

Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 55

March 25, 2026

Executive Summary

This briefing document analyzes the core themes of First John 3:4–10, focusing on the fundamental incompatibility between a professing Christian and a lifestyle of sin. The text identifies a significant "pollution" within modern American evangelicalism, characterized as "easy believism"—a theology suggesting that salvation requires no repentance, obedience, or behavioral transformation. Drawing on the cyclical teachings of the Apostle John and the contemporary critiques by John MacArthur, the analysis establishes that true saving faith is validated by moral conduct, sound doctrine regarding the Trinity, and love for others. The document concludes that any theology divorcing spiritual "knowledge" from righteous living is a form of modern Gnosticism that contradicts the biblical definition of salvation.

Theological Context: The Cyclical Teaching of First John

The Apostle John's approach to instruction in his first epistle is characterized by a "circle" method. He introduces a theme, teaches it, and then returns to it repeatedly—often three or four times—to add layers of depth and enhance the reader's understanding.

The Scope of First John 3:4–10

The current section of study (verses 4–10) is viewed by scholars as a specific, parenthetical paragraph. Its primary mission is to define the boundaries of the Christian life in relation to sin.

- **The Nature of Sin:** The text defines sin as lawlessness: *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness* (1 John 3:4).
 - **The Purpose of Christ:** Jesus was manifested for two specific reasons: to take away sins and to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:5, 8).
 - **The Reality of the Believer:** John asserts that *In Him there is no sin and Whoever abides in Him does not sin* (1 John 3:5–6). This does not imply sinless perfection but rather the active removal of sin from one's life.
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The "Pollution" of Modern Evangelicalism

A central argument presented is that the "soil" and "groundwater" of the American evangelical movement have become toxic. This is compared to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, where radiation continues to affect the environment decades later.

The Critique of "Easy Believism"

Drawing from John MacArthur's works, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988) and *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (1993), the analysis identifies several erroneous viewpoints formerly propagated by prominent institutions like Dallas Theological Seminary. These views include:

- **Redefining Repentance:** Claiming repentance is merely a synonym for faith and that turning from sin is not required for salvation.
- **Transitory Faith:** The idea that a true Christian can completely cease believing and lapse into "willful unbelief" while remaining saved.
- **The "Carnal Christian" Fallacy:** The teaching that a "born again" person can live a life of lifelong carnality, indistinguishable from the unsaved.
- **Lack of Fruit:** The assertion that spiritual fruit is not a guaranteed result of a Christian's life.

The Failure of Momentary Experience

The document posits that saving faith is not merely the "experience of a moment" or giving intellectual credence to facts about Jesus. If a profession of faith does not result in a "life-changing transformation" or "new creature," the individual is not biblically saved according to John's criteria.

Historical and Modern Heresies

The document identifies two major movements—one ancient and one modern—that share a common error: the separation of spiritual knowledge from physical conduct.

Gnosticism

The early church was infiltrated by Gnostics (from the Greek word *ginosko*^[1]). Their heresy included:

- **Esoteric Knowledge:** The belief that "true religion" was about the mind alone—an exalted, mysterious knowledge.
- **Body-Spirit Dualism:** The idea that the body was irrelevant and its actions had no impact on one's righteousness.
- **Self-Delusion:** False teachers believed they had achieved a transcendent level of spirituality that excused them from the requirements of holy living.

The Word of Faith Movement

A modern parallel is found in the Word of Faith movement and the "experiential" focus of certain television evangelists. Key figures associated with these aberrant theologies

include Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and others. The briefing notes that these movements often possess:

- **Wrong Doctrine:** Flawed views of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the definition of faith.
- **Failed Conduct:** A denial of the necessity for repentance, righteousness, or the moral tests laid out by John.

The Biblical Tests of Faith

John provides a series of "anti-toxin" tests to validate a profession of faith. These tests are intended to help believers "check themselves" and to help congregations identify and remove false teachers.

1. The Moral Test (Conduct)

John is explicit: *He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil* (1 John 3:7–8).

- Obedience to commandments is the primary indicator of knowing God.
- *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4).

2. The Social Test (Love)

- *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother* (1 John 3:10).

3. The Doctrinal Test (The Trinity)

- Believers must hold a correct view of the Trinity.
- *By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God* (1 John 4:2).

Conclusion

The evidence from 1 John suggests that there is no "gray area" in the spiritual life; one is either a child of God or a child of the devil. True Christianity requires more than "cheap grace"; it requires a transformation of the spirit that manifests in a totally different life from the world. As the text concludes, "Jesus didn't die on the cross so you could come to Him and have a life of sin; Jesus died on the cross so you could be filled with His Spirit and live a totally different life."

Linguistic Reference Guide

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Brief Definition
Hypocrites	hi-po-kree-TAYS	A performer; specifically, an actor who wears a mask in a drama or comedy.[^2]
Ginosko	ghin-OCE-ko	To know; specifically, to have knowledge or to perceive.[^3]

[^1]: Referring to the root of Gnosticism, focusing on mental knowledge over moral conduct. [^2]: Originating from Greek amphitheaters where actors wore masks to portray characters. [^3]: The root word from which the Gnostics derived their name, emphasizing esoteric "knowing."