

1 John 3:9 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[INDEX FOR ALL VERSES ON 1 JOHN](#)

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

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN
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			

1John 3:9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God:

Greek: Pas o gegennemenos (RPPMSN) ek tou theou hamartian ou poiei (3SPAI) hoti sperma autou en auto

menei (3SPAI) kai ou dunatai (3SPPI) hamartanein (PAN) oti ek tou theou gegennetai (3SRPI).

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

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

KJV - Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. {is born: or, has been born}

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

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

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

Related Passages:

1 Peter 1:23-25+ Peter explains "**you have been born again** not of **seed** which is perishable but imperishable, [that is,] through the living and abiding word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDES FOREVER." And this (THE SEED) is the word which was preached to you.

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

BORN OF GOD: BECAUSE HIS SEED ABIDES

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

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

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

The Test of Righteousness)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Related Resources:

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

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

and His victory, we would forever be enslaved to Satan and sin. Any righteousness we do flows from the righteousness of Christ poured into our lives by means of the new birth. ([Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary](#))

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

Warren Wiersbe - "Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin!" Why? Because he has a new nature within him, and that new nature cannot sin. John called this new nature God's "**seed**." When a person receives Christ as his Savior, tremendous spiritual changes take place in him. He is given a new standing before God, being accepted as righteous in God's sight. This new standing is called "justification." It never changes and is never lost. The new Christian is also given a new position: he is set apart for God's own purposes to live for His glory. This new position is called "sanctification," and it has a way of changing from day to day. On some days we are much closer to Christ and obey Him much more readily. (**ED**: AMEN OR O MY!)Just as physical children bear the nature of their parents, so God's spiritual children bear His nature. The divine "seed" is in them. A Christian has an old nature from his physical birth and a new nature from his spiritual birth. The New Testament contrasts these two natures and gives them various names (SEE CHART BELOW) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#)) (As an aside Wiersbe entitles 1 John 3:1-10 "THE PRETENDERS"!) (**ED**: See [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#))

Old Nature	New Nature
"our old man" (Ro 6:6)	"the new man" (Col 3:10)
"the flesh" (Gal 5:24)	"the Spirit" (Gal 5:17)
"corruptible seed" (1Pe 1:23)	"God's seed" (1Jn 3:9)

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

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

*Immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin.
The new-born life within us keeps us holy.*

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

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

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

William MacDonald writes that John "is contrasting the regenerate man with the unregenerate, and is speaking of constant or habitual behavior. The believer does not have the sin habit. He does not defiantly continue in sin." (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

*God's nature and the grace of the Spirit abide in him and he cannot practice a life of sin;
he is born of God! A life of sin is distasteful to him who pants after holiness and desire to be like Christ*

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

and desire to be like Christ. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

*1 John 3:9 does not mean that we cannot sin;
it means that if we obey the life of God in us, we need not sin.*

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

THE NEW BIRTH: ITS EVIDENCES AND RESULTS 1 JOHN [James Smith - Handfuls on Purpose](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIKE FRUIT TREES BEARING FRUIT AFTER THEIR KIND

(Ge 1:11)

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

His seed ([sperma](#)) **abides** ([meno](#)) **in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God** - Seeds bear fruit trees after their kind and if the seed of the tree is holy, the fruit of the tree cannot be unholy. Sinners with God's **seed**, cannot continually commit sins and still claim to be born of God! As Jesus taught "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." (Mt 7:18+) **Abides** ([meno](#)) describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, or endures. John uses the present tense which in the context of God's seed abiding in us would serve to emphasize the [assurance of our salvation](#). Indeed, John's description conveys the picture of the permanence of our new birth, a regeneration which cannot be reversed. In short, he is eternally secure! This is not an excuse to wantonly commit sins. Rather it is a guarantee that he will not go on habitually sinning. As MacDonald says "This divine relationship precludes the possibility of continuance in sin as a lifestyle."

Zodhiates on **seed** - "In 1Jn 3:9 the spérma of God denotes the power of God operative through the Holy Spirit working in believers." (BORROW [The Complete Word Study Dictionary](#))

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

In regeneration, the new creation in Christ
has real, inevitable effects on our physical life of obedience.

