walks out of phase with God. Sin characterizes the life of a *lawless believer*. He made a decision to go negative toward God and His Word at some point." ([Gotquestions.org](#) (an excellent, bibliocentric resource I highly recommend) directly refutes Richison's specious teaching writing "The key thing to understand is that while a Christian can be, for a time, carnal, a true Christian will not remain carnal for a lifetime. Some have abused the idea of a "carnal Christian" by saying that it is possible for people to come to faith in Christ and then proceed to live the rest of their lives in a completely carnal manner, with no evidence of being born again or a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Such a concept is completely unbiblical. James 2 makes it abundantly clear that genuine faith will always result in good works. Ephesians 2:8-10 declares that while we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, that salvation will result in works. Can a Christian, in a time of failure and/or rebellion, appear to be carnal? Yes. Will a true Christian remain carnal? No."

THOUGHT - Is Richison really what John is saying? John does not say that **lawlessness** is carnality but that it equates with **sin**. Furthermore as noted the way Richison uses "carnal" is highly questionable and potentially dangerously misleading! () And then Richison's sentence "Sin characterizes a *lawless believer*." O my what a misleading [oxymoron](#)! A "*lawless believer*" sounds like the Paul's description of a non-believer who professes to be a believer (cp Titus 1:16+)! A believer is not *lawless*, but in fact has the law of God written on

his or her heart (Jer 31:33+, Heb 8:10+, Heb 10:16+). Does a genuine believe break the law? Of course, but not as the continual, habitual practice of his or her life and not with abandon and/or joy but with a pierced conscience and sadness and a desire to confess and repent! If you can continually sin and continually enjoy it without any regrets then you need to carefully heed Paul's words in 2Cor 13:5+ lest you hear Jesus' frightening words in Mt 7:21-23+ (for then it will be too late to do a self-examination!). Dear believer, think of those times you have willfully sinned against God. Did your sin bring joy and peace and satisfaction? Beloved, teaching of this type is deadly and deceptive for it gives an "out" (an "escape hatch") to the person who may have made a "profession" of faith at some point in the past and then spends the rest of their life (their habitual practice) committing sin and not being grieved by such sin. Such a one can claim they are simply "*lawless believers*" as Grant Richison calls them! Woe! Jesus addressed this genre of teaching and thinking head on in the Sermon on the Mount. Listen carefully to our Lord's somber words of warning and see if He classifies the (present tense) **practice of lawlessness** as a "*lawless believer*."

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does **present tense** = as the general direction of their life) the will of My Father who is in heaven. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never (absolutely never at any point in time) knew you (speaking of the intimate relation of a believer being in Him, in covenant with Him, in oneness with Him - cp 1Jn 3:6 = Jesus did not know them because they never knew Him!); **DEPART** (present imperative = command) FROM ME, YOU WHO **PRACTICE** (present tense - habitually!) **LAWLESSNESS** (+ - identical to John's phrase, even the tense of the verb!)' (Mt 7:21-23+) (Bolding mine) (COMMENT - Chose who you will believe - Grant Richison or Jesus Christ!)

*The very fact that he is 'comfortable' about his sin is proof of the Spirit's absence.
His spiritual vital sign registers 'no life.'*

R. Gene Reynolds speaks to the deceptive danger of professing to be a Christian and yet failing to bear the fruit of love - A person who is living sinfully, who *knows* he is living sinfully, who *enjoys* living in such a manner, who intends to *continue* that sinful way of living—that person does not have the Holy Spirit living within him. The very fact that he is 'comfortable' about his sin is proof of the Spirit's absence. His spiritual vital sign registers 'no life.' (From [Assurance: You can know you're a Christian](#) See also Gerald Borchert's book "[Assurance and Warning](#)")

You be the judge -- What does Jesus say about the fate of one who **practices lawlessness**? Is he a "*lawless believer*" or is he a person who calls Jesus "*Lord*" but does not obey Him, and thus proves himself to be an unbeliever?" I will admit that I do not have a theological degree and so you could say that I am not accurately interpreting John's text because I have not taken a formal course in hermeneutics (which I have not). But is this not exactly what John was alluding to in the previous chapter when he said (all) believers have an "anointing (referring to the indwelling Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, our Teacher - 1Jn 2:20+) which (we) received from Him (and this anointing) abides in (us), and (we) have no need for anyone to teach (us)." (1Jn 2:27+)?

Many people today are resting in false hopes.

There are many who are deceived by the false professions that they make

To quote the respected Bible teacher **Chuck Smith** (now with the Lord) "You **cannot** be living in sin and at the same time rightly claim to be a child of God... If you are living in sin, you have not seen Him nor known Him (as your Savior). It makes no difference what you may say or profess. Salvation is much more than *saying* the right things, it is *doing* the right things... Many people today are resting in false hopes. There are many who are deceived by the false professions that they make." ([Sermon Notes](#))

As **Dr Martyn-Lloyd Jones** said "We can put it this way: it is what we **are** and what we **do** that really proclaims our **belief** and our **profession**... the **profession** of faith is of no avail unless it leads to this **particular practice**." ([Children of God- Studies in First John](#))

Pulpit Commentary - Once more the apostle turns from the positive to the negative. Having shown what birth from God involves, he goes on to show what it excludes. "Everyone that doeth sin" evidently balances "everyone that hath this hope" (1 John 3:3+), and "to do sin" is the exact opposite of "to do righteousness" (1 John 2:29+).

Of course one of the clear truths from 1 Jn 3:4 is God's "definition" of **sin** is **lawlessness**. Webster says lawlessness describes one who is not restrained or controlled by the law.

Jon Courson says **practices** "speaks of continual action. Thus, this verse does not refer to one who falters in sin, struggles with sin, or falls because of a struggle with a certain sin. It refers to one who blatantly, habitually, and continually practices sin. I used to watch my son Benny in the backyard with his baseball bat, practicing his swing over and over again. So, too, there are those who

practice sin in order to get good at it. (See [Jon Courson's Application Commentary: Volume 3](#))

The **Puritan Thomas Manton** wrote that 1Jn 3:4 "speaks "of those who delight in sin, of those in whom sin reigns; of those who deliberately, voluntarily, easily, freely, frequently break God's laws."

W E Vine - John's use of the present tense of the verb [poieo](#), "to do," expresses the meaning of the alternative verb [prasso](#), "to practice." The manner of life which is marked by continuing to do sin is described by the phrase "practices lawlessness," which is constant disregard of the law of God. As, then, **doing righteousness** is an evidence of the new birth, so **doing lawlessness** is an evidence of **not** being born of God. ([Collected Writings](#))

SIN DEFINED AS LAWLESSNESS

Sin ([266](#)) (**hamartia**) originally conveyed the idea of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow and missing the mark or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. See literal use of similar Hebrew word (Jdg 20:16). In Homer some hundred times hamartia is used of a warrior hurling his spear but missing his foe. Later **hamartia** came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. **Hamartia** in the Bible signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word or deed (righteous). It pictures the idea of missing His appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation from what is pleasing to Him. In short, sin is conceived as a missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is the Triune God Himself. As Martin Luther put it "Sin is essentially a departure from God." The law is like a ruler and sin is like a crooked line - Anyone can detect a crooked line (cp sin) when a perfectly straight line (cp law) is drawn next to it!

