

The Incompatibility of “God’s Seed” with Sin: An Exegetical Study of 1 John 3:1–10

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Abstract

The author of 1 John wrote, “everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot continue sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). This verse, within its context, highlights the incompatibility of “God’s seed” with sin hence giving a rationale for those “born of God” not dwelling in sin. An exegetical study of 1 John 3:1–10 provides a proper understanding of the work of Christ, believer’s identity as children of God, and the incompatibility of “God’s seed” with sin. The author of 1 John points out that believers in Christ are children of God because of the love of the heavenly Father. Their new identity and status in the family of God gives them an eschatological hope that shapes their present lives. The first coming of Jesus Christ and the hope of his second coming guarantees believers glorious bodies and victory over sin and Satan. The author of 1 John further instructs that a person born of God (one who has seen or known him) does not continue sinning because “God’s seed remains in him.” He emphatically states that we can distinguish the children of God from the devil’s children because the model of believers’ righteousness is Christ. In contrast, the model of any sinfulness is the devil.

Keywords: Children of God, Righteous, Sin, Lawlessness, Devil, and God’s seed.

Introduction

The author of 1 John, in his short letter, admonishes believers on authentic Christian living. He expounds on the implications of Christian truths in the life of a believer and the community of believers. In the first section of chapter 3, he discusses the heavenly Father's love for His children, their eternal hope, the purpose of Jesus' incarnation, the incompatibility of sin and righteousness, and the incompatibility of "God's seed" with sin. Does this passage teach about sinless perfection? The study reviews the teachings in this pericope.

The letter of 1 John does not mention its author or its immediate audience, and as a result, there exist debates concerning its authorship. Some scholars attribute the epistle of 1 John to John, the apostle of Jesus, while others dispute this position.¹ Painter and Harrington² have convincingly argued for Johannine authorship with parallelism between the Gospel of John and 1 John. Having ascribed 1 John to the same author as the Gospel of John, it is possible to arrive at "John the son of Zebedee, the beloved disciple," as the author.³ The Early Church tradition also acknowledges John, the disciple of Jesus, as the author of the Gospel of John and the epistle" of 1 John. Irenaeus, for instance, writing in AD 202, acknowledged that the Gospel of John and the epistle have a singular author who is John the disciple.

Similarly, Tertullian endorses that John the disciple wrote both the Gospel and the epistle of 1 John by comparing John 1:18 with 1 John 1:1.⁴ Noticeably, some scholars who dispute John's authorship include Bultmann,⁵ Brown,⁶ and Kruse,⁷ among others. Without undermining their view, the researcher assumes John the apostle to be the author of this letter in line with the church tradition.

¹ Robert W. Yarbrough: *1–3 John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008), 5–8.

² John Painter and Daniel J. Harrington: *1, 2, and 3 John, Sacra Pagina Series*, v. 18 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 112.

³ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger: *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 1080.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, ed., *The Epistles of John, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible*, v. 30 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1982), 49.

⁵ Georg Strecker and Harold W. Attridge: *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John, Hermeneia--A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7. Bultmann's eschatological view rules out an actual eyewitness of Jesus and rather suggests a spiritual witness who are "eschatological contemporaries of Jesus."

⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 163. Brown proposes that the member of Johanne school wrote the letter.

⁷ Colin G. Kruse: *The Letters of John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000), 10. Kugler proposes that the letter was written by an implied author using fictional language but not the actual author.

Scholars have debated whether the epistle was written before or after the Gospel of John.⁸ This study agrees with scholars who argue the Gospel was written before the epistle. Having introduced Jesus as the Christ through the Gospel, John now encourages his audience to abide in him and rebukes emerging heretics. The Gospel of John was then written around AD 70–80 as a missionary document intended to affirm that “... Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing [in him they] may have life in his name” (John 20:31).⁹ While the heretics mentioned in 1 John 2:18–20 came up later during the first century; thus, the epistle may have been written between AD 80–90.¹⁰

The writer of this article outlines the epistle of 1 John as follows. The letter begins with a prologue (1:1–5) and ends with an epilogue (5:13– 21). The body of the letter can be outlined as follows: the light and the darkness (1:6— 2:11), ‘children of God’ and “children of the devil” (2:12— 3:10), demands of God’s love to us (3:11— 4:21), and faith as the foundation of love for one another (5:1– 12).