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

W A Criswell - God's **seed** represents the new life which results from spiritual regeneration. ([Believer's Study Bible](#))

Charles Ryrie on **seed** - The divine nature given the one born of God (cf. John 1:13+; 2Pe 1:4+). This nature prevents the Christian from habitually sinning. (Borrow [The Ryrie Study Bible](#))

*"That's right. I do what I want to do, but in regeneration Christ did something to my 'wanter.'
I just don't want to do the things that you are talking about."*

-- W. T. Conner

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

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

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

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

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

*"He cannot keep sinning,"
as the seed cannot cease growing.*

-- [David Smith - Expositor's Greek Testament](#)

W E Vine on **He cannot sin** - here again, not the committal of an act is in view, but **continuance in sin**. It is not a case merely of

moral impossibility, relationship to God, once it is established, not only abides forever but precludes the possibility of **continuance of sin as a practice of the life**. This difference between the **children of God** and those who are not is categorically stated in the next verse (1 Jn 3:10+). (Collected Writings)

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

Habitual actions indicate one's character.

Charles Ryrie on **cannot sin** - I.e., **cannot sin** habitually. See note on verse 8 ("practices = continually practices. I.e., sins as a regular way of life."). Habitual actions indicate one's character. (Borrow [The Ryrie Study Bible](#))

A great deal of false theology has grown out of a misunderstanding of the tense of hamartanein here.

A T Robertson considers "cannot sin" a wrong translation because it means the believer cannot commit sin -- The present active infinitive hamartanein can only mean "and he cannot go on sinning," as is true of *hamartanei* in 1Jn 3:8 and *hamartanon* in 1Jn 3:6. For the aorist subjunctive to commit a sin see *hamartate* and *hamartei* in 1Jn 2:1+. A great deal of false theology has grown out of a misunderstanding of the tense of hamartanein here. Paul has precisely John's idea in Ro. 6:1 *hamartiai*... in contrast with *hamartesomen* in Ro. 6:15.

*Those who do habitually sin have neither seen Him nor known Him.
They are not genuine Christians.*

ESV Study Bible (borrow) - True followers of Christ do not recklessly and habitually violate what their anointing (1Jn 2:20, 27) has planted within them (see note on 1Jn 3:9-10). Those who do habitually sin have neither seen him nor known him. They are not genuine Christians.

Stephen Smalley on **he cannot sin** - John concludes this section by reminding his readers that the true child of God is (like the Father himself) opposed to sin. Whereas **the determined sinner** (the heretic in John's church, perhaps, as opposed to the orthodox Christian) **belongs to the devil** (1Jn 3:8), the spiritually reborn believer, being a member of God's family, **cannot as a settled policy act lawlessly** (cf. 1Jn 3:4). In other words, we reproduce in our lives a "family" likeness depending upon our spiritual parentage; and those who are "born of God" do not sin (cf. 1Jn 3:7, 8, 10). (BORROW [1, 2, 3 John](#))

*Christians don't go on sinning without conflict and confession.
Christians see it, hate it, confess it and fight it.
And they do so with increasing vigilance as they grow up into Christ.*

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

*No Christian can possibly be a deliberate and consistent sinner;
no Christian can live a life in which sin is dominant in all his actions.*

William Barclay - What John is saying may be put down in four stages. (a) The ideal is that in the new age sin is gone forever. (b) Christians must try to make that true and with the help of Christ struggle to avoid individual acts of sin (**ED: BETTER = THE ENABLING POWER OF THE SPIRIT - SEE Ro 8:13+**). (c) In fact all men have these lapses and when they do, they must humbly confess them to God (1Jn 1:9, Pr 28:13), Who will always forgive the penitent heart (**ED: NOTE THAT THE ACT OF CONFESSION RESTORES FELLOWSHIP. CONFESSION IS NOT A MERITORIOUS ACT THAT EARNS GOD'S FAVOR BUT DOES RESTORE FELLOWSHIP. EVERY SIN OF A BELIEVER HAS BEEN PAID FOR IN FULL ON THE CROSS. SEE Jn 19:30+**). (d) In spite of that, no Christian can possibly be a deliberate and consistent sinner; no Christian can live a life in which sin is dominant in all his actions. John is not setting before us a terrifying perfectionism (**ED: HE HAS REFUTED THAT IN 1Jn 1:8, 10**); but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way but the abnormal moment of defeat. John is

not saying that the man who abides in God cannot sin; but he is saying that the man who abides in God cannot continue to be a deliberate sinner. ([Daily Study Bible](#))

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

Born of God - Repeated for emphasis. His new nature gives him new desires, because He now has the Holy Spirit within his body (cf 1Jn 2:20, 27) and habitual unholy behavior is not even possible for a genuine born again individual.

