

Christian, Don't Sin

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

1st John chapter 2, "My little children," — and of course when this is speaking not about his actual biological children, but when this is speaking to Christians, you know many believed that John was an aged, old apostle and certainly a title like this would give reason for us to see him just addressing these Christians; the tender affection of an aged pastor, a spiritual father. You can see a man in his 80s or 90s. Even old men in their 50s and 60s and 70s are little children to him.

"I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous."

Now, brothers and sisters, I want you to focus your attention on not only the first verse here in this second chapter, but I want, right here in the beginning, I want us to focus on the first sentence of this first verse of this second chapter. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

Just simply reading these words, I mean just think about it; Just read these words as they are. Pastoral. Practical. These things were meant to be practical. So often, we turn things into theological debates. That doesn't mean we don't need to discuss what things mean, but a lot of times we use verses more from a theoretical standpoint; in our ivory towers, you know, we want to discuss and debate theology.

But that's not what Scripture is primarily intended for. It's meant to be practical. It's meant to deal with people right where they are. That's what John is doing, he's addressing these people. And I want you to ask yourselves, What's John saying here? What's he saying? I mean, just a practical, pastoral sense, what do you hear coming from the heart of this apostle?

He's teaching, he's encouraging his spiritual children. I ask you this question, Is John not clearly indicating that Christians need not sin? I mean, think with me. What's he saying here? I'm not saying John is teaching perfectionism here. You can all read this for yourselves. You've got your Bibles open before you, you can see for yourself and read for yourself what he is saying. What does it sound like John is saying here? "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."

Grace Community Church, some things have been done in order to equip you so that you don't sin. Some things have been done so that you may not sin.

John is assuming here, It certainly sounds like John is expressing his desire that these Christians he's writing to might not sin. Might not sin when? Ever. At all.

Again, perfectionism isn't the issue here. But is he not writing to them that they not sin, when? When they might sin. And I mean, you live a whole life like that, not sinning when you might sin, what does it end up looking like? It ends up looking good. It ends up looking healthy. It ends up looking to be like the life that clearly John wants his little children to live like. Brethren, that's what it says.

What does it sound like John is saying here? His desire is that they may not sin, period. I know you can all see that. But you know what? This isn't just him giving an expression of his desire that they not sin. John is not just a passive observer on all these, who sort of sits over

there and says "O, I hope they don't sin." That's not what's happening. John tells us he is actively engaged in his own effort in helping them not to sin. How is that? By writing in the way that he believes is calculated to prevent these Christians from sinning.

You all see that? "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." 'So that' — John writes what he writes in order to produce a certain result; so that Christians who would potentially, perhaps sin in a certain situation, had John not written to them what he's written to them, they might now avoid sin precisely because of what he has written to them. You can see the pulse of John's pastoral heart here. That's what's coming out.

Here he is, an old man, and he's penning this letter. He's penning it with a heartfelt purpose. And what's that purpose? His earnestness is about this little flock. What does he want? He wants them not sinning.

I am trying to drive a point home here. I mean, for one, John is not casually writing. He writes on purpose, with a purpose; and that is, that God's people not sin. That is realistic folks, to believe that the Christian doesn't have to sin. That's what I'm driving home. As I survey John's words here, it's clear to me that John does not believe that Christians have to sin. Christian, do you think that way? I'll tell you, the mindset with which we approach sin is so absolutely critical. I come back to this, time and time again; that there in Romans 6, where we are specifically told not to let sin reign in your mortal bodies, that's not how he started. Paul started by saying, You need to reckon yourself, you need to consider yourselves dead to sin. You need to think right about sin. You need to think right about who is master in the Christian life. And unless you think right about it, if you go into the Christian life with this defeatist mentality that I just have no power over it, I'm just kind of a ragdoll and it throws me around wherever, you know, you can't expect me to do much better.

That's not the approach of Scripture; and what Scripture is saying to us is, we've got to think right about sin and how it relates to the Christian if we're ever going to fight it right.

John isn't denying that this is an all out battle. John isn't denying that there aren't these passions of the flesh that wage war against the soul. John isn't denying that sometimes we have to resist sin all the way to shedding our blood. He's not denying any of that.