Exegesis of 1 John 3: 1–10

Heavenly Father’s Love to His Children and their Eternal Hope (vv1–3)

Greek Text: ἴδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν· καὶ ἐσμὲν. διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν.¹¹

Translation: Behold, what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and (such) we are. Because of this, the world (does) not know us, because it did not know him.¹²

The constative aorist imperative verb ἴδετε (behold!) is used dramatically to both entreat and draw the attention of the audience as though the event was happening at present. The audience is called upon to behold ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατὴρ (what manner of love the Father has given us). The agape love originates from the Father (ὁ πατὴρ). The intensive perfect verb δέδωκεν (he has given) focuses on what God has done that has enabled apostle John’s audience to be referred to as “children of God.”

⁸ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 33–34.

⁹ English Standard Version (ESV).

¹⁰ Barker and Kohlenberger, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, 1081–82.

¹¹ Barbara Aland *et al.*, eds, *The Greek New Testament, Fifth Revised Edition*, 4th Corrected Printing (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2018). This is the Greek text used in this paper.

¹² The translation of 1 John 3:1–10 are mine.

The succeeding phrase “ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν” (that we should be called children of God) further reveals the identity of John’s audience. The reference of his audience as τέκνία (little/ dear children) resonates with the title ‘children of God’ in John 1:12, 11:52, 1 John 3:2, 10 and 5:2. The genitive noun θεοῦ (of God) in the phrase “children of God” expresses the relationship that the children have with God. Here the audience has a son–father relationship with God through believing in Jesus Christ (John 1:12). The construction ἵνα with the aorist subjunctive verb κληθῶμεν (we should be called), indicates a result clause. The subjunctive mood here does not imply a mere probability but an actual present state. Also, the present durative verb ἐσμέν emphasizes the present state of those who have received the love of the Father. Hence, the Father-child relationship is not exclusively futuristic but is an ongoing reality.

The last part of the verse expresses the world’s inability to comprehend believers because it does not know God. The phrase ὁ κόσμος is used not to mean the literal earth but those who are opposed to God and who hate the followers of Christ.¹³ It also metaphorically refers to the unbelieving people of the world who are opposed to the Father and are opposed to his children.¹⁴ The durative present verb οὐ γινώσκει (does not know) carries a progressive idea which means, the world has not known them from the past to the present. According to John, the failure to “know us” was an ongoing reality, while “not knowing him” is already a past event.¹⁵ The reason the world does not know the believers is because it “did not know God.” Jesus reminded his followers that the world would hate them just as it hated him (Jn 15:18). The aorist verb ἔγνων (know) focuses on the idea as a whole. The world does not know the Father and his wondrous love through Jesus, the same love that has given believers a new identity and status as children of God.

Verse 2: Ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστίν.

Translation: Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

¹³ Spiros Zodhiates: *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1994), 882.

¹⁴ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 99.

¹⁵ Painter and Harrington, 1, 2, and 3 John, 220.

In the former verse, John refers to his audience as τέκνα θεοῦ (children of God), but in this verse, he affectionately refers to them as αγαπητοί (beloved). Since the audience has received the “love of the Father,” they are presently dear “children of God.” The noun θεοῦ can be taken as a qualitative genitive or a genitive of relationship. The verb ἐσμεν (we are), describes the ongoing status as children of God.

The indicative aorist verb ἐφανερώθη (appeared) is constative, looking at the action as a whole. The verb ἐσόμεθα (we shall be) is a predictive future, looking at the eschatological state of God’s children. The οὐπω (not yet) here parallels νῦν (now) in the first part of the verse. In the present, those who have received the Father’s love are children of God, but greater still, a future glory awaits them.¹⁶ The present body experiences weaknesses, temptation, and other shortcomings, but apostle John encourages his audience to look into the future with the hope of receiving a body that is not susceptible to weakness and sin.

He confidently states that “οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῇ ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστίν” (we know that when he appears, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is). Strecker believes that apocalyptic knowledge existed in John’s community as part of their traditional knowledge. The nature of such knowledge cannot be verified, hence speculative. Yarbrough rightly notes that when John says οἶδαμεν (we know), he refers to himself and others who received the apostolic faith.¹⁷ Using the intensive perfect οἶδαμεν, John refers to a future awareness that he and his audience had regarding the return of Christ. This optimism might have stemmed from their realization that they are ‘now children of God’ and from the apostolic teachings that promised that we now know in part, but at his revelation, we shall know fully (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18). The use of ἐὰν and an aorist verb φανερωθῇ is a first-class condition which should be translated as ‘when’ as opposed to mere possibility ‘if.’ The verb φανερωθῇ (he appears) here refers to the parousia when Christ will be manifested physically to the world. The proleptic aorist verb φανερωθῇ (he appears) indicates that the future appearing will be sure.