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

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

The believer's lapses into sin are like the mischances of the weather which hinder the seed's growth. The growth of a living seed may be checked temporarily

Wuest - "**His seed**" refers to the principle of divine life in the believer. It is this principle of divine life that makes it impossible for a Christian to live habitually in sin, for the divine nature causes the child of God to hate sin and love righteousness, and gives him both the **desire** and the **power** to do God's will, as Paul says, "God is the One who is constantly putting forth energy in you, giving you both the desire and power to do His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13NLT+). **Smith** comments: "The reason of the impossibility of a child of God continuing in sin. The germ of the divine life has been implanted in our souls (**ED**: Read what God does for us in Ezek 36:27+), and it grows (**ED**: i.e., progressive sanctification or growth in holiness)—a gradual process and subject to occasional retardations, yet sure, attaining at length to full fruition (**ED**: cp Php 1:6+, 1Th 5:24+). The believer's lapses into sin are like the mischances of the weather which hinder the seed's growth. The growth of a living seed may be checked temporarily; if there be no growth, there is no life." ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

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

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

While believers can sin and even become ensnared at times in sin Thomas Manton warns that "One sin let alone and allowed, is Satan's nest-egg in our hearts, that he may come thither again and lay more." Manton added that "Faith makes us hate sin." The upshot is that if you find yourself loving sin more than loving God, then you need to read and ponder 2Cor 13:5+ "Test yourselves [to

see] if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" Peter says we need to "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." (2Pe 1:10+)

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

Colin Kruse - Putting these things together and allowing them to inform our understanding of the present verse, we may say that to be born of God here means being brought to new spiritual life by the will of God and through the agency of his Spirit. Of such people, the author says, it is impossible for them to continue to sin. The author uses a present tense form of the verb 'to sin' (hamartanō), indicating that it is sinning as an ongoing action that he has in mind here as impossible for those born of God. (See [The Letters of John - Page 124](#))

Simon Kistemaker - In Greek, the verbs express continued action, not a single occurrence. Therefore, by using the present tenses of the Greek verbs, John is saying that the believer cannot practice habitual sin. "The thought being conveyed in 1 John 3:9 is not that one born of God will never commit a sinful act but that he will not persist in sin." (Distinctive Johannine Vocabulary and the Interpretation of 1 John 3:9," WJT 40 1977: 142.)

*He keeps purifying himself (1Jn 3:3),
is constantly busy sweeping out sin.*

R C H Lenski - To this extent the Son of God has already destroyed the devil's works in everyone that has been born of God, that by regeneration has been born into a new life, has become a child of God, has God as his Father. Everyone who is so born "does not go on sinning." The present durative ποιεῖ is as vital for John's meaning here as it was in v. 6. Ο χ μαρτάνει (v. 6) = μαρτρίων ο ποιεῖ : "does not go on sinning"—"does not go on doing sin" (anarthrous: what is of the nature of sin). He keeps purifying himself (1Jn 3:3), is constantly busy sweeping out sin. (BORROW [The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude](#))

*If even isolated sins are incongruous, what is utterly impossible is persistence in sin,
'a character, a prevailing habit, and not primarily an act'*

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

*John is not talking about sinless **perfection**,
but rather about the **direction** of the life of a believer.*

Steven Cole - 1Jn 3:9 has generated a lot of confusion and controversy. It's one thing to say that no one who is born of God practices sin, but then John goes farther and states that he is not able to sin! I'm sure that my experience is like yours: I feel quite capable of sinning and years of walking with the Lord have not lessened my ability! So what does John mean? Here are some principles to guide us.