But you see clearly what he is saying. You can see as plainly as I can, that it is assumed here that if Christians take what John has written, and do with it what John intends for them to do with it, the result will be what? You answer it, That they may not sin. That these Christians would refrain from sin. And you tell me this, What is John writing? What is he writing?

"My little children, I write these things," What things? Obviously 1st John. And what is 1st John? It's Scripture. It's God-breathed. That's what we have here. I mean, what you need to get from that is, it's not just John who believes that the Christian doesn't have to sin. It's ultimately who? It's God. This is God-breathed. So, it is ultimately God who believes that Christians don't have to sin.

It's God who believes that Christians, think about this: It's God who believes that you take a person and save them through the merits, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ; regenerate them by the power of God, Indwell them by the Spirit of God. If they'll use their heads, the brains that God gave them, and process the Word of God. If they will meditate on that Word and know that Word and come to fear that Word. In their minds, they'll chew on it. They'll tremble at it. They'll believe it, they'll be convicted by it if they apply it to their life.

God believes you can actually be deterred from sin by doing that. You can avoid sin. Brethren, does this not sound something like maybe what David said in Psalm 119? What did David say in Psalm 119 that sounds really similar to this? I've hid Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Is there a reality to that? I mean, did he just make that up? Is he an exception?

Brethren, John assumes the same thing. Absolutely. And notice, I want you to see this. Notice how John progresses in this first verse. What's the next thing that he says? It's really interesting to me how he says this. "But - that's the ESV - but, If anyone does sin." I write these things to you so that you don't sin, but if you do, (now a lot of the translations put 'and', but that doesn't take away from the fact that that word 'if' is there.) You know what? That could easily be translated 'in case.' It means the same thing. You're not doing any injustice to Scripture if you read it this way: "I write to you that you do not sin, but in case you do."

Now here's the thing that I want you to see about that. In John's mind, what does it sound like is normative, and what does it sound like to him, is the exception? Is sinning the normative thing, or not sinning the normative thing? Which one is the exception, when we don't sin as Christians or when we do? What does that sound like? Christians, I write to you that you don't sin, but in case you do.

I mean, in case there's a fire, we have an exit back there. Does that sound like the fire is the normal thing? It sounds like it's the exception. That's how he's talking here. Can you imagine it? An inspired man, An inspired apostle actually writing like the most normative thing is that the Christian practices righteousness. Is that amazing to people?

Christians not sinning is the norm here, not the exception. And listen, it's not like John only says that here. This first epistle of John resonates with this reality all over the place. I'm just going to show you one place because I think it's one of the most stark; it's just one of the most obvious portions. If you jump forward to 1st John 3, — I mean, John here is not so specifically pressing us to take what he writes and not sin, as much as he is just indicating the reality that if you are truly a Christian, the pattern of sin in your life will be broken. The practice of righteousness will be the norm. The practice of sinning will no longer be the reality.

And if we pick up in 1st John 3:5, "You know that Christ appeared to take away sins." Now, here's the thing: I do not believe he is talking about taking away the guilt. I believe he is talking about taking sin out of your life. He is taking the practice of sin out of your life. Why do I believe that? Well, watch. "You know He appeared to take away sins, and in Him (in Christ) there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Now look, I would tie that thought right there, "The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil," right back with what's said in verse 5, "He appeared to take away sins." The Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. And certainly, what's he talking about? He's talking about the practice of sin. Whoever practices sin is of the devil. The devil has been sinning, and those who are his, sin.

But Christ appeared to break that. So much so, that verse 9 says, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him. He cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God." This sounds like radical language, but true Christianity is radical. Regeneration is radical. To be born of God is radical. It's a new creation. "By this, it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

Now, the thing is, I'll emphasize again. These verses here are simply all (I didn't look at every verb here) but it's likely all in the indicative. It's indicating what's true.

