

CAN WE BE PERFECT ALWAYS? (Scripture Reading: I John 3:4-9)

Introduction: I like the bumper sticker that says, "Christians are not perfect, but they are forgiven." It is a true statement. But some may twist it by saying, I am always forgiven, no matter what I do, I will be forgiven, and so I can live as I please? This is one extreme. Another extreme is perfectionism. Christians cannot sin at all! Even today, some denominations like Pentecostal holiness still believe that. Even John Wesley promoted Christian perfection to some extent. It's interesting to note that if you take verse 5 out of the Scripture reading and read I John 3:4,6-9 it will sound like Christians cannot sin at all. But verse 5 brings some balance to perfection vs forgiveness of our sins.

Similarly we can see the same structure in 1 John, 1:5-10.

5. *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.*
6. *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*
7. *but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*
8. *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.*
9. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
10. *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.*

1 John 2:1

1. *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*
2. *and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

The ending of this epistle has a verse that points to Christian perfection also.

1 John 5:18.

18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

But is it only for sins we committed before coming to Christ or our present and future sins also. This whole passage is very tough, and raises many serious questions. I'll try my best to answer some of those questions today. But I want you to understand this passage correctly, and if you have any more doubts, come and discuss with me. Now let us try to understand the real meaning verse by verse.

1 John 3:4

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

We live in an age and time where no one likes to use the word sin. For some that word may mean more like a mistake, short coming, failure, bad decision or a psychological flaw.

But actually sin is the transgression of any law according to this passage. We can all agree to this first statement. Sin is actually rejecting God's law, rebelling against God's law, ignoring God's law.

Paul says that through law no one can be justified. We all sinned and fell short of God's expectation. Pharisees thought that they fulfilled the law by going way above and beyond the law. But they could not fulfill the spiritual aspect of the law. They might not have committed adultery actually, but they committed it in their hearts. Likewise, murder, keeping the oath etc. They were like white washed tombs, but their inward heart was like ravenous wolves. The law referred here, is it the kind of civil law where you are charged for your criminal action or intent, or it means as Jesus means, sinful thoughts and motives of lusting in our hearts? We have to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and we must follow the law of the Spirit, and not just the law of the letter.

Every one of us stumble around the Law. Scripture says, no one is righteous, not one. We are all like sheep that are gone astray. We are all sinners and have fallen short of glory. But we know the good news! Jesus can save us from sin, death, and hell.

1 John 3:5,6

- 5. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.*
- 6. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.*

We know the verse 5 very well. He who knew no sin became the propitiation for our sins for the past, present, and the future!

Whoever abides in Him does not sin! We came across this "abiding in His anointing" principle also. When we abide in the Spirit, we will not sin, but the minute we step away from Him, we start sliding toward a sinful life. The person who does not know Christ falls into sin always. But the Scripture does not address here the issue of someone who knows Christ already, and yet falls in sin!

1 John 3:7,8.

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

8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Verses 7, and 8 is very straight forward. He who practices righteousness is righteous. That is a true statement. But we have to be careful with the next sentence. He who

sins is of the devil? We have to be careful not to call people who sin as the one who is of the devil, but look at them as the victims of the devil. Like a bird that falls into the net of a hunter, these people fall into the hands of the devil. We should be praying for that person and should try to set him free. Actually we were children of the devil before we came to Christ, but when Son of God came to this world to bruise the head of Satan, so that he may let the sinners go free, we became the children of a God. He paid for their ransom through His precious blood, that we may be declared free from the devil. We may at times fall into the temptations of the devil but we are not of the devil.

But there are people like Pharisees were hypocrites, and they were misleading people. So Jesus called them you are of your father devil, because there was no truth in them! Living in truth is essential!

1 John 3: 9

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.

This is the toughest verse of all! Whoever is born of God doesn't sin? How can that be? Some people interpret it as habitual sins. The one who continues to sin. Even then, there are some exceptions to that rule. Sometimes born again Christians may have to take pain medications for their excruciating pain relief, and then they have a tough time shaking that habit off! Paul also talks about that in Romans 7. I do the things I shouldn't and I don't do the things I should. Who can deliver me from this! He cries out with gratitude, thanks be to Christ!

Some of our Pentecostal friends take it literally and say that we ought to live a sinless life. John Wesley insists that perfection is possible! But at the same time, 1 John 1:8,9,10 says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive all our sins! But if we say that we have no sin, we lie and the truth is not in us! Seems like John is saying we are all sinners, but sometimes, he seems to say that Christians are perfect. Which one is right?

John's discussion of sin may be stated in 4 stages:

1. The ideal situation is that the sin is gone forever.
2. Christians must strive to make it true, but occasionally they will stumble.
3. In fact, all men will have fallen in sin onetime or the other and they must confess, repent, and come back to Christ for reconciliation, and healing.
4. No Christian can live as a deliberate, continuous willful sinner. If someone keeps willfully rebelling, that means that person is not born again at all and the seed of God, the Holy Spirit is not in Him.

A scholar, William Barclays summarizes this way: John is not setting before us here a terrifying perfectionism, in which He is demanding a life, which is totally, and absolutely without sin; but He is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life whichever fights the battle of goodness, a life which has never surrendered to sin, a life in which the sin is not the permanent state, but only the temporary aberration, 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, (I disagree here! That is exactly what the book of 1 John says in verse 3:9. He cannot sin!!) But he is saying that the man who abides in God cannot continue to be a consistent, and deliberate sinner! I concur with most part of Barclay's brilliant conclusion.

The born again new creation cannot sin, but the old nature is like a whirlwind, constantly tries to pull us away from the will of God. Who can deliver us from this struggle? Again, it is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who can keep us from falling!

The seed of God is the Holy Spirit, and He can keep us from falling, if we abide in Him.

Jude 24,25.

*24. "Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
25. To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."*

Lord's Prayer: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

But if someone blatantly sins again and again and thinks God will forgive him, he deceives himself. It is like he is spitting in the face of God again and again and assumes that God will forgive him. Let us not play that game.

Conclusion:

We must be born of the Spirit and abide in the Spirit always.

If we commit sin, we must repent, confess, and come to the Lord for His cleansing power.

Pray always that we may not enter into temptation and fall down.

Our God is able to keep us from falling, if we love Him, and hold onto Him.

Everything is by grace! - our salvation, our sanctification, and our preservation of soul.

But we must constantly press on, keep ourselves pure, holy, and present ourselves as acceptable unto Him.

Let us focus on denying ourselves, taking up the cross and following Christ our Lord!

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