

Difficult Passages- Lake Geneva conf.1984 - Part 4

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald explores the complexities of sin in the life of a believer, emphasizing the importance of confession, reliance on Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin.

Duration: 39:17

Scripture: 1 John 3:4

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of saying no to temptation and being willing to be different from the world. He highlights the pressure that young people face to conform and the need for Christians to swim against the tide. The speaker also discusses the role of Jesus Christ in taking away our sins and the importance of abiding in Him. The sermon encourages believers to read, memorize, study, meditate on, and obey the Word of God, as well as to pray without ceasing.

Transcript

In chapter three, verses four through nine, it says in the King James, Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not, whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. Well, I don't have to emphasize that that last verse has certainly been used to unsettle the hearts of many of God's people, and it is a difficult verse, isn't it? Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

That's enough to make you doubt your salvation, isn't it? So we want to ask ourselves the question this morning, what does this verse mean? Oftentimes in handling difficult Bible portions, a good way to begin is to determine what it doesn't mean, and we can do that with this verse. We can prove from this very epistle

it doesn't mean sinless perfection, it doesn't mean that a Christian never sins. So how do you know? Well, go back to chapter 1 and read verses 8 and 10.

Verse 8 of chapter 1 says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Verse 10, If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. I'm glad for those two verses, aren't you? They help.

And then look at chapter 2, verse 1. It says, My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Now, in the first part of that verse, it says, My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.

God's will for us is that we should not sin. And you know, God had to write the verse that way. For instance, if the verse had said, My little children, these things write unto you, that you sin just a little, that wouldn't be God speaking.

Because God is perfect, and God is holy, and God is righteous, and God cannot condone any sin. So when God writes, he says, sin not. And incidentally, I cannot say I do not sin, but I cannot say I have to sin either.

It isn't really doctrinally correct for me to say I must sin, because what I'm saying is that the Holy Spirit is not powerful enough to deliver me from sin. He is, if I call upon him. If I call upon the Lord in the moment of temptation, he will deliver me from sin.

So I mustn't say I have to sin. It's not correct. I mustn't say I never sin.

That's not correct either. But I mustn't say I have to sin. But notice that provision is made for failure.

It says, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. First of all, that shows that whatever the verse in 1 John 3 means, it doesn't mean that the Christian never sins. Because it says, if any man sin, we have an advocate, notice, with the Father.

Even if a believer sins, God is still his Father. That's a comfort. It doesn't say, if any man sin, we have an advocate with God.

It says, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. Well, what does the verse mean? What does 1 John 3 verse 9 mean? Well, first of all, I think it's speaking about sin in its character of lawlessness.

And I'd like you to go back to verse 4. I read it in the King James, but if you read it in almost any other translation of the Bible, it will say, Whosoever committed sin doeth lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. Not all sin is transgression of the law. Sin existed before the law was given.

There was sin before there was law, but I think John here is speaking of sin in that character of lawlessness. I don't care what God says, I'm going to do it anyway. That is not typical of the child of God, that spirit of lawlessness.

We do sin in our frailties. We do sin, and when we sin, we're ashamed to our tiptoes of what we've done. But that sin does not have the character of lawlessness.

I think this is very important to see. There's a difference between a Christian's sinning and an unbeliever's sinning. Listen to the Christian who sins in Romans chapter 7. The Apostle Paul is speaking there.

He says, verse 15, For that which I do, I allow not. For what I would, that do I not. But what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

Now then, it is no more I that doeth, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.

For the good that I would, I do not. The evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that doeth, but sin that dwelleth in me.

I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members, O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this, the body of this death, or this body of death? The agony of a Christian struggling with sin, the ding-dong battle with sin. And then I think you have it also in an Old Testament Saint in Psalm 32.

Now I think this is very, very significant, and it will ring a bell in your own heart as well. Psalm 32 verses 3 and 4. David is confessing his sin. When I kept silent, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. That is not characteristic language of an unsaved person. It speaks of the anguish of heart of a believer when he sins.

So I would say, first of all, that 1 John 3.9 is speaking especially about sin in its character of lawlessness, and it's saying that when a Christian does sin, when a Christian does commit an act of sin, there's a different attitude of heart. There's an agony of soul. The other thing, of course, is that John is speaking about habitual behavior.

John is speaking about that which characterizes a person's life. He's speaking about practice. Perhaps the word commit in the King James is a bit unfortunate.

Whoso practices sin practices also lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. Verse 9. Whoever is born of God does not practice it. And some modern versions actually have the word practice there, and they base it on the fact that John is using the present continuous tense.

