

Review:

1. Test 1 – Have I experienced godly sorrow that produces repentance?
2. Test 2 – Has my repentance produced fruit?
3. Test 3 – Has my faith persevered through trials?
4. Test 4 – Is my life characterized by obedience?

And now Test 5...

Do I practice sinning?

This test might sound similar to Test 3, but Scripture differentiates between a life characterized by obedience and someone who practices sinning, so I'm going to differentiate between them. In other words, b/c Scripture presents these as two different tests I want to present them as two different tests. And as we continue this morning I think you'll see the differences.

Sin is something we shouldn't "practice." I've chosen this word, b/c it's the word used in a few places in Scripture.

As I've said w/ each test, it doesn't really matter what I say. It only matters what Scripture says. So let me give you some verses that support this test...

In **Rom 1:29-31** Paul has a long list of sins and sinners...

Rom 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God (now listen to this...), THAT THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS ARE DESERVING OF DEATH, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

So he says the people who **practice** these sins deserve death! This sounds terrifying since we've all committed most of these sins, but the key to understanding these verses is found in the word **practice**.

- Paul distinguishes between people who have committed these sins, versus people who **practice** these sins.
- There's a difference between **practicing** something versus struggling against it and grieving over it.

Paul has a similar list of sins in **Gal 5:19-21**. Let me start reading at **verse 21**...

Gal 5:21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Again, we've all committed a number of the sins Paul listed, but there's a difference between committing these sins and practicing them.

Paul has a similar list in **1 Cor 6:9 -10** and in **verse 10** he says, **“And such were some of you.”**

After we become Christians we still commit some of the sins Paul listed, but they no longer characterize our lives. Therefore we can no longer be identified by those titles: liar, adulterer, murderer, etc.

Listen to this verse as Paul discusses mourning over people who practice sinning...

2 Cor 12:21 I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which THEY HAVE PRACTICE D.

Paul says he's going to **mourn** for the people who haven't repented of these sins, but have practiced them instead. Why is Paul going to mourn for these people? Because they're unbelievers who are going to hell. They don't know Christ or they wouldn't act this way.

So while I think the truth of this test is taught in a few places in Scripture, there's one place in particular that I think makes it very clear and that's **1 John 3**.

Before we turn there though, let me remind you of something I shared w/ you when we went over Test 4...

John wrote his gospel so people would believe in Jesus...

John 20:31 these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Then John wrote 1 John to give believers confidence that they possess eternal life...

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

During this discussion of salvation we could start to wonder if God wants us questioning whether we're saved. This verse makes it clear that God wants you to **know that you have eternal life.** Salvation isn't something God wants us walking around doubting. But it is something He wants us to test or examine as we've discussed.

Since John wants us to know we have eternal life, he provides tests in his book. We're looking at the second one this morning.

Next please look at a few verses in **1 John 1**...

1 John 1:8 I f we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Then, just to make sure we don't miss this point, he says the same thing in

verse 10 ...

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

John used the words **we** and **us** in both verses showing he's talking to believers.

The point is, on this side of heaven, believers never reach a point of sinlessness. You might remember in the previous test I mentioned John's repeated use of the phrase, "If we say..." John uses that phrase again to point out that if we say we are w/o sin we do two things:

1. **We deceive ourselves.**
2. **We make [God] a liar.**

So as we go through this test, it's not a test to see if you never sin. If that was the standard, none of us would – or could – be saved.

So what is the test?

Scripture does a tremendous job providing balance in many areas, and sin in a believer's life is one of those areas. Because Scripture seems to teach two truths pretty clearly:

1. First, we'll never be sinless on this side of heaven.
2. Second, Christians sin, but we don't practice it.

The balance looks like this:

- **Verses 8** and **10** are referring to the sinful disposition we have – so we're going to sin – but there shouldn't be an unbroken pattern of sin in our lives.
- John didn't deny that Christians sin, but he denied that we can live in sin. Sin can't be a lifestyle for Christians.
- We never stopping sinning completely and to believe differently is a lie, but at the same time believers can't practice sin.
- Christians sin and feel convicted, but people who enjoy deliberate sin and don't feel convicted aren't saved.
- Christians can't have habitual, deliberate, consistent, persistent sin that characterizes their lives.

