

# 1 John 3:4 Commentary

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

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

From Talk Thru the Bible

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

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

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

**ESV** - Everyone who **makes a practice** of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

- **Practices** - 1Jn 3:8,9 1Ki 8:47 1Chr 10:13 2Co 12:21 Jas 5:15
- Nu 15:31 1Sa 15:24 2Ch 24:20 Isa 53:8 Da 9:11 Ro 3:20 4:15 Jas 2:9-11
- 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
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- [What does it mean that believers do not continue to sin \(1 John 3:6; 5:18\)?](#) - John MacArthur
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- F B Meyer Devotional on 1John 3:4

## **GOD'S DEFINITION OF SIN AND SINNERS**

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** 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**note**).
- (B) Christians abide in Christ and do not live in sin (1Jn 3:6**note**).
- (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**note**).
- (B) The Devil is a sinner who has been defeated (1Jn 3:8**note**).
- (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**note**).
- (B) God's children do not practice sin (1Jn 3:9**note**).

(C) God's children love one another (1Jn 3:10-note).

[Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary- Dr. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, Tony Merida](#)

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-note), and do commit and need to confess sin (1Jn 1:9-note; 1Jn 2:1-note), 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-note; cp Ro 6:12-note).

**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) 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](#))

**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. There is no other basis (**Ed:** Of course he is alluding to the Spirit of Jesus Who now lives in every believer -- He is holy and He energizes a holy walk in those He indwells. 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. Nothing else than that is righteousness. ([One or the Other - 1 John 3:10](#))

**David Allen** - John further develops his point from 1Jn 3:3-note 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-note. 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.** 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. 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. In 1Jn 3:4-8 John states or imply 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. ([1-3 John- Fellowship in God's Family Preaching the Word](#))

**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-note, 1Jn 3:2-note), to the shame or glory of His servants. This **apokaradokia** as the Apostle Paul called it (Ro 8:19-note)—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 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.

**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." ([Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#))

**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. ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary- Dr. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, Tony Merida](#))

**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. 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](#)). (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." (1John 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 verse 3 the habitual practice was to (continually) purify themselves, but in verse 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." ([Notes](#))

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** 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, cp Jesus' words in Jn 3:18, Jn 5:38, Jn 10:25-26, Lk 8:12). **John Piper** 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." ([Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Johann Bengel** - There is an antithesis to this in, he that doeth righteousness, 1 John 3:7-note. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**Practices sin** in 1Jn 3:4 presents a striking contrast with **practices righteousness** in 1Jn 2:29-note 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-note, "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself"; and 1 John 3:7, "He that does righteousness." ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**Henry Alford** - (In 1Jn 3:3-note) 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. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**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 ([1 John 3 Commentary - John Gill's Exposition on the Whole Bible](#))

**Practices** (4160)(poieo) to do and in the **present tense** expresses an action that continues. This stands in striking contrast to the continual purification (1Jn 3:3-note) and the continual practice of righteousness (1Jn 3:7-note).

As **Kenneth Wuest** explains "Now John shows the incompatibility of being a child of God and yet continuing in sin."

**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).

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). (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 Online](#)) ([The Epistles of John- An Expositional Commentary](#))

**NLT Study Bible** - 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)

**MacDonald** on **practices** - It is a matter of continual behavior, expressed by the **present**, continuous tense.

**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-note; 1Jn 3:7-note). 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-note) 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. (Baker New Testament Commentary - Exposition of James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude) (Bolding added)

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

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-note) 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 1John 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." (The Letters of John, 132-33)

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) ([Wiersbe Bible 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).

Here is an example of a somewhat unusual interpretation by **Dr. Grant Richison** 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 **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."

**Is this really what John is saying?** John does not say that **lawlessness** is carnality but that it equates with **sin**. And then Richison's sentence "Sin characterizes a *lawless believer*." O my! A "*lawless believer*" sounds like the Paul's description of a non-believer who professes to be a believer (cp Titus 1:16-[note](#))! A believer is not *lawless*, but in fact has the law of God written on his or her heart (Jer 31:33-note, Heb 8:10-[note](#), Heb 10:16-[note](#)). 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. 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-[note](#) lest you hear Jesus' words in Mt 7:21-23-[note](#). 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. Such a one can claim they are simply "*lawless believers*" as Richison calls them! 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** (**Note** - identical to John's phrase, even the tense of the verb!).' (Mt 7:21-23-[note](#)) (Bolding mine)

**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-[note](#)) which (we) received from Him (and this anointing) abides in (us), and (we) have no need for anyone to teach (us)." (1Jn 2:27-[note](#))?

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)

**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. "Every one that doeth sin" evidently balances "every one that hath this hope" (1 John 3:3-**note**), and "to do sin" is the exact opposite of "to do righteousness" (1 John 2:29-**note**).

Of course one of the clear truths from 1 Jn 3:4 is God's "definition" of **sin** as **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.

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!

**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 Online](#)) ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#))

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

**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. ([Sermon Notes](#))

**Ironsides** - There was a little boy who when his Sunday school teacher asked him this question, 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.

**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) ([Wiersbe Bible 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."

**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" ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary- Dr. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, Tony Merida](#))

**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.

**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](#))

**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](#))

**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-note; 1Jn 2:1-note)? **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)

**John Stott** agrees writing that "The first step towards holy living is to recognize the true nature and wickedness of sin." [The Letters of John by John R. W. 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)."

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-note), 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)

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**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. 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](#))