He's speaking about behavior that characterizes a person's life, and that's really true of the child of God, isn't it? Sin is not the dominating influence in the life of a child of God. The Christian is not sinless, but he does sin less, and when he does sin, he's filled with guilt, sorrow, shame, and discouragement, and he wants to fly to God in repentance and confession. A believer does not want to practice sin as a way of life, and if I may say so, he does not commit sin with the same freedom he had before.

I've sometimes said he does not sin with the full consent of his will. I believe there's a freedom to sin that an unsaved person has that is not true of one who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I should say that many people believe that what John is speaking about here are the two natures, and that what he's saying is that the new nature doesn't sin.

The old nature does, but the new nature doesn't, and of course that's true. It is true that the new nature doesn't sin. We have the divine nature spoken of here as his seed, God's seed.

God's divine nature remains in him that is in the believer. The only trouble with that explanation is that God holds the person responsible, not the nature. So, when I sin, I can't say, well, that wasn't my new nature.

That was my old nature. You've heard the legend of the man that was brought before the judge for speeding, and he was a very devout believer, of course, and when he was accused, he said, well, judge, that was my old nature that was guilty of speeding. And the judge said, well, I fine your old nature \$50 for speeding.

And he said, I fine your new nature \$50 for being an accessory before the fact. Now, if he had just kept his mouth shut, he'd have only had to pay \$50. We can't blame the nature.

We as individuals are responsible for what we do before God. It is true the new nature doesn't sin. It is true the old nature can't do anything but sin.

Those things are true, but I don't think that's the explanation in this particular passage. I think that John is speaking about sin in its character of lawlessness, and he's speaking of that which characterizes a person's life, the dominating influence in a person's life. But some young person might say to me, brother, that's just a problem.

You say that a Christian doesn't practice sin, and yet I have this besetting sin in my life, and I cannot find victory over it. But I think we can all empathize with that situation. We've all all made of flesh.

We're all made of the same dust. We're all of feet of iron and clay. Now, how do you answer that? Well, I answer it, first of all, that for the child of God, there is no sin that the Holy Spirit cannot and will not give victory over.

I have to remind myself of that all the time. We have an omnipotent Holy Spirit. We have an omnipotent Lord, and there's no sin so great for the child of God that God will not give victory over.

And that would be true of whatever besetting sin you have. So, I'd like to spend a little time this morning just with some practical advice as to how we can know victory over that besetting sin in life. How do we come to know victory in our life? And first of all, I would suggest this, that we must confess and forsake sin as soon as we're conscious that it has come into our lives.

That means even walking down the street, a random thought of evil comes to my mind. I stop right there. I drag it out in the open before the Lord.

I call it by its wretched name. I say, Lord, that was sin. I reject that sin and confess it and forsake it to you.

When we do that, that keeps us clean, doesn't it? Confessing and forsaking sin as soon as we're conscious that it has come into our lives. Very, very important. The second thing that we must do is spend time continually in the Word of God.

We heard one of the children reciting that verse last night, did we not? Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. It's wonderful how the Word of God acts as a monitor in our life. Every day of life, we're faced with temptations to sin.

We're reading the Word of God in the morning before we start out in work. We read the Word of God. During the day, that very subject comes up, and we say, no, I can't do that.

I can't do that. However, if I get away from the Word of God, I become insensitive. I lose that sensitivity to the Lord.

And incidentally, the worst thing about sin is the affront it brings to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the worst thing about sin is an insult to the majesty of God. And I think it's interesting the way in our passage where how John brings in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know that he was manifested to take away our sin, and in him is no sin. The work and person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And really, the real test for any sin, anyway, is how it appears in his sight, not how it appears in my sight.

The real test for anything is how it appears in the sight of our blessed Redeemer. Read, memorize, study, meditate on and obey the Word of God. The Word of God is a tremendous preventive agent in my life and in your life as far as sin is concerned.

Pray without ceasing. I'll tell you, if any man, any woman is going to be holy, that person must pray without ceasing. Say, pray what? Pray that God will keep us as holy as is possible for people to be in this life.

Pray that God will prevent the opportunity to sin and the temptation to sin from ever coinciding. Sometimes we have the temptation to sin, but we don't have the opportunity. Sometimes we have the opportunity, but the temptation isn't there.

Temptation comes in waves. Pray that the temptation to sin and the opportunity to sin will never coincide. That's when it's really there.

Pray that he will keep us from sinning even when we want to do it. Pray in desperation that God will take us home to heaven rather than let us fall into sin. That's what God wants, is blood-earnest prayer.

Pray that God will take us home to heaven rather than let us fall into sin. Pray the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught the disciples. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

You know, that's a puzzle, isn't it? Say, why do you pray that God would never lead anybody into temptation? I know it. I know it is perplexing, but what it says to me is, when I pray that prayer, I say, Lord, left to myself, I'm sunk. Keep me from the temptation.

