

Holiness

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[0 : 00] and let me pray for us now. Lord God, you long that your people meditate on your word day and night, that they may be like trees with strong roots well watered by your word.

And so we pray tonight that not only for this next little while will your word inform our minds and transform our lives, but that indeed we'll continue to meditate on it so that your word will abide in us and us in you till the day when Jesus comes again in glory and so that we may stand with confidence on that day in your presence.

So we ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you don't have your own Bible, you may like to have the Pew Bibles in front of you, page 990, and 1 John, the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 that I can read for us.

My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. John makes it very clear why he writes this letter.

That is, as he says at the beginning of chapter 2, so that you may not sin. That's the big issue that he's dealing with here, the issue of sin.

[1 : 32] The letter's got a moral purpose about it, and we find throughout this letter, a bit like music in a way, themes keep coming to the surface and then, in a sense, taking a back seat while another theme comes up and then the first theme comes back again.

So the themes keep recycling in slightly different ways, but all the time the whole letter, as a unified whole, is here so that we may not sin.

And the context, remember, is that the readership is facing the pressure or threat of false teachers. Some of their number have gone out from them, perhaps it seems, and now are sprouting some form of wrong teaching that involves some heresy of denial of the Christ, in particular, the preceding passage that I looked at on Sunday night in the middle of chapter 2, in effect, deals with that issue, but not just heresy, heresy and some form of immorality or sin as well.

The two, of course, always go hand in hand in life as well as in the scriptures. And so that John is dealing with wrong claims about who Jesus is and wrong claims about what is appropriate behavior for a Christian.

And John is very clear, as we saw last week, as we'll see even more so tonight, I think, about the right behavior for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 00] Indeed, in tonight's passage, from chapter 2, verse 28, a slightly arbitrary beginning. Verse 28 is a sort of transitional verse, in a way, from what precedes to what follows.

I've chosen to link it with what follows, in particular, although you can see in the Pew Bibles it's broken up slightly differently. And what we find in these verses is really a formidable argument for Christians not sinning.

So strong, in fact, is the argument in these verses that there are some who have interpreted these verses as claiming that a Christian cannot, should not, must never, ever commit any sin, any one isolated sin, let alone a whole range of sins.

That any sin in a Christian's life is impossible if you're a real Christian. And so, in effect, claiming a theology of what's called sinless perfection, that Christians, even on earth, are sinlessly perfect. Well, we'll come back to that argument or interpretation a bit later on tonight. We do need to unpack this carefully and understand the thrust of what John's on about.

[4 : 11] And that's why I've reminded us of the purpose of the letter, so that you may not sin, the context of the wrong teachers and their influence over some of the readers leading them astray and so on.

And through this passage, we find that John summons a range of different motivations to urge and command, really, his readers not to sin or not to continue in lives of sin.

As I said, morality and truth are bedfellows, as are immorality and falsehood, are bedfellows. And so, we must be careful not to just look at these verses tonight out of the context of the letter and think that really what matters for a Christian is just doing good things.

We see in the preceding passage from verse 18 onwards, right-thinking belief or theology is just as essential for the Christian. So, please don't separate what God never separates.

Right-theology, dealt with in the preceding verses, is the bedfellow of what's commanded tonight the right morality or behavior. So, don't just think that the totally sufficient test for whether somebody is a Christian or not is, are they good people?

[5 : 28] That's totally insufficient, though it's a significant test of Christian faith and relationship with God. So then, and as I said, verses 18 to 27 deal with that theological truth, in particular focused on Jesus, attacking in those verses the denial that Jesus is the Christ and indeed very strongly denouncing those who deny that as being manifestations of the Antichrist.

the end of that section, verse 27, and this shows the link quite clearly, I think, if I just read the second, I'll read the whole verse 27, as for you, the anointing that you receive from him, that's to do with the spirit writing the word on the heart, abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you, but as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.

So abiding in him, God, Jesus, is tied to the word of God's truth, abiding within the believer. That's the theological truth.