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

(2) John's main concern is not to delve into some deep theological discourse, but rather to be pastorally practical. He does not want his flock to be deceived by the heretics, whose errors lie behind the apostle's words. 1Jn 3:10 is crucial to understanding the entire passage: John wants us to be able to identify the children of God and the children of the devil by observing their behavior. To do that, he again paints in black and white, with no gray areas. His point is that those who are truly born of God practice righteousness; those who are of the devil (the only other category) do not practice righteousness. There have been many different attempts to explain 1Jn 3:9 ([John Stott in The Letters of John](#) lists seven; these are a few from his list. -ED: See also [1 John 3:9 Special Study on Ways it Has Been Interpreted](#))

(a) Some have said that John means that believers cannot commit terrible sins, such as murder or what the Catholic Church labels "mortal" sins. But, clearly, John does not specify sins, and besides, believers are capable of committing such sins.

(b) Others draw a distinction between the old and new natures of the believer, and argue that the new nature is incapable of sinning. While this may be true, it clearly is not John's meaning here. The heretics could have used this to argue, "I'm not sinning; only my old nature is!" But in 1Jn 3:10 John says that by observing the person's behavior, we can tell whether he is a child of God or of the devil. He is talking about a whole person sinning, not just his nature.

(c) Some holiness teachers think that the verse is teaching the possibility of attaining sinless perfection. They say that if you learn the secret of abiding in Christ, you will live without sin. While that may be so, John does not attribute the believer's not sinning to the abiding life, but to the fact that he has been born of God. This is true of every believer, not just those who have attained it.

(d) Some say that John means that believers cannot sin willfully or deliberately. But, both experience and Scripture show that believers are quite capable of willful, deliberate sin!

The key question in interpreting this verse is whether John is speaking about committing individual acts of sin, or is he talking about sin as a way of life? John uses the present tense throughout this section, and while the Greek present tense does not necessarily emphasize continuous action, it certainly allows for it. In 1Jn 3:8, when John says, "the devil has sinned from the beginning," the verb is present tense. Clearly he means, "From day one and persisting ever since, the devil is characterized by sinning." Thus when John says that those born of God do not practice sin and that they cannot sin, he means that it is impossible for a child of God to persist in a lifestyle marked by sin. The reason for this is not only that he has been born of God, but also that God's seed abides in him. This refers to the new life that God imparts to those He begets as His children. That word picture is helpful in understanding John's meaning. When you plant a seed in the ground, it does not sprout, grow and bear fruit in a day. It takes time, cultivation, water, and sunshine. Or, to use the human analogy, when a husband's sperm unites with his wife's ovum, new life begins. But it takes nine months before birth, and after that it takes years to grow to maturity. But, if life is present, it affects everything. It is impossible for a normal child not to grow. So John is not talking about sinless perfection, but rather about the direction of the life of a believer. If God has imparted new life to you, so that you have become His child, you cannot go on living in sin. (Ed: But I don't recommend you test the veracity of this immutable principle!) When you do fall into sin, you will recognize that you cannot go on in it. God will convict you of it and you will repent and walk in righteousness. (ED: **ILLUSTRATION**) A pig and a sheep may fall into the same mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that's its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature. If God's seed abides in you, you cannot wallow in the mud. If you like it in the mud and don't want to get out, you may need to ask whether you truly have been born of God. ([The Believer and Sin 1 John 3:4-10](#))

In this text, the key which unlocks the door of difficulty is discovered in the meaning of the Greek tenses.

[Believer's Study Bible](#) on 1Jn 3:6 and 1Jn 3:9 - Together with 1Jn 3:9 and 1Jn 5:18 (also cf. 1Jn 1:8-2:21), this verse constitutes a most difficult assignment for the reader in English. In this text, the key which unlocks the door of difficulty is discovered in the meaning of the Greek tenses. **This verse does not teach that a Christian will never commit an act of sin.** The verb employed in the Greek is in the present tense, which indicates continual action. These verses, therefore, do not claim that a Christian never sins after conversion, nor, for that matter, that a believer ever reaches perfection in his life. The present tense, in this context, indicates the breaking of the perpetual hold of sin in the life of the disciple. Thus the verse can be understood to mean, "*Whoever abides in Him does not continually and habitually sin.*" The power to overcome habitual sin is based on the invulnerability of the believer to the ravages of satanic influence (1Jn 5:18), and on "His seed" remaining in him (1Jn 3:9). The expression "His seed" is a reference to the divine principle of life that abides in a man after regeneration in Christ. This principle prevents slavery to Satan and sin.

