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## **The Christian Life in I John**

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## Introduction:

- A. Because I John is concerned with identifying false teachers we can also use it to tell us how true Christians should behave.
  - B. Some of these “behaviors” are found paired against their opposites (e.g. “obedience” versus “disobedience”).
  - C. Some are seen as solutions to problems (e.g. “confession” for sin).
  - D. Some are simply the results of proper belief (e.g. “prayer”).
  - E. Questions that will be answered in this paper:
    - 1. How should post-conversion sins be viewed and “handled”?
    - 2. How should our behavior reflect our relationship with God?
    - 3. How should our relationship with God affect our behavior toward one another?
- I. How should a Christian view sin?
- A. 1:6—John makes an association between a person's words and deeds.
    - 1. It is impossible for someone to say that he/she has fellowship with God and yet be indifferent to moral action.
    - 2. Almost the same thing is repeated in 2:4. The person who claims to be a Christian (one who has “come to know him”) and yet does not keep God's commandments is being inconsistent; he/she is a liar, their claim is false.
  - B. 1:8—Actually: “we are not guilty even though we have sinned”.
    - 1. We deceive ourselves if we say that we can sin all we want and still not be guilty before God.
    - 2. “The claim to have no guilt from sin recognizes that the deeds are wrong but contends that they have no effect.” (Morris)
  - C. 1:10—“we have not sinned” shows a perfectionistic attitude towards sin. (i.e. That sin is not even possible so that if I do something that would be considered sin if a non-Christian had done it would not be sin for me.)

1. If we “walk in darkness” (see verse 6) and yet say that “we have not sinned” we make God a liar.
  2. To deny that sin is sin if we commit it is not the proper way for a Christian to handle the situation.
  3. God's standard for conduct does not change once a person becomes a Christian.
- D. 3:8-10—“practicing sin” and “not practicing righteousness”
1. The one who habitually sins shows that he/she belongs to the devil. (The devil is the one who has sinned from the beginning.)
  2. When someone habitually sins they are not being like God but they are being like the devil.
  3. It does not matter if it is called sin or not; sin is sin. It is a very serious matter. It is something associated with the devil not with God.
  4. No one who is truly a Christian (i.e. “born of God”) habitually sins.
  5. Is 3:9(b) or 5:18 a contradiction of 1:10? No, John is talking about habitual sin.
    - a. The Christian cannot be controlled by sin; not that it is impossible for the Christian to sin.
    - b. As the divine seed in us grows we should grow more and more sinless. Increasing sinlessness is a sign of growth. As a matter of fact, John is writing so that we might not sin! 2:1(a)
    - c. Divine childhood is not a once-for-all gift but a life that has to express itself in the behavior of the Christian. (Morris)
  6. 3:10—The true children of God are those who practice righteousness and who love their “brothers”. Anyone who does not do these things is obviously a child of the devil.
    - a. Not that you can make yourself a child of God as opposed to a child of the devil just by doing these things.
    - b. A child of God behaves this way as a result of the divine seed being within him/her. (i.e. These things are not the *cause of being* a child of God but rather *result from being* a child of God.)
- E. Summary: (with regard to the sin issue)

1. A person cannot be a Christian and still consistently not keep God's commandments.
2. A Christian cannot claim (on the basis that he/she is “in Christ”, etc.) that he/she is free from guilt if he/she sins.
3. A person cannot claim that it is impossible to sin (no matter what he/she does) once he/she is a Christian.
4. A person cannot habitually sin and still be a Christian. (Sin is in the realm of Satan not of God.)

F. How a Christian should deal with sin once it has been committed?

1. 1:7—“walk in the light”
  - a. If a Christian walks (the habitual activity of one's whole life) in the light (where God is; where nothing can be hidden) and lets this light shine in and dwell within him/her then he/she is cleansed from all sin by the blood of Christ.
2. 1:9—“confess our sins”
  - a. We must keep confessing specific sins as soon as we become aware of them. (Present tense verb)
  - b. “Confess”—To agree with God about the fact that something is sinful and then to promise to leave it. “This includes our desire to never again commit the sin.” (Osborne)
  - c. The results are forgiveness of our sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness. 1:9(b) We can rejoice in this forgiveness and cleansing being confident that it is so because of the fact that:
3. 2:1(b)—“we have an advocate with the Father”
  - a. We need not despair when we sin. Jesus is before the Father to intercede for us on the basis of the sacrifice that he has already made on our behalf.

