

How to Win over Sin

1 John 3:4-9

1. In *Moody Magazine*, Carl Armerding told the story of watching a wildcat in a zoo. **"As I stood there,"** he said, **"an attendant entered the cage through a door on the opposite side. He had nothing in his hands but a broom. Carefully closing the door, he proceeded to sweep the floor of the cage."** The worker had no weapon to ward off an attack by the beast. In fact, when he got to the corner of the cage where the wildcat was lying, he poked the animal with the broom. The wildcat hissed at him and then lay down in another corner of the enclosure. He remarked to the attendant, **"You certainly are a brave man."** **"No, I ain't brave,"** he replied as he swept. **"Well, then, that cat must be tame."** **"No,"** came the reply, **"he ain't tame."** **"If you aren't brave and the wildcat isn't tame, then I can't understand why he doesn't attack you."** The man chuckled, then replied with an air of confidence, **"Mister, he's old -- and he ain't got no teeth."** Too often Christians think of the Devil in that way. He may be old, but the Bible says in 1 Pet 5:8, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."**

2. Some people question the existence of the enemy. D.L. Moody once said that he knew Satan was real for two practical reasons. First, the Bible tells us so and second because he had done business with him. All around us is evidence of the presence of Satan. How else can we explain some of the horrible and grotesque acts in this world? Years ago, Billy Graham said, **"Our world is on fire and man without God cannot control the flames. The fires of greed, hate and lust are sweeping uncontrollably around our globe. We live in the midst of crisis, danger, fear and death."**

3. Sin is not just a problem of humanity. It is a personal problem. A reporter once asked G.K. Chesterson, **"What's wrong with the world?"** He replied simply, **"I am."** The Bible tells us that unbelievers are in bondage to sin. Before we came to Christ we couldn't help but sin. It was in our nature. However, as believers we are no longer under bondage. We don't have to sin; but sometimes we choose to sin.

4. I can sum up what John says in these six verses with two words: **DON'T SIN**. In this passage there are at least four keys to help us win over sin.

I. Understand the What of Sin Is: Lawlessness (vv.4-5).

A. The Problem: Lawlessness Abounds Everywhere (v.4).

1. in this first verse John gives us a definition of sin. V.4 says **"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."**

2. **"Lawlessness"** is not just breaking man's laws, but God's law. **"Lawlessness"** means acting as though there are no laws, being a law unto yourself, making up your own rules for life and disregarding those that already exist. Lawlessness says, **"I don't care what the Bible says. I don't care what society says. I'm going to do what I want to do."**

3. **"Lawlessness"** has many forms. It's easy to recognize in the defiant, radical young person who rejects all restraint and convention and seeks total personal freedom at any cost. But just as lawless is the other extreme, the old person who warms himself in the smug self-righteousness of his own respectability. Both disregard God's law. Both attitudes are infected with the virus of sin.

4. In Mt.24:12, Jesus said of the last days, **"Lawlessness will abound..."**

Look around. Our world is filled with "lawlessness."

B. The Solution: Jesus is the Only Answer (v.5).

1. EDUCATION will not overcome lawlessness. Today information is king. This has rightly been dubbed the information age. I recently heard that the information amassed by humanity prior to 1845 could be described as a stack of papers one-inch thick. The information gained from 1845 to 1945 would be a stack 3 inches thick. However, the information we gained from 1945 to 1975 would be represented in a stack of paper higher than the Washington Monument! Today it is said that our information rate doubles every few years. Still, man is lawless. If anything, the more humanity learns the more lawless humanity becomes.

2. PSYCHOLOGY will not overcome lawlessness. For the last generation man has thought that if people could simply understand the mind, learn why we do the things we do, everything would be straightened out. Now there are therapists on every corner but lawlessness still abounds.

3. LEGISLATION will not overcome lawlessness. As crime rates climb we hear cries for less guns, more police officers and more prisons. Even as gun laws become more restrictive, more police are cruising the streets and new prisons are filled, lawlessness still abounds.

4. Carlos Romulo, former Philippine ambassador said, "*We have harnessed the atom, but we will never make war obsolete until we find a force to bridle the passions of men.*"

5. John tells us the only way lawlessness can be cured is in Jesus. He says, "**You know that He [Jesus] was manifested to take away our sins and in Him there is no sin.**" John the Baptist cried out, "**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**" (Jn.1:29).