Upon the return of Christ, those who believe in him will be like him. The resemblance in purity merits the reunion of believers with Jesus at his return, as stated in Matthew 5:8. Jobes comments that John is not concerned with a metaphysical transformation but rather an ethical

¹⁶ Yarbrough, 1–3 John, 177.

¹⁷ Yarbrough, 1–3 John, 178.

transformation that will cause believers to reflect the Father's character.¹⁸ The phrase ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα (we shall be like Him) shows that believers' believers will be as pure as Christ, they will have received the ultimate salvation from sin. Believers ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστίν (shall see him as he is). The verb ὁψόμεθα is a progressive future; the future event will begin at a point in the future and continue being in that state. It implies that the believers will not only see Christ as he is but experience him eternally. The customary present ἐστίν (is) shows the unchanging nature of Christ, he is now as he will be when he appears, and he shall continue to be the same way forever. Kruse also observes that ἐστίν refers to the ethical purity of Christ¹⁹ while Jobes alludes to both moral and physical state.²⁰ The Bible indicates that believers will physically see the glory of God during Christ's return (Matt 5:8, 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18).

Verse 3: καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτὸν καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν.

Translation: And everyone having this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure.

The conjunction καὶ links this verse with the previous verses, with this verse serving as a summary. John uses the adjective πᾶς to generalize the audience beyond the original targets but is limited to anyone who has the hope described in the previous verse. The hope alluded to here (τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην) refers to the hope of seeing and being like Christ when he appears. This hope also refers to believers longing to be pure as Christ and the anticipation to witness Christ's return. Strecker remarks that this eschatological hope is the basis by which the Christian community defines itself.²¹

The second part of the verse ἀγνίζει ἑαυτὸν καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστιν (purifies himself even as he is pure), gives the implication of the preceding verses. The durative present verb ἀγνίζει (purifies) indicates that the believer continually purifies himself. Kittel and Bromiley argue that ἀγνίζω “denotes full moral purity as the presupposition for the reception of salvation.”²² Since moral purity has to do with putting aside what is wrong and adopting what is right, the durative present highlights the continuity of the pursuit. In 1 John 1:9, apostle John admonishes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and

¹⁸ Karen H. Jobes: *1, 2, and 3 John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014), 187.

¹⁹ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 100.

²⁰ Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 188.

²¹ Strecker and Attridge, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, 91.

²² Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids (Mich.): Eerdmans, 1995), 123.

cleanse us from every unrighteousness.” The purification process of a believer involves confessing sins before God instead of contesting or rationalizing them.²³ The continuous acknowledgment and confession of sins by believers prepare them for the parousia. It enables believers to have victory over sin. Strecker and Attridge remark, “the demand for believers to purify themselves means that they are to keep themselves free from sin.”²⁴

In verses 1–3, John teaches that believers have received God’s love making them His children. Unfortunately, the world is hostile to believers, just as it was to Jesus. Although believers are already children of God, they still await greater glory when Jesus returns. During this second coming, they will be holy as Christ. In preparation for this great event, believers should get rid of unrighteousness by confessing their sins.

The Nature of Sin and the Purpose of Jesus’ Incarnation (vv4–6)

Verse 4: Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία.

Translation: Everyone practicing sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.

The author makes a general reference using the adjective Πᾶς (everyone, anyone, or whoever). The durative present verb ποιῶν in the phrase ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν communicates a continuous inclination to sin; the focus here is not on the individual acts of sin but the tendency of the heart. The phrase ὁ ποιῶν (the one practicing) is a substantival participle, and the phrase καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία (for sin is lawlessness) means sinning is (ἐστὶν- gnomic present) acting lawlessly. Zodhiates agrees with this view that ἁμαρτίαν is used with a focus on breaking divinely instituted law.²⁵ This definition is similar to his definition of ἀνομίαν.²⁶ Kittel *et al.* define ἁμαρτία as “action(s) opposed to the divine ordinance which corresponds to the right.”²⁷ They also define ἀνομία as rebellion or alienation from God. Brooke agrees with this view that “doing sin” is not only a violation of the law, but sin in its very nature is a transgression of the law of God.”²⁸ The apostle John admonishes that everyone living in sin is also living in rebellion against God and transgression against his laws.

