

Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 56: Our Incompatibility with Sin

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Executive Summary

This document synthesizes the theological examination of 1 John 3:4–10, focusing on the fundamental incompatibility between a life of faith and the habitual practice of sin. The central thesis posits that while believers are not sinlessly perfect, the "ruling principle" of their lives shifts from lawlessness to righteousness upon regeneration. The analysis resolves the apparent contradiction between 1 John 1 (which acknowledges human sin) and 1 John 3 (which states believers do not sin) through an examination of Greek tenses, emphasizing that a true Christian cannot engage in continuous, unrepentant, and habitual rebellion against God. The document further outlines the roles of the Trinity—the Father's Law, the Son's work, and the Spirit's ministry—in establishing the holiness of the believer.

The Nature of Christian Sonship and Conduct

The transition from 1 John 2 to 1 John 3 marks a shift in thematic emphasis from "fellowship" to "sonship." The source context outlines that the reality of a believer's standing as a child of God must be manifested through visible conduct.

- **Requirements of Sonship:** Being a true Christian requires two emblematic manifestations:
 - The practice of righteousness.
 - A dominant, measurable love for other Christians.
- **The Manifestation of Belief:** Conduct serves as a test of the reality of one's faith. Those who claim Christianity but habitually practice sin and lack love for the fellowship call their spiritual status into question.
- **Incompatibility and Impossibility:** 1 John 3 presents two critical statements:
 - *Whoever abides in Him does not sin* (1 John 3:6).
 - *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* (1 John 3:9).

Resolving the Paradox: 1 John 1 vs. 1 John 3

The document addresses the surface-level contradiction between 1 John 1:8, which states that those who claim to have no sin deceive themselves, and 1 John 3:9, which suggests those born of God cannot sin.

Erroneous Theological Interpretations

Various schools of thought have attempted to reconcile these verses with varying degrees of accuracy:

- **Perfectionism:** Associated with Arminian theology, this view suggests a Christian can reach a state of absolute sinlessness ("eradication of sin"). Failure to maintain this state results in losing one's salvation, leading to a cycle of repenting and re-earning it.
- **Antinomianism:** This "anti-law" view argues that because Christians are under grace, sin is irrelevant. It suggests that grace abounds more where sin abounds, leading to an indifference toward God's Law.
- **Mortal vs. Venial Distinctions:** Traditionally held by the Roman Catholic Church, this view limits John's warnings to "mortal" (major) sins, while viewing "venial" (minor) sins as less critical to one's status as a Christian.
- **The Dual Nature (Carnal Christianity):** A modern view (often linked to dispensationalism) that separates the "new creature" from the "old creature." It argues the new nature cannot sin, so any sin committed is the fault of the old nature, effectively removing personal responsibility.
- **Idealism:** The view that John is merely describing an unreachable goal or ideal rather than a practical reality.

The Correct View: Continuous Habitual Action

The resolution lies in the Greek tenses used in the original text. When John writes that a believer "does not sin," he refers to **continuous, habitual action**.

- **The Habitual Pattern:** A believer may sin occasionally and even willfully, but they do not sin relentlessly or persistently as a way of life.
- **Direction of Life:** Regeneration changes the direction of a person's life toward holiness and God. While a believer is not perfect, the ruling principle of their life is opposition to sin.
- **Defining the Unsaved:** Habitual sin is the defining characteristic of the unredeemed. The "sin of unbelief" reigns supreme in the life of the non-believer, manifesting in a pattern of thoughts, words, and actions.

Three Arguments for the Holiness of Believers

The scripture provides three reasons why a habitual life of sin is impossible for a true Christian, involving each member of the Trinity.

1. Incompatibility with the Law of God (The Father)

- *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness* (1 John 3:4).

- **Sin as an Attitude:** Sin is not merely a single transgression but an attitude of indifference or rebellion toward the Law and the Lawgiver.
- **Universal Truth:** This applies to everyone (*pas*), with no exceptions. Anyone practicing lawlessness exists outside the kingdom of God. As recorded in Matthew 7:23, Christ will say to such individuals: *I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*

2. Incompatibility with the Work of Christ (The Son)

- The work of Christ was intended to destroy the works of the devil and to take away sins. A life of habitual sin contradicts the very purpose of Christ's sacrifice.

3. Incompatibility with the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit's presence in the believer ("His seed remains in him") produces a new nature that longings for righteousness.

The Believer's Relationship to the Law

Conversion involves a shift in "mastery." A believer trades slavery to sin for slavery to righteousness.

- **The Commitment of Salvation:** Following Christ requires self-denial and submission to His lordship. As stated in Luke 9:23: *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*
- **Loving the Law:** Like the author of the Psalms, a believer begins to love the Law of God. *O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day* (Psalm 119:97).
- **The Struggle of the Flesh:** Using Romans 7, the document illustrates the internal conflict of the believer. Paul affirms that the *law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good* (Romans 7:12). While he admits to doing what he hates, his grief over sin affirms his love for the Law.
- **Repentance as Affirmation:** When a believer violates the Law and feels brokenhearted, they are affirming the goodness of the Law. This grief is a mark of a true Christian that is absent in the lawless.

Greek Language Reference and Guide

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Nomos ¹	NOH-moss	The Law; the standard of God's requirements.
Hamartia ²	ha-mar-TEE-ah	Sin; literally "missing the mark," like an arrow missing a target.

Adikia ³	ah-dee-KEE-ah	Unrighteousness; a failure to live a life of righteousness.
Anomia ⁴	ah-no-MEE-ah	Lawlessness; an attitude of rebellion or disregard for the law.
Pas ⁵	PAHSS	All; every; everyone. Indicates a universal application without exceptions.

¹ Contextualized in the briefing as the root for "nomian" in antinomianism. ² Used to define the nature of sin as missing God's standard. ³ Phonetically referenced in the transcript as "Idakia"; refers to unrighteousness. ⁴ Used to describe the state of the unconverted heart as open rebellion. ⁵ Referenced in the transcript as "Pasco"; denotes the inclusive nature of the warnings in 1 John 3.