And so that theme continues in this transitional verse 28, and now little children, abide in him. Same idea. Exhortation in this verse.

That is, if you are to abide in Jesus, in God, as all Christians are, that is the appropriation of God's truth by his spirit in our hearts and minds, affecting our lives.

[7 : 06] It's an ongoing practice to abide in him. But now we move more to the issue of morality than the issue of truth, but you can see how they're connected. The truth within us, abiding in us, means we abide in him, which means we will practice godly behavior or holy lives we will exhibit.

So that's the connection. And therefore, at the heart of this passage on morality and behavior is indeed right theology and belief.

So verse 28 goes on there. Now, little children, abide in him so that when he, Jesus, is revealed, we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Some take it that he could be God, the Father. I think more likely it's Jesus, but maybe in one sense we don't need to distinguish too much. It's looking forward to a time when Jesus, who is at this point invisible, will be manifest, will be visible.

He will appear or be, literally it's a passive verb, he'll be appeared or be revealed. That is, presumably, the idea is God the Father will reveal the Son at some future point.

[8 : 28] And the idea of the revealing or the appearing of Jesus, that's the language used at the beginning of the whole letter. In verse 2, for example, to talk about his first coming, born in Bethlehem, he was revealed then and we've seen and touched and heard him, John says, in those opening verses of chapter 1.

But now this is clearly referring to the future, to his second appearing, to his return at the end of history and again calling it an appearing or his revelation.

Clearly it's referring to the second coming as the last verse of verse 28 says, before him at his coming. Two ways of describing in effect the same event.

He is appearing, he's coming. And the word, of course, the theological, the Greek word really for coming is parousia, which sometimes is used in theological circles even today, a Greek word that's just borrowed in that sort of way.

Behind that word is like the coming of a royal visit in a sense. That is, it's not just somebody's arrival, but it's the arrival of a ruler to his or her dominion in effect.

[9 : 41] So like a royal visit, it's a significant arrival is behind the word parousia, the last word of verse 28. And you may know that when the royals visit, people do clean up jobs.

It happens in any country of the world, their own royals or other people's royals. And people sort of, you know, hive off behind the scenes all the scum, the dirt, the garbage, the homeless, and so on, so that everything looks nice, at least on the outside, for the arrival of the royals.

There's a sense of that behind this, that at this royal coming in the future, when Jesus the king returns, we ought to be ready for his coming, ready to receive him, morally ready, of course, and

not just on the surface, but in the heart.

Now notice in this verse the connection between the present abiding in him and the future being confident before him.

The two are clearly connected. They're relational ideas, really. Abiding in him is really about knowing or, back in chapter 1, verse 5, having fellowship with God and fellowship with his son.

[10:57] It's being in a relationship, an intimate relationship, knowing him or abiding in him.

They're the sorts of terms that John uses in this letter, in one sense interchangeably, but they're relational at their heart.

And so in a sense, this Jesus is away in the body, so to speak. He's invisible now, and yet we keep up a relationship with him now so that when he comes back physically and appears again, we'll be confident.

The relationship has been sustained through his physical absence is, in a sense, behind the connection of abiding in him and having confidence in him.

Now, we ought not underestimate the significance of confidence here. The Greek word is *parousia*. Sounds similar to *parousia*, different root, but maybe there's a deliberate pun so that we're to have *parousia* at the *parousia* is the idea.

The word confidence has got that element of boldness about it. Not boldness that is rash, but boldness that is assured and confident.

[12:07] That is, even though this is the king who is coming, there's a sense in which, rightly, we can stand before him, approach him, metaphorically, I suppose, greet him, shake his hand, welcome him, whatever, you know what I mean.

That is, there's an appropriate boldness because this is the king, not a rashness, you know, somebody who's impolite in bowing up to, you know, the queen or the king or the prime minister where they've never met or something, say, hey, John Howard, how are you going?

