

Reading: 1 John 5:13-21

Theme: Christians Do Not Continue to Sin!?

Last week we started looking at the 4th area of certainty believers can have – **Christians do not habitually practice sin**. We looked at v16-17- things that are difficult to grasp, understand and cause concern for many. I am not going to add any further thoughts on those verses at this time, but I want to move on to consider v18, where John is now beginning to end the letter and he does so with 3 affirmations in v18-20 and gives a final exhortation in v21.

John concludes with further, specific certainties. He did not want to simply fade out with a whimper. If we have followed his reasoning, we all can have the same hope and say 3 times with John “*we know...*” in v18-20. It is not arrogant boasting - for John wants all believers to have sure notes of clarity and certainty in their lives. He comes to this crescendo and ends this letter on a major, upbeat note. As believers we may often be uncertain about ourselves and abilities, but we are to be confident and certain about what God has revealed He has done for us. John gives us these 3 confident, bold assertions. These are 3 summaries which are real gems at the end of this letter - if we read them and learn from them, they will do us good if we think often on them. I want us to concentrate on 2 things in v18:

1. Impossibility.

Once again, John says “*we know*” - we know, understand and continue to do so... This is going to be certain and sure, no matter what others say, no matter what we think or feel - this is a sure and certain truth. John likes talking, or rather writing in these absolutes - it surprises, it shocks, but makes us sit up, take notice and hopefully cause us to think biblically. Here John says we know that whosoever is born of God “*sinneth not*” (AV), “*does not continue to sin*” (NIV), “*does not keep on sinning*” (ESV). John

says it is impossible for someone who is born of God to sin!! John appears to say - Christians do not sin! Surely this is a problem as our own experience will cause many of us to despair - for we know that even as believers we have sin and continue to sin; we let our God and Saviour down many times. Now it seems that John jumps up and down on us with his hobnail sandals on and seemingly is saying “*You are not a Christian, for Christians do not sin!*”

Some have hijacked this verse to teach Perfectionism and they link it to 3:9 (NKJV) “*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God..*” Yet to take a text out of context is to make it a pretext and all were left with is a con! That is why I often refer in a series, or a one-off sermon to its setting in Scripture, its historical placement. Thankfully this verse is to bring shouts of confidence, of joy from our hearts and lives - as it is not designed to leave us bruised, battered, cowed and fearful. We need to grasp what John is saying here - he is summarising things we have dealt with before (2:29, 3:6-9).

John is not saying that Christians, those born of God - sense of the tense here means ‘*born of God and remain so even now*’ - cannot ever sin at all. He never makes a case for that in this letter. In fact, he spoke if any one sin (2:1) and what to do when we sin (1:9) and even in the immediate context here is about if a brother commits a sin (5:16). John does not say Christians are perfect and sinless. They, we are certainly not like that in this life and will only be perfect milli-seconds after death and safe in glory. Until then we will commit **acts of sin** and we will fall and fail.

What then does John mean here? John is referring to our habitual state and practice. Our condition and position as believers are that of having had been born again and because of this we are free from

sin's guilt, condemnation, power, rule and dominating force. Yes, sin will be fallen into, but it is not our state, our new life condition. It will not be our habitual practice and way of life. Yes, we may have too low a view of sin, may still be dogged all our days with besetting, clinging sins, but we will more and more hate, loathe and despise the sin, our proneness to wander and to leave the God we love.

The child of God is in a different position and condition to that of an unbeliever. Someone here, if you're not a Christian, no matter how nice and moral you are, you are still under the control of the devil, you are dead in trespasses and sins, you have a will, as well as desires and emotions that are bound by the devil. You are not free to choose God or for the things of God; you are in a condition and position of sinning - being sinners under sin, under Satan's domination and because of this you will habitually, naturally, by nature sin and will keep on sinning.

The Christian, the one born of God, does not "*keep on sinning*" i.e. habitually, continually be in a state of sinning - such is the force of the Greek. Modern versions do not obscure the force of the Greek as do some of the older versions.

My heading for the 4th certainty is that *Christians do not habitually practice sin*. Yes, we will sin, do acts of sin, we will fall, we will be prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love, we may backslide - all these unless, in and by God's enabling grace, these are minimised, but that is not the same as continually, habitually doing sin, being under its control, dominion and it is not the motivating power in our lives. It is an impossibility for believers to habitually practice sin and be under its absolute control. The work of God will not allow it to go on, as He will chastise and discipline us if we are His children or if we stubbornly drag His

name in the gutter, He can and has removed people from this scene of time - hence Paul's warning to examine ourselves before eating of the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

As believers we are counted, reckoned sinless in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is not an excuse to sin freely or lightly, but from this position of honour and privilege, we are to strive, battle against the world, the flesh and the devil - for we know we are God's people and are not bound to obey and practice sin. Now moving on, I want us to note:

2. Security.

We do not continue to habitually practice sin, but we are secure, safe - not because of our skill, determination and doggedness, but because we are in protective custody. We have a divine minder, bodyguard - Augustus Toplady puts it "*A Sovereign Protector I have, Unseen, yet for ever at hand...*"

As believers we have been born of God and remain so. John uses a verb noun here in the 1st part of v18 for the Christian's new birth "*the born-again ones*", while in the 2nd part of v18, some versions simply translate it as "*born of God*" but it is a different form of it (*Aorist participle*) and helpfully translated "*begotten*" in AV. Some use "*he who was born of God*" and it refers to the once-for-all fact and truth of the begetting of the Son of God - our Saviour Jesus. It does not refer to the believer as the one born of God in the 2nd part of the verse, but it refers to the Son of God - the only begotten Son of God and refers to the glorious truth that a believer is kept by the Son of God. Amplified version translates it to bring out the force of the tenses etc. "*We know <absolutely> that anyone born of God does not <deliberately and knowingly> practice committing sin, but the One Who was begotten of God carefully watches over and protects him <Christ's divine presence*

within him preserves him against the evil>, and the wicked one does not lay hold (get a grip) on him or touch <him>.”