²³ Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 123.

²⁴ Strecker and Attridge, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, 92.

²⁵ Spiros Zodhiates: *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 186.

²⁶ Zodhiates, 130, defines ἁμαρτία as missing the scope and the true end of our lives, which is God.

²⁷ Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 306.

²⁸ A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, *Nachdr.*, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 85.

Verse 5: καὶ οἴδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ, καὶ ἀμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν.

Translation: And you know that he appeared that he might take away sins, and in him, there is no sin.

The conjunctive καὶ (and) links verse 4 and verse 5 by relating the problem of lawlessness with the work of Christ. The intensive perfect οἴδατε (you know) signals the present reality of his audience; they already knew the reason for Christ's appearance. However, Stott argues that the knowledge John refers to is the knowledge of the person of Jesus and his work.²⁹ The constative aorist ἐφανερώθη (appeared) refers to the first coming of Christ. The purpose of Jesus' first coming was to take away our sins.³⁰ The verb ἐφανερώθη in this verse parallels ἦλθεν (he came) in the Gospel of John 1:11, which speaks of Jesus' incarnation.

The conjunctive ἵνα (to/so that) shows the reason or purpose of Christ's incarnation. Thus, purposefully, Christ appeared so that τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ (he might take away sins). The subjunctive ἄρῃ does not indicate a probability of the action. Instead, the combination with ἵνα shows a purpose. In John 1:29, the apostle introduces Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The last part of the verse reveals the identity of Christ, καὶ ἀμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν (and in him, there is no sin). The gnomic present ἔστιν (is) shows the custom nature of Christ not to sin therefore affirming believers longing to be like him in 1 John 3:3. Jesus is God, and in him, there is no sin. In Hebrews 4:15, he was tempted in every way, yet he was without sin (See also 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18). Therefore, the one who takes away the sin of the world is qualified because he himself has no sin.

Verse 6: πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἀμαρτάνει· πᾶς ὁ ἀμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν.

Translation: No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who continues to sin has seen him or known him.

Apostle John emphatically writes πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἀμαρτάνει· (No one who abides in him keeps on sinning). The verb μένων (abiding) as a durative present brings out the

²⁹ John R. W. Stott: *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*. 1988, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/11052432>. p. 129.

³⁰ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed: *Africa Bible Commentary (Nairobi, Kenya : Grand Rapids, Mich: WordAlive Publishers ; Zondervan, 2006)*, 3716.

idea of continuity in Christ. The dative ἐν is a dative of sphere (in him, referring to ‘in Christ’). Again, the present tense verb, ἁμαρτάνει, is durative (keeps on sinning- brings out the idea of sinning progressively or habitually). The uses of a present tense participle with μένων (abiding) and the action of the main verb (ἁμαρτάνει) are simultaneous.

Similarly, the participle (ἁμαρτάνων) in the last part of the verse is simultaneous to the verbs ἑώρακεν and ἔγνωκεν. According to John, being in Christ and sinning are entirely contradictory. An encounter with Christ, who came to take away our sins, should bring to a stop the habit of sinning. Thus, πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτόν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν (no one who continues to sin has seen Him or known him). The verbs translated “he has not seen” and “he has not known” can be used interchangeably.³¹ The two verbs can be used to denote accepting the divine love in Jesus and living in its demands. Apostle John had seen Christ and had been transformed by this experience. He testifies, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). Living in sin consequently means not having seen or known Christ. Campbell rightly comments that since sin is rebellion against God, anyone living in such rebellion is not living in Christ.³² Therefore, having not known and seen Jesus Christ makes nonbelievers live in sin. Similarly, “To know Christ is to outlaw sin; to sin is to deny Christ and to reveal that one is not living in him.”³³

In verses 4–6, the apostle John teaches that sin is rebellion against God. Jesus, who was and is sinless, came on earth to deal with sin through his sacrificial death on the cross. All who abide in Christ do not live in rebellion against God because Christ is incompatible with sin.