That all will be well. Deliver me from evil. Then the next thing is, I think we must constantly be yielding ourselves to the Lord, committing ourselves to the Lord.

Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. Be sending your body a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed. I want to tell you, dear friends, if you confess and forsake sin constantly, you're clean.

And if you yield yourself to the Lord constantly, you're available. And if you're clean and available, God will use you and keep you. Believe that.

Just as simple as that. Next, maintain regular fellowship with Christians. People say, I can go it alone.

I could be the lone wolf. No, you can't. God knows better than that.

I want to tell you, there's a sanctifying influence in being with other Christian people. There was a sanctifying influence in being together here this week with other believers. I didn't hear a single cuss word.

I watched, I had to laugh down there at the volleyball court, watching Christians playing volleyball. I didn't see a single display of temper. It was terrific.

You almost forgot what the world was like. It was really wonderful. There's a sanctifying influence.

I want to tell you, there's a sanctifying influence in the weekly remembrance of the Lord. God knows what he's doing, but let us remind ourselves at the close of this conference that all the commandments of God are for our good, not for his. You ever think of that? People are always raising the cry of legalism.

Legalism. First of all, let me define legalism. Legalism is doing things in order to obtain merit before God.

That's what real legalism is. But it has come to have another meaning. Anything that you're forbidden to do that you want to do becomes legalism.

But God is not a legalist, and all the commandments of God given in the Bible are for man's good, not for God's. The great God existed long before man did. He did along very well.

But God's laws are kindly laws. They're compassionate laws, and the more we obey them, the better life we live. It means avoiding the companionship of evil men.

It says in 1 Corinthians 15, evil companionships corrupt good manners. How true it is. Every once in a while, you say, what happened to that young fellow? Oh, he fell in with the wrong crowd.

You ever hear of that? He fell in with the wrong crowd. Then I think we have to keep busy for the Lord. I think that the moments of greatest temptation in life are the moments when we're well fed and well slept.

And I think there's tremendous sanctification in keeping busy for the Lord. Remember David? It was at the time when kings go forth to war. David didn't go forth to war.

He stayed home. He let his eyes wander. He became lustful.

He pampered the flesh. He fell into the dual sins of adultery and murder. And one of the sins of Sodom, when we think of Sodom, we think that it was just a collection of gays.

But one of the sins of Sodom was an abundance of idleness. Interesting, isn't it? Tell you the Word of God is a wonderful book on psychology, an abundance of idleness. So, I find in life that keeping busy for the Lord is a great thing.

It's called sublimation, where you take one drive and sublimate it, redirect it into the service of the Lord. Great thing. And it works.

Next, I would say we have to discipline the body. Paul says, I discipline my body. I keep it under.

I bring it into submission, lest, having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. And I want to tell you, you know it as well as I do, that the highway of the Christian life is littered with corpses these days. Many prominent men, men whose names are household words in Christian circles, have fallen because

they didn't discipline the body.

Chuck Smith was speaking to a graduating class recently, and he said to them, three don'ts. He said, don't touch the woman. Don't touch the money.

Don't touch the glory. And I'll tell you, he said a mouthful when he said that. Don't touch the woman.

Don't touch the money. Don't touch the glory. And that means avoid petty familiarity, touches, caresses, endearing words, even body language.

We have to avoid anything that lowers our resistance to sin. I believe that God has built us with an inner resistance to sin, and certain things like alcohol and drugs lower that. Why do you think prophetized men drink? Why do you think they take drugs? They want to do things that ordinarily they'd be inhibited in doing, and so the Christian has to be on guard against this type of thing.

Paul tells us in Romans chapter 6 that we should respond to sin exactly the way a dead body would. Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I've often thought I'd like to have a meeting sometime and start preaching, and then have some men bring in a casket with a dummy in it, and just set the casket down there.

Then I'd like to come off the platform and start talking to that dummy in the casket there, and suggest various things, you know, go out on the town and all the rest. No response. No response.

That's exactly the way I should be when temptations come knocking at my door. I should respond just the way a corpse would. That's how we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.

It means learning to say no 10,000 times a week. I don't think that's an exaggeration. Learning to say no 10,000 times a week.

It's said in Daily Bread the average number of times a man says no to temptation is once weekly. W-E-A-K-L-Y. The average time a man says no to temptation is once weekly.

And that of course means that we have to be willing to be different. If I'm going to say no to temptation 10,000 times a week, I'm going to have to be different from the herd. That's tough.

It's tough for young people. It's tough for young people in high school and college. There's a tremendous pressure.

The world exerts tremendous pressure on us to conform, and the world hates non-conformists. That's why it crucified the Lord of Glory, because he wouldn't conform to its ways, its lifestyle, and all that it had to offer. And I want to tell you, if you swim against the tide, the world won't love you, but it'll never forget you either.

