

the light of the Scriptures.

5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

In this verse, John continues to emphasize that a person whose life is characterized by sin is not a child of God. As noted above, in v. 4, the phrase *πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*, “everyone who is doing sin” utilizes the present participle in the Greek, which often denotes a present and ongoing action or customary activity. In emphasizing that someone whose life is characterized by sin has proven himself or herself not to be a “child of God,” John is simply reiterating the teachings of Yeshua Himself. For Yeshua Himself taught:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin (*πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*) is the slave of sin. (Jn 8:34)

Thus, John utilizes the exact phrase in v. 4 (*πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*) as we find in Jn 8:34 which records the words of Yeshua.

Moreover, since the very purpose for Yeshua’s incarnation was to conquer the domain of sin in the world, for a person to confess on the one hand that he or she is a true disciple of Yeshua and yet to have a life characterized by sin, is entirely incongruent. Remember the words of Yochanan HaMatbil (John the Baptist) when he saw Yeshua approaching:

The next day he saw Yeshua coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (*ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου!*)” (Jn 1:29)

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; – John affirms that his readers know this important fact, that Yeshua came in His first advent “to take away sins.” How is it that they have come to know this? Undoubtedly the answer is through the teaching of the Apostles and their own written accounts in the Gospels and Epistles.

We should note that in the phrase “to take away sin,” the Greek text has the definite article and the word “sin” is in the plural: “to take away the sins.” The NASB and other English translations presume that the articular plural indicates the abstract category of “sin” in general. But if that were the case, we might expect the singular to be used rather than the plural. Rather than indicating the category of “sin,” the articular plural prompts the reader to ask the question, “what sins”? To which the obvious answer is “our sins,” i.e., all who, by faith, confess Yeshua

to be their Savior. In fact, the word “our” (ἡμῶν, *hēmōn*) appears after the word “sins” in Codex Sinaiticus as well as in the Coptic and Syriac (Peshitta) versions. Such an understanding of our verse is corroborated in 4:10.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1Jn 4:10)

The Greek verb utilized in our text, as well as in Jn 1:29, which is translated “take(s) away,” is the verb αἶρω (*airō*), which can also carry the sense of “remove,” or “seize control of.”¹ The primary purpose for Yeshua’s incarnation was to save His people from their sin.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Lk 19:10)

This He did by defeating death through death, and thus “taking away” sin and its penalty for all those who would be saved. As the author of Hebrews says:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Heb 2:14–15)

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come to remove the sins of His people by bearing their sins upon Himself (Is 53:4, 11-12), and Peter uses Isaiah to emphasize the reality that Yeshua took away sin and its penalty for all those for whom He died.

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1Pet 2:4)

Note carefully how Peter’s words have the same emphasis as our current text in 1John: the result of salvation in the life of one who belongs to Yeshua is that they die to sin and live to righteousness, that is, their lives are no longer characterized by sin.

Paul speaks to the same reality in 2Cor 5:21.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so

1 So BDAG, “αἶρω”, 3.

that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2Cor 5:21)

This is precisely what John is teaching in our current text when he states that Yeshua “appeared in order to take away sins.” To “take away sins” means “to render sin and its penalty ineffective and powerless.” Therefore, those who have been born again through the work of the Ruach in regeneration, and who therefore have been given a new life in Messiah, are freed from slavery to sin and therefore no longer live their lives dominated by sin.

... and in Him there is no sin. – John emphasizes the impeccable nature of Yeshua, for in order to take away sin He must Himself be sinless. This coincides with Paul’s words quoted above (2Cor 5:21) in which he states that Yeshua “knew no sin.” As F. F. Bruce notes:

This goes further than to say that He committed no sin; it denies the presence of indwelling sin in His heart...i.e., He had no consciousness of it in His personal experience.¹

6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Given the reality that Yeshua came to take away sin, and is Himself entirely without sin, how could sin be cherished by anyone who “abides” in Him? The opposite is true: anyone who truly abides in Yeshua likewise seeks to please Him and to become like Him. This means that as one grows in his or her sanctification, there will be an ever increasing hatred of sin and love of righteousness.

Once again we must reiterate that John is not teaching a state of “sinless perfection” for the believer in Yeshua. Note that in this verse John once again uses a present participle for the word “abides” (*μένων, menōn*), which denotes an ongoing characteristic of a true believer. In contrast, the first occurrence of the word “sins” is a present tense indicative, and the second occurrence is a present participle, both of which indicate normal, ongoing actions which describe the norm. In short, this is someone who claims to “abide” in Yeshua but whose life is characterized by ongoing, regular sinful behavior.

Obviously by using a present tense verbal form in the phrase “No one who abides in Him sins,” John is not asserting that believers never sin but that sin is not the regular characteristic of their lives. He teaches us that if we do sin, we are to confess our sins and thereby receive the

1 F. F. Bruce, *1John*, p. 90.

forgiveness and cleansing promised by God to all who are His (1Jn 1:9).

no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. – Here John uses terminology reminiscent of the words of Messiah which he recorded in his Gospel account, in which Yeshua is confronting those who accused Him of violating the Sabbath when He healed the man who was lying near the pool of Bethesda.

And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. (Jn 5:37–38)

Again, in conversation with the Pharisees, Yeshua said:

So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Yeshua answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.” (Jn 8:19)

Thus, John’s point is clear: for someone to say that they possess eternal life because they have confessed Yeshua as their Savior, yet they continue to live a life of sin, their actions negate their words.

