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W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

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THE TIME WHEN YOU CANNOT SIN!

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
NUMBER 37
1 JOHN 5:18-21

Dr. W. O. Vaught
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

1 JOHN 5:18-21 "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

When we read a passage like this one before us now, we are prone to ask some questions like this--"Have you been born again? Have you done any sinning lately? Then why does this passage say whosoever is born of God sinneth not?"

1 JOHN 5:18 "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." The statement that gives us some trouble is the statement, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." When you put that statement in the hands of some person who does not know doctrine and the complete teaching of the Word of God concerning sin, then you are in real trouble. Some individuals and some denominations believe in what they call sinless perfection and they really get thing terribly mixed up when they come to a passage like this one.

Sinless Perfection An Impossibility

From time to time you will run into those strange and ridiculous people who claim they have never deliberately sinned since they became believers. They, of course, have forgotten such passages as 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This verse actually says this--"If we say we have no old sin nature after we have been converted (and the old sin nature is where sin comes from), then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But the question arises "How do you reconcile a verse like this with the verse we have before us now, which says that the one who has been born again does not sin?" To help answer this question, we need to look at 1 John 1:10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." This verse means that if we say we have not sinned after salvation, we make God a liar and His Word is not in us.

No Real Contradiction Here

People often take these verses when they do not properly understand them and say that the Bible has contradicted itself at this point. The reason why they make that mistake is this--THEY DO NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN PRINCIPLE AND EXPERIENCE. It is quite obvious that in 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10 we are talking about an experience. But here in 1 John 5:18 we are talking about a principle. The trouble with a lot of people who think they are not sinning is this--they are sinning by thinking they are not sinning and by saying they are not sinning. This case of super self-righteousness is one of the worst sins of all. Let me state very frankly that what appears to be a contradiction in these two verses is not a contradiction at all. In one passage we have an experience and in another passage we have a principle.

1 John 1:8 is explaining the Christian experience from the standpoint of a believer who is a liar. The believer who says he has never sinned (deliberately) since the day of his conversion is a liar. When he says that, he sinned in that very moment, for lying is a sin.

God Never Sins

God has never sinned at any time. God cannot sin and he cannot solicit to sin. God is absolutely perfect and can't sin and never has sinned. Once you are born into the family of God, God will never tempt you to sin and will never solicit you to sin and neither will he condone sin when you commit a sin. Sin is incompatible with the perfect character of God. This is also true of Christ and The Holy Spirit

Learn From Your Own Experience

You have learned enough doctrine to know that every minute since you have been saved, you have been under the control of the Holy Spirit or under the control of your old sin nature. Both are absolutes and you are under the control of one or the other. Both can't be controlling your life at the same time.

Go back now to 1 John 5:18 and notice that this verse says, "We know." This is the perfect tense of oida and this means permanent truth we have stored in our minds. The Holy Spirit regenerated you by putting you into union with Christ and the Holy Spirit has taken up his permanent home inside you. This is information that you have acquired. You know that experientially you are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. This relationship with the Holy Spirit begins the moment of salvation. Next we have the words "Whosoever is born" are the perfect, passive, participle of gennao. This construction of this verb means we were born sometime in the past (the moment we believed in Christ) with the result that we will stay born into the family of God forever. This is an experience that must happen in time, here on the earth. No one is ever born again after death or in eternity. So, if you are going to be born again, it must happen in time, here and now, while we are still alive on this earth. No one is ever given a chance, a second chance to be born again after death. The Bible states this principle in the line "As a tree falls, so shall it lie." In eternity you cannot sin because you will not have an old sin nature. You will not sin and you will not produce any human good.

A Believer Can And Does Sin

Many scriptures such as 1 Cor. 3:13 and 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10 and Galatians 5 and Colossians 3 are passages that deal with sins of believers. Quite obviously as a believer you are going to commit sins, many of them. But you can also have an experience in time here on the earth when you are filled with the Holy Spirit and at such a time, you do not sin and cannot sin. This is God's perfect will for us and he commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, from these scriptures, we see that while we are here in time, as believers, we have times when we sin and times when we do not sin. When we are under the control of the old sin nature, we sin. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we do not sin.

Distinguish Between Principle And Experience.