*The idea is not just one act of sin;
the idea is that he does not live in sin.*

J Vernon McGee - "Whosoever is born of God" -- this is the new birth we have been talking about. This is what the Lord Jesus spoke of when He said to a religious ruler, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." A child of God is given a new nature, and that new nature does not and will not commit sin. The reason that the prodigal son could not stay in the pigpen is that he was not a pig. He was a son of the Father, and he longed for the Father's house. If you are a child of God, you will want to be in the Father's house, and you will long for it.

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" -- unfortunately, this gives a wrong impression here. The

idea is not just one act of sin; the idea is that he does not live in sin. John has said earlier in chapter 2, "If any man [any Christian man] sin, we have an advocate with the Father" -- the believer will sin. However, John makes it very clear that it is God's will that we live without sin: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (1John 2:1). Sin is anything contrary to the will of God, but when sin comes into our lives, John says that we have an advocate with the Father, and "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:9). Again, John is talking to believers, and he is saying that believers will sin. Therefore, when John says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," he is saying that that new nature will not continue to live in a pigpen -- never, under any circumstances will it do that.

"For his seed remaineth in him." If you are a child of God, you have a divine nature.

"And he cannot sin." Why? Because he "is born of God." John is talking about something that is real and genuine. He is not talking about some little profession which you made when you went down to the front of a church and shed a few tears. The question is: Have you been born of God? I believe in the security of the believers, but I also believe in the insecurity of make-believers. It is well for us to take an inventory and to look at our lives. We must examine ourselves and see whether we are in the faith or not. Are you really a child of God? Do you long after the things of God? That is the important thing.

Someone might say of this young man who is a homosexual, "He cannot be a child of God." I say that he can be; but if he is a child of God, he is going to give up that sin. A prodigal son ought not to be in a pigpen, and he will not live there. He is going to get out. The day will come when he will say, "I will arise and go to my Father." And his Father is not anywhere near that pigpen -- He is as far from it as He possibly can be.

Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin.

He does not go on in sin.

Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin. He does not go on in sin. When we received a new nature, we did not lose our old nature -- that is the problem. No wonder Paul cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). Only the Spirit of God can deliver you, my friend (**ED**: MEMORIZE Ro 8:13+). If you recognize that you are helpless and hopeless, if some sin binds you down, spoils your life, robs you of your joy, and you are miserable, then may I say to you that He can and He will deliver you -- if you want to be delivered. If you want to get rid of that sin, if you really want to serve Him, if you mean business with Him, He means business with you. "For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (See [Thru the Bible Vol. 56: The Epistles 1 John](#))

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

Sin dwells in him, but does not govern—it has power, but does not rule—it torments, but does not reign with a continued, unbroken supremacy

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

and conduct, in their humblings and confessions, and their holy and upright walk with God in after-years. Reader, have you ever been made sensible of the inward plague? What do you know of the warfare within—of "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh"? (Gal 5:17+) Your honest reply will decide the great question, whether you are born of God.

Jerry Bridges - OUR NORMAL PRACTICE

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. (1 JOHN 3:9)

The apostle John gave us another indicator for knowing we have eternal life: "You may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him" (1 John 2:29).

This test can be a tricky one. We might understand John to say that only those who always do what is right are born of God. Though that's certainly God's standard for us, obviously none of us measures up to it. Even John himself said, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

When John spoke of "everyone who practices righteousness," he was thinking of our normal practice, of the dominant direction of our lives.

Sometimes our obedience is marked more by desire than by performance. So we have to ask ourselves: Is my life characterized by an earnest desire and a sincere effort to obey God in all that He commands? What is my attitude toward God's Law? Do I find it to be holy, just, and good? And do I delight in it in my inner being, even though I find my sinful nature struggling against it? (See Romans 7:12, 22–23.)