*Every crook in our life, and thought, and feeling,
discovered by the straight rule of God's holy law is sin.*

-- James Smith

Spurgeon - Sin is any want of conformity to the perfect mind of God; or, according to our text, "sin is the transgression of the law," and every transgression of the law is sin. Therefore, we say that, first, every sin breaks God's law. It does not matter what sin is committed, it breaks the law at some one point. There are ten great commandments of God; and it may be that you think you have never broken No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6, but if you have broken No. 7, 8, 9, or 10, you have snapped the chain asunder as really as if you had broken all its links. It little matters to miners in a pit, if the chain be broken, at what particular link it came asunder. So, any offence against the law of God breaks the whole law, and spoils any hope of the sinner being saved by keeping it. Every sin is an offence against the law, as you will see if you look at the law in another aspect.....Every breach of the law is a sin. If thou dost not do what God commands thee, fully, heartily, always, without fail, thou hast sinned; and if thou dost at any moment that which God commands thee not to do, thou hast therein sinned against him. And let it never be forgotten that what I am now saying about actions applies also to words; our Lord told his disciples that for every idle word anyone utters he must give an account in the day of judgment. And remember, too, that this rule applies to thoughts and imaginations and desires, and to those secret motives which hide away within the soul, and never actually come into deeds. God shall bring these hidden (Sermon - [The Sinful made Sinless](#))

Hiebert adds that "In classical Greek the word "sin" denoted "to miss, to fail, to fall short," but in the New Testament this negative meaning is largely lost sight of and sin is viewed as positive and active, a deliberate deviation from the standard of right. It is a willful rebellion, arising from the deliberate choice of the sinner." ([1 John 2:29-3:12](#))

*[Sin] is a deliberate rejection of God's standards
and a resort to one's own desires.*

-- Guthrie

Sam Storms - **Sin**, writes [Westcott](#), "is the assertion of the selfish will against a paramount authority" (102). Sin is not merely a negative failure but an active rebellion against the revealed will of God... John again appeals to the knowledge of his readers concerning the purpose of the Incarnation. If they will but reflect on the design of his death and resurrection they will abhor sin... **A logical conclusion:** If Christ was sinless and came to remove sin, how can one abide both in him and in it simultaneously? The one who abides in Christ does not sin as a prevailing habit. Conversely, an undisturbed persistence in sin exposes the individual as one who has neither seen (with the eye of faith) nor heard him.

Robert Neighbour - The word "transgress" means to "go across." God has given us His will as a rule of life. Whenever we go against that will, we transgress the law, and we have sinned. Sin is my way as against God's way. Sin carries with it the spirit of rebellion. It is casting aside the will of God, it is tramping His purposes under one's feet.

H A Ironside - There was a little boy who when his Sunday school teacher asked him this question (WHAT IS SIN?), said, "I think it is anything you like to do." That is not far from wrong, because in our natural state we are so utterly out of touch with God that we like to do those things that are contrary to His holy will.

A person who deliberately and habitually sins is proving that he does not know Christ and therefore cannot be abiding in Him.

Warren Wiersbe - There are several definitions of sin in the Bible: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Ro 14:23). "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Pr 24:9). "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). "All unrighteousness is sin" (1Jn 5:17). But John's epistle defines sin as lawlessness (1Jn 3:4). It views sin as defilement (1Jn 1:9-2:2), but here it views it as defiance. The emphasis here is not on sins (plural), but on sin (singular): "Whosoever **practices sin**." *Sins* are the fruit, but *sin* is the root... "Whosoever abides in Him does not practice sin" (1Jn 3:6). "Abide" is one of John's favorite words. To abide in Christ means to be in fellowship with Him, to allow nothing to come between ourselves and Christ. Sonship (being born of God) brings about our union with Christ; but fellowship makes possible our communion with Christ. It is this communion (abiding) with Christ that keeps us from deliberately disobeying His Word. A person who deliberately and habitually sins is proving that he does not know Christ and therefore cannot be abiding in Him. (Bolding added for emphasis) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Spurgeon - And there will never be a better definition of sin than this. However men may philosophically try to mar it, this simple statement will be better than any that they can give us: "Sin is the transgression of the law." ([Spurgeon Expositions and Sermons on 1 John](#))

John Trapp - As there is the same roundness in a little ball as in a bigger, so the same disobedience in a small sin as in a great.

Illustration - Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman used to tell of a Methodist preacher who often spoke on the subject of sin. He minced no words, but defined sin as "that abominable thing that God hates." A leader in his congregation came to him on one occasion and urged him to cease using the ugly word. "Pastor," he said, "We wish you would not speak so plainly about sin. Our young people, hearing you, will be more likely to indulge in sin. Call it something else, a 'inhibition,' or 'error' or a 'mistake,' or even 'a twist in our nature.'" "I understand what you mean," the preacher remarked and going to his desk brought out a little bottle. "This bottle," he said, "contains strychnine. You will see that the red label here reads 'Poison.' Would you suggest that I change the label, and paste one on that says, 'Wintergreen?'" He made his point. You can call sin by other names, but none-the-less, it is still sin.

Daniel Akin - In your practice of sin, you rebel against your rightful King and say, "I hate Your law." Sin is nothing less than personal treason against the Sovereign of the universe. And sin is not a one-time offense. It is the habitual and settled disposition of your heart and your life that makes you, as Anyabwile says, "an outlaw against God" (See [Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John - Page 66](#))

Lawlessness (458) (**anomia** from **a** = negates what follows + **nomos** = law) literally describes that which is without the law and signifies, not merely the abstract idea, but disregard for, or actual breach of, the law of God. While **anomia** means "no law," the main idea is not so much "the absence of law but the willful rejection of the law, or the will of God, and the substitution of the will of self. It is thus the very opposite of righteousness, which is conformity to the standard or law of right." It is an attitude of flagrant opposition to and disregard for the statutes of God. It is not so much the having of no law but the living as if there were no law. A person who rejects God's authority doesn't care what God thinks about his habits. He has the heart of a rebel, a continual inclination and attitude to do what is wrong! It's not just missing the mark, but is an active rebellion against God.

ANOMIA - 15X/13V - lawless deed(1), lawless deeds(2), lawlessness(12) Matt. 7:23; Matt. 13:41; Matt. 23:28; Matt. 24:12; Rom. 4:7; Rom. 6:19; 2 Co. 6:14; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 1:9; Heb. 10:17; 1 Jn. 3:4

John Piper - **Lawlessness** is living as though your own ideas are superior to God's. **Lawlessness** says, "God may demand it, but I don't prefer it." **Lawlessness** says, "God may promise it, but I don't want it." **Lawlessness** replaces God's law with my contrary desires. I become a law to myself. **Lawlessness** is rebellion against the right of God to make laws and govern his creatures... The work of Satan is to tempt us to reject the authority of God and become like God ourselves. Satan works to nurture and cultivate the pride that puts its own desires above the law of God. This is lawlessness; this is the essence of sin; and this is what the Son of God came to destroy in you and me. ([The Son of God Appeared to Destroy the Works of the Devil](#))

Spurgeon - Let me further say that sin is mainly sin because it is a transgression of the law. Many a person will say, "I did no harm to anyone." That is not the point; if you break the law of God, you thereby sin. We must never judge sin merely by its consequences, or we may make great mistakes. A pointsman on the railway does not turn the switch aright, and one train dashes into another, and a hundred lives are lost. He may say to himself, "What a crime I committed by my carelessness," and everybody denounces him for it. But suppose he forgot to turn the switch, and by a sort of miracle the two trains escaped coming into collision. If by some extraordinary coincidence the two mighty masses of matter rushing onward were stopped in their progress, and no hurt came of it, the pointsman would be just as guilty in that case as in the other. It is not the amount of damage that results from it that makes the sin; it is the thing itself. If you are doing wrong, even though you should feed a nation by your wrongdoing, I say that you would still be committing sin. (Recommended Sermon - [The Sinful made Sinless](#))

S Lewis Johnson on lawlessness - The reason we are lawless, the reason we are rebellious, the reason we do not respond to the word of God is that we do not believe the word of God... We're inclined to think that immorality is sin. Well, it is sin, but the fundamental cause of immorality is unbelief that leads to rebellion, which issues in immorality. Adam disbelieved in his heart first of all, Eve as well. The inclination originated within their hearts that led to the volition, "I will take of the fruit," And then finally, the action of partaking of the fruit, and eating it. But the sin occurred long before Eve actually tasted the fruit. It occurred when the inclination developed within her heart and Adam likewise. So our sins first of all are inclinations within the heart that issue in a volition, and finally in an action. So unbelief issues in lawlessness, rebellion, and finally is seen in immorality. ([The Inadmissibility of Sin](#))

