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## Does Sin Still Come to Christians? The Perspective of 1 John 3:9

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### Abstract

*Sin has been a major problem since the fall of man. This is the reason for Jesus' reincarnation into the world: to redeem humankind from sin. However, even though the cross has taken place, the discussion about sin continues, especially in search of an answer as to whether Christians still sin even after being redeemed by the blood of Jesus. This article answers that question through the exegesis of one of the verses in New Testament studies, namely First John 3:9. An exploration of the meaning will be done on the statement that everyone born of God does not sin anymore. The research concludes that first, sin must be purified or sanctified through Jesus, the true redeemer. Second, Christians must decide to confess each of their sins and show repentance as a sign that Jesus has redeemed them. Thirdly, the Christian must build a new lifestyle by ceasing sin. In this case, despite being redeemed, the process and goal for Christians are still happening, and the process must be won as a characteristic of true Christianity.*

**Keywords:**

sin, true Christianity, redemption, repentance, Christians

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## Introduction

This paper aims to find the meaning of 1 John 3:9 and to understand what sin means when associated with fellowship with God and eternal life according to the Letter of 1 John. The sin here talks about everything that is not following God's standards, both about God and humans. So that sin must be cleansed and confessed, and sin as a believer's lifestyle must be stopped. Sanctification can only be done by Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This must be done because God does not tolerate sin.

In a relationship with God, sin first breaks God's rules to the people. Sin as a missed action is, of course, not just linked with a relationship with God. According to previous research by Sihombing and Situmorang, humans have failed to fulfill their function as the crown of creation due to the misuse of special blessings that other creations do not get, namely free will and reason.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Tarpin's research found that dogmatically, sin is a crucial mistake committed by humans for violating God's commandments. Adam and Eve's greed in disobeying God's command by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has caused a break in their relationship with God. Even that act became a legacy for humanity's children and grandchildren.<sup>2</sup> When summarized from previous research, men sin against God when their actions deviate from God's will. Sin is one of the obstacles to the relationship between God and humans; when humans fall into sin, humans violate their rules and covenants. The relationship between humans and God became increasingly dire, so God took the initiative to restore broken relationships and plan for salvation. According to Marshall, the Epistle of 1 John, "The Epistles

of John is concerned with the foundations of Christian theology."<sup>3</sup> So, it is not wrong to study the theme of sin from the perspective of the Letter of 1 John. The central theme of 1 John is Communion with God, but many themes are raised in this letter, including the theme of sin. Hodges says that communion is the goal of John's letter.<sup>4</sup>

What is the ethical issue in this verse? The ethical issue is whether a Christian can sin no more. Also, who are these people born of God in 1 John 3:9? Different from the previous studies as described above, the approach taken to answer the research question is to exegesis text.

## Method

The primary approach used in this paper is the exegesis of 1 John 3:9. To this end, the background of John's letter will first be explained. Then, the author will exegete 1 John 3:9 with three perspectives, namely (1) No One Born of God Makes a Practice of Sinning; (2) b. God's Seed Abides in the Believer, and (3) The One Born Of God Cannot Keep Sinning Because He is Born Of God. The author will conduct a normative conceptual reconstruction of sin in Christianity from these three approaches. All analysis in this paper uses a qualitative approach as described by Zaluchu.<sup>5</sup>

## Result & Discussion

### Background of 1 John 3:9

Critical study of the Johannine literature in the past generation has revolutionized our understanding of the historical context from which the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine

<sup>1</sup> Sihol Situmorang and Agustian Ganda Sihombing, "DOSASAL MENURUT AGUSTINUS," *LOGOS* 17, no. 1 (December 2020): 16–29.

<sup>2</sup> Tarpin Tarpin, "Pandangan Kristen Tentang Dosa: Asal Muasal Dan Cara Menepisnya," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 16, no. 2 (2010): 221–233.

<sup>3</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*

(Grand Rapids Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "Epistle of John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1983), 884.

<sup>5</sup> Sonny Eli Zaluchu, "Strategi Penelitian Kualitatif Dan Kuantitatif Di Dalam Penelitian Agama," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 4, no. 1 (2020): 28.

