

## Module 12: 1 John 3:4-10

### 1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 2:28-3:18 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 3:4-10?
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 3:4?
- d) Transition (4)
  - i) No connecting word
  - ii) “Everyone”
    - (1) Verse 3: who has this hope fixed on Him
    - (2) Verse 4: who practices sin
  - iii) Great contrast (greater because of no connecting word) to the previous verses which talk about children of God who purify themselves because of the hope of Christ’s appearing.
  - iv) Previous verses also teach that practicing righteousness indicates the person is a child of God. (2:29; 3:1-2). Now we will learn what practicing sin indicates.
- e) “Practices”
  - i) *Poieo*: to do, to carry out, to execute
  - ii) Six times in 4-10. Every time it refers to an on-going action, not a one-time or sporadic event.
    - (1) “practices sin” (4): present participle
    - (2) “practices lawlessness” (4): present indicative verb
    - (3) “practices righteousness” (7): present participle
    - (4) “practices sin” (8): present participle
    - (5) “practices sin” (9): present indicative verb
    - (6) “practice righteousness” (10): present participle
- f) “Sin”
  - i) *Hamartia*: a missing of the mark
  - ii) Ten times in 4-10.
    - (1) Verse 4: noun, 2 times
    - (2) Verse 5: noun, 2 times
    - (3) Verse 6: present indicative verb, 1 time; present participle, 1 time.
    - (4) Verse 8: noun, 1 time; present indicative verb, 1 time.
    - (5) Verse 9: noun, 1 time; present infinitive, 1 time.
- g) “Lawlessness”
  - i) *Anomia*: flagrant defiance of the known will of God
  - ii) “The rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.” (Vine)
  - iii) Verse 4a: “The use of the definite article with both “sin” (“the sin”) and “lawlessness” (“the lawlessness”) makes the two abstracts definite and indicates that John is thinking of two inclusive concepts rather than single occurrences.” (Hiebert)
  - iv) Verse 4b: “the sin is the lawlessness”
    - (1) The terms are interchangeable, since they both have the definite article.

- (2) Lawlessness is the essence, not the result, of sin. (Stott)
- (3) The term “lawlessness” “does not mean a state of being without law, but the assertion of the individual will against and in defiance of the law of God, the refusal to live in accordance with the revealed standards of right and wrong.” (Drummond and Morris)
- (4) “It is thus the very opposite of righteousness, which is conformity to the standard or law of right.” (Hiebert)
- h) Verse 5 Observations
  - i) The word “appeared” (*phaneroo*) is used, not the word “born”. This is consistent with Christ existing prior to His incarnation, whereby He was “manifested” or “made visible” to mankind who had not seen Him before.
  - ii) Christ appeared to take away sins (plural), which refers to the removal of the practice of sins, not our sin nature.
  - iii) The sinlessness of Jesus is stressed positively and negatively (2:29; 3:3, 7)
- i) Verse 6 Observations
  - i) “Has seen” and “knows” are in the perfect tense. No one who sins has had either of these two experiences with Christ, and therefore, has not had any lasting results.
  - ii) “Seen” refers to a spiritual vision of Christ through faith, not a literal seeing. No one who sins habitually has had a spiritual vision of Christ through faith.
  - iii) “Knows” is the word for experiential knowledge. No one who sins habitually has entered into a personal relationship with Christ.
- j) Verse 7 Observations
  - i) John gives a pastoral warning, addressing his “little children”
  - ii) 2:26 refers to doctrinal deception. Now 3:7 refers to deception concerning the moral demands of the gospel, that is, righteous living.
- k) “Devil”
  - i) *Diabolos*: slanderer, one who knowingly and deliberately advances false charges.
  - ii) “is of the devil” (8a)
    - (1) Not “born of the devil” as one can be “born of God” (9)
    - (2) People are not “born” or “born again” of the devil.
    - (3) “Of” denotes the source of the evil which dominates the sinner’s life and practice.
    - (4) “For the devil made no man, begat no man, created no man: but whoso imitates the devil, that person, as if begotten of him, becomes a child of the devil: by imitating him, not literally by being begotten of him.” (Augustine)
  - iii) “From the beginning” refers to when the devil first rebelled against God.
  - iv) Christ came to “destroy the works of the devil”.
    - (1) “Destroy” is in the aorist tense. Christ’s victory on the cross was a decisive occurrence, not one that must be repeated.
    - (2) “Destroy” does not mean to annihilate, but to loose, break up, give release, render powerless or inoperative.
- l) “Seed”
  - i) *Sperma* in verse 9 has been suggested variously to mean the following:

- (1) Children (of God)
- (2) The principle of spiritual life as imparted to the believer (also referred to as God's nature or the divine principle of life)
- (3) Word of God
- (4) Holy Spirit – compare John 3:5-8; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-23.
- (5) Combination of “word” and “Spirit” (Smalley)
- ii) I lean toward #2 above, the divine nature a believer gets at his rebirth.
- m) In verse 9, what is meant by “cannot sin”?
  - i) As mentioned above, this present infinitive refers to the habitual practice of sinning. The one born of God cannot sin habitually.
  - ii) Thus, this does not mean the believer is perfect and will never sin again.
  - iii) “He is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life which ever fights the battle of goodness, a life which has never surrendered to sin, a life in which 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.” (Barclay)
- n) Verse 10 Observations
  - i) “Are obvious” is the word for manifest (visible, plainly to be seen).
  - ii) Two groups, then, are obvious: children of God and children of the devil. There is no third category.
  - iii) Members of each group are distinguished by what they habitually do in life: practice righteousness, or don't practice righteousness (i.e. practice sin).
  - iv) Added at the end is the concept of loving one's brother as another obvious sign. This statement is a transition to the John's discussion about love in the next set of verses.
- o) Repeated pattern in verses 4-10 (Stott)

	Verses 4-7	Verses 8-10
The introductory phrase:	“Everyone who practices sin”	“the one who practices sin”
The theme:	The nature of sin is lawlessness	The origin of sin is the devil
The purpose of Christ's appearing:	“He appeared in order to take away sins”	“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil”
The logical conclusion:	“No one who abides in Him sins”	“No one who is born of God practices sin”

- p) What other observations do you see?

## 2) Interpretation

Every single person who has the lifestyle of sinning by missing God's mark, moreover, also has the lifestyle of defiance against the known will of God. This is in stark contrast to the believer who dwells in his relationship with Jesus. Furthermore, this defiance, or lawlessness, is the essence and the definition of sin.

You have previously been taught that Jesus came to earth the first time for the purpose of removing our habit of sinning. Remember that Jesus is totally without sin; there is not a single speck of sin in Him.

Not a single person who dwells in his relationship with Christ sins habitually. As for the other category of people, not a single person who habitually sins has ever seen Jesus through the spiritual eyes of faith. Neither has this person experienced a personal relationship with Jesus.

Little children, be on guard and ensure that none of the deceivers or antichrists pull the wool over your eyes. Your moral conduct does matter. The person who habitually does righteous act shows that he has a righteous essence, just like Jesus has a righteous essence.

In contrast, the person who habitually sins gets his evilness from the devil. The reason for this is that ever since the devil first defied God, he has been continually doing so. Jesus, the very Son of Father God, was revealed in order to render the influence of the devil inoperative.

No one who has experienced spiritual rebirth and is now part of the family of God habitually sins. This is because the divine nature takes residence in this believer and he is not able to sin habitually, being a member of the family of God.

This is an obvious way to distinguish between the two camps of people, those who have been born into God's family and those who are influenced by the devil. The one who doesn't habitually do right things by obeying God's will, he obviously is not part of God's family. The person who doesn't make a habit of loving his brother is not part of God's family either.

### 3) Applications

- a) How does the definition of sin as "lawlessness", not just the absence of law, but a defiance of the known will of God, affect your understanding of how God views sin? What should be our view of sin?
- b) Can you distinguish in yourself the difference between habitual sin and an aberration of sin that is not a normal way of life? Describe that difference and the evidence it gives you that you are freed by Christ from habitual sin.
- c) Does our lifestyle matter? Why or why not?
- d) In this passage, is Jesus or is the devil the more powerful one? How does a person get to the state where they do not habitually sin?
- e) What does the teaching "he cannot sin (habitually)" do for you?
- f) Going back to John's purpose for writing this epistle, he wants us to have assurance of our salvation and gives us signs or tests to help us figure out for ourselves which camp we are in, the camp of Christ or the camp of the devil. What's your response to that?
- g) What other application do you have?

- 4) Handout for next week
  - a) Praise God that it is impossible for a child of His to continue in habitual sin!
  - b) Worship Jesus who came to earth with the purpose of destroying the works of the devil!
  - c) Exalt the Holy Spirit for what he has taught you in 3:4-10.
  - d) Read verses 2:28 to 3:24 for context.
  - e) Focus on verses 3:11-18.
  - f) How do these verses fit into the context of what we have already learned?
  - g) What do you think is the one main point of these verses? Make sure to base this interpretation on what you observe in the text. Remember, observation, then interpretation, then application.
  - h) Fill in the title for the paragraph beginning in verse 3:11 in the SURVEY CHART.