If you see people who throw themselves into sin wholeheartedly w/ no restraint but claims to be a Christian, their salvation should be in doubt.

With the last test we discussed that Christians can never reach a place of perfect obedience, but they can have lives characterized by obedience. Likewise, Christians can never reach a place of perfect sinlessness, but they can have lives that aren't characterized by sin.

Now we can take a look at **1 John 3:1** ...

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

When unbelievers sin, they are sinning against their Creator, but when believers sin they are sinning against their Father. When unbelievers sin they are sinning against the Law. When believers sin they are sinning against love.

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

There's a tension that exists between the beginning of the verse and the end of the verse: **we are children of God and we shall be like Him.** This tension allows for believers to sin. We are God's children, but we aren't like Him yet.

The words **we shall be like Him** don't mean we become divine, but it does mean we'll be similar in regards to the glorified, resurrected bodies we'll receive. We'll be perfectly sanctified, completely free from our sin natures.

Paul explains it like this...

Phil 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Now for believers who know we're going to be like Him, there's something we do. Look at **verse 4** ...

3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The **hope** John is referring to is the **hope** he mentioned in the previous verse: **[being] like Him** and **[seeing] Him as He is.** The relationship this has to the previous verse is everyone who has this **hope** knows Jesus **is pure** and therefore tries to **purify** himself too. Since we know we're going to **be like Him** in the future, we should seek to be like Him now.

The words **purifies himself** are the key to this test. We strive to remove sin from our lives. We play a part in this process:

- **2 Cor 7:1 b let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**
- **1 Pet 1:22 a You have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit**

People who won't do this are showing they're not **children of God.**

Now the following verses – in particular verses 4 through 10 – deal w/ people who won't engage in this purifying; people who are not **children of God** ...

4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

These verses contain four reasons why true Christians can't habitually practice sin, and **this is the first reason Christians can't practice sin**: practicing sin is incompatible w/ the Law of God.

Believers have an affection for God's Law. We don't obey God's Law perfectly, but we have an affection for it:

- **Psa 119:77b For Your law is my delight.**
- **Psa 119:97 Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day.**
- **Rom 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.**

Unbelievers on the other hand do not have an affection for God's Law. You can see how John has moved from discussing believers to unbelievers. Believers are those who purify themselves. Unbelievers are those who don't purify themselves. In other words, as he says, they **commit sin**.

The **sin** John describes in this verse and the following verses is not occasional sin, but a consistent lifestyle of sin. The verb for **commits** in the Greek conveys the idea of making sin a habitual practice. This comes out in other translations:

- **ESV makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness**
- **NASB and BSB practices sin practices lawlessness**

There are several definitions of sin in the Bible:

- **Rom 14:23b whatever is not from faith is sin.**
- **Pro 24:9a the devising of foolishness is sin.**
- **James 4:17 to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.**
- **1 John 5:17a all unrighteousness is sin.**

In this verse John also describes sin as **lawlessness**. This is a great definition for this account, b/c it's presenting sin as something done very defiantly.

This is not the absence of law but active rebellion against God's law. John MacArthur said, *"The term 'lawlessness' conveys more than transgressing God's Law. It conveys the ultimate sense of rebellion, i.e. living as if there was no law or ignoring what laws exist."*

These people make a practice of disregarding the divine standard of God and resort to making their own rules for themselves.

Jesus made it clear that those who **practice lawlessness** are unsaved:

- **Matt 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS!'**
- **Matt 13:41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS,**

²³ And

In both verses notice the word **practice**. We've all committed **lawlessness**, but there's a difference between the person who commits it versus practices it or makes a habit of it.

Now let's look at the next verse...

5a And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins,

In **verse 2** John said **when He is revealed**. John was looking forward to Jesus' **Second Coming**. With the words **He was manifested**, John is looking back to Jesus' **First Coming**, and he gives two reasons for Jesus' First Coming:

1. **Verse 5** to take away our sins.
2. **Verse 8** to destroy the works of the devil.

The purpose of the Incarnation was for Jesus to take away our sins. If Christ is sinless and the purpose of His coming was to **take away our sins**, then whoever **abides in Him does not sin**. Again, the idea is practicing sin.