That's not what's happening in 1st John 2:1. He's not just indicating a reality. Here, he's pressing home the reality that he has written, and we are responsible to take what he has written, and process that so that we don't sin. O, the thing about 1st John 2:1 that ought to excite us is the fact that John is clearly not just telling us to passively sit over there; and because Jesus did all this work to destroy what the devil did, that you can just passively sit over there, and you just really have no part to play; and God is just going to be zapping you and doing this and doing that and all these things, and you can sit there and do nothing and you'll just turn out to be this sinless person.

That's not the issue. There's obviously a responsibility here. What's the responsibility? The responsibility in our part, is to take what has been written, and to do with it such things as we need to do with it, so that we end up not sinning. We have a responsibility to take God's Word and apply it in our lives. And you know what? Not just John, but God Himself assumes that you can do that.

You know what I'm finding? And I've seen a lot of this just from the result, just from the response to brother Charles Leiter's book on justification and regeneration. I'm finding a lot of reformed people, a lot of people in the reformed community, they don't like talk like this. Why? They claim that talking like this, is what they call 'Over-realised Soteriology.' Let me put that in layman's terms, they just believe that it's over-victorious. "It just sounds too good to be true. It isn't realistic," they claim. "We should expect Christians to be these wretched men who never do good but they're always doing the evil that they don't want to do."

There's charges of perfectionism that get laid out there. They abound. But look folks, John isn't concerned, John is not dealing with us sitting over in our theological ivory towers and just debating perfectionism. That isn't the issue here. Look, you can't miss this. This is even about whether John believes somebody can actually reach a point where they no longer sin in this lifetime. But you be honest with the text.

The way he writes here, do you think he will have us chase perfection all out? You better believe it. He's not telling us whether he thinks we can actually achieve it or not. But I'll tell you what he does believe we can achieve, is habitually taking the Word of God, processing it and as a result, not sinning. And doing that over and over and over; and having such a practice of righteousness.

I mean, you know that's true. You see it right here in his words. He seems to be convinced that if we truly heed what he's written, we're not going to sin. But here's the thing, I think this is the next question we have to ask ourselves. What did he write? Well, he wrote 1st John. And I have a feeling that because he is saying it at this point in the letter, that he is primarily referring to chapter 1. 'These things,' I think he is alluding to what he just wrote.

So, I mean, let us ask this. We're going to go through the rest of this book, Lord willing, and we'll see the rest of the things that he wrote, that we might not sin. But for now, at this point in the letter, I think he is primarily referring to what he just wrote. What did he just write? Let's just think about several of the things that he just wrote that might help us not sin.

I read through that 1st chapter again, what are the kind of things that jump out? "God is light." God is light. I mean, I just thought about this: Christian, are you going to play with sin, when God is light? God is light. O how we ought to think about the nature and the beauty and the greatness of God more than we do. I don't think people that are riveted with the grandeur of the person of God, very easily sin.

When we fill our mind full of thoughts of who the true God is, that alone is a deterrent to sin. God hates sin! He hates it. God damns men and women and angels, for sin. He is light, and sin is dark. Sin is what it is; If you think about it, sin is what it is, precisely because it is contrary to who God is.

Brothers and sisters, we ought to ask ourselves, Isn't that enough? Isn't that enough of a reason not to sin? Because it is absolutely contrary to the nature of God. I mean, we have to ask ourselves this, Do we want to live for the glory of God? Are you really even interested about the glory of God? Living your life where you are just driven by fear all the time. Living your life where you are just afraid of punishment all the time. What is that? That's not what God wants. God wants people who are in awe of Him. God really wants people that worship Him.

If we're really wired to, Oh we want to please Him, we won't easily sin. Another thing that comes out at me here in 1st John 1 is just this: "If we walk in the light." You know, brothers and sisters, we walk in the light. We walk in the light. I would say this to you: Don't be content with always looking at sin from the negative side. You know what I mean by that? "Oh no, I don't want to sin, I don't want to sin." The Christian life is not all about going around and saying to ourselves all the time, "don't walk in the dark, don't walk in the dark." Remember the positive side of being a Christian. We walk in the light. We walk in the light. Don't live your life just trying to avoid darkness. Don't live your life just saying, "what's wrong with that, or why shouldn't I do that?"