Not that sort of boldness, but a boldness that's confident, knowing this is an established relationship that is now being expressed intimately and physically when Jesus appears again.

As John Wesley put it in that great hymn, bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own. Not bold as in like, I remember boys games when I was in Cubs and Scouts and so on, where you had to try and sneak up to pinch the prize at the end of the hall without one of the other boys sort of finding you and stabbing you or hitting you or whatever they had to do.

That sort of boldness where you're racing and grab the throne or the crown and race back again away from enemy terrorists, you're not that sort of boldness. It's a boldness that is appropriate because of an established relationship.

[13:24] A relationship, of course, that is established by grace as we see at the end of chapter one in this letter. Not a relationship that is grounded in my own holiness, though that's the theme of this passage.

Not an arrogance about it, but a confidence based on what God's grace has given and secured for me through the death and blood of Jesus Christ.

The opposite to confidence in this verse is shame so that we may have confidence and not be put to shame so that we're going to see Jesus again when he comes with confidence we can approach him and he's not going to put us to shame.

That is, the sense or it's an allusion to judgment. He's not going to expose in a sense our shamefulness and sin because we rightly have a relationship with him.

Abiding in him now leads to confidence when he returns and we see him face to face. Now, verse 29 builds on this theme.

[14:34] That's why verse 28 is transitional. Verse 28 picks up the earlier theme of abiding but it adds in the idea now of Jesus appearing in the future, his coming and so on and that theme continues on in the verses that follow and the idea of perhaps of judgment probably is behind verse 29.

If you know that he is righteous you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him. The idea, I guess, is of God the righteous judge or even Jesus the king as the righteous judge. We know that he's righteous, he's perfect, and we will have confidence before him and John whenever he restates a theme as I said last week often adds a new idea to that theme.

It's not just repetition, it's repetition that builds the ideas. So here we get a new idea that he'll tease out a bit further. Those who do what is right are born of him.

New idea for this letter, assuming the gospel was written before the letter, not new for John. For example, if you remember back to those well-known words at the beginning of John's gospel in verse 12, to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

[16:01] Same idea here in effect. And then of course that discussion in John 3 with Nicodemus as well, you must be born again. So here that theme recurs in the last verse of 1 John 2.

Everyone who does right has been born of him, the righteous one, the righteous judge. So the connection is that somehow even on judgment day before the righteous judge, we can have confidence before him because we've been abiding in him, his truth has been in us, and now teasing out the moral ramifications of that, we do what is right.

And we'll see what that means as we go through these verses that follow. The idea of being born of him leads John into a wonderful statement of assurance because by itself verse 29 could be rather intimidating.

If you know that God is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him. and you might well think, oh, well, maybe I haven't been born of him.

I mean, can I really claim that I do what is right? That is, that verse by itself is challenging, it could undermine assurance, and then see how it's juxtaposed with the beginning of chapter three.

[17:24] See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are. That's an astonishing thing.

In the light of verse 29 in particular that talks about before the righteous one, those who are born of him do what is right. It's a wonderful letter, John, because at one level it shakes us so violently almost, come on, get your life in order, and then in the very next verse it breathes out the most wonderful reassurance about our status before God.

Must always keep both things in hand together. Well, what a wonderful verse verse one is of chapter three. See, that is consider, reflect, meditate upon, remember, don't take for granted, think again, that sort of idea.

What love? The word for what is an odd word. It's a word that expresses surprise. See what surprising love, we might say almost.

It expresses surprise at the nature or type of love, given that love's the next word in this. That's the thrust of the word what.

[18:42] It's not a bland see what love, you know, this love. See what what love? It's an astonishment that's being expressed here about love.

Now, of course, the love is God's love for us. That's a theme that gets built upon later in the letter. It's a love that is to the loveless shown, as that great hymn writer put it.

It's a love that is unmerited to us, a love which we don't deserve. That's part of the astonishment expressed here. It's a love that is associated with grace and mercy as well.