*The false teachers that John was confronting were no doubt,
as many false teachers in our day, minimizing the serious nature of sin.*

Steven Cole on lawlessness - John is saying that the one who practices sin is "in revolt against God" and that "sin is nothing but rebellion against God." In other words, John is hitting at the truth that sin, at its core, is much worse than an outward breaking of a commandment. To practice sin is to be in open rebellion against God Himself. We may ask, "Why does John begin with this?" The answer is, as **J. C. Ryle** points out ([Holiness- Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots](#)), "that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity... If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies." If you do not have a biblical view of the seriousness of sin, then you do not need anything nearly as radical as a Savior who "**appeared in order to take away sins**" (1Jn 3:5). If our need is just for a few tips on how to have a happier life or improve our self esteem, then why all this extreme talk about Christ shedding His blood as the propitiation for our sins (1Jn 1:7+; 1Jn 2:1+)? The false teachers that John was confronting were no doubt, as many false teachers in our day, minimizing the serious nature of sin. **Satan's strategy has always been to get rebellious man to think more highly of himself than he ought to think:** "I may not be perfect, but I'm not a wretched sinner! I'm not a worm!" At the same time, Satan gets us to pull God down from His absolute holiness: "Surely, a loving God understands that I'm only human. He wouldn't send someone as good as me to hell! He wouldn't demand perfect righteousness, would He?" The conclusion is, if God is not so holy and I'm not so sinful, then I don't need anything as radical as the shed blood of a sinless substitute to atone for my "faults"! Thus Satan works to undermine the Cross. ([Ibid](#)) (Bolding added)

*"The first step towards holy living
is to recognize the true nature and wickedness of sin."
-- John Stott*

MacArthur writes that "**lawlessness** conveys more than transgressing God's Law. It conveys the ultimate sense of rebellion, i.e., living as if there was no law or ignoring what laws exist (James 4:17)." ([Online note](#))

Lawlessness is living as though your own ideas are superior to God's.

Lawlessness says, "God may demand it but I don't prefer it."

Lawlessness says, "God may promise it but I don't want it."

Lawlessness replaces God's law with my contrary desires. I become a law to myself.

Lawlessness is rebellion against the right of God to make laws and govern His creatures. Lawlessness signifies everything that is contrary to the will and law of God and is more intentional and flagrant sin. It is direct and open rebellion against God and His ways.

Lawlessness describes one who has the quality of not being regulated by, restrained by or controlled by law. It is one who is not governed by nor obedient to laws and who is thus unbridled and uncontrolled in general. Some close synonyms include the quality of a person that manifests lawlessness include words such as -- anarchy, rebellion, insurgence, insubordination, chaos, disorderliness, mutiny, recklessness, sedition, unruliness (that's enough for starters!)

Ligon Duncan sums up 1Jn 3:4 - John tells us—and this is the fifth part of his argument—in 1Jn 3:4, that the opposite, that not pursuing this holiness (1Jn 3:3+), but living in a life of sin is, in fact, an evidence that we don't know God and we haven't experienced grace. Look at what he says in verse 4. "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." John is saying that pursuing a life of sin is evidence of a rejection of God's word, God's word which is Christ's word—He wrote it; He obeyed it. And when we pursue a life of sin, we show that we prefer to do it our way as opposed to God's way. And he says that those who practice sin are practicing lawlessness. It's an evidence of a rejection of God's word and a rejection of Christ. (**1 John 2:29-3:10 The Test of Righteousness**)

Can A True Believer Continue in Sin and Persist in Sin?

"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. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (1 John 3:9-10).

"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18).

The Teaching of Zane Hodges and Joseph Dillow	
The fruitful believer The partaker or heir The believing believer The overcomer	The barren believer The carnal one (non-heir) The saved person who stops believing The non-overcomer
This righteous saved person has a new nature that never sins. Moreover this saved person consistently walks in the Spirit and does not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.	This unrighteous saved person continues in sin and persists in wickedness. This carnal believer does not practice righteousness. He is born of God and has a new nature but he consistently walks in the flesh. He will not inherit the kingdom and will not reign with Christ.

There are three factors which prevent a true believer from continuing in sin, and they all begin with the letter "C."

(1) **CONFESSION**—The sinning believer need not continue in a state of sin because he may CONFESS his sins (1 John 1:9) and God is faithful and just to forgive his sin and cleanse him from all unrighteousness.

(2) **CONVICTION**—Spirit wrought conviction ought to lead to humble confession. If it does not, the conviction continues. The Holy Spirit makes His grieved presence felt (Eph. 4:30). The true believer can never be comfortable in his sin, even as righteous Lot's soul was vexed in Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7-8). We can thank God that He makes us miserable when we are not right with Him. When we are disobedient we are unsettled, unpeaceful, unhappy. Thank God it is so!

(3) **CHASTENING**—If the sinning believer does not respond in the right way to God's conviction in the heart, then the Father will chasten His child whom He loves (1 Cor. 11:31-32). Maximum chastisement can even result in the physical death of the believer (1 Cor. 11:30). As a good human father will not permit his child to continue doing wrong, so the Heavenly Father will not permit His child to continue in wickedness. [Hodges teaches that it is possible for true Christians to be "bastards" (Heb. 12:8--KJV) or illegitimate sons, and even though they are saved, they will not be chastened of the Father and they will lose their inheritance!]

See Hodges discussion of Hebrews 12:8 in The Bible Knowledge Commentary. See also [The Teachings of Zane Hodges](#)]

A Key Question:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1)

Paul's answer:

"God forbid (Perish the thought!). How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2)

Hodges/Dillow answer:

The believer should not continue in sin but many believers do. Many persist in sin and practice unrighteousness (even persisting in the sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). They will be saved but they will not inherit the kingdom.

Questions: Why are not these believers convicted? Where is the Father's chastening hand? Where is the heavenly restraint?

R. Gene Reynolds in his helpful book Assurance—You Can Know You're A Christian said the following on page 73:

- A person who is living sinfully, who knows he is living sinfully, who enjoys living in such a manner, who intends to continue that sinful way of living—that person does not have the Holy Spirit living within him. The very fact that he is 'comfortable' about his sin is proof of the Spirit's absence. His spiritual vital sign registers 'no life.' (From [Assurance: You can know you're a Christian](#) See also Gerald Borchert's book "[Assurance and Warning](#)")

Hodges teaches that righteous living proves that a person is saved but that unrighteous living does not prove that a person is lost (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 893). He says, "the converse does not follow" (p. 893). In other words, Hodges teaches that a person can give evidence that he is saved but he cannot give evidence that he is lost! His righteous living points to LIFE but his unrighteous living does not point to DEATH! He can have assurance of salvation but not assurance of damnation!

For more discussion of this dangerous, deceptive teaching of Hodges, Dillow, Wilkin, et al see [INDEX PAGE](#).

Theodore Epp - 1 John 3:1-10

To live under the dominion of sin without any evidence of righteousness demonstrates that the person has not been born again.

To live under the dominion of sin without any evidence of righteousness demonstrates that the person has not been born again. The reasons for this are clearly pointed out in some of these verses.

First John 3:4, for example, says that sin is contrary to the law of God. Verse 5 says that sin is contrary to the mission, or the work, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ not only came to take away the guilt of sin, but He broke sin's power so that the believer need not live under its dominion.

When we do commit an act of sin and then confess it, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and our Advocate with the Father maintains our standing of righteousness before Him.

Some have used these verses to teach that a person reaches a certain place in his Christian life after which he no longer commits any sin. These verses do not give any license to sin, but they contrast the state, or behavior, of the children of God with the state, or behavior, of the children of the world.

A continual practice of sin in the life shows that the person is a child of the Devil rather than a child of God. "The devil sinneth from the beginning" (1Jn 3:8), and his children continue to live in sin, for that is in keeping with the character of their heredity.