You have to learn to say no if you're going to be a holy Christian. In fact, the word holy means different. Do you ever think of that? Sanctifying means set apart.

Well, if you're set apart, you're different. You're set apart from the herd. I think we should remember that every time we resist sin, it becomes easier to resist it.

Every time we yield to temptation, it becomes easier to yield to temptation. The strength of response, a bell in my heart. Each victory will help you, some other to win.

Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny. It's all said there in a few words. Another thing we can do is maintain the blessed hope.

I have always believed that the hope of the Lord's imminent return exerts a sanctifying influence on the life as well. He that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure. I think all Christians believe in the second coming of Christ.

Not all Christians believe or agree on the details of his coming. But I, for one, never want to abandon the thought that the Lord Jesus could come today. That's what we call the pre-tribulation rapture.

The pre-tribulation rapture is the only view you can hold and still believe that Christ could come before midnight tonight. But I believe that has a purifying influence in the life of the child of God. He's coming.

Would I like to be found doing that when the Savior comes back again? I know that that hope has kept me from many things in life. Somebody says to me, Abba, what do you do in the moment of fierce temptation? And we all have those moments, don't we? That moment when temptation comes like a colossus and we feel so powerful, so powerless, that is, to resist it. What do we do in a moment like that? Well, a verse that's been a great help to me is Proverbs 18 and 10.

It says, The name of the Lord is a strong power. The righteous runneth into it and is safe. And that says to me that in that moment of temptation, that moment of fierce temptation, I'm to call upon the name of the Lord.

Every time I do, he saves me. I think of Peter, when Peter began to sink under the water, and I cried, Lord save me. Did he do it? Of course he did it.

The only trouble with me is I don't always call, but I sink beneath the waves. So God has given us some very practical ways in which we can. I believe that God wants me to be holy, but I don't think God will make me holy without my cooperation.

I know there are a lot of formulas for holiness today, the faith-dressed life, where you just sit back and sip Cokes all day and expect it to come like some mystic experience. It's never been that way in my life. To me, the life of holiness is something very practical and things in the Bible that I'm told that I must do.

God will do his part, but he's not going to do my part for me, and God will not make me holy against my will. Now, I'd just like in closing to go back to 1 John chapter 3, our passage, and go over it and suggest again that it does not mean sinless perfection. It could mean the two natures, but I don't think it does because God holds the person responsible, not the nature.

I think John here is talking about what is habitual behavior, what is practice in a person's life, what is the dominating influence in the person's life, and he's saying the child of God is not characterized by sin. And I think that idea of habitual behavior is borne out by the latter part of verse 8, or not the latter part, but in the middle of verse 8, speaking about the devil, it says, He that doeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning. He's speaking about what was characteristic behavior of the devil, and he says that

characteristic behavior of his children, like father, like son.

And then also, I think that John is speaking of sin in its character of lawlessness, that the Christian doesn't have that lawless attitude. He does sin. He does commit acts of sin, but his attitude in doing it is different from the attitude of the world.

He doesn't sin with the same freedom that the man of the world does, that the sinner does. And when he does sin, he's ashamed of himself. He thinks, that's what nails my Savior to the cross, and here I've gone on and done it again.

And he confesses his sin, and he forsakes his sin, and he picks himself up from the dust. He may fall seven times, but he rises again, doesn't he? Difference between the child of God and the one who isn't. So, let's just read it again, and try to read some of these thoughts into it.

Whoever practices sin practices also lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness, a defiant attitude against the Most High. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins, the work of the Lord Jesus. And in him is no sin, the person of the Lord Jesus, the sinless son of God.

Whoever abides in him, that is, whoever is born again, whoever is a true believer, does not practice sin. Whoever practices sin has not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you.

He who practices righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that doeth sin, he that practices sin, the one in whose life sin is the dominating influence, is of the devil. The devil has been sinning from the beginning.

He's been practicing it. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever is born of God does not practice sin, for his feet, God's feet, the divine nature remains in him, in the believer, and he cannot go on sinning as the dominating influence of his life, because he is born of God.

May the Lord seal home these portions to our hearts today, may we go out with a new determination to live lives of separation and holiness for him, that we might be a Bible and not a libel for our adorable Savior, shall we pray. Father, we just thank you for our little time together here at the close of this conference. We realize that we're going back out into the conflict once again, and we know that the conflict is fierce.

We know that we're in warfare, and in warfare there are casualties, and Father, we pray indeed that we might put on the full armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. We pray, Lord, that you'll make us as holy as it is possible for men and women to be on this side of heaven. We pray that we might be fitting representations of the Lord Jesus to those about us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

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