It's a love that is given. I think the NIV translates it as lavished upon us. In one sense theologically that's true. It's probably going a little bit beyond the language but it does capture the sense of surprise.

It's not just stingily given as a little portion. It is abundantly and freely given. It's not that it's lavish that causes the surprise. It's the nature of the love, not the amount that's given that expresses the surprise.

[19:52] It's in effect love to people who don't deserve love. That's the surprise. And yet this love is, we might say, following the NIV, lavished as well.

And the outcome or in one sense the purpose or content of that love is then expressed in the next clause that we should be called children of God.

That we should be called children of God. Children of God is not a new idea in Jesus' day, though it adds profound depth when he says you can call God your father.

But the idea of father-child relationship between God and his people does occur in the Old Testament. It's there a few times in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, even in the Psalms, Psalms 103, and a few other places as well.

It's not a very strong theme. It's certainly enriched and deepened in the New Testament, far beyond its occurrence in the Old, but it is there in the Old. As well.

[20:53] Although I think I'm right in saying in the Old Testament it's only ever corporately expressed, so that it's the people of God as a whole who are the children of God.

I don't think in the Old Testament, and someone may well know their Old Testaments well and correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think you've got the idea of a child or a son or daughter of God and God my father, which becomes more personal, I think, in the New Testament, certainly much deeper through Jesus.

It reminds us though, a very important point that's often forgotten I think, is that not every human being is a child of God. That is, this is a particular grace to believers that enables them to call God their father, to know that they are a child of God, adopted into God's family, is the theology behind this.

not every person by being human is a child of God. It's one reason why I slightly object really to that hymn, Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, because the language of God as our father is applied to believers, not to humankind as a whole, it seems to me in the scriptures.

And though there are plenty around who have the idea of the brotherhood of man and therefore the fatherhood of God for anyone and everyone, whatever you believe or don't believe, it's not a biblical view.

[22 : 21] And I think if we extend it as our humanist society does sometimes, then we lose the wonder that's expressed at the beginning of verse 1. See what love, I mean if every human being can say I'm a child of God, then there's no wonder really in it at all, in one sense.

That is, it's a particular grace for which John is expressing his surprise in one sense, that he should be a recipient of it. As I said, the idea is that we're adopted by grace into God's family, not by virtue of being human but by virtue of Jesus and through faith in him.

There's the old story of the school child who's bullied in the playground because he's adopted by his parents whose wise retort is, well at least my parents chose me.

And there's a sense of here of wonderment that God chose us to be his children, chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be adopted into his family is how Ephesians 1 of course puts us, puts it.

And then to add to the reassurance, John says in the middle of the verse, and that is what we are. So you readers whom I've just urged to abide in him, and to whom I've given you the illusion of God, the righteous judge, and needing to stand before him doing what is right on judgment day, before you suddenly go to jelly and think oh what a failure I am, we are God's children.

[23 : 53] What wonderful reassurance. It's grounded in what God has done, not what you've done, it's grounded in grace, not your works, or your holiness, or your effort, or anything like that at all.

Well if Christians, as I mentioned, I think, if not last Wednesday, it was one of the Sunday sermons, I lose track sometimes of which is which, if we are to be strong to resist false teaching, and that's why John's writing this letter in the context of false teachers, we must be strong in our doctrine of grace.

And I think of that passage, I may have quoted it last week, in 2 Timothy 3, about the silly women who are overburdened by their guilt, who are therefore prone to go after any and every wind of doctrine.

That is, when we have a robust and right theology of grace, when we have therefore a firm foundation of grace that establishes our relationship with God, we are not vulnerable to false teaching which can offer us no more than what we already have.

That's why grace is so important to grasp as the thread through this letter, and to keep that in mind when we see such strong words in the next few verses about not sinning.

[25 : 13] If we misunderstand them and think that it all depends on my effort and righteousness and goodness and behaviour, then we'll become very vulnerable to chase after false teaching.