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). ([Back to the Bible](#))

WHAT IS SIN? (1 John 3:4) - Croft Pentz

What is sin? This question has been asked many times. Sin is failing to keep the Ten Commandments—Exodus 20:1–17. Sin is failing to live according to The Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5–7. The Bible says that all men have come short of the glory of God—Romans 3:23. Sin is of the devil—John 8:44. Sin is: (1) Anything that opposes the Bible; (2) Anything that opposes God; and (3) Anything that opposes the church. As Christians we should hate sin, but love the sinner!

I. SIN IS DISOBEYING GOD'S COMMANDS

1. Command of salvation—John 3:1–8. We must be born again. We must be changed! Notice John 3:18. If we do not believe we are already lost. Man goes to hell because he refuses to accept this command.

2. Command of surrender—Matthew 6:24. Trying to serve Satan, sin, and God at the same time is impossible. Note the words of Jesus in Luke 6:46. Have you surrendered completely to God?

3. Command of separation—Hebrews 12:14. Those who refuse to live a holy life are living in sin. Only the pure in heart will see God—Matthew 6:24. We must cleanse ourselves—2 Corinthians 7:1.

4. Command of sacrifice—Luke 9:23. Disobeying God means a lack of love for Him—John 14:23. If we love Him we will sacrifice for Him.

Note these words: "But those who keep sinning are against God, for every sin is done against the will of God"—1 John 3:4, Living New Testaments.

II. SIN IS DISOBEYING YOUR CONSCIENCE

"Happy is the man who need not condemn himself for doing the thing that he approves"—Williams Translation.

1. Comfort—1 Timothy 1:19. Having a clear conscience. Many people cannot sleep because their conscience bothers them. Having a clear conscience is the best medicine you can get.

2. Conviction—John 8:9. The conscience is given by God. Thank God for your conscience, which convicts you. Your conscience is the best and truest friend you can have. When you are convicted and feel something is wrong—do not do it.

3. Cleansing—Hebrews 9:14. Having our conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ. As we walk in the light, we will have our consciences cleansed and made new.

“These teachers will tell lies with straight faces and do it so often that their consciences won’t even bother them”—1 Timothy 4:2, Living New Testament.

III. SIN IS DISOBEYING YOUR CONVICTIONS

When you disobey your convictions it is sin! Others may do things and are not convicted by doing so, but if God convicts you, do not do it!

1. Seeing wrong—James 4:17. When we do what is right and fail to do it we commit sin. Many sins are committed by omission.

2. Spirit’s work—John 16:8. The Holy Spirit convicts, but He will not force us to do anything against our own will.

3. Sinning wilfully—Hebrews 10:26. God does not approve of wilful sinning.

4. Sanctifying work—Hebrews 9:14. We must purge our conscience. We must keep our consciences clean.

When a person does not: (1) heed God’s commands; (2) obey His commands, and (3) obey his convictions, then he is in danger. Sin always separates from God. It separated Samson from God. Saul had the same problems. Judas, Peter, and many others, permitted sin to separate them from God. If we will please God in our daily lives, then we will not be guilty of sin.

Robert Neighbour - Sin Scripturally Defined

"But sin, that it might appear gin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13).

There are at least six distinctive descriptions of sin. Some of them seem to overlap each other, but yet they carry separate considerations. Let us observe them.

1. "All unrighteousness is sin" (I John 5:17). This verse speaks of immoralities. It has to do more particularly with man's attitude toward his fellow-men. An unrighteous man is one who sins against his fellow-men. Unrighteousness sums up the works of the flesh, as described in Galatians 5:19 — "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like." Every work of sinful self is sin. It is in the heart of man that sin is conceived. The whole outflow from the sinful heart is sin, because the old man is "corrupt according to deceitful lusts," and a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

2. "Sin is the transgression of the Law" (I John 3:4). The word "transgress" means to "go across." God has given us His will as a rule of life. Whenever we go against that will, we transgress the law, and we have sinned. Sin is my way as against God's way. Sin carries with it the spirit of rebellion. It is casting aside the will of God, it is tramping His purposes under one's feet.

3. Sin is believing not on Him. Christ said that the Holy Ghost, when He came, would convict the world "of sin, because they believe not on Me" (John 16:9). A man may be ever so moral in life and he may be more or less obedient to the Law, and yet if he believes not on Christ, to him it is sin. The Holy Spirit does not convict men of sin because of their unrighteousness or because of their transgressions. All men know they are sinners on this line. The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin because they reject the Saviour; because they have been treading Him under foot, because they have been counting His Blood unholy; because they have believed not on Him.

4. "The thought of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9). Sin is rooted in the mind. God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "The thought of foolishness is sin," that is, the very thought with which we consider evil is sin. David made a covenant with his eyes, because his eyes led him to the thought of evil. God is able to garrison the believer's thoughts and mind in Christ Jesus, but the mind of the flesh is corrupt, just like the heart is corrupt.

5. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). This verse has more to do with the sins of believers than of unbelievers. Whenever we do that which we cannot do in faith, we break fellowship with God and we sin. A good Christian should never do anything of which he is doubtful, for "He that doubteth is condemned." In our days we need sure footing. We must not go against the voice of the Spirit within.

6. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). This passage also has special reference to the saved. There are sins positive; there are also sins negative. The latter is expressed in our failure to do the good. It is a sin of disobedience. When God tells us to do this or to do that, and we do it not, we sin. Paul said, "I was not disobedient unto the Heavenly vision." When the Lord spoke to Philip, he arose and went in the way to Gaza. Had either Paul or Philip known to do this

good and had done it not, they would have sinned.

Henry Mahan - Every person who practices sin as a course of life, excuses and justifies a life of flesh, and lives unrestrained, is lawless and a transgressor of the law. But no true believer can ever find peace

John says God's commands distinguish love from sin and are not burdensome (see 1 John 3:4; 5:3). The world says God's commands are chains to be broken and shackles to be thrown off (see Psalm 2:3). Which attitude characterizes you?

GENUINE BELIEVERS DO NOT CONTINUALLY SIN - **ILLUSTRATION** - Let me give you an illustration that may help us understand what John is saying here. The Nile River is the longest river in the world running 4,160 miles. Another interesting thing about the Nile is that it is the only river of any consequence that flows from the south to the north. Most rivers, like the Mississippi, flow from the north to the south. Not the Nile...it flows from the south to the north. However, just north of the fifth cataract in Sudan, the Nile bends to the west. It continues to bend until it actually is flowing south. But that southward flow only lasts for a short distance as the bend of the river turns once again back to its overall northward flow up to the Mediterranean Sea.

That's a great illustration of the flow of a Christian's life when it comes to sinful behavior. In fact, Dr. John Phillips says it this way in his commentary of First John: "The flow of a true believer's life is toward obedience and faith. Occasional lapses may occur; some of them may even be prolonged. But that is not the main trend. The occasional stretches of misdirected (sinful) behavior represent an interruption of the general trend toward Christ-likeness." In other words, the prevailing trend of a Christian's life will not be sinful behavior but Christ-like behavior.

Johnny Sanders - (ED COMMENT - This poem by Johnny Sanders is one we should all strive to emulate dear follower of Jesus. It is a tad bit convicting to me!)

MY LIFE

My life is an open book,
Open wide for all may see.
Each day it must be a little better,
For someone may follow me.

My life is an open book,
Open wide that you may know,
With but one quick look,
What kind of seed I sow.

The print is large, the type is bold,
And easy for you to see.
So, when my life you behold
I ask your prayer before you judge me.
--Johnny Sanders

Let me share with you a poem I copied - as I recall - from a wall in the main lobby of camp 4 at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman some 40 years ago:

NO TIME FOR GOD

You've time to build houses and in them dwell,
And time to do business - to buy and to sell,
But none for repentance, for deep earnest prayer,
To seek your salvation you've no time to spare.