As children, sons and daughters of God, born of God, we are kept by the Son of God, the only begotten of God. The word “*keeps*” is in the active continual tense - the begotten Son of God is always keeping those who are born of God, the word “*keep*” means *to guard, watch over, care for, preserve, observe carefully*. Picture a new born baby in its pram and there is mum and dad watching over it, making sure no flies, wasps, bees etc. go near their darling baby, that he or she is not too hot or too cold, if the child moves, cries, they are there. Picture a soldier guarding a prisoner, or a bodyguard their boss or better a bodyguard or soldier guarding their own child!

Here these pictures fade into insignificance when we consider the love and power of the Lord Jesus united to continually guard, keep, watch over and care for those who are born of God. He is watching over us now, caring, keeping, preserving the likes of you and me. We are to remember who it is who cares for us, watches over, cares, keeps us. Thankfully, He who keeps His people will never slumber or sleep (Psalm 121). See what Jesus says concerning His people in John 10:28 *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no-one can snatch them out of my hand.**”* Or in 17:11-12, 15 *“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy **Father, protect them** by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled... My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”* Now go over to Jude 24-25 *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And*

to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Saviour, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.” We will soon sing “*A Sovereign Protector I have, Unseen, yet for ever at hand...*” and we need to note well the glorious biblical truths contained in that hymn.

We easily realise our own weaknesses, how helpless we are, that if left to ourselves we would all be as weak as water, sifted, spoiled by our desires, inclinations, love of the world, the flesh and the devil. We need to be kept and thankfully we are being kept. We all are kept as believers - whether we own it or recognise it. That is true in the joyful, triumphant times, as it is when we are tempted, tried, tested and stumble. He is watching over us and even in temptations and testing our Saviour gives us grace and a way of escape - 1 Corinthians 10:13 “*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*” So much so that the evil one cannot harm believers and we are kept safe. Yes, we have to obey His commands, keep our hearts, desires etc. under control, but primarily He keeps us.

The wicked, the evil one is the devil. he'd savage us as a roaring, hungry and angry lion. He would fool, delude and deceive us as an angel of light. The devil is real, hates men and women - even those who sell their souls to him, who are his greatest servants. When a sinner is saved by God's grace, the devil rages, hates and despises such a one; and like Peter, he would sift and destroy them, rob them of their Christian walk and the joy it should be. Yet he cannot rob us of our salvation. John Bunyan pictures him as a lion on a chain - roaring, terrifying, but while on a chain, he can do pilgrims no harm.

Here at the end of v18 is what John writes of - the evil one cannot touch, harm believers. John uses a word that means “*fastens oneself to, to cling to, to grasp and not let go*”. John records that the Lord Jesus used this word to Mary after He had been raised - “*don’t touch me i.e. cling onto, grasp onto, fasten onto my bodily presence.*” (John 20:17) In rugby someone scores a try and seems to run through the opposition and it is often said “*They never touched him or her*”. They may well have been touched, but through skill, agility or strength, they never fastened onto them to bring them down.

The devil would not only like to tackle us and bring us down, but maul us, fasten onto us and take us back under his domain and control as the rest of the world is (v19). Yet the devil cannot harm, touch, grip or fasten onto us - again the present continual tense - he keeps on being unable to do so

Yet he will accuse us, seek to bring us low, rob us of our joy of salvation, cause doubts, will tempt us, will roar and intimidate us, but he cannot grasp us and make us his again. Redemption, the new birth, salvation cannot be undone. We are delivered and free. William Wilberforce was instrumental in freeing slaves and freed they were - freed not to serve as slaves again. They could choose their masters now. They would be foolish to work for a poor wage for their former cruel master. We are free and free to serve the Lord Jesus - not the devil, our former lusts and sinful desires (*as Paul argues in Romans 6*). Now we belong to Jesus, we belong to the King of Kings who watches over us, keeps us - because we are royal children, born of God. We must be careful not to listen to and follow the insinuations, suggestions and orders of our old master and we are to be on guard and aware of his tricks to cause us to serve him in acts of sin.

The KJV version of v19 says *“the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* ESV *“the whole world is in the power of the evil one.”* As believers we are not - we lie safe in the arms of Jesus, in His hands and no one can pluck us from His hands - we are safe and we have a Sovereign Protector, unseen and for ever at hand. He has kept us, is keeping us and will keep us and we can think on the years that have past with thankfulness - (*muse* says Augustus Toplady in his hymn) *“I muse on the years that are past, wherein my defence Thou hast proved; nor wilt thou relinquish at last, a sinner so signally loved.”* We are being kept by our God and Saviour and in the words of another song *“He’ll never, no never, no never forsake”* what a Saviour to have and rejoice in. Let us praise Him, especially as we sing the truths of our great God and Saviour in our closing hymn *“A Sovereign Protector I have”*.