Epistles emerged.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to set the Johannine concept of sinlessness. 1 John 3:9 against the backdrop of selected Old Testament texts and themes as part of the argument that eschatology best explains the hamartiological tensions of the Epistle. This study proposes that the Old Testament exerts a more significant influence upon 1 John than is sometimes realized. Such important Old Testament themes as creation (or protology), new creation, the New Covenant, and their relationship to eschatology contribute much to our understanding of the problem.

This does not imply that the author of 1 John lacked originality in using the Old Testament. On the contrary, "John's use of the Old Testament and Jewish sources is not formalistic or slavish. He assimilates elements of the Old Testament and Judaic traditions in a personal way since they are combined and interpreted in the light of the unique mystery of Jesus Christ."<sup>7</sup> These OT illustrations would probably call to the mind of the first reader not only the immediate context in which they are found but also the larger context.<sup>8</sup>

For instance, reference is made in 1 John 3:8a to the devil who "sins from the beginning." This phrase "from the beginning" most likely refers to the devil's encounter with Eve in Paradise narrated in Genesis 3. That being the case, when we apply the principle mentioned above, this reference would have called to mind such associations as (1) the creation account (Genesis 1-3), (2) the human race made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), (3) God's observation that what he had created was "very good" (Gen 1:31), (4) the description of Paradise (Genesis 2), (5) the temptation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), (6) their subsequent fall, and (7) the promise of the seed who would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).<sup>9</sup>

The connection between the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15) and the Son of God who "appeared . . . to destroy the devil's work (3:8b)." In the next breath, the author writes about the sinlessness (and impeccability) of the one born of God (3:9) because of the abiding seed.

These Johannine subtleties demonstrate that the relationship between 3:8-9, Gen 3:15 and 1:26-27, 5:3 (with the first man and woman created sinless) is more than mere coincidence, especially when one understands the "born of God" terminology as equivalent to "image of God."<sup>10</sup> This was the message of the prophets that despite Israel's impending judgment for unrepentant sin, a sin that wells up from incurably wicked hearts, God, for his name's sake, would, at some time in the future, create for his people new hearts from within. Eichrodt notes: "The only course left open was to turn one's eyes to the eschatological new creation of people, which would be able to heal the irremediable rift between Man and God (emphasis in original)."<sup>11</sup> The New Covenant provides the basis for this eschatological new creation.

The community or communities had also been exposed to various untrue teachings, with many suggesting that the core of these teachings involved Christology, that is, the nature of Jesus as both divine and yet fully "in human flesh." It is worth reviewing why views of this sort cropped up. Concerning 1 John, it is noteworthy that much of John's language involves an almost Manichaean dichotomy between, for example, those in the dark and those in the light (2:8-11), those who love the world and those who have the Father's love (2:15-16), the devil-born versus the God-born (3:8-10).

Moreover, the enigmatic reference that they departed from us perhaps suggests that John's church has undergone schism and that

<sup>6</sup> Richard B Hays, *The Moral Vision of The New Testament* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 1996), 146.

<sup>7</sup> E. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant: A Study of Sivoa Ev and Fisvsiv Sv in the First Letter of Saint John (AnBib 69)* (Rome: Rome Biblical Institute, 1978), 9.

<sup>8</sup> H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London:

Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy, 1952), 61, 126.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Books, 1980), 23.

references to darkness, love of the world, and being devil-born are all meant to identify a specific group of docetic heretics and distinguish them from us that is the faithful believers who have remained in John's orthodox church. Reconstructions of this sort point out how the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of Jesus's life and ministry is very different from that of the Synoptics, exhibiting what some call a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross. Given that the Johannine writings are, therefore, strongly related internally and odd concerning the other writings of the New Testament, it is not hard to imagine how scholars searching for a plausible history behind the texts might have supplied such a backstory.

### Exegesis of 1 John 3:9

*No one born of God practices sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9).*

#### **No One Born of God Makes a Practice of Sinning**

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning is composed of the following:

(1) nominative masculine singular form of the adjective *pas* (πᾶς), "πο one" (2) articular nominative masculine singular perfect passive participle form of the verb *gennaō* (γεννάω), "born" (3) preposition *ek* (ἐκ), "of" (4) articular genitive masculine singular form of the noun *theos* (θεός), "God" (5) accusative feminine singular form of the noun *hamartia* (ἡμαρτία), "of sinning" (6) emphatic negative adverb *ou* (οὐ), "no one" (7) third person singular present active indicative form of the verb *poieō* (ποιέω), "makes a practice." The apostle John is once again employing the figure of Asyndeton. This time, he uses it to emphasize the eternal spiritual truth or axiom he is communicating here in 1 John 3:9.