You've time for earth's pleasures, for frolic and fun,
For her glittering treasures how quickly you run,
But care not to seek the fair mansions above,
The favor of God, or the gift of His love.

You've time to take voyages over the deep sea,
And take in the gay world's jubilee;
But soon our hopes will be lost in the gloom

Of the cold, dark river of death and the tomb.

You've time to resort to woods, mountains, and glen,
And time to gain knowledge from the books of men,
Yet no time to search for the wisdom of God;
but what of your soul when you are under the sod?

For time will not linger when helpless you lie;
Staring death in the face, you will take time to die!
Then, what of the judgment? Paul, think, I implore!
For time will be lost on eternity's shore.

Phil Newton -

*So the aim is not sin as an act
but rather sin as a practice.*

Persistent sin is rooted in a lawless disposition (1 John 3:4) The translation brings out the verb tense by the use of "practices." The ESV translates it, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness." "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." So the aim is not sin as an act but rather sin as a practice. What's the difference? Some have construed John's meaning as some type of sinless perfection required of Christians. We certainly want to aim for perfection! But we don't arrive until we "see Him just as He is." The Bible is filled with exhortations for God's people to fight against sin and to pursue holiness. Yet some have been deceived into thinking that they've reached perfection. However, John has already declared, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8). He's reminded us that when we sin "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jn 2:1). So what is his point? The use of "lawlessness" is critical for understanding what he means. We know that the basic meaning of lawless ([anomia](#)) means "without law." Consider the last clause. "And sin is lawlessness." What is sin? It is the transgression of the law of God. Sin disregards the law of God; sin feels no constraints by the law of God. If there's no constraint by God's law then there's no consideration of the God whose character is reflected in the law. So the practice of sin, John says, is the ongoing practice of lawlessness or disregarding the law of God, having no sense of restraint by the law of God. In that case, "lawlessness" is a disposition of the heart. That's why he writes, "anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." **In other words, the reason that they do not practice righteousness but practice sin instead, is the disposition of the heart. They are not of God so they have a lawless heart....**

Let no one deceive you about why Jesus Christ came into the world or what He makes us to be through His redeeming work or what clarifies us as genuine Christians.

Gil McKee - Sin Is Lawlessness 1 John 3:4 [Experiencing God Day by Day: Daily Devotional - Page 45](#)

It is a dangerous thing to live your life without a spiritual "plumb line," or standard, by which you determine right from wrong. God's Word is that plumb line. Spiritual laws, like physical laws, are meant to protect you, not restrict you. You may exercise your freedom to challenge the laws of electricity, but to do so can bring you death. Likewise, you will not break God's laws, they will break you. God established absolute moral and spiritual laws that we are free to ignore, but we do so at our own peril. These laws are timeless. Culture does not supersede them. Circumstances do not abrogate them. God's laws are eternal, and they will save you from death if you follow them.

You may feel that God's laws restrict and bind you. On the contrary, God's Word protects you from death (Rom. 6:23). For example, when God said that you are not to commit adultery He wanted to free you to experience the fullest pleasure of a marriage relationship. Furthermore, He knew the devastating heartache that would come to you, your spouse, your children, your relatives, your friends, and your church family if you broke this law. How important the laws of God are for your life! Without them, you would be robbed of the delights God has in store for you. Sin is choosing a standard other than God's law on which to base your life. If you are measuring your life by that of your neighbors, or society at large, then you are basing your life on lawlessness, and lawlessness is sin.

What is the main flow and trend of your life? Is your life characterized by continual and habitual patterns of sin? Or is your life more characterized by faith and obedience to Christ? Does the main flow and trend of your life produce fruit of righteousness or fruit of unrighteousness?

Who do you really belong to today? Are you a child of God or a child of the Devil? Those are the only two kinds of people here this morning. We are all one or the other. Which are you? The Bible says you can know for sure.

If you've been born of God, that is, if you've been born again, then you are a child of God. If not, you can be.

Arthur Pink - [The Scriptures and SIN](#)

14. **QUESTION:** What is sin? (from [Spurgeon's Puritan Catechism](#))

ANSWER: Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4).

John MacArthur - Sin is refusing to obey God's law; it is rejecting God's standards; it is, in fact, living as if God did not exist. Sin is the ultimate act of ingratitude toward the God "who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Sin is the only thing that God hates (cf. Jer. 44:4), and so must believers (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15). The great Puritan writer Thomas Watson noted that a prerequisite for sanctification is such hatred for sin. Renew your commitment today to grow in your relationship with the Lord by hating evil (Prov. 8:13).

Martin Luther - Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3:4

We are all sinners, and at times we all fall into sin. But when true Christians fall, they soon come back, turn around, and struggle against the sin so that they won't offend their neighbor. To illustrate, it's difficult to avoid being wounded in times of war. Yet it's an honor if one stands up to fight again. But it's a disgrace if someone retreats. Similarly, even if Christians are completely surrounded by sin, they should still fight against it. Some people think they're Christians because they've been baptized. These people give their desires free rein and don't care about conquering their sins. They merely follow their own cravings.

Committing sin comes from following the enticement and desire to sin. Many give these sinful desires free rein. They don't want to repent or stand up to fight again. Today they commit adultery; tomorrow they want to live purely. It's impossible for these people to avoid offending their neighbor. If they don't offend them by something they do, then they certainly will by neglecting what they ought to do for their neighbor.

An important part of Christianity is love, and love is not self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:5). Insisting on our own way is not loving our neighbor, but following our own desires. So not showing love is the same as being disobedient. Those who aren't pure, who don't struggle daily against themselves, will give in to sin and do wrong. Those who don't have the fruit on the inside won't show it on the outside toward their neighbor. If we have not died to ourselves so that we can disregard our own desires, how can we seek what's best for others?

John Henry Jowett - TAMPERING WITH THE LABEL 1 John 3:4-10

SIN is transgression. It is the deliberate climbing of the fence. We see the trespass-board, and in spite of the warning we stride into the forbidden field. Sin is not ignorance, it is intention. We sin when we are wide-awake! There are teachers abroad who would soften words like these. They offer us terms which appear to lessen the harshness of our actions; they give our sin an aspect of innocence. But to alter the label on the bottle does not change the character of the contents. Poison is poison give it what name we please. "Sin is the transgression of the law."

Let us be on our guard against the men whose pockets are filled with deceptive labels. Let us vigilantly resist all teachings which would chloroform the conscience. Let us prefer true terms to merely nice ones. Let us call sin by its right name, and let us tolerate no moral conjuring either with ourselves or with others. The first essential in all moral reformation is to call sin "sin." "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin."

Paul Enns - July 29 WHAT IS SIN? Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4) [Approaching God \(Enns\) - Page 29](#)

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, denied the existence of sin. "Evil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis," she claimed. In contrast, other greats have acknowledged sin's existence. Seneca the philosopher said, "We have all sinned, some more, some less." Goethe, the poet, exclaimed, "I see no fault which I might not myself have committed." Coleridge remarked, "I am a fallen creature ... an evil ground existed in my will previous to any given act." The Chinese refer to "two good men; one dead, the other unborn" (Bancroft, Christian Theology, p. 214). Most people will acknowledge sin, but what is it?

The Bible uses several words to describe sin. One is transgression (Galatians 3:19). Sin is transgressing God's law; it is "stepping over the boundary." God gave Israel the law to show Israel His standard. When an Israelite committed murder or adultery or stole something, he sinned because he had stepped over the boundary of God's law.

Sin also means to "miss the mark" or "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God has established a standard, and failure to keep that precise standard is to sin, or miss the mark of God's standard. Moreover, man deliberately chooses to miss God's moral mark—it is a voluntary choice.

Sin is rebellion against God (1 John 3:4). It is a frame of mind that results in lawless action. Why will a group of young men smash dozens of mailboxes with a baseball bat? Rebellion against constituted laws.

Sin is also a nature or principle within man (Romans 7:17). Paul lamented, "The good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish," concluding that it is "sin which dwells in me" (w. 19, 20).