This is **the second reason Christians can't practice sin**: it's incompatible w/ the work of Christ. Christ died to sanctify us, or make us holy. Sinning is contrary to Christ's work of breaking the power of sin in the believer's life.

This is why in **Phil 3:18** Paul said unbelievers **are enemies of the cross of Christ**. As wonderful as it is, there's more to death's Christ on the cross than just providing our salvation. Jesus also died to break the power sin has over us.

This is why John says those who go on sinning are not saved. Look at the rest of **verse 5** and then **verse 6...**

5b and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

The phrase **does not sin** is similar to the phrase **commits sin** in **verse 4**. Again, the idea is making a practice of sin. A number of translations, like the NIV, NLT, ESV, BSB, and ISV say **does not keep on sinning**.

Jesus is the sinless One (**in Him there is no sin**) and to claim to have a relationship w/ Him while practicing sin is a contradiction in terms. People who practice sin are proving they don't know Christ and therefore are not abiding in Him.

To **abide** in Christ means to have fellowship w/ Him, and not only do people who practice sin have no fellowship w/ Him, it says they **have neither seen Him nor known Him**. John MacArthur said the "*pronouncement is absolutely clear — salvation never took place.*"

Let's look at **verse 7** ...

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

More than likely there were counterfeit Christians in John's day trying to convince people they could be true believers while practicing sin. John told his readers – including us – not to be **deceived** by their lives.

We talked about this verse when covering the fourth test, so I don't want to spend much time on it again. But I will remind you of one thing: whenever you see a verse that begins w/ the words **let no one deceive you**, you know you're looking at an area that contains a strong temptation for people to be deceived.

And what's the deception?

- We're all sinners...
- We're all saved by grace through faith as opposed to being saved by our sinlessness ...
- We never obey perfectly...

So there can be a temptation to believe a lifestyle of sin is acceptable.

- And this is a deception.
- True believers don't practice sin.

But according to John, when people practice sin but claim to be believers, there are only two possibilities:

1. They're deceived. They think they're Christians when they're not.
2. They're deceivers. They're lying.

So we want to make sure we don't let anyone deceive us into thinking we can be believers while practicing sin.

Let's look at **verse 8** ...

8a He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.

If you're going to have this sort of discussion of sin, you're going to have to mention the devil. Let's deal w/ the words **the devil has sinned from the beginning** first...

This doesn't mean **from the beginning of time**, since we know **the devil** used to be a godly angel. It means from the **beginning of him** becoming the devil (accuser) and Satan (enemy).

So there's a contrast in these verses:

- **Verse 5** says Jesus who has no sin. He's the obedient Son of God: **Phil 2:8** says **obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**
- The devil does nothing but sin. He's the rebellious enemy of God.

And John mentions the **devil** at this point for two reasons...

First, John wants to associate the sin he's been discussing w/ the devil. He's the originator and instigator of the sin that's committed.

Second, John is creating a contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. John frequently identifies believers as children of God:

- **1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD...**
- **10 In this the CHILDREN OF GOD and the CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL are manifest...**

So John has been identifying Christians as children of God, and now he identifies unbelievers as children of the devil. That's what he means when he says **He who sins is OF THE DEVIL.** Again, the words **he who sins** refers to practicing sin. This is the distinguishing mark of children of the devil.

Think of Jesus' words to the religious leaders in **John 8:44a " You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning."** Even though John said this to the religious leaders, it's true of all unbelievers.

When we went through Test 4 I said, "Family likeness is indicative of family membership." I said this b/c we were in **1 John 2** and John says rebirth in the family of God produces righteousness. Righteousness is an indication of belonging to God's family. But the opposite is equally true: practicing sin is evidence of being part of the devil's family.

You could say it like this:

- With the fourth test that we looked at in **1 John 2**, John established that righteousness or obedience is the identifying mark of believers.
- With the fifth test in **1 John 3**, John establishes that wickedness is the identifying mark of unbelievers.

Since Jesus came to **destroy the works of the devil**, to practice sin is to show you are **of the devil** and not of Christ. The devil's sinful nature is shown through the lives of those who belong to him.

The logic here is clear:

- If a man belongs to God, he will obey God.
- If a man belongs to the devil, he will obey the devil.

Now the rest of **verse 8** ...