The nominative masculine singular form of the adjective *pas* means anyone, any person, everyone, every person since the word pertains to any one of a totality. The word pertains to totality with emphasis on its components. Here, the word is of any person in

the Christian community. The word functions as an attributive adjective, modifies the subject, an articular nominative masculine singular perfect passive participle form of the verb *gennaō*, "born," and has an attributive relation to this participle. Here, the word refers to the act of God the Father fathering those sinners whom He declared justified and regenerated by the Spirit through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, in the sense of causing their regeneration and birth as His child.

The participle form of this verb is also in the nominative case and functions precisely as a nominative subject. This means that any believer is receiving the action of being fathered by God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and regeneration through the Spirit. The perfect tense of this verb *gennaō* is a consummative perfect used to emphasize the completed action of a past action or process from which a present state emerges and should usually be translated in English as a present perfect. The emphasis is on the completed event in the past time rather than the present results.

Therefore, here in 1 John 3:9, the consummative perfect of the verb *gennaō* emphasizes the completed action of the past action of God the Father, regenerating the believer at the moment of their justification. The present state that emerges is that they are now children of God. The passive voice of the verb means that the subject receives the action of the verb from either an expressed or unexpressed agency. The subject here is the regenerated sinner, and the agency is expressed by the prepositional phrase *ek tou theou* (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), "**of God**." Therefore, the passive voice expresses the idea that the believer has received the action of being fathered by God.

Therefore, this prepositional phrase expresses the idea of the sinner declared justified by the Father through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, having been fathered by God. This would imply that God is the source from which they can practice righteousness and that He is their spiritual father. The noun *hamartia* is used regarding mental, verbal, and overt acts of personal sin from the perspective that these acts miss the mark of the absolute perfection of God's character, i.e., His holiness.

The verb **poieo** means "to practice," and its object is the articular accusative feminine singular form of the noun *hamartia*, "of sinning." Its meaning is emphatically negated by the emphatic negative adverb *ou*, which expresses an absolute, direct, and complete negation. Therefore, these three words express the idea that every person whom God has fathered "never practices sin." The noun *hamartia* is in the accusative case and functions as an accusative direct object, meaning it receives the action of the verb *poieo*. This would then indicate that an act of sin is receiving the action of never being practiced by the believer whom God has fathered through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit's work in regeneration.

The present tense of the verb *poieo* is a gnomic present, which is used for a general, timeless fact or, specifically, a spiritual axiom or an eternal spiritual truth.

### **God's Seed Abides in the Believer**

For God's seed abides in him is composed of the following: (1) conjunction *hoti* (ὅτι), for (2) nominative neuter singular form of the noun *sperma* (σπέρμα), seed (3) genitive third person masculine singular form of the intensive personal pronoun *autos* (αὐτός), God's (4) preposition *en* (ἐν), in (5) dative third person masculine singular form of the intensive personal pronoun *autos* (αὐτός), him (6) third person singular present active indicative form of the verb *menō* (μένω), abides.

The conjunction *hori* is employed with the indicative mood of the verb *meno*, "abides," to form a causal clause that presents the reason for the previous assertion that every person whom God has fathered never practices sin. The NET Bible argues that the word means "seed," write, "The closest meaning for σπέρμα (*sperma*) in this context is "male generating seed" (ef. BDA" 937 v 1. b), although this is a figurative rather than a literal sense. Such imagery is bold and has seemed crudely anthropomorphic to some interpreters.