What a dilemma if there were no solution! But "Jesus Christ has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8:2). Apart from Christ there is no solution to sin, but trusting Him resolves the dilemma.

LESSON: Sin is rebellion against God, overstepping His boundary, and missing the mark of His standard.

James Smith - SIN 1 JOHN 3:4 (R.V.)

1. Its Character. Pollution (Isa. 1), rebellion (Eph. 2:2), bondage (Rom. 5:21; 6:17), death (Eph. 2:1).
 2. Its Course. (Rom. 5:12; Gal. 3:22).
 3. Its Curse (Rom. 6:23). Ground cursed.
 4. Its Cure (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).
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WHAT IS SIN? Sin is the transgression of the law.—1 John 3:4 - Ian MacPherson

Sin is today what Sangster would call a "blurred word." It has lost its sharp edges. It has, in fact, almost disappeared from popular speech. We hear much of vice, a great deal about crime, but sin has practically been dropped from the popular vocabulary.

The term needs exact definition. Here are four views of its nature and effects.

1. It is a delight that deceives us.

"Whosoever sins against light kisses the lips of a blazing cannon" (Jeremy Taylor).

Sin is a kiss that kills.

Sin is a hooded harlot whom men think beautiful and long to embrace, but when they take her to their breast she is unveiled as a loathsome hag.

2. It is a drug that dopes us.

"Every sin works like a drug, and continued sin tends to stupefaction" (John Henry Jowett).

"The more sense of sin the less sin" (Samuel Rutherford).

There is this curious paradox in human life that it is not the sinner but the saint who knows most about sin. This is because it drugs its devotees.

3. It is a disease that destroys us.

You may remember John Newton's nimble lines:

The worst of all diseases
Is light compared with sin;
On every part it seizes
But rages most within.

'Tis leprosy and fever
And palsy all combined,
And none but the believer
The least relief can find.

4. It is, as John in our text expressly tells us, a disobedience that demoralizes us.

There is an oft-told tale of how Calvin Coolidge, having heard a sermon whose subject was "sin," was asked by his wife what the preacher had said about it. Coolidge replied: "He said he was against it."

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden.

--John Milton, Paradise Lost

HOLINESS - SIN

J C Ryle

Source - [Ryle's highly recommended book 364 page magnum opus entitled "Holiness" - see PDF](#)

"Sin is the transgression of the law."—1 JOHN 3:4

HE that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. I make no apology for beginning this volume of papers about holiness by making some plain statements about sin.

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are "words and names" which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes any one a new creature in Christ, is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with "light," and so also does the spiritual creation. God "shines into our hearts" by the work of the Holy Ghost, and then spiritual life begins. (2 Cor. 4:6.)—Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the Church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

(1) I shall begin the subject by supplying some DEFINITION of sin. We are all of course familiar with the terms "sin" and "sinners." We talk frequently of "sin" being in the world, and of men committing "sins." But what do we mean by these terms and phrases? Do we really know? I fear there is much mental confusion and haziness on this point. Let me try, as briefly as possible, to supply an answer.

I say, then, that "sin," speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article of our Church declares, "the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone (*quam longissimè* is the Latin) from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation." Sin, in short, is that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race, of every rank, and class, and name, and nation, and people, and tongue; a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

I say, furthermore, that "a sin," to speak more particularly, consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining, anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God. "Sin," in short, as the Scripture saith, is "the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God's revealed will and character constitutes a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God's sight.

Of course I need not tell any one who reads his Bible with attention, that a man may break God's law in heart and thought, when there is no overt and visible act of wickedness. Our Lord has settled that point beyond dispute in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 5:21–28.) Even a poet of our own has truly said, "A man may smile and smile, and be a villain."

Again, I need not tell a careful student of the New Testament, that there are sins of omission as well as commission, and that we sin, as our Prayer-book justly reminds us, by "leaving undone the things we ought to do," as really as by "doing the things we ought not to do." The solemn words of our Master in the Gospel of St. Matthew place this point also beyond dispute. It is there written, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire:—for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink." (Matt. 25:41, 42.) It was a deep and thoughtful saying of holy Archbishop Usher, just before he died,—"Lord, forgive me all my sins, and specially my sins of omission."

But I do think it necessary in these times to remind my readers that a man may commit sin and yet be ignorant of it, and fancy himself innocent when he is guilty. I fail to see any Scriptural warrant for the modern assertion that "Sin is not sin to us until we discern it and are conscious of it." On the contrary, in the 4th and 5th chapters of that unduly neglected book, Leviticus, and in the 15th of Numbers, I find Israel distinctly taught that there were sins of ignorance which rendered people unclean, and needed atonement. (Levit. 4:1–35; 5:14–19; Num. 15:25–29.) And I find our Lord expressly teaching that "the servant who knew not his

master's will and did it not," was not excused on account of his ignorance, but was "beaten" or punished. (Luke 12:48.) We shall do well to remember, that when we make our own miserably imperfect knowledge and consciousness the measure of our sinfulness, we are on very dangerous ground. A deeper study of Leviticus might do us much good.

(2) Concerning the ORIGIN AND SOURCE of this vast moral disease called "sin" I must say something. I fear the views of many professing Christians on this point are sadly defective and unsound. I dare not pass it by. Let us, then, have it fixed down in our minds that the sinfulness of man does not begin from without, but from within. It is not the result of bad training in early years. It is not picked up from bad companions and bad examples, as some weak Christians are too fond of saying. No! it is a family disease, which we all inherit from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and with which we are born. Created "in the image of God," innocent and righteous at first, our parents fell from original righteousness and became sinful and corrupt. And from that day to this all men and women are born in the image of fallen Adam and Eve, and inherit a heart and nature inclined to evil. "By one man sin entered into the world."—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."—"We are by nature children of wrath."—"The carnal mind is enmity against God."—"Out of the heart (naturally as out of a fountain) proceed evil thoughts, adulteries," and the like. (John 3:6; Ephes. 2:3; Rom. 8:7; Mark 7:21.) The fairest babe that has entered life this year, and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little "angel," or a little "innocent," but a little "sinner." Alas! as it lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which is bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in it the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, obstinacy, greediness, envy, jealousy, passion,—which, if indulged and let alone, will shoot up with painful rapidity. Who taught the child these things? Where did he learn them? The Bible alone can answer these questions!—Of all the foolish things that parents say about their children there is none worse than the common saying,—“My son has a good heart at the bottom. He is not what he ought to be; but he has fallen into bad hands. Public schools are bad places. The tutors neglect the boys. Yet he has a good heart at the bottom.”—The truth, unhappily, is diametrically the other way. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy's own heart, and not in the school.

(3) Concerning the EXTENT of this vast moral disease of man called sin, let us beware that we make no mistake. The only safe ground is that which is laid for us in Scripture. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart" is by nature "evil, and that continually."—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9.) Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected. Even the conscience is so blinded that it cannot be depended on as a sure guide, and is as likely to lead men wrong as right, unless it is enlightened by the Holy Ghost. In short, "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" about us. (Isa. 1:6.) The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners, and outward decorum; but it lies deep down in the constitution.

I admit fully that man has many grand and noble faculties left about him, and that in arts and sciences and literature he shows immense capacity. But the fact still remains that in spiritual things he is utterly "dead," and has no natural knowledge, or love, or fear of God. His best things are so interwoven and intermingled with corruption, that the contrast only brings out into sharper relief the truth and extent of the fall. That one and the same creature should be in some things so high and in others so low,—so great and yet so little,—so noble and yet so mean,—so grand in his conception and execution of material things, and yet so grovelling and debased in his affections,—that he should be able to plan and erect buildings like those to Carnac and Luxor in Egypt, and the Parthenon at Athens, and yet worship vile gods and goddesses, and birds, and beasts, and creeping things,—that he should be able to produce tragedies like those of Æschylus and Sophocles, and histories like that of Thucydides, and yet be a slave to abominable vices like those described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,—all this is a sore puzzle to those who sneer at "God's Word written," and scoff at us as Bibliolaters, But it is a knot that we can untie with the Bible in our hands. We can acknowledge that man has all the marks of a majestic temple about him,—a temple in which God once dwelt, but a temple which is now in utter ruins,—a temple in which a shattered window here, and a doorway there, and a column there, still give some faint idea of the magnificence of the original design, but a temple which from end to end has lost its glory and fallen from its high estate. And we say that nothing solves the complicated problem of man's condition but the doctrine of original or birth-sin and the crushing effects of the fall.