I love Ray Stedman's comment on this verse, "*This is not merely an empty claim. It has been the demonstration of over 2000 years of human history. Again and again in every generation, the hardest cases have responded to this amazing remedy – homosexuals, alcoholics, drug addicts, sex addicts, acid heads, murderers, thieves, everyone. Even more difficult cases have surrendered – the proud, the intellectuals, the bitter, the cynical, the angry young men, the jaded old people. And always there have been the despairing, the wounded in spirit, the hopeless, the pathetic, the pitiful, the lost, broken derelicts that float through life. Jesus touches every race – the Chinese, Indians, Africans, Russians, and Eskimos. No matter where or when man has lived it is always the same story, always the same deliverance, always the same results: the healing of lawlessness. The miracle occurs when men and women, boys and girls, come to know Jesus Christ and receive Him into their lives. Then the sickness begins to heal*"

C. The Application: Believers are not to Return to Sin.

1. V.5 says "**in Him there is no sin.**" That's our goal! Rom.6:19 says, "**...Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness [lawlessness], so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness**" (NIV).

II. Maintain Your Fellowship with Jesus: Abide in Him (v.6).

A. Intimate Fellowship with Jesus keeps us from Sin.

1. If you've been paying attention you may have noticed that throughout 1

John, we see the word "**abides**" or "**abide**" a lot: 23 times in 18 verses. To "**abide in Him**" means to have a relationship with Jesus where we enjoy fellowship with Him. It refers to intimacy, having our life in Him and having His Word and His Spirit in us.

2. John says, "**Whoever abides in Him does not sin.**" He says something similar down in verse 9, "**Whoever is born of God does not sin.**" What does he mean? Are we, as believers, really sinless? Does a real Christian never sin?

If that is what it means then you and I both know that all of us here are in trouble, because we do sin. I am sure that your experience is the same as mine. Although I do not want to disappoint my heavenly Father, and although the Holy Spirit in me urges me away from sin—sometimes I do give in to temptation and I sin. What does this mean? Am I lost?

Turn back to 1:8. John says here, "**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**" In 2:1 John says "**If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father...**" John appears to say in these verses that even Christians do sin sometimes. What's going on here? Is there a contradiction between these verses and what John has just said in chapter 3?

3. The answer is in the Greek tense of the verb in these verses of chapter 3. It is a present continuous tense. Some other translations of this verse make that clearer. The NIV translate it "**keeps on sinning**" or "**continues to sin.**" The NASB translates verse 9, "**practices sin.**" The NCV says it well, "**So anyone who lives in Christ does not go on sinning. Anyone who goes on sinning has never really understood Christ and has never known him.**" It does not mean that the one who abides in Christ cannot commit sin; rather it means no one who abides in Him practices habitual sin.

4. *The most important key to winning over sin is to abide in fellowship with Jesus!* Remember 2:28, "**Abide in Him that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed.**"

5. Jesus said in Jn.15:10, "**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love...**" In other words, if you obey Me you abide in Me. Abiding requires obedience by faith.

6. We may find it difficult to love some believers yet we know God commands us to do so. When we obey the command anyway, we find the abiding power of God! Sensual lust is a big temptation. When we obey God and flee it, great abiding power follows!

7. We abide in Jesus by not allowing the enemy to have a foothold in our lives. Eph.4:27 tells us not to "**give place to the devil.**"

A man in Haiti wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. The only man who would buy it offered him half as much. He agreed to sell all of the house but a nail above the front door. Later he asked to buy the house back and was refused. So he hung the rotting corpse of a dead dog on the nail until the house was uninhabitable. If we leave the devil a foothold in our life, he will ruin our fellowship with God.

B. The Absence of Fellowship is a Sign of Unbelief. John says "**Whoever sins [characteristically keeps on sinning] has neither seen him nor known Him.**"

III. Beware of Your Enemy: Satan (vv.7-8).

A. Don't let the Devil Deceive You (v.7).

1. In 2:26 John has already warned us that there are those who would "**deceive**" us. However, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is the master deceiver.
2. John says, "**He who practices righteousness is righteous just as He [Jesus] is righteous.**" In other words, The one who does not keep on living a characteristically sinful lifestyle, but abides in Jesus shows that He has been made righteous by Jesus. Because Jesus is righteous and Jesus lives in me, righteousness will break out in my life!
3. Did you know, Satan loves religion. Religion is one of his most deceptive tools. He fools people into thinking that if they will go to church, receive baptism, give money, wear the right clothes, carry a Bible, learn religious jargon, etc... they can then do whatever they want to do. They will feel secure because they are religious.
4. In Jesus' time, the Pharisees had all the religion you can imagine. They wore the right clothes, memorized the OT, prayed on the street corners, and gave their tithes. Yet Jesus said to them in Mt.23:27, "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**"
5. Jesus is not interested in religion; He is interested in you having a relationship with Him that results in righteousness. He wants you to abide in Him so that His love, His goodness and His mercy might flow through you.
6. Satan is dead set against you showing love, goodness and mercy. He's like the rancher who put up a NO-TRESPASSING sign at his gate that said, "**STOP. I know you're thinking about crossing this gate. What you should know is that if the Coyotes, Cactus, Mesquite, Heat, Dust or Rattlers don't get you, I will.**"

B. Jesus came to Destroy the Work of the Devil (v.8).

1. John says "**He who sins** [continuously characteristically lives in sin] **is of the devil for the devil has sinned from the beginning.**" He was Lucifer, a beautiful angel who led a rebellion against God (cf. Is.14; Ez.28).
2. Just as the presence of Jesus in the life of a believer causes him to do righteousness, the presence of Satan in the life of an unbeliever causes him to live in continual sin.
3. John 10:10 says, "**The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...**" He does not want to steal your house, your car or your money. He wants to steal your freedom and joy in Christ.