However, it poses no more difficulty than the image of God as a male parent fathering Christians that appears in John 1:13 and is behind the use of γεννάω (*gennaō*) concerning Christians in 1 John 2:29: 3:9: 4:7:5:1, 4. and 18.<sup>12</sup>

Silva disagrees; he writes that The noun σπέρμα is used in a variety of contexts. When John states that God's seed abides in those who have been born of God (1 John 3:9), it is unlikely that he echoes the Philonic concept of the 'divine seed.' In any case, John considers the divine principle of life in the believer (God's word? the Spirit? grace?) that renders continuance in sin incongruous. As the physical seed was the generator of life in the physical order (Gen 1:11-12), so the divine σπέρμα becomes the fount and origin of life in the new order of recreated humanity."<sup>13</sup> That's why the indwelling 'seed' enables and motivates the sin-free living of the child of God. The metaphorical designation 'his seed,' which appears only here in John's writings, is variously interpreted. Some interpret it as the Word of God. Others designate it as the divine nature or principle of life, which God implants in the believer. Some understand the seed to denote God's offspring, his children collectively. Still others identify the seed as the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8).

Through the Word and the Spirit, the Christian is born of God and enabled to live like Christ. This option is attractive, but the natural parallelism with human reproduction is too strong. The believer cannot continue in sin because of the divine life implanted through the new birth.

### **The One Born Of God Cannot Keep Sinning Because He is Born Of God**

Moreover, he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God is composed of the following: (1) conjunction *kai* (καί), "and" (2) emphatic negative adverb *ou* (οὐ), "he cannot" (3) third person singular present middle indicative form of the verb *dunamai* (δύναμαι), "he cannot" (4) present active infinitive form of

<sup>12</sup> Bill Wenstrom, "Exegesis and Exposition of First John 3:9-10," *Academia.Edu*.

<sup>13</sup> M. Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Few Testament Theology and*

*Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 345.



the verb *hamartanō* (ἁμαρτάνω), "keep on sinning" (5) conjunction *hoti* (ὅτι), "because" (6) preposition *ek* (ἐκ), "of" (7) articular genitive masculine singular form of the noun *theos* (θεός). "of God" (8) third person singular perfect passive indicative form of the verb *gennaō* (γεννάω), "he has been born."

The verb *dunamai* means to have power by inherent ability or resources and has the following meanings: (1) To be able, to be capable of (2) To be able, with specific reference to the subjective spiritual or moral attitude which either makes able or not, to will or not to will. (3) To be equal to, to count as to signify. Words derived from the stem *Duna* all have the basic meaning of "being able" or "capacity" in virtue of an ability. The noun *dunamis* suggests the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out, whether physical. Spiritual, military, or political. It indicates the power to act, which is the right of anyone in his position.

The participle here is the writer's choice in its use as substantival, namely, using participles as adjectives. Participants functioned as a substitute for a noun. So here shows the perpetrator's actions. Humans, in terms of morals, do what is not right and do it continuously. So, it can be interpreted that every believer is born from God and does not carry out morally wrong actions that are carried out continuously or become a habit of sinning. The next word for sin is *hamartanein* (ἁμαρτάνειν), which has a figurative meaning, offending God, human, religious or moral law sin, committing a mistake, violating, or doing what is not correct. *Hamartanein* is an infinitive verb that is present and active. The infinitive expresses the concrete idea contained in the verb, namely presenting the "facts" or "actions" themselves.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

If we look at the context, it can be interpreted that because the seed of God is in the believer, they cannot carry out actions that offend God or humans and have something terrible moral

behavior. So, the author's opinion of sin in this verse is morally related to sins and actions that can offend God and man. Sin in 1 John consists of a noun and a verb. Moreover, the definition of sin here is anything that is not by God's standards, both about God and fellow humans. The relationship between sin and Communion with God cannot be separated from the understanding that God is light and darkness does not exist in God, so the author sees three things: first, sin must be purified or cleansed, and only Jesus Christ can do that. Sin is the nature of humans, so humans cannot boast of being able to have communion with God if these sins are not cleansed. Second, believers must confess their sins as a sign that we need Jesus Christ. Third, believers must stop sinning as their lifestyle. It can be concluded that even though sin has been atoned for, man's sinfulness remains because he is in the world and lives in the flesh. That is what makes humans not immune to the temptation to sin. Therefore, in daily life, Christians must rely on God on the one hand to face every temptation and every life process by daring to say no to sin in any form. True Christianity is when Christians experience victory because they rely on God and stay away from every seed of sin that comes their way.

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<sup>14</sup> Petrus Maryono, *Bahasa Yunani Perjanjian Baru: Gramatika Dan Sintaksis* (Yogyakarta: STTII, 2016), 163.

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