When you are in a family, you take on the characteristics of that family. All of us have certain genes at birth, then in addition to this, we have certain environment that helps shape our lives. It is

just inevitable that you take on the characteristics of the family where you live. You become the product you were reared and trained to be. When you believe in Jesus Christ and are born again, you take on the characteristics of God and that means whosoever is born of God does not sin. Now that is PRINCIPLE. The Holy Spirit is the agent of that salvation and he indwells you. When the Holy Spirit fills you and controls you, then you cannot sin. That infilling may not last long, that depends on your spiritual maturity and your ability to take in doctrine. But as long as you, a believer, are filled with the Holy Spirit, you cannot sin. This is a principle, not an experience. Experimentally we will sin, sooner or later, and we do sin. Once you are born into the family of God, you are there to stay. The passive voice of this word gennao means you received this salvation as a grace gift from God and it will be your everlasting possession. As long as you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are like God and you cannot sin. But when you stiff arm the Holy Spirit and fall into temptation, then is when you sin. This is the moment when you take on the characteristics of the first Adam. Therefore, in this verse, we have a great principle. When you are controlled by the Holy Spirit, you do not sin and cannot sin. When you are controlled by the old sin nature, you do sin, and you sin deliberately. These are not contradictory things, one is principle and the other is experience.

Next in this verse we have "sinneth not" and this is from hamartano. This is an aristic present and it means a present tense to give a principle. All this verse is saying is this--under certain conditions you cannot sin, but once you move out from under those conditions, then you can sin and do sin in your daily experiences.

1 John 3:9 states exactly this same principle. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Get Four Principles Here

1. The believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, cannot sin.
2. The believer, under the control of the old sin nature, sins and produces human good.
3. The believer goes from spirituality to carnality by his own volition, and even if he sins in ignorance, it is still a sin and volition is involved even though he may not be conscious of it. He still wanted to do that sin and his volition was involved. There is never a sin you commit that you do not commit from your own volition (unless you are a moron). Even when you commit a sin in ignorance, it is still something you wanted to do and your volition was involved.
4. Therefore, only when the believer is filled with the Spirit does this principle apply. Only when you are filled with the Spirit do you take on the characteristics of the family of God. If you are a baby believer, you act like a baby in the family of God. If you are an adolescent, you act like an adolescent Christian. If you are a mature member of God's family, then you respond like a mature believer. But whether baby, adolescent or mature, you do not sin only at those times when you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Look At This Illustration

Suppose you are the descendant of a family where the people all have hot tempers. Your great grandfather died of a stroke because he had a terrible fit of temper. But you come along and you appear to be calm and sweet and you always appear to have everything under control. Then one day someone crosses you and a volcano erupts. For the first time in your life you really took on the family characteristics, but at other times you are calm and sweet. This is the principle, and this is the issue in this passage.

This word for sin, hamartano, means "missing the mark." So the principle is this, whosoever is born of God and is under the control of the Holy Spirit does not miss the mark and sin. The erection of the edification complex in the soul is the force that stabilizes you and keeps you in fellowship and helps you to remain filled with the Holy Spirit.

Next in this verse we have "he that is begotten" and this is an aorist passive, participle of gennao and it means to be born again. Then we have the words "from God" and this is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ who paid for our sins on the cross. Just like Christ kept himself from sin and went to the cross, once we are converted and filled with the Holy Spirit, we keep ourselves from sin. Then we have the expression "the wicked one does not touch him" and this is the present middle, indicative of haptomai. This completes the explanation of a great principle which we have in this verse, and this is that we cannot sin as long as we are in that bottom circle, in fellowship, controlled by the Holy Spirit.

1 JOHN 5:19 "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." We know that we are from the source of God. This present, active, indicative of eimi means that once we are saved, we are saved forever. This next phrase actually says, "The whole world lieth in the lap of wickedness." This is the present, middle, indicative of keimai and means that until Satan is finally bound by Christ and finally defeated he will continue to be the ruler of this world. The word for wickedness is the masculine gender with the definite article in front of it and it should read, "In the wicked one."

1 JOHN 5:20 "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." This phrase "we know" rings like a bell through these verses. "That the Son of God is come" comes from heko and not erchomai and it means "arrived on the scene." And please notice what he did when he arrived. "He has given us an understanding" and this is the perfect, active, indicative of didomi and it means he gave this to us in the past with the understanding that we will always have it. Now we come to another word for know and that word is ginosko and it means to come to know experientially. The word for "true" is alethinos and should be translated "The true one." This is a very beautiful picture of the magnificence of Jesus Christ. Now we have alethinos and this time it is speaking about God the Father.

1 JOHN 5:21 "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."
The term "Little children" refers to believers with stunted spiritual growth, believers who stay out of fellowship most of the time. Next we have a warning. "Guard yourselves" is phulasso and it means "be on the alert constantly." The way to do this is to fill your mind with doctrine. They are warned to keep on the alert apo and it means "from the ultimate source of idols," and this means false religions.

Through these verses we have just studied runs the idea of confidence. Confidence comes from knowing doctrine.

1. We saw confidence in the will of God, and that was verse 14.
2. Next we saw confidence in prayer in verse 15.
3. Next we saw confidence that comes from being alive.
4. In verse 18, where we spent most of our time tonight, we saw confidence in spirituality.
5. In verses 19 and 20, we saw the importance of confidence in our relationship with God.
6. We ended up 1 John with the idea that we have confidence by being spiritually self-sustaining.