Martin Luther wrote, "*The devil takes no holiday; he never rests. If beaten, he rises again. If he cannot enter in front, he steals in the rear. If he cannot enter at the rear, he breaks through the roof or enters by tunneling under the threshold. He labors until he is in. He uses great cunning and many a plan. When one miscarries, he has another and continues his attempts until he wins.*"

4. In the last half of John 10:10, Jesus said, "**I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly**" Here in v.8, John

tell us, **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."**

5. Jesus came in the flesh, lived for us, died for us and rose again for us that we might have the abundant life! He came to destroy Satan's influence over you. Don't go back now and sell out to him!

An upscale neighborhood experienced a garbage company strike during the Christmas season. Mounds of putrid garbage stacked up along alleys and curbs until the stench was unbearable. One fellow had a bright idea. He wrapped his garbage in festive Christmas paper and left it on the front porch overnight. Sure enough, thieves stole his garbage. Satan loves to wrap sin in bright attractive packages. However, sin still stinks. Don't sell out to your enemy!

IV. Live Out of Your New Nature: Righteousness (v.9-10).

John says in verse 9, **"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."**

Again the Apostle John is saying here that a Christian cannot persist in habitual, continual sin because he is **"born of God."** We cannot sin without a struggle or without a sense of grief so powerful that ultimately, despite our struggles, we will be brought to repentance and a forsaking of sin. What John is declaring to us, then, is that sin is no longer natural to the believer. We have a new nature because we have been born again from above. Though, for a time, we may slip into sin rather easily, nevertheless, sin is now contrary to our nature.

When we were saved, God gave us a new nature. That is what John means by **"His seed."** The word, **"seed,"** is the Greek word, *"sperm,a"* it means something sown, or the offspring of that seed. Jesus, in explaining His parable of the wheat and the tares says in Matthew 13:37,38, **"He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom."** In several passages it is translated *"offspring or descendants."* In Galatians 3:16 Paul identifies the Seed of Abraham as Christ (cf. Heb 2:16). And in Galatians 3:29 he says, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."**

When we are born again, God puts His Seed in us. Jesus Himself comes to live in us through His Holy Spirit. So we have a new nature that is not sinful **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Cor.5:17). "When we are born again, something very radical has happened to us. There is a deep, radical, inward transformation which changes us from the bottom up. Because of that change, the process can never be reversed. God's seed abides in us and we cannot persist in habitual sin because there is a root within, a life that is constantly surging up, that simply will not permit (sin) to go on forever." (Stedman).

This means that after we have been born again, the Spirit begins to point to certain things in our life and He says, *"These must go."* Now, often we try to downplay them and justify them. We say, "these are just little things." But there are no little sins. These are the things that keep us in bondage. They are the reason for our restlessness, our distress, our depression, and our heartache. And because God loves us, he will not put up with them. The Holy Spirit convicts us saying, "What are you going to do about this?"

Have you ever had that experience? Have you known what it means for the Spirit of God to say "No," and, despite everything you do, you cannot get away from that "No"? I have

had times as a Christian when I have felt the full force of some temptation, and I was in a circumstance where I could have sinned, I had every opportunity to do it, and I felt a desire to do so, but I couldn't sin. Something held me back; I just couldn't do it, despite all my desire. That is the Spirit saying, "No!" That is God's seed abiding in us.

It is possible for both a sheep and a pig to fall into a mud hole, but the difference in their nature becomes immediately evident in their reaction. The pig is perfectly happy. He rolls over on his back, singing "Home Sweet Home." But the sheep is very disturbed, troubled, unhappy and miserable, and earnestly desires to get out. And will get out.

True Christians cannot persist in a lifestyle of sin. If you are claiming to be a Christian, but you are not turning from sin—if you are going on week after week, month after month, year after year in a condition and relationship that you know is wrong, then you may not be a Christian at all. Despite your claims, despite your attendance in church or anything else, you have never been born again! This is the proof of it. Isn't that what John says? No one who persists in sin, no one who habitually remains in a rebellious, lawless attitude toward God, has ever seen him or known him.

Are you winning over sin? Have you been born again?