Incompatibility of God’s Seed and Sin (vv. 7–10)

Verse 7: Τεκνία, μηδεὶς πλανᾷτω ὑμᾶς· ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν·

Translation: Little children let no one deceive you; the one practicing righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

³¹ Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 110.

³² Constantine R. Campbell: *1, 2, & 3 John, The Story of God Bible Commentary Series. New Testament Series*, 19 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 104.

³³ Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 130.

Once again, John addresses his audience as Τεκνία (little children). John might have addressed his audience this way because of his authority over their spiritual lives. Strecker and Attridge agree with this view saying that “this address expresses the authority asserted by the author towards the readers.”³⁴ He does not want his children to be deceived (πλανάτω- descriptive present). The threat of deception from heretics was real to his audience (1 Jn. 2:26; 4:1–3). The author turns to the docetic opponents, although he is not addressing false Christology but rather a false mentality that does not translate the knowledge of God to right ethical behavior.³⁵ Burge remarks that John’s opponents were either too permissive of sin or preached perfectionism that held that Christians are free from sin hence dismissing morality.³⁶ He reminds his audience that “the one practicing righteousness is righteous, just as he (Christ) is righteous.”

The adjective, δικαιοσύνην (righteousness) here refers to right conduct according to true righteousness which is embodied in Christ. The phrase “practicing righteousness” here is contrasted with “practicing sin” in 3:8. Just as those who practice righteousness are righteous like Christ is, those who live in sin are like the devil. The customary present ἐστίν (is) emphasizes the unchanging, righteous character of Christ. By declaring that the one who practices righteousness is righteous, John brings out Christ as the model for believers. Spurgeon noted that practical godliness is needed for true Christian character; therefore, a person cannot be righteous without doing what is righteous.³⁷ The life of a believer should mirror the character of Christ.

Verse 8: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου.

Translation: The one practicing sin is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason, the Son of God appeared that he might destroy the works of the devil.

The phrase ὁ ποιῶν (the one practicing) is a substantival participle. The verb ποιῶν is a durative present highlighting the progressive inclination to sin. The genitive διαβόλου (of the devil) is qualitative to bring contrast: sinners are ‘of the devil’ (3:8) while believers are children

³⁴ Strecker and Attridge, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, 97.

³⁵ Strecker and Attridge, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, 97.

³⁶ Gary M. Burge: *The Letters of John: From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p. 150.

³⁷ ‘1John 3 Commentary - Spurgeon’s Verse Expositions of the Bible,’ <<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/spe/1-john-3.html>> [Accessed 30 March 2020].

‘of God’ (3:2). The devil is at work in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). Further, apostle John also reveals that the devil has been sinning (ἁμαρτάνει- customary present) from the beginning. Sinning is within the nature of the devil. This assertion is consistent with other scriptures- he was a murderer from the beginning and is a father of liars (John 8:44; Rev 20:10). The beginning in view here is not the beginning of the world but rather the time when angel Lucifer became the devil.

In verse 5, Jesus Christ appeared so that he might take away our sins (3:5). The second part of verse 8 begins with the conjunction ὅτι (for) and gives another reason for the appearance of Jesus Christ. John writes, εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου (For this reason, the Son of God appeared that he might destroy the works of the devil). The verb ἐφανερώθη, just like in verse 5, refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In this verse, Jesus is referred to as the Son of God. The Greek construction of ἵνα with a subjunctive (λύσῃ) shows purpose. The mission of Jesus on earth was also to destroy the works of the devil. Kruse observes that Jesus’ death on the cross dealt with the problem of human sin hence destroying the work of the devil.³⁸ The purpose of Jesus’ incarnation was to destroy the devil’s work by atoning for the sins of the world, hence delivering believers from the power of sin and powers of the evil one.

Verse 9: Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει· καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται.

Translation: No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot continue sinning, because he has been born of God.

The perfect participle γεγεννημένος (is born) as an intensive perfect focuses on the new birth, which is also taught in the Scriptures (John 3:3; Titus 3:5). The genitive θεοῦ in the phrase ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ is a qualitative genitive. The one who is born of God does not practice sin (ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ- taking ποιεῖ as a durative or gnomic present). On the contrary, those who are “born of God” practice righteousness (2:29), are the children of God (3:1), love (4:7), overcome the world (5:4), are kept from the evil one (5:18), do good (3 Jn 11), and have been born “through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

³⁸ Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 106.