Brethren, pursue good. Walk in the light. Actually live in the light. I mean, have you ever considered that, perhaps, maybe the best way not to sin is just to walk in the light and fill your life with good. Have you ever considered not always forever, to be just going around and saying, "don't do this, don't do that." God never intended for you and I as Christians to simply not do evil. He didn't.

The best way to not sin is to aggressively pursue righteousness. I get the sense that some of the people that come here, I hear them and I don't see them over in the corner strategizing on how to visit the widow and the orphan. I hear them saying, "What's wrong with that? What's wrong with that movie? What's wrong with that kind of music? What's wrong with that hairstyle? What's wrong with tatoos? What's wrong with this? What's wrong with that? What's wrong with me wearing a hat? What's wrong with this?"

Brothers and sisters, God doesn't intend for you to approach Christianity from this negative perspective all the time. Yeah, we do have to look at things and weigh out; Is this right, Is this wrong? Does this build up? Does this bring me into, you know, am I going to be controlled

by this thing? Is this idolatry? How does this fare with my brothers and sisters, will it cause them to stumble?

But brethren, live doing good! I was hungry and you fed me. Go feed somebody! Quit worrying about "Well, should I do that? Is that kind of music okay or isn't it?" Go out and do what you know is good! Don't live just this mediocre, (Piper calls it minimal morality.) Get over that. Live for Christ. Live with a Purpose. Live on purpose. Do good. Live righteously. Throw away that sloppiness.

How about this, another thing that he wrote - Now, at first, it can almost seem like this might do the opposite than to encourage us not to sin. But think about what he wrote, especially in verses 7 and 9 of chapter 1. "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." What things? Well, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and He is going to cleanse us of all this unrighteousness.

Brethren, I think that is chiefly one of the things that John means is calculated to make us not sin. You say, "Wait, wait, how does that work? I mean, if you're telling me that if I do run into sin, I have an Advocate; if I do run into sin and I confess it, He is faithful and just to forgive; if I do run into sin, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin. Wouldn't that tend to make me a little less vigilant? Wouldn't that tend to encourage more carelessness?"

Brethren, does the free offer of forgiveness actually make God's people more zealous to run into sin? Does it do that? Brethren, does it not melt us? If I have such a God like this, who spilled the blood of His Son; who crushed His head, who poured Him out like water. If I have such a God that doesn't just cast me into hell when I sin, but He's provided my way of escape through the merits of His own son. If I have a God like that, Brethren does that just encourage you to just go out and sin all the more boldly? Or does it melt you and say "O, if I have a God like that, I want to live for Him and I want to please Him. I don't want to sin."

Brethren, do you see the guilty Christian, do you see the guilty man? the brother or sister with their head hung low; and water filling their eyes, and they are confessing their sins to their Father in heaven. And it's just fresh to their soul all over again, John's words that he writes, O the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin. And this assurance that God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse. Do you see that person? What do you see him run out of the door do? Say, "O boy, if that's it, I'm just going to go out and indulge." No, that's not what that produces. If I have a God like that, then I am going to go out and live for Him. I don't want to sin against Him.

Brethren, I hope you have not come to the place where you believe that threatenings and thunder are the most effective way to keep people from sinning. I don't think John believes that. Brethren, what happens when people obey because they fear you? What does that look like? You know what it looks like to me, It looks like a slave and a slavemaster. That's what that looks like.

That doesn't mean we're not to fear God. I'm not saying that. But brethren, I'll tell you this: You can't read your Scripture for long without seeing God wants your heart, and God wants your love. God wants you to love Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. God wants your life love-motivated. Don't you get that from Scripture? I certainly see that.

It is not love-motivated, or I should say, Is it not love-motivated purity that seems God is so desirous of, and it thrills Him. And brethren, if we do, I mean, as we're practising righteousness, we're seeking to live for God; if we sin, My brothers and sisters, we are told that if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

My brothers and sisters, we need to get rid of the idea once and for all, that God is against us. The devil will suggest that to you when you sin, but we need to get over that idea; because you need to remember we have an Advocate. But you remember this: The Judge appointed that Advocate. God wants to be appeased. He wants to be satisfied in your behalf. He appointed such a One as Christ. When we feel the guilt of sin, the suggestions will come.

