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THE TIME WHEN A CHRISTIAN CANNOT SIN

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN
NUMBER 17
1 JOHN 3:6

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1 JOHN 3:6 "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

In our last study we looked carefully at the sinlessness of Christ. Christ faced all kinds of temptations and yet he never sinned. He had none of the imputed sin of Adam, he had no old sin nature and he never committed an act of sin. But there is another doctrine that parallels the doctrine of his sinlessness and that is the doctrine of the hypostatic union.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

(Don't allow the name "Hypostatic Union" to confuse you. This is the theological term meaning the union of his human and divine natures into one individual. This is why Christ is the unique figure in the universe. He is the only one who has ever had these two natures in one person.)

1. In the person of Christ we have two natures, inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identities, without loss or transfer of properties or attributes, the union being personal and eternal.
2. We have many scriptures that tell us of the hypostatic union such as Phil. 2:5-11, John 1:1-14, Romans 1:2-5, Romans 9:5, 1 Cor. 3:16 and Hebrews 2:14. For our use here we will look at only one. ROMANS 1:2-5 "(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh: And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:"
3. The incarnate person of Christ includes undiminished deity. Jesus Christ is God. He is co-equal and co-eternal with God The Father and with God the Holy Spirit. He has the identical essence as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. This is why the Bible says, "The Lord our God is one Lord." It means they are one and the same in essence. That is why we have the word Elohim used for God. It is a plural word and it includes all three of them.
4. Jesus Christ is also humanity, true humanity, with body, soul and human spirit. Because of the virgin birth, Jesus Christ avoided spiritual death and was born without an old sin nature and was born with a human spirit. Jesus Christ is actually the only person born with a human spirit. Adam was created with one, but lost it in the fall in the Garden of Eden. All other members of the human race are born with an old sin nature, with their human spirit blacked out. When they become believers, their human spirit is revived and becomes the depository of doctrinal truth from which they exhale faith toward God.

5. The two natures of Christ (human and divine) are united without transfer of attributes. In other words, the attributes of deity adhere to deity and the attributes of humanity adhere to humanity. The perfect essence of his deity was never changed. The infinite cannot be transferred to the finite. To rob God of a single attribute would destroy his deity and his humanity. He is undiminished deity and true humanity in one person forever. That cannot be said of any other person in the universe.
6. During the incarnation (his 33 years here in the flesh) no attribute of his perfect essence was changed. In fulfilling the purpose of the incarnation certain attributes of his deity were used. He restricted certain of these deity characteristics, but it doesn't mean that he lost them or didn't have them. Christ lived among men and took on himself certain human limitations. The divine elements were there, he just didn't call on them so as not to limit or overrun his perfect humanity.
7. Therefore the union of the divine and human natures must be considered hypostatic and personal. (The Greek word hypostasis means essence, it means characteristics, it means the qualities of character under which you stand.) Christ always remained God but he caused certain of his divine characteristics to stand aside so he could die on the cross.
8. This does not mean that deity possesses humanity or that deity indwells humanity. The union is more than a harmony or a synthesis, it is personal.
9. The God-man, Jesus Christ, has one hypostasis. Therefore, both his human and his divine attributes belong to the person of Christ. The attributes of one nature are never attributed to the attributes of the other nature. His deity is always his deity and his humanity is always his humanity. This means that at the same time he is all powerful and weak, he knows everything in his deity but does not allow that all-knowledge to run over into his human limitations. To illustrate this look at MATTHEW 24:36 "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."
10. Look at the necessity for Christ's humanity.
 - a. Christ had to become a man in order to be our saviour. HEBREWS 2:14-15 "Forasmuch then as the children are partaker of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."
As God he could not die for our sins. God cannot die. He had to become humanity in order to die.
 - b. Christ had to become a man in order to mediate between man and God. He could lay his hand on man and his hand on God and pull them together. (Job 9:32-33, 1 Tim. 2:5-6)
 - c. Christ had to become a man to be our high priest. This is taught in many passages in Hebrews.
 - d. He had to be true humanity in order to one day fulfill the Davidic Covenant. (2 Samuel 7:8-16, Psalm 89:20-37)

11. The Bible lists the categories of his attributes.
His deity is expressed in John 8:58.
JOHN 8:58 "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."
His humanity is expressed in John 19:28.
JOHN 19:28 "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst."
Often we will see all these attributes together showing his uniqueness.

12. Everything Christ spoke came from one of three sources.
The passage just listed above in John 8:58 came from his deity.
The passage just quoted above from John 19:28 has reference to his humanity.
In Matthew 11:28 he spoke from his hypostatic union.
MATTHEW 11:28 "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." God the Holy Spirit sustained the humanity of Christ all through his incarnation. There was never a moment when Christ was not filled with the Holy Spirit (Except the three hours on the cross when he became sin for us).