II. How should our behavior reflect our relationship with God?

A. Our lives should be characterized by obedience...

1. 2:3, 5(a), 3:24, 5:3—“keep his commandments” and “keep his word”
  - a. John tells us that the test to see if really have come to know God is if we are keeping his commandments.

- b. What is involved is more than mere intellectual knowledge but obedience which grows out of a dynamic fellowship and love relationship with God.
  - c. “keeping his commandments” “is not the condition, but rather the characteristic of the knowledge of God.” (Bultmann)
  - d. “Obedience is the necessary outgrowth of a proper relationship with God.” (Osborne)
2. 2:29 and 3:7—Since God is righteous, if we are born of Him then we should practice righteousness. “A righteous life is the only sign that righteousness exists.” (Osborne)

B. ...as opposed to disobedience.

- 1. We have already looked at some of the references to this issue particularly under point D. of section I.
- 2. 3:6—Again, this is speaking of habitual sin not specific sins.
  - a. How can we abide in Him (or see Him or truly know Him) if we habitually sin? We cannot; they are mutually exclusive.
  - b. God is holy and righteous. He *hates* sin. The person who abides in Him will begin to share His attitude toward sin.
- 3. These passages make very strong statements about sin that reflect God's very strong hatred of it. God has taken His stand against it and so must the Christian.

C. We must “abide in Him” (abide—habitual fellowship)

- 1. 2:6—The one who abides in Him (i.e. the Christian who is in fellowship with God) is under personal obligation to live a life after the example of Christ.
  - a. All of our conduct and behavior should be patterned after the sinless conduct and behavior of Christ that he modeled for us while he was among us as a man.
  - b. There must be a parallel between one's claim to be a Christian and one's life showing growth in Christ-likeness.
  - c. If a person possesses eternal life then it will express itself in the life of that person.
- 2. 2:28—Another motivation for abiding (and all that accompanies it) is so that we will be confident and not be ashamed (of the life we have lived) when Jesus comes back again.

D. A Christian's life should be characterized by prayer.

1. 3:22—If we are keeping His commandments and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight then “whatever we ask we receive from Him.”
  - a. “keeping His commandments” is a continual practice that can only be achieved through abiding in Him.
  - b. Thus, this implies growing in Christ-likeness in all areas of one's life (including one's will) and not just legalistic attempts at keeping God's laws (especially just for the purpose of getting God to answer the prayer!).
  - c. What Christian wouldn't want to pray with a promise like this!
  
2. 5:14-15
  - a. The Christian has confidence to approach God in prayer because of the freedom he/she has in Christ.
  - b. There is one condition that is explicit here: “if we ask anything according to his will...” This is brought about through “a oneness of will between the petitioner and the petitioned.” (Morris) (See notes on “abiding” above.)
  - c. Does this mean that God will the answered with a “yes”? No, our praying “according to his will” is a submission to God's overriding purpose, not necessarily understood by us. It is a subordinating force rather than an empowering one. (Stott)

III. How should our relationship with God effect our behavior toward one another? The answer to that can be summed up in the words “love for our brothers and sisters in Christ”.

- A. 2:10—It is not possible to abide in the light and not love our fellow Christians.
  
- B. 3:10-11—We have already looked at verse 10 under point 6. of point D. in section I. above. But, the last phrase is also relevant here.
  1. The one who does not love his brother is not of God. Therefore the one who is of God should love his brother!
  2. This more specifically states what is involved in keeping his commandments.
  3. “Love is righteousness in relation to others.” (Ross)
  
- C. 3:14-15—Love for our brothers and sisters is a sign that we have passed from death to life because it is of God (4:7).
  1. Hate is equated with murder and one who murders does not have eternal life.

- D. 3:17-18—What it means to love (and to “keep his commandments”—3:23) is shown more specifically here.
1. Love must be practical. It must be expressed through deeds (not just words). It must be sensitive to the needs of those around us.
  2. Love involves sharing our material possessions with those who need them.
- E. 4:11—The ultimate example of love: God's love for us expressed through the death of His son.
1. If God has loved us in this way then we should also love our brothers and sisters.
- F. 4:21—The one who loves God is commanded to also love his/her fellow Christians.
- G. 5:1(b)—One's relationships with one's brothers and sisters are inseparable from one's relationship with God.
1. How can one love the Father and not love the children of the Father? John says you can't.