John wrote to us so that we wouldn't sin. But what happens? At times we do. And what happens? We get tempted to despair, we get tempted to discouragements; Doubts fill your head, Would God take me back? Can I have fellowship with Him like I've had in the past? Afterall He is very holy and what I did, I know is defiling. You feel so defiled. You feel stupid. 'Why did I do that?' Maybe it makes you cold. Sin tends to do that. Discouraged.

But there He is. I mean we said, behold Him there; The Risen Lamb, there He is. An Advocate for the people of God. He represents you. Remember what an Advocate means? He represents you. He has your cause and your case that He is concerned with. He represents you. He ever lives - have you ever noticed how Scripture says that? - He ever lives to intercede for you. That comes out of Hebrews 7. You know what you don't want to do with that? You know what that does not sound like it's saying? Is that, well, really, Christ died on the cross; and really because God knows that He did back then, in His memory of that, that's what it means for Christ to be an Advocate or an Intercessor. And so, really, it doesn't really mean that He does anything, He just sits over there; again, passively sits over there and nothing is done. That's not what Scripture makes the advocacy of Christ sound like.

Brethren, He ever lives to make intercession in behalf of His people. He stands before the court and He presents your case. He pleads on your behalf. That's what Jesus Christ is to us who believe. You don't get the idea it's just passive advocacy. You get the idea He always lives to make intercession. You get the distinct impression from that idea there in Hebrews 7, that Jesus Christ is very active. He lives to intercede. That does not sound passive. It sounds like He is actively involved in pursuing the interests of His people, all the time. He's there in heaven.

I came across this idea that —John says it, he says that we have an Advocate with the Father. — And you know, I read Martin Lloyd-Jones on that statement there, and he made an observation about the word 'with.' And I thought I don't need to say that. But then, last night I was laying on my bed, and I had RefNet on my phone - that's R. C. Sproul's internet radio program; and Sproul said this very same 'with.' This very same greek word is found in John 1:1.

When we talk about, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." And Sproul was really hitting on the same thing that Martin Lloyd-Jones thought was so important. And it's this idea that - in the greek, there are actually three different words that get translated into the english 'with.' And he went through and he explained all three of them. The one we have here actually means to be with somebody face to face. eyeball to eyeball.

And I mean, you just imagine that picture. Here's our Advocate. He's there on our behalf, and He is eyeball to eyeball with His Father. What a picture. Here is God face to face with God;

and yet, One of those persons actually in every respect became like us so that He might be a sympathetic High Priest. He might be able to relate to us in our infirmity, our weakness. He knows. He's felt the things we felt, yet without sin. But He's felt the temptations, He's felt the weakness. And He is eyeball to eyeball with His Father, actively interceding. Actively, there on our behalf. Actively.

And it's not like the Father needs to somehow have His arm twisted. Remember, the Father so loved the world, that He gave His Son. He appointed Him to this advocacy. The Father is in this thing. And here is Christ, eyeball to eyeball with the Father, just removing all the barriers to our fellowship. All the barriers. We fall into sin. He writes to us that we not, but O when we do, there is Christ and all is made well. All the barriers are removed.

Brethren, we can come to God with confidence and with assurance and the faithfulness of our Advocate. We can. It is He who lives. He ever lives. That's the reality. That's why He is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He ever lives! He never dies! When they die, they could no longer intercede on our behalf. But He ever lives. He ever lives eyeball to eyeball with the Father. He lives to act on our behalf. It is He who enables God to accept you. And you have to think about this, God would in fact be unjust if He did not accept you. And God the Father wants it that way.

The Father in His everlasting love, has Himself provided you with One to ever live in His presence to in fact actively be interceding, and acting the part of an advocate.

And Christian, I would just say this: Christian, Christian, with such a salvation as this; with such a Father as this; with such an Advocate as this, Christian, don't sin.

[Prayer] Father I pray the reality this might just be pressed upon us, in Christ's name I ask, Amen.