And how crippling a lack of assurance is for Christians. Not that we're saved by assurance, but assurance ought to be part of our thinking, our heart, our understanding for every believer.

For our salvation is secured by the grace of God, therefore we have confidence, as verse 28 says, when Jesus returns. I visited a very elderly lady last week into the almost, no, into now her second half of her 90s, who may well be in her last, maybe not days, but weeks, months, and who seemed not quite to grasp assurance that she will meet God in favourable circumstances.

And so many times in my ministry, it's an important part of ministry, to reassure people, often elderly people facing death, that they can have assurance and confidence to meet God, not because of themselves, but because of Jesus.

So let me urge you, if you lack that assurance and confidence, get it. It will liberate your Christian life now, it will demolish your fear of dying, and it will enrich your relationship with God no end, of

course.

[26 : 48] Well the implication of this wonderful reassurance of verse 1, firstly comes at the end of verse 1, the reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him, Jesus.

And notice there clearly that, even more clearly perhaps, that John doesn't have in mind that every human being is a child of God. Clearly there are the believers and the world.

And the world does not know us as children of God because it didn't know Jesus. And so again there's reassurance here for the believers that even though they're in a secure relationship with God for eternity, the world doesn't know them.

Not that that's their fault, because the world didn't know Jesus either. People love darkness more than light. John's saying don't be rattled by opposition. Don't be rattled by there being false teachers and unbelievers.

It happened to Jesus too. You've got to expect the same for yourself. The world doesn't know God, chapter 2 verse 16 said, so don't expect it to recognize you as a child of God necessarily.

[27 : 53] Don't expect it to treat you with respect or love necessarily either. Now John ties this in with his theme of the second coming. Beloved, we are God's children now.

That's the ringing endorsement. It's a good thing, a great privilege. What we will be has not yet been revealed. Not that we won't then be God's children, but what greater privilege and glory will be ours, that's not yet been revealed.

That is, there is a now and a not yet in the Christian life. Not everything is ours for full enjoyment now. There is more that awaits us when Jesus returns, when he appears at the end.

And so yes, we're God's children now, that's secure. Even greater things is the implication of verse 2 are yet to come. What we will be has not yet been revealed, but what we do know is this.

That is, it's not total mystery. We know something, we know something significant, we know even sufficient about the future, and what he says is this, when he, Jesus, appears or is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

[29 : 14] The heart of the future, when Jesus comes again, not before, is that we will be like him. now there's a connection between the now and the not yet.

That is, it's a trajectory of family likeness. We are children of God now, therefore related to Jesus clearly, and when Jesus comes, we will be like him.

Not yet in perfection, but then we will be. We've been adopted into God's family, and the perfection of the family likeness will come when Jesus appears again, and we will see him as he is, as verse 2 is telling us.

What is that? It's a moral characteristic. We're not talking about flowing robes and long beards and stuff like that. We're talking about morality and character and holiness. Jesus, we've already been told at chapter 2, verse 1, is righteous.

Later on, in the next verse, we'll be told that he is pure. Later again in this section in verse 5, we'll be told that he's without sin. That's what it's referring to. That on that final day when Jesus appears and we see him as he is, we will be like him then.

[30 : 34] Righteous, pure, without sin. Perfect on that day of glorification. In between, then, the now and the not yet, we are already God's children where we've begun the journey of family likeness, if I can put it like that, and we hope for that end.

Verse 3 says, and all who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure. That is, our hope, our expectation of Jesus' return is purificatory for our life now.

You see, sometimes we long for Jesus' coming to escape the suffering of this world. Fair thing to long for. But our longing for Jesus' return is to be a moral longing as well.

And let me say there are many days when my longing for Jesus to return is to escape the sort of humdrum or demands of the job or whatever, but there are certainly days when my longing for Jesus' return is that finally and amazingly I will be morally perfect on that day.

That ought to be our longing. But it's a longing that feeds back into our daily life. Our hope of that day is purificatory. Verse 3 says, all who have this hope in him, in Jesus' return, purify themselves.