Accompanying our sincere desire to obey God will be a heightened sensitivity to our indwelling sin. Often it's our increased awareness of sin that causes us to doubt our salvation or to give Satan an inroad into our minds to suggest that "a Christian wouldn't sin like you do." But Satan would certainly not suggest such a thought to an unbeliever. Rather, he wants unbelievers to be complacent about their sin. So turn the tables on Satan and your own internal doubts. Ask yourself if those accusations or doubts are not really a sign that you do trust Christ. (See [Holiness Day by Day: Transformational Thoughts](#))

ILLUSTRATION - H A Ironside - When I think of **justification**, I think of a forensic act of God by which I am cleared of every charge of guilt. When I think of **regeneration**, I think of the imparting of a new nature through the power of the Holy Spirit in which the whole direction of my life is changed. Years ago when I went to California as a boy, the only oranges we knew were the ones with seeds. But then two of the Washington navel orange trees were brought to Riverside from Brazil and cultivated. Cuttings were taken from these parent trees at Riverside, and orange trees were budded with the Washington navel shoots, and their character was completely changed. A man having a forty acre orchard and not wanting to be left completely without fruit, would have the tops of one half of the trees cut off. Twenty acres would go on bearing the oranges with the seeds. But he would cut under the bark of the lopped trees, and put in the navel orange cuttings, and in a couple of years all those trees would have new branches and would be loaded with oranges. I might say to the owner, "What kind of oranges are these?" "Washington navel oranges," he would reply. "Is that the only kind of oranges they bear? Don't they sometimes bear oranges with seeds?" "Oh no," he would say; "A budded tree does not produce seeded oranges." But even as he speaks I stoop down and see a little shoot under the branches coming out of the trunk of the tree, and say, "Look, what is that shoot?" He would snip it off, or taking his knife out of his pocket would cut it away, saying, "That's from below the graft. It must be pruned off." You see what is characteristic of the budded tree is that it bears the navel oranges, but if one does not watch, below the grafting there will be a shoot of the old nature. Likewise as children of God we cannot go on living in sin. If you ever find a Christian slipping into anything unclean or unholy, you know that this comes from below the graft- it is the old nature manifesting itself! How can you keep the old nature from producing sin? By using the pruning knife of self-judgment. Whenever you find any tendency of rebellion against God, any tendency of self-will, any tendency to think of unclean or unholy things, get out the pruning knife and use it unsparingly on yourself. These tendencies are of the old nature, not of the new, and they must not be allowed to grow and develop, or they will destroy your fellowship with God. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,...because he is born of God." The new life given to him is eternal life. It abides in him, and he cannot continue in sin because he is born of God. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

Sam Storms - Special Study
1 John 3:9 (1 John 5:18)
And the Doctrine of Perseverance

From [1 John 3:9 and the Doctrine of Perseverance](#)

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

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

(1) To avoid the difficulty some have narrowed the definition of "sin" to notorious crimes or offences against love (this was the view of both Augustine and Luther).

(2) It has been suggested that what John means is that a Christian cannot sin because what is sin in the life of an unbeliever is not regarded as such by God when committed by a believer. This is contrary to both John and the rest of the NT.

(3) One interpretation draws a distinction between the "old" nature in the Christian and the "new" nature. The "old" nature may continue to sin but the "new" cannot. But how do we isolate a "nature" from the "individual" himself/herself? We may speak of "flesh" and "spirit" in a person, but it is always the person who sins or does not sin, not merely a "nature".

(4) Others say John is speaking about the ideal and not reality. The argument is: Since all anticipate that sinlessness will be characteristic in the age to come, and since John believed that the age to come had come (1John 2:8), he naturally asserted the sinlessness of Christians!

(5) Some say that John, in the heat of controversial circumstances, breaks forth in holy passion and speaks with apparent exaggeration and over-emphasis.

(6) One view stresses 1John 3:6 where it is stated that the one who **"abides"** in him does not sin. They contend that this "abiding" in Christ is not descriptive of all Christians but is a condition which only some (those "in fellowship") believers fulfill. The degree of a believer's holiness, then, and his ability to sin or not sin are dependent on whether or not he **"abides"**. When one is abiding in Christ he cannot sin. When one does not abide, one does sin. But 1John 3:9 makes it clear why a Christian doesn't practice sin, indeed, is unable to sin, and it has nothing to do with abiding. It is because he/she **"is born of God"**.

(7) Others say that the sin of which John speaks in 1John 3:9 is willful and deliberate sin. The Christian, so they say, cannot commit such deliberate sin in the face of the Lord. Oh, really? What of David?