8b For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

This identifies the second reason for Jesus' First Coming: to destroy the devil's works.

And this introduces **the third reason Christians can't practice sin**: Christ came to destroy the works of the father of sin, the devil. People who practice sin are showing they don't understand or appreciate what Jesus did on the cross.

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 words **does not sin** and **cannot sin** have the idea of practicing sin:

- NIV and BLB **No one who is born of God will continue to sin...they cannot go on sinning.**
- NLT, ESV, NAS, BSB **No one born of God makes a practice of sinning...he cannot keep on sinning.**
- BSB **Anyone born of God refuses to practice sin...he cannot go on sinning.**

And this is **the fourth reason believers can't practice sin**: we've been **born of God**.

The word **seed** creates some wonderful imagery...

First, seeds produce or give birth to new life, and that's what John is discussing: being born again or experiencing new life. Think of the language of **2 Cor 5:17** **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

Second, the word **seed** creates the image of God's nature being planted in us. This makes a nice complement to the earlier discussing of us abiding in Christ. Now it talks about God's **seed remaining** or abiding in us.

Using the word **seed** creates the image of God's nature being planted in us: **2 Pet 1:4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these YOU MAY BE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

Since it says the **seed REMAINS** it communicates the permanence of the New Birth, which can't be reversed or removed; can't be taken out of us.

When we're **born of God** the new nature we receive prevents us from practicing sin. Let me conclude by discussing what takes place when we're born again, including receiving this new nature...

First, we have a new standing before God...

When people become Christians, tremendous spiritual changes take place. We're born into the family of God. We're sons and daughters of the King. We're recognized as being righteous in His sight. This is known as justification. It takes place in a moment, and it never changes and it's never lost.

Second, we have a new position, set apart to God...

Christians are also given a new position. We're set apart for God's purposes, to live for Him, His purposes, and His glory. The new position is called sanctification. Unlike justification, sanctification is not instantaneous. It takes place throughout our lives as we're changed day to day as we become more like Christ.

To be clear though, there are some days that more much more like and more obedient to Him, whereas other days that's not the as much the case.

Third, we have a new nature from God...

We are regenerated, brought to life spiritually. *Re* means "again" and *generation* means "birth." Just as physical children bear the nature of their parents, so God's spiritual children bear the nature of our Father at our spiritual birth. When we're born again, we receive a new nature, and it's the nature of God Himself...

In the New Testament this new nature is also called the "new man" and it stands in contrast to the "old man" or the flesh that remains with us. It is that unredeemed part of us that we have to resist. This is why we read:

- **Eph 4:24 Put off, concerning your former conduct, THE OLD MAN which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on THE NEW MAN which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**
- **Col 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off THE OLD MAN with his deeds, and have put on THE NEW MAN who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,**

The old nature produces sin, but the new nature produces righteousness and obedience. Our old nature came from Adam, and our new nature comes from the "Second Adam" (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 15:45). This is why true believers can't practice sin. Counterfeit believers can't help but practice sin, b/c they don't have God's nature w/in them, but converted individuals have the nature of God Himself preventing consistent, habitual sin.

John MacArthur said, *"A genuinely born-again believer has a built-in check or guard against habitual sinning due to a new nature."*

Let me conclude w/ an illustration...

YOUTH CAMP ILLUSTRATION

I wish he would've said, "IF you have repented...if you have turned from your sins." Instead he simply said, "Repeat after me..."

Then he guaranteed all these kids they were saved. I left the camp w/ many of those kids and :

- Their lives weren't changed at all .
- They continued in the same sins they were engaging in prior to camp.

But now they were convinced they were saved, b/c of what this man said . I'm sure the man well, but what he did for many of them was give them a false sense of security, b/c he didn't mention repentance or fruit.

The girl they coerced to say the words.

You can go to funerals across the country and people will stand up and claim people are in heaven even though...

- They've never repented of their sins...
- They've never surrendered their lives to Christ...
- They've never produced the good fruit that should serve as evidence of their salvation.

Richard Sibbes said, "It is evident that our conversion is sound when we loathe and hate sin from the heart." ¹

DONE:
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Nelson
Moody
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¹ The Treasury of David: Containing an original exposition of the Book of PsalmsP. 365