



# First Baptist Pulpit

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Preached by Pastor David Saylor

## Can a Christian Live in Sin?

### 1 John 3:9

**1 John 3:5-9** *<sup>5</sup>But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup>Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. <sup>9</sup>No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.*

**1 John 5:18** *<sup>18</sup>We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.*

These are strong verses about the believer and sinfulness. They "seem" to be saying that true Christians do not continue to sin.

**COMPARE THAT** to earlier:

**1 John 1:8-9** *<sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

If God knows that all Christians sin..., then why does John ALSO say that those who "continue to sin" cannot be Christians (3:9)?

In **3:9** etc., John is not referring to isolated acts of sin, but to continual or habitual, willful sin.

<sup>9</sup>No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

The point is not that a Christian won't "occasionally" commit a sin, certainly he/she will. Nothing I talk about today has to do that phenomenon. 1 Jn. 1:9 is all about that issue. The Bible is crystal clear on that, and when it happens and we repent and confess our said, God is faithful and just to forgive us.

However, John is here referring to willful, and habitual sin habits that the "Christian" either cannot or refuses to repent of and turn away from. From sin that he/she knows to be "sin" and never-the-less chooses to continue in it.

Is John saying then that a person who lives in "willful" sinfulness is not a Christian, even if he/she says they are and thinks they are? I think that is exactly what John is saying. I am here to tell you that the Bible says this is the "general rule".

Let me explain WHY today, and whether there are any possible biblical "exceptions" to this general truth, which I happen to think there are some.

### I. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

There are some people who, probably because the teaching they have heard is faulty or incomplete and their own Bible understanding is limited -- think that being a Christian and being saved is something akin to a "get out of hell free" card.....

*"Being saved is when I accept Jesus Christ and he forgives my sins and someday when I die I will go to heaven."* Although that statement is absolutely truth, it is not the "whole truth." A half truth can become like a lie.

Salvation is MUCH, MUCH more than that!

I looked for a simple but comprehensive and accurate definition of salvation. *Baptist Faith & Message*:

*Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.*

If salvation only involved “justification” it would be like a “get out of jail free” card, but it is more.

*B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.*

## REGENERATION

But salvation is MORE than Justification. There is no justification without Regeneration. And it is this area that I want to spend some time on this morning.

*A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.*

We may define regeneration as follows: *Regeneration is an act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us.* This is sometimes called “being born again” (using language from **John 3:3–7** **John 3:7** *“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”*). Or conversion.

Scripture views regeneration as something that affects us as whole persons. Of course, our “spirits become alive” to God after regeneration (**Rom. 8:10**). In fact, it is not just our spirits, but *every part of us* is affected by regeneration: **2 Cor. 5:17** *“If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come”*.

Regeneration is an *instantaneous, supernatural event that is the work of God alone*. It happens only once. At one moment we are spiritually dead, and then at the next moment we have new spiritual life from God.

Nevertheless, we do not always know exactly when this instantaneous change occurs. Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible

study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the Gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from “hardened sinner” to “holy saint.” But there is an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God awakens spiritual life within. The change will *become evident* over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God.

In other cases (in fact, probably most cases when adults become Christians) regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time at which the person realizes that previously he or she was separated from God and spiritually dead, but immediately afterward there was clearly new spiritual life within.

Results can usually be seen at once—a heartfelt trusting in Christ for salvation, an assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible and pray, a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, a sincere desire to be obedient to God’s Word in Scripture, and a desire to tell others about Christ.

People may say something like this: *“I don’t know exactly what happened, but before that moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation. I was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But after that moment I realized that I did trust in Christ and he was my Savior. Something happened in my heart.”*

C.S. Lewis tells the story of his own conversion: *“I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driving to Whipsnade (zoo) one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion”*<sup>1</sup>

Regeneration is in this sense “mysterious”. It is just as Jesus said in **John 3:8** *“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

Now that is regeneration - an essential part of salvation.

## RESULTS

In describing what regeneration is, I have already alluded to the fact that such a “change” will certainly bring “results,” -- and it’s one of those results that we are interested in understanding today.

<sup>1</sup> *Surprised by Joy* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955], p. 237.

One of the results is a new attitude regarding sin. (In fact, a number of the **results of regeneration**, are brought up in 1 John.)