(8) A few take John quite literally. Hence they believe he is teaching **perfectionism**. 1John 3:9 proves that sinlessness is attainable in this life. The statements in 1John 1:8,10 and especially 1John 2:1 are describing the immature believer who although not yet sinless may still become such through diligent activity and love.

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

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

(10) **The view adopted by most commentators is that the sin a Christian does not and cannot commit is habitual, persistent, unrepentant sin.** John is not concerned so much with the momentary, individual acts of sin as he is with the overall characteristic tendencies and inclinations of a person's life. John is looking at the pervasive temper of one's overall experience in life, not at the singular incidents individually. John is not taking a snapshot, but a moving picture. His repeated use of the Greek present tense appears to bear this out. He focuses on the habitual character of the activity in view.

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

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

John also says the one begotten of God **is not able to sin**". But again notice that **"to sin"** is not an aorist infinitive but a present infinitive. If the infinitive had been aorist John would be contradicting what he said in 1John 2:1. The present infinitive again indicates

that he has in mind **the inability of the born-again believer to habitually live in sin as if it were the prevailing temper of his soul.**

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

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

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

GREEK WORD STUDY

Abides (3306)(**meno**) in simple terms means to remain in the same place or position over a period of time. It means to reside, stay, live, lodge, tarry or dwell. Menō describes something that remains where it is, continues in a fixed state, or endures. **Meno** can mean "to take up permanent residence" or "to make yourself at home." **Meno** is the root of the Greek noun mone which means mansion or habitation (Jn 14:2, 23). More than one half of the uses of **meno** are by John in his Gospel and letters. Here is a summary of some of the nuances of meno related specifically to dwelling or abiding in Christ - (1) to dwell in God (or Christ) means that we walk as Christ walked (1Jn 2:6, Php 2:5, Jn 13:15); (2) to dwell in Christ means that we don't habitually live in sin (1Jn 3:6); (3) to dwell in Christ means that we continue in His Word (Jn 8:31, 1Jn 2:17); (4) to dwell in Christ means that we bear fruit (Jn 15:5, Heb 13:5, Col 1:10, Ro 6:22, Php 4:7, 1Co 16:5, Jn 4:36)

MENO IN JOHN'S EPISTLES - 1 Jn. 2:6; 1 Jn. 2:10; 1 Jn. 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:19; 1 Jn. 2:24; 1 Jn. 2:27; 1 Jn. 2:28; 1 Jn. 3:6; 1 Jn. 3:9; 1 Jn. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:15; 1 Jn. 3:17; 1 Jn. 3:24; 1 Jn. 4:12; 1 Jn. 4:13; 1 Jn. 4:15; 1 Jn. 4:16; 2 Jn. 1:2; 2 Jn. 1:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

BDAG says sperma can refer to "genetic character, nature, disposition, character, of the divine sperma (the word of God; the beginning or germ of a new life, planted in us by the Spirit of God; the grace that makes us holy) that dwells in one who is and makes it 'impossible for such a person to sin (ED: continually) - 1 Jn 3:9." (BORROW [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament, and other early Christian literature:](#))

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

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

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

Sperma in the NT 43x in 40 verses - children(7), conceive*(1), descendant(4), descendants(16), posterity(1), seed(10), seeds(4). Matt. 13:24; Matt. 13:27; Matt. 13:32; Matt. 13:37; Matt. 13:38; Matt. 22:25; Mk. 4:31; Mk. 12:19; Mk. 12:20; Mk. 12:21; Mk. 12:22; Lk. 1:55; Lk. 20:28; Jn. 7:42; Jn. 8:33; Jn. 8:37; Acts 3:25; Acts 7:5; Acts 7:6; Acts 13:23; Rom. 1:3; Rom. 4:13; Rom. 4:16; Rom. 4:18; Rom. 9:7; Rom. 9:8; Rom. 9:29; Rom. 11:1; 1 Co. 15:38; 2 Co. 9:10; 2 Co. 11:22; Gal. 3:16; Gal. 3:19; Gal. 3:29; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 2:16; Heb. 11:11; Heb. 11:18; 1 Jn. 3:9; Rev. 12:17

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