Fellowship with the sinless One and indulgence in sin are a contradiction in terms. Whatever high claims may be made by one who indulges in sin, that indulgence is sufficient proof that he has no personal knowledge of Christ.¹

7–8 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Once again John appeals to his readers as a pastor, addressing them as “little children” (*τεκνία, teknia*), a term which is one of endearment and not pejorative. His concern for them is that they not allow anyone to deceive them with words that may seem deep and profound, but which would actually lead them into error. He has already warned them once about those who are trying to deceive them and turn them away from the truth (cf. 2:26). The word translated “deceive” is *πλανᾶω (planaō)* and can carry the sense of “to wander,” “to be led astray.” The

1 F. F. Bruce, *1John*, p. 90.

verbal picture which John gives is of someone persuading a person to take a different path with the promise that doing so will bring them to their desired destination more quickly or with less effort on their part. Yet the path or way being offered actually leads them away from their desired destination and even to a place of danger and death.

It may well be that early, nascent Gnosticism, with its emphasis upon an unknown, entirely and extremely transcendent “god” who had no connection whatsoever to the material world, formed the basis from which the false teachers made their appeal. In the Gnostic philosophical and mystical religion, the only connection which the unknown god had with the material world was the power to help people escape its physical clutches and ascend to a world of “pure spirituality.” As such, the physical world was considered non-consequential, and one could therefore do with it whatever one wanted without impunity from the transcendent god who had no connection to the earthly sphere and therefore gave no laws to govern it. This left the realm of morals and ethics as entirely without universal parameters. As Jonas notes:

Acosmism, the real basis of the Gnostic position, contains the seeds of nihilism; the very extremism of divine transcendence has nihilistic implications. As totally other, alien, and unknown, the Gnostic God has more of the *nihil* than of the *ens* in his concept. For all purposes of man’s relation to the reality that surrounds him, this hidden God is a negative term; no law emanates from him—none for nature, and thus none for human action as a part of the natural order. His only relation to the world is the negative one of saving from the world. Antinomianism follows naturally, even if not inevitably, from these premises.¹

Gnosticism, then, held to a god who could never be known except through escaping from the material world. The “god” who created the material world was an evil “god” who endowed all physicality with evil. To escape the evil, physical world, so the Gnostic teachers believed, was available only through mystical experiences by which secret knowledge (*gnosis*) was gained, allowing the Gnostic to ascend more and more until finally leaving the physical realm. As such, the material world in which we live was meaningless. No moral or ethical realities existed in the material world, and thus morality and ethics were simply the figment of mankind’s ignorant imagination. The Gnos-

1 Hans Jonas, “Gnosticism” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (Macmillan, 1972), 3.341.

ticism that entered into the emerging Christian Church therefore had a major problem with the incarnation of Yeshua. Either they concocted a fanciful theory of how Yeshua's body never "touched" His spirit or soul, or that His body was really a figment of one's imagination and really never existed, or they denied Yeshua entirely. Thus, in relegating the physical world as meaningless and therefore having no value, boundaries which defined moral and immoral, or ethical and unethical were likewise non-existent. Such led to teaching that one could engage in whatever behavior one desired and such could never be labeled as "immoral" or "unethical."

If, indeed, those who were seeking to lead John's readers astray were of the Gnostic persuasion, one can understand why they were teaching that Yeshua, having come in the flesh, partook Himself of sin, for all things material were believed to be endowed with sin. This helps us understand why John repeatedly asserts that Yeshua is, and always has been, without sin.

Moreover, John repeats his emphasis in our text that one's actions or the way one lives is the true litmus test of whether they are followers of Yeshua or followers of the devil. Since Yeshua is infinitely righteous, those who follow Him, that is, who have committed themselves to Him in faith as their Messiah and Savior, will likewise have lives that are characterized by righteousness. Conversely, those who "practice sin," that is, who have lives characterized by sinful behavior, are of the devil who is known as having sinned from the beginning.

Lest we think that John's words in these verses have little relevance to our times, let us be reminded that even in our times there are those who teach that "being saved" is the result of one's confession and does not necessarily result in a change of the way one lives. Or to put it in theological terms, that justification is not necessarily tied to sanctification. The "carnal Christian" doctrine, which teaches that a person could be a "Christian" without having any outward manifestation of Christian faith, is just such an example.

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.
 – Note the parallel to v. 4 of our chapter, which states that "sin is lawlessness." This means simply that sin is rebellion against God, for sin is a shunning of the very commandments and instructions which God revealed to mankind. And from the Scriptures we understand that the evil one, the devil, rebelled against God and His authority, and thus John confirms that the devil "has been sinning from the beginning." Thus, sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is disobeying God.

John again is building his argument directly upon the words of Yeshua. For when Yeshua was confronted by the Pharisees, who re-

fused to accept Yeshua as the One sent from the Father, He responds by showing that their rejection of Him proves their true character.

“You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” Yeshua said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (Jn 8:41–44)

Here we see in Yeshua’s words the same stark contrast that John gives when comparing those whose lives are characterized by righteousness as contrasted with those who live in unrighteousness. To say that someone who is living a life of sin is following the ways of the devil may seem in our post-modern world to be too strong of a statement. But note that when Yeshua made this analysis, He was talking to those who considered themselves to be Jews who set the high standard for religious observance and holiness. This reminds one of Yeshua’s words in Matt 7:22–23.

Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ (Matt 7:22–23)

Thus, the point John is making is clear: a person who claims to have Yeshua as their savior, but whose life is filled with sin, is deceived and is lost. The person who has been truly born from above will evidence that reality in the manner in which they live. Righteousness is the living fruit of genuine, saving faith.

9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

The NASB, along with most of the other English translations, add words to help uncover the meaning of the Greek grammar which John utilizes. The verb “is born” (*γεγεννημένος, gegennēmenos*) is in a form