[32 : 06] And the sense of that verb is a continuous one. It's not a one-off thing as though today my hope in him is strong, so therefore suddenly today I'm purified. Not at all.

It's keep on being purified as we anticipate his coming. So it's a trajectory of being adopted into the family and perfecting or having perfected in us the family likeness on that final day.

And we're in between those two things. and as we have confidence at the beginning because it's God's grace, and as we look with hope and expectation at Jesus' return, we are in a sense purifying ourselves, getting ready.

We know that on that final day he'll judge us, he's perfect, pure, without sin and righteous, and so we're purifying ourselves as we become more and more ready for that day.

And the power for that is the word of truth abiding in us. As we saw at the very beginning of today's passage coming from the previous few verses as well. This is like Paul's theology in 2 Corinthians 3.

[33 : 13] I haven't got time to read that but you can read chapter 3 verse 18 about being transformed more into Christ's likeness from glory to glory. Charles Wesley's hymn, love divine change from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place and so on.

That's what's going on in these verses here. Perfection is our destiny. And so therefore Christian hope ought to be perfecting in us. It has a moral component this hope.

It ought to be making us more holy, more pure, more sinless as we keep on growing in our hope and expectation of his return. Now of course the doctrine of Jesus' return is very underplayed in modern Christianity.

There are fewer hymns about it it seems to me than there were 100, 200 years ago. Although there's some recapture of it perhaps in the last decade or two. But as our doctrine of Jesus' return in glory weakens, is it any surprise that churches, congregations, fellowships or Christians where there is a weak doctrine of his return usually in fact evidence of very weak morality or holiness as well.

Confidence in grace expressed back in verse 28 gives no grounds for complacency. Confidence in grace strengthens our hope which purifies us here and now for the future.

[34 : 42] So we've seen then already the motivation for holiness, second coming is one motivation, God's love in adopting us already in the past secured, that's another motivation for holiness.

Indeed Jesus' first coming is also a motivation for holiness. In verses 4 and 5 everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness, sin is lawlessness, you know that he, Jesus, was revealed, now it's talking of his first appearing, to take away sins and in him there is no sin.

So the second coming as well as the first coming as well as our adoption, they're three distinct motives for holy living that John is in a sense appealing to in these verses here.

Sin he describes in verse 4 is lawlessness. I don't think in the sense of breaking the Old Testament law, it's the only time this expression occurs in 1 John, I don't think it's breaking rules and regulations, I think the idea of lawlessness, a bit like in 2 Thessalonians, the man of lawlessness is the man of outright rebellion against God's rule.

rule. That's what sin is. Rebellion against God's rule is probably the right context here and it's in effect implying and certainly verse 5 is making explicit that God is opposed to lawlessness.

[36 : 05] He doesn't take sin indifferently, he doesn't treat it lightly like probably the false teachers are doing. The whole purpose of Jesus' first coming was to take away sins with the sense of forgive as well as get rid of them, take them on himself, get them out of the way.

I think the implication being to take away their penalty as well as probably their presence ultimately as well. Well now the logic of that is applied to the readers.

In verse 6 we read, no one who abides in him sins. No one who sins has either seen him or known him.

what a confronting statement that is. Gulp. We've just been told that we abide in him if we're a reader of this letter.

We've been wonderfully assured that we're children of God, that we can have confidence before him when he appears again. And now we're told that no one who abides in him sins.

[37 : 11] sins. And we think, not back too far, earlier today, if we're careful, I've sinned. So all of a sudden has John changed his mind?

Is he hot and cold with his assurance and his challenge? What's he saying? Well, these verses 6 to 10, the rest of tonight's passage, are very black and white.

They have been interpreted to justify the case for Christians being sinlessly perfect on earth.

They've been interpreted as denying that a Christian can sin and so that any sin in your life is evidence that you're not a Christian.