Back to our verse, **1 John 3:9**, “*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God*” Here John explains that a person who is born again has that spiritual “seed” (that life-generating and growing power) within him, and that this keeps the person from living a life of continual sin.

This does not of course mean that the person will have a perfect life, but only that the pattern of life will not be one of continuing indulgence in sin.

Can a Christian Live in Sin? I hope you see that the Bible, the full teaching of Salvation and John and Jesus says “NO.”

Let’s suppose. I’m a rank amateur golfer. (I haven’t played in 3 years.) When I do I hit mostly bad shots. Sometimes I hit a good shot. But it is the exception. Sometimes I want to play.

Suppose suddenly I wake up one day and I’m Tiger Woods! I’m a professional golfer. Golf is now in my blood - I look forward to playing every day - it’s my passion. Now, when I hit the ball, I hit mostly good or great shots. I occasionally hit a bad shot, but it is no longer the rule, it is the exception. I have the inborn ability to hit good shots.

This is “kind of like regeneration.” If you are saved, you cannot “live” in sinfulness because your new nature is so designed by a holy God that you can’t do it. And it doesn’t want to do it. It is distasteful - leaves a bad taste.

## II. ARE THERE TIMES WHEN A TRUE REGENERATED CHRISTIAN CAN END UP IN PERSIST OR HABITUAL, WILLFUL SIN (AND THUS STILL BE A CHRISTIAN)? YES.

### 1. They are NEW BELIEVERS (Babes in Christ)

- Analogy: children and biblical discipline
  - I. Childish irresponsibility vs. Willful disobedience
  - II. Ignorance of God’s desires
  - III. It is willful disobedience that God is talking about in first John

### 2. Struggling with a besetting type sin

(they desire to change, they just have not...yet)

- Anger

### • Forgiveness

- Mt 18:21-22<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “**I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**”

- Act differently at home and church
- Pornography
- Drugs/ alcohol problem

### 3. In a Rebelling or Backslidden condition

- **1 Corinthians 11:29-32**<sup>29</sup> *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*<sup>30</sup> *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*<sup>31</sup> *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.*<sup>32</sup> *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*
- **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**<sup>1</sup> *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife.*<sup>4</sup> *When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,*<sup>5</sup> *hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*

[**2 Corinthians 2:5-8**<sup>5</sup> *If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely.*<sup>6</sup> *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.*<sup>7</sup> *Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*<sup>8</sup> *I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.*]

- Ex. ISRAEL....

## III. THE RESULT IS THAT PERSON CAN NEVER HAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT THEY ARE TRULY SAVED (EVEN IF THEY ACTUALLY ARE).

In all these “exception” cases it is impossible to have assurance of salvation. In other words, even if you are converted, you will not be able to have any confidence that you are. Nor should others, (remembering that it is not ours to sit in judgment upon someone else, merely to help them and communicate to them God’s Word.)

## CONCLUSIONS

1. You can walk down an aisle, pray the sinners prayer and not be converted.

- If someone (even someone you love) outwardly accepted Jesus Christ by faith, maybe was baptized.... But later stopped living a Christian life,
- Pray for loved ones etc. Don’t assume they are saved just because.... (they might be (exceptions) but only god knows.)

2. Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith.

**2 Corinthians 13:5** *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. [Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?]*

Are you talking the talk and not walking the walk?.....

- If you don’t mind “sinning” then most likely you are not a Christian.....

Do not fool yourself into hell.

Many are going to miss heaven by 6 inches.

3. Are you struggling and grieving with a sin that you can’t seem to have victory over? (drinking, drugs, sexual sin, outbursts of anger?)

- The fact that you hate this situation is a good sign of your conversion. There was a time before that when you would have felt no such remorse.
- Keep yielding to the Lord and he will help you to have control or victory.

**4. Has a situation led you to rebel against God?**

- Have you placed another human being (boyfriend, girlfriend, boss, child) before God and thus begun to ignore his commands?

- Are you angry at him? Disappointed? Realize it’s only because you can’t see your life from his perspective. He still loves you and has his perfect plan for your life.
- Have you turned you back on the Lord, but somewhere deep inside you know you need to come back? You know he has laid claim to your life and you belong to Him?
  - And you know that what you need to do is return to Him in repentance and be the person you were meant to be.
  - Don’t wait any longer.