Let us remember, beside this, that every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that sin is the universal disease of all mankind. Search the globe from east to west and from pole to pole,—search every nation of every clime in the four quarters of the earth,—search every rank and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest,—and under every circumstance and condition, the report will be always the same. The remotest islands in the Pacific Ocean, completely separate from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, beyond the reach alike of Oriental luxury and Western arts and literature,—islands inhabited by people ignorant of books, money, steam, and gunpowder—uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization,—these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the abode of the vilest forms of lust, cruelty, deceit, and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin! Everywhere the human heart is naturally "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.) For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of Genesis and the Mosaic account of the origin of man,

than the power, extent, and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair, and that this pair fell (as Gen. 3 tells us), and the state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it, as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous "difficulties of infidelity."

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man, even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost's operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article, "this infection of nature doth remain,—yea, even in them that are regenerate." So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again, renewed, "washed, sanctified, justified," and made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts, and, like the leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. Sin, no doubt, in the believer's heart, has no longer dominion. It is checked, controlled, mortified, and crucified by the expulsive power of the new principle of grace. The life of a believer is a life of victory, and not of failure. But the very struggles which go on within his bosom, the fight that he finds it needful to fight daily, the watchful jealousy which he is obliged to exercise over his inner man, the contest between the flesh and the spirit, the inward "groanings" which no one knows but he who has experienced them,—all, all testify to the same great truth, all show the enormous power and vitality of sin. Mighty indeed must that foe be who even when crucified is still alive! Happy is that believer who understands it, and while he rejoices in Christ Jesus has no confidence in the flesh; and while he says, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory," never forgets to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation!

(4) Concerning the GUILT, VILENESS, and OFFENSIVENESS of sin in the sight of God, my words shall be few. I say "few" advisedly. I do not think, in the nature of things, that mortal man can at all realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of that holy and perfect One with whom we have to do. On the one hand, God is that eternal Being who "chargeth His angels with folly," and in whose sight the very "heavens are not clean." He is One who reads thoughts and motives as well as actions, and requires "truth in the inward parts." (Job 4:18; 15:15; Psa. 51:6.) We, on the other hand,—poor blind creatures, here to-day and gone to-morrow, born in sin, surrounded by sinners, living in a constant atmosphere of weakness, infirmity, and imperfection,—can form none but the most inadequate conceptions of the hideousness of evil. We have no line to fathom it, and no measure by which to gauge it. The blind man can see no difference between a masterpiece of Titian or Raphael, and the Queen's Head on a village signboard. The deaf man cannot distinguish between a penny whistle and a cathedral organ. The very animals whose smell is most offensive to us have no idea that they are offensive, and are not offensive to one another. And man, fallen man, I believe, can have no just idea what a vile thing sin is in the sight of that God whose handiwork is absolutely perfect,—perfect whether we look through telescope or microscope,—perfect in the formation of a mighty planet like Jupiter, with his satellites, keeping time to a second as he rolls round the sun,—perfect in the formation of the smallest insect that crawls over a foot of ground. But let us nevertheless settle it firmly in our minds that sin is "the abominable thing that God hateth;"—that God "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon that which is evil;"—that the least transgression of God's law makes us "guilty of all;"—that "the soul that sinneth shall die;"—that "the wages of sin is death;"—that God shall "judge the secrets of men;"—that there is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched;—that "the wicked shall be turned into hell,"—and "shall go away into everlasting punishment;"—and that "nothing that defiles shall in any wise enter" heaven. (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; James 2:10; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 2:16; Mark 9:44; Ps. 9:17; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 21:27.) These are indeed tremendous words, when we consider that they are written in the Book of a most merciful God!

No proof of the fulness of sin, after all, is so overwhelming and unanswerable as the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the whole doctrine of His substitution and atonement. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane, and cry at Golgotha, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46.) Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we shall have of sin, and the retrospect we shall take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Never till the hour when Christ comes the second time shall we fully realize the "sinfulness of sin." Well might George Whitfield say, "The anthem in heaven will be, What hath God wrought!"

(5) One point only remains to be considered on the subject of sin, which I dare not pass over. That point is its DECEITFULNESS. It is a point of most serious importance, and I venture to think it does not receive the attention which it deserves. You may see this deceitfulness in the wonderful proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God; and in their readiness to extenuate it, make excuses for it, and minimize its guilt.—"It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!" Who is not familiar with this kind of language?—You may see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases which men have coined in order to designate things which God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. What do such expressions as "fast," "gay," "wild," "unsteady," "thoughtless," "loose" mean? They show that men try to cheat themselves into the belief that sin is not quite so sinful as God says it is, and that they are not so bad as they really are.—You may see it in the tendency even of believers to indulge their children in questionable practices, and to blind their own eyes to the inevitable result of the love of money, of tampering with temptation, and sanctioning a low standard of family religion.—I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul's

disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colours, saying, "I am your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you for ever in hell." Oh, no! sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss; and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words. The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve; yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David; yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at its first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember St. Paul's words: "Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13.) It is a wise prayer in our Litany, "From the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us."

And now, before I go further, let me briefly mention two thoughts which appear to me to rise with irresistible force out of the subject.

On the one hand, I ask my readers to observe what deep reasons we all have for humiliation and self-abasement. Let us sit down before the picture of sin displayed to us in the Bible, and consider what guilty, vile, corrupt creatures we all are in the sight of God. What need we all have of that entire change of heart called regeneration, new birth, or conversion! What a mass of infirmity and imperfection cleaves to the very best of us at our very best! What a solemn thought it is, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord!" (Heb. 12:14.) What cause we have to cry with the publican, every night in our lives, when we think of our sins of omission as well as commission, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13.) How admirably suited are the general and Communion Confessions of the Prayer-book to the actual condition of all professing Christians! How well that language suits God's children which the Prayer-book puts in the mouth of every Churchman before he goes up to the Communion Table,—"The remembrance of our misdoings is grievous unto us; the burden is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past." "How true it is that the holiest saint is in himself a miserable sinner," and a debtor to mercy and grace to the last moment of his existence!

With my whole heart I subscribe to that passage in Hooker's sermon on Justification, which begins, "Let the holiest and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show unto the grand majesty of God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet influence of His tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, 'Call upon Me,' He had set us a very burdensome task? It may seem somewhat extreme, which I will speak; therefore, let every one judge of it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and not otherwise; I will but only make a demand! If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham,—If fifty, forty, thirty, twenty—yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed; but, and if He should make us an offer thus large, Search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam, find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all; and for that one man's only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned."*

That witness is true. For my part I am persuaded the more light we have, the more we see our own sinfulness: the nearer we get to heaven, the more we are clothed with humility. In every age of the Church you will find it true, if you will study biographies, that the most eminent saints—men like Bradford, Rutherford, and McCheyne—have always been the humblest men.