And yet, this letter makes it clear that Christians do sin and that if you claim not to sin, you're lying. We see that at the end of chapter 1 very clearly. We have to try and put these things together as the right way of interpreting it.

And we also saw in verse 3 that he who hopes or the one who hopes in Jesus purifies themselves and the purifier is an ongoing thing. And that presupposes then that leading up to Jesus' return, you're a sinner needing purification.

[38 : 23] So all of that context makes it clear that we can't simply say that verse 6 is saying, you know, if you live a basically good life but all of a sudden you slip up somewhere and you sin, that you have suddenly lost your whole eternal assurance and destiny and you have no relationship with God at all.

That's clearly not what John is on about here. Some people claim that the sin used in verse 6 onwards is specific sin, sin that leads to death whereas elsewhere maybe he refers to just general sin.

But the trouble is John doesn't make that sort of distinction here. He uses sin in a broad sense other than defining it as lawlessness in verses 4 and in verse 4. And even that's a fairly, in one sense, broad definition as well.

Some say that it's the sin that denies that Jesus is the Christ, picking up earlier in chapter 2. Again though, John's language is broader than that. The connection, it may be that sin being lawlessness associates you with the Antichrist but that's not made explicit and tight as a connection in 1 John 2 and 3.

The lawlessness Antichrist connections in 2 Thessalonians rather than being explicitly here. More importantly, I think, the verbs, they're the doing words, are important.

[39 : 47] The verbs are the present tense which in the Greek usually conveys a continuous sense. I think maybe even the NIV translates verse 6 along the lines of, no one who abides in him keeps on sinning.

And that's certainly the sense of what's being said. It's not the person who's just, oh, I realized that I slipped up and I lacked love there or I did something wrong there.

It's the person who keeps on sinning in the sense of being unrepentant, non-confessing, not worried about living that life of sin.

Somebody who just keeps on walking in sin untroubled by that direction and that behavior. That's the sense of the present continuous sense of the person no one, sorry, no one who abides in him keeps on sinning in verse 6.

And that's probably the best way of understanding the passage. But in addition to that, I think more can be said because this is very strong language as well.

[40 : 59] So it's not simply putting out there those who just keep on sinning and distancing the reader from that. The language itself doesn't include the reader in those who keep on sinning, but in the strength of language it's warning the reader away from there.

So it's not just simply saying I'm talking about those out there who keep on sinning, you're okay, you're over here. It's warning language. Now of course in Western Christianity, I think by and large, we're morally fairly complacent.

And John here is writing to people who under false teachers we see in chapters 1 and 2 are in danger of treating sin lightly or thinking they don't sin or something like that.

He's trying to jolt them and he's using jolting language and he's saying that sin in your life is totally incongruous if you're a Christian. He's not saying it's impossible for a Christian to sin, although he is saying it's impossible for a Christian to continue walking untroubled in a path of sin.

But he's stressing the incongruity, the inconsistency, the incompatibility of living a life of sin and being a Christian.

[42 : 15] They don't go together. And so he's warning his readers here, don't walk or live or practice sin in your life.

It's a bit like, and I borrow this illustration from elsewhere, a person goes to a new school, posh school for example, and they do something that's not quite up to the etiquette of the school and they get told very quickly by the teacher, that is not done here.

Well, the little boy, if he was cheeky, could well say, well, yes it is, because I just did it. You know what we mean though. That is not done here. That ought not to be done here. It is incongruous if you are in this school to do that behavior.

Well, in a sense, John's language is a bit like that. Sin is not done here if you are a Christian. And he's meaning this life of keeping on in sin.

I actually think it's a bit stronger than that too, because his purpose in writing is that you do not sin in a sense at all. We do until the day of Jesus' return.

[43 : 24] But John's letter is to get us ready for that day of Jesus' return. So that we stop walking in those deliberate paths of sin. But even when we sin by way of sort of slipping up, the inadvertent, non-deliberate sort of sin, John's trying to eradicate that from his readers' lives as well.