1 JOHN 3:6 "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." The first "whosoever" in this verse is referring to the believer filled with the Holy Spirit. The second "whosoever" is talking about the unbeliever. We are dealing in these verses with principles, not with practice. The words "whosoever abideth" refers to the believer in fellowship, the believer filled with the Holy Spirit.

JAMES 1:13 "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:" This verse in James sheds some light on this principle. When a man is controlled by the Holy Spirit, he cannot sin.

The Power Of Free Will

It is your free will that takes you out from under the control of the Holy Spirit and puts you under the control of the old sin nature. While under the control of the old sin nature, you cannot please God. We read in Romans 8:8 that they that are in the flesh cannot please God. "In the flesh" is a technical term for being under the control of the old sin nature. Therefore, in this verse, we have a principle established, and in principle this is always true of all believers. As long as a believer is controlled by the Holy Spirit he cannot sin.

The Power Not To Sin Is Not Your Power

There are those who believe that if they are good enough, if they agonize enough in prayer, if they will just do certain things of a spiritual nature, then they can attain sinlessness. This is not true. The sinless state is achieved by the work of God and no man achieves this on his own. When you become "A new creature in Christ Jesus" this is the work of God in you and never your own achievement.

A Beautiful Contrast

We can pick up a perfect contrast in practice and principle by looking at two verses in this Book of 1st John.

In 1 John 1:8 we have practice.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Here in 1 John 3:6a we have principle.

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not"

So when you are reading along in a little technical book like 1 John, you need to know what is practice and what is principle.

Abiding In Christ

When you read such terms as "In Christ" or "abide in him" you are reading technical terms that refer to a believer being under the domination of the Holy Spirit. Here in this first part of verse 6, the word "abideth" is a present, active, participle of meno. This is an aristic present which connotes punctiliar action in present time to show the status quo of a believer. In other words, as long as a believer stays under the control of the Holy Spirit he cannot sin. This participle modifies the verb "sinneth not" and this is the present, active, indicative of hamartano plus the strong negative ouk. "In him" is from en autos and this is referring to the filling of the Holy Spirit as a principle. Hamartano means missing the mark and is a perfect word to use for sin as a principle.

A Principle For All Believers

So the principle we have is this--You cannot sin as long as you are controlled by the Holy Spirit. THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE. It is always true of all believers under all conditions. When we sin we go in a direction away from the Holy Spirit and that's why we have the term in scripture "grieving the Holy Spirit." It is impossible to get out from under the control of the Holy Spirit unless you do it yourself. No one can take you out from under his control, it must come from an act of your own free will. The issue always is free will. Therefore, the objective of every believer is to stay in the bottom circle all the time to stay in fellowship all the time, to stay under the control of the Holy Spirit all the time. This is our guarantee that we will not sin. The Holy Spirit cannot solicit to sin neither can he tolerate sin.

Breaking The Relationship

For the believer under the control of the Holy Spirit to sin, he must first break the connection and of his own free will take himself from under the Spirit's control. This is accomplished at the point of temptation and is a part of the temptation. But just the temptation will not void this relationship apart from an independent act of the free will. Volition is involved in every sin, both known and unknown sins.

A One Way Street

Getting out of fellowship and out from under the control of the Holy Spirit is a one way street. I mean by that, that you can do something to get out of that relationship but you can do nothing to get back into that relationship. Just like you can do nothing to be saved, neither can you do anything to regain the filling of the Holy Spirit. BOTH BELIEVE FOR SALVATION AND CONFESS FOR THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE NON-MERITORIOUS VERBS. In neither case can you do anything, for the Lord does it all for you. Both salvation and spirituality are gifts from God and neither can be achieved. So we do something to lose fellowship but we can do nothing to regain it.

Look At This Word Confess

You confess your sin, but the sin you confess was already cared for by Christ when he died on the cross. He has already taken that sin and has paid for it in full. Therefore, your being reinstated to your fellowship position was not your accomplishment, but rather was his doing. That is why we sing "Jesus paid it all." He paid it all in salvation and in restoration. Both are acts of grace.

The second "whosoever" in this verse refers to an unbeliever. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." This too is principle. The one who keeps on sinning really means the one who persists in living in unbelief. The greatest sin of all is the sin of unbelief. If you continue in unbelief, you continue to be a sinner, an unbeliever. The reason John brings this statement in here is to point out to us that the believer out of fellowship is under the control of the old sin nature and the unbeliever is also under the control of the old sin nature. Both will do the same kind of things, though one is saved and the other is unsaved. Superficially and overtly there is no difference between the carnal believer and the unbeliever. Both produce acts of sin and acts of human good. They are functioning under exactly the same principle.

Because this is a rather complicated statement, we will leave this until our next study.