The genitive pronoun ‘his’ in σπέρμα αὐτοῦ (his seed) can either be understood as a qualitative genitive to imply the divine nature of God in a believer. It is difficult to expressly point out what John was referring to by σπέρμα αὐτοῦ (his seed). However, Stott suggests σπέρμα αὐτοῦ (his seed) could refer to the Holy Spirit, the word of the Gospel or the divine nature.³⁹ The divine nature in believers keeps them from habitual sin. It is true that a believer, in this life and with the human body, still struggles with sin (1:8,9) hence the need for confession. However, the habit of sin should cease in the life of a believer because Jesus appeared to provide the solution to the problem of sin and destroy the works of the devil.

In this verse, John argues that “everyone born of God” does not live a life of sinning (habitual sin) also because God the Holy Spirit dwells in them. The indwelling of God, the Holy Spirit in a believer, does not paralyze the believers’ ability to sin but rather makes habitual sinning detestable to them. Whenever believers sin, the Holy Spirit convicts them to recognize their sins and to confess them. He makes a believer hates sin and flees from it.⁴⁰ Thus, being born of God makes it impossible for a believer to live with unconfessed sin comfortably.

Verse 10: ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου· πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

Translation: In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil: whosoever does not practice righteousness is not of God neither he that does not love his brother.

Having distinguished “the children of God”(v. 7) from “the children of the devil” (v. 8), John summarizes the discussion. As opposed to the children of God, the devil’s children do not practice righteousness and do not love their brothers. Moral behavior distinguishes “the children of God” from “the children of the devil;” hence the absence of righteousness and love is a sign of a lack of divine birth.⁴¹

In verses 7–10, John teaches that Christ is the model of righteousness to believers. This righteousness is only attained by abiding in him. Whoever lives in “sin is of the devil” because the devil has rebelled against God from the beginning. The purpose of Jesus’ incarnation was to take away our sins and destroy the works of the devil. Since believers are born of God, they cannot live in rebellion against God because his Spirit dwells in them. The children of God and

³⁹ Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 136.

⁴⁰ “Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible,” 1 John 3 Commentary

⁴¹ Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 134.

the children of the devil are distinguished based on their conduct; the children of God practice righteousness and love; while the children of the devil habitually rebel against God and his laws.

Application

In verses 1–3, believers are declared as children of God because they have received the love of God, while nonbelievers are of the world because they are opposed to God and those who belong to him. For this reason, Christians should not be shocked when they are misunderstood, hated, or isolated by the world. The world is first hostile to God and consequently believers (John 17:14). It has opposing values (1 Jn 2:15; Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:14). Believers living in the contemporary world should not be surprised when the world relates to them in a hostile manner.

Further, children of God have a greater hope of seeing Jesus Christ during his return and being like him in a glorified state, a nature that does not sin or experience the effect of sin. This should serve to encourage believers that their struggle with sin will cease upon the return of Christ. Apostle John instructs that anyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as he is pure. Therefore, believers should guard their spiritual lives and live authentic Christian lives that esteem confession of sins.

In verses 4–6, sin is defined as rebellion against God. Jesus provided the ultimate solution to the enigma of sin. He came to “take away our sins” and to pay the ultimate price of redemption. He was sinless hence qualified as the ultimate sin-remover. Those who remain “in Christ” do not habitually sin because sin is against God and his laws. It is thus hypocritical for one to live in sin yet claim to be in Christ.

Finally, in verses 7–1, John instructs that our deeds reveal who we are. Christ is the model of righteousness and love for believers; in contrast, the devil is the standard of rebellion and evil for the ungodly. Righteous living is a sign that one is a child of God, but unrighteous living indicates that one is a child of the devil. Thus God’s seed remains incompatible with sin.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the incompatibility of God’s seed with sin in 1 John 3: 1–10. Believers in Christ are described as “children of God” because they have received God’s love. Although they still struggle with sin while on earth, they await a glorious moment when Jesus will return

and give them glorious bodies that are not vulnerable to sin or death. In keeping with the hope of being holy as Christ is, believers, purify themselves by confessing their sins. Jesus purposefully came to the world to atone for human sins and to destroy the works of the devil. Further, John teaches that sin is rebellion against God and his laws, and those who remain in Christ do not dwell in rebellion. The deeds of the righteous and those of the unrighteous distinguish them as either children of God or children of the devil.

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