On the other hand, I ask my readers to observe how deeply thankful we ought to be for the glorious Gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy revealed for man's need, as wide and broad and deep as man's disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin, and study its nature, origin, power, extent, and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the Almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes: in the everlasting covenant of redemption, to which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are parties,—in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect Man in one Person,—in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification,—in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd, and Advocate,—in the precious blood He shed which can cleanse from all sin,—in the everlasting righteousness that He brought in,—in the perpetual intercession that He carries on as our Representative,—at God's right hand,—in His power to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners, His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest, His readiness to bear with the weakest,—in the grace of the Holy Spirit which He plants in the hearts of all His people, renewing, sanctifying, and causing old things to pass away and all things to become new,—in all this—and oh, what a brief sketch it is!—in all this, I say, there is a full, perfect, and complete medicine for the hideous disease of sin. Awful and tremendous as the right view of sin undoubtedly is, no one need faint and despair if he will take a right view of Jesus Christ at the same time. No wonder that old Flavel ends many a chapter of his admirable "Fountain of Life" with the touching words, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ."

In bringing this mighty subject to a close, I feel that I have only touched the surface of it. It is one which cannot be thoroughly handled in a paper like this. He that would see it treated fully and exhaustively must turn to such masters of experimental theology as Owen, and Burgess, and Manton, and Charnock, and the other giants of the Puritan school. On subjects like this there are no writers to be compared to the Puritans. It only remains for me to point out some practical uses to which the whole doctrine of sin

may be profitably turned in the present day.

(a) I say, then, in the first place, that a Scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity now-a-days which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably "something about Christ, and something about grace, and something about faith, and something about repentance, and something about holiness;" but it is not the real "thing as it is" in the Bible. Things are out of place, and out of proportion. As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of "mingle-mangle," and does no good. It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death; and those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure and mend this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old Scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven, and live like pilgrims, until they really feel that they are in danger of hell. Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin, in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in Universities. Let us not forget that "the law is good if we use it lawfully," and that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." (1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 3:20; 7:7.) Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men's attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus, and stay with Jesus, and live for Jesus, unless they really know why they are to come, and what is their need. Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

(b) In the next place, a Scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the extravagantly broad and liberal theology which is so much in vogue at the present time. The tendency of modern thought is to reject dogmas, creeds, and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatsoever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be.—Everything forsooth is true, and nothing is false! Everybody is right, and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved, and nobody is to be lost?—The Atonement and Substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and enable it to keep pace with modern science.—Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, illiberal, old-fashioned, and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish Book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the Book was completed!—Now, I know nothing so likely to counteract this modern plague as constant clear statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power, and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of these men of broad views, and demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts, and tell us whether their favourite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague earnestness, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing "something" within, which all the free inquiry and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. And then we must tell them that this gnawing "something" is the sense of sin, guilt, and corruption, which they are leaving out in their calculations. And, above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest, but submission to the old doctrines of man's ruin and Christ's redemption, and simple childlike faith in Jesus.

(c) In the next place, a right view of sin is the best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity, which has swept over England like a flood in the last twenty-five years, and carried away so many before it. I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in this system of religion, to a certain order of minds, so long as the conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our constitution called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that a sensuous ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys, and dolls, and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once let it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it but food. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. Music, and flowers, and candles, and incense, and banners, and processions, and beautiful vestments, and confessionals, and man-made ceremonies of a semi-Romish character, may do well enough for him under certain conditions. But once let him "awake and arise from the dead," and he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him mere solemn triflings, and a waste of time. Once let him see his sin, and he must see his Saviour. He feels stricken with a deadly disease, and nothing will satisfy him but the great Physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have nothing less than the bread of life. I may seem bold in what I am about to say; but I fearlessly venture the assertion, that four-fifths of the semi-Romanism of the last quarter of a century would never have existed if English people had been taught more fully and clearly the nature, vileness, and sinfulness of sin.

(d) In the next place, a right view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the overstrained theories of Perfection, of which we hear so much in these times. I shall say but little about this, and in saying it I trust I shall not give offence. If those who press on us

perfection mean nothing more than an all-round consistency, and a careful attention to all the graces which make up the Christian character, reason would that we should not only bear with them, but agree with them entirely. By all means let us aim high.—But if men really mean to tell us that here in this world a believer can attain to entire freedom from sin, live for years in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God, and feel for months together not so much as one evil thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very unscriptural.—I go even further. I say that the opinion is very dangerous to him that holds it, and very likely to depress, discourage, and keep back inquirers after salvation. I cannot find the slightest warrant in God's Word for expecting such perfection as this while we are in the body. I believe the words of our Fifteenth Article are strictly true,—that "Christ alone is without sin; and that all we, the rest, though baptized and born again in Christ, offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—To use the language of our first Homily, "There be imperfections in our best works: we do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our heart, mind, and power; we do not fear God so much as we ought to do; we do not pray to God but with many and great imperfections. We give, forgive, believe, live, and hope imperfectly; we speak, think, and do imperfectly; we fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh imperfectly. Let us, therefore, not be ashamed to confess plainly our state of imperfection."—Once more I repeat what I have said, the best preservative against this temporary delusion about perfection which clouds some minds,—for such I hope I may call it,—is a clear, full, distinct understanding of the nature, sinfulness, and deceitfulness of sin.

(e) In the last place, a Scriptural view of sin will prove an admirable antidote to the low views of personal holiness, which are so painfully prevalent in these last days of the Church. This is a very painful and delicate subject, I know; but I dare not turn away from it. It has long been my sorrowful conviction that the standard of daily life among professing Christians in this country has been gradually falling. I am afraid that Christ-like charity, kindness, good-temper, unselfishness, meekness, gentleness, good-nature, self-denial, zeal to do good, and separation from the world, are far less appreciated than they ought to be, and than they used to be in the days of our fathers.

Into the causes of this state of things I cannot pretend to enter fully, and can only suggest conjectures for consideration. It may be that a certain profession of religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age, that the streams which were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality. It may be that the vast increase of wealth in the last twenty-five years has insensibly introduced a plague of worldliness, and self-indulgence, and love of ease into social life. What were once called luxuries are now comforts and necessaries, and self-denial and "enduring hardness" are consequently little known. It may be that the enormous amount of controversy which marks this age has insensibly dried up our spiritual life. We have too often been content with zeal for orthodoxy, and have neglected the sober realities of daily practical godliness. Be the causes what they may, I must declare my own belief that the result remains. There has been of late years a lower standard of personal holiness among believers than there used to be in the days of our fathers. The whole result is that THE SPIRIT IS GRIEVED! and the matter calls for much humiliation and searching of heart.

As to the best remedy for the state of things I have mentioned, I shall venture to give an opinion. Other schools of thought in the Churches must judge for themselves. The cure for Evangelical Churchmen, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer apprehension of the nature and sinfulness of sin. We need not go back to Egypt, and borrow semi-Romish practices in order to revive our spiritual life. We need not restore the confessional, or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind! We must simply repent and do our first works. We must return to first principles. We must go back to "the old paths." We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, examine clearly what the Lord Jesus calls sin, and what the Lord Jesus calls "doing His will." We must then try to realize that it is terribly possible to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, and yet at the same time to maintain Evangelical principles and call ourselves Evangelical people! Once let us see that sin is far viler, and far nearer to us, and sticks more closely to us than we supposed, and we shall be led, I trust and believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once drawn nearer to Christ, we shall drink more deeply out of His fulness, and learn more thoroughly to "live the life of faith" in Him, as St. Paul did. Once taught to live the life of faith in Jesus, and abiding in Him, we shall bear more fruit, shall find ourselves more strong for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways. Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, shall we labour to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we shall love much. In short, as the Apostle says, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.)

Whatever some may please to think or say, there can be no doubt that an increased feeling about holiness is one of the signs of the times. Conferences for the promotion of "spiritual life" are becoming common in the present day. The subject of "spiritual life" finds a place on Congress platforms almost every year. It has awakened an amount of interest and general attention throughout the land, for which we ought to be thankful. Any movement, based on sound principles, which helps to deepen our spiritual life and increase our personal holiness, will be a real blessing to the Church of England. It will do much to draw us together and heal our unhappy divisions. It may bring down some fresh out-pouring of the grace of the Spirit, and be "life from the dead" in these later times. But sure I am, as I said in the beginning of this paper, we must begin low, if we would build high. I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin.