See, it's not... I think part of our trouble is that we're... We sort of think, oh, yeah, well, look, you know, I'm not a serial adulterer. I'm not a murderer. I'm not always doing bad things. Periodically, I sort of slip up.

But, you know, that's basically good. John's trying to jolt us out of that complacency. Yeah, maybe you're not practicing a really terrible life, but you've still got a big clean-up job to do.

God's got a big clean-up job to do. So the language is jolting. And I'm trying, in one sense, to help us fit the warning and the assurance together. But on the other hand, I'm trying not to water it down either.

I'm trying to help us feel the strength of what John is saying. Sin should have no part in our life. Any sin. However, infrequent.

[44 : 37] We do sin. We confess our sin and God is gracious and faithful and just to forgive us our sins in Christ. We see that at the end of chapter one. But ultimately and ideally, there ought to be none.

Now, only on the day of Christ will we be like him. Any claim to be without sin before that is a lie, as John says in chapter one. But the hope of that day is to be purifying us now.

And that's why his language is so strong here. God is light in him. There is no darkness at all. And we're heading for the light on that final day.

So John goes on then. Little children, tender words now. Let no one deceive you. You see, children are so often deceived, gullible, etc. And his readers are vulnerable to being deceived by false teachers.

Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. There was a slogan when I lived in England years ago called say no to strangers. It was for children so they wouldn't get vulnerable to abuse by people who try and get them into their car or whatever.

[45 : 52] I thought it's quite a funny slogan, really. I thought if I take this literally as I walk down the street and I see people I don't know, no. No, no. Say no to strangers. One day I went to an old church in Whitby in Yorkshire and in old English stranger means a visitor.

So for those of you who don't belong to Holy Trinity tonight you're in a sense strangers. And in this church that had little walled off pews, it had a little section for strangers. Very high wall.

And it wasn't a Sunday service. There was no one there. But I did poke my head over and say no. No. Well that came to mind when I was thinking about verse 7 here.

Little children let no one deceive you. That is say no to those who seek to lead you astray. And the false teachers were clear in this letter are riddled with errors regarding sin.

Everyone who does what is right is righteous just as he is righteous. It's not saying just a basically good person therefore must be a Christian. The theological content was earlier in chapter 2.

[46 : 58] Everyone who commits sin, again the continuous sense, is a child of the devil. Stronger language again. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

Clearly identifying the devil with the serpent in Eden in Genesis 3. And so on. The son of God was revealed for this purpose to destroy the works of the devil. We're told earlier on that he was revealed to take away sin.

Another way of saying the same thing is to destroy the works of the devil. God takes sin seriously. That's the whole reason why Jesus came in the first place. To destroy the works of the devil.

Sin as well as all its temptations as well. So what John is saying is sin is serious. God's fundamentally opposed to it. How dare you take it lightly or pretend that it's not serious or pretend that it doesn't exist.

Sin is worse than just slipping up. Everyone who commits a sin, commits sin, is a child of the devil. That is, it's not just sort of defective behavior. It's diabolical behavior.

[48 : 03] Sin, we might say, is the devil's DNA. And if you continue in sin, then his DNA is all through you. You belong to his likeness, in effect, is what John is saying.

No different from Jesus' words, of course, in John chapter 8 as well. But on the other hand, those who've been born of God, which includes the readers, remember the assurance from verse 1. Do not sin, that is keep on sinning, because God's seed abides in them. Probably seed here means metaphorical, but the seed is the idea of creation of life, as in sperm, the Greek word sperma. Probably here it's not meaning literally, in a sense, anything about creation of life, but the seed of God's spirit or his word. Just in general, that is, if you're born of God, you're adopted in his family, the family likeness has begun.

God's life has begun in you. They cannot sin because they've been born of God. The absolute incongruity and incompatibility of practicing sin and yet being born of God.

[49 : 14] Notice there are two options and no neutral ground. Children of the devil or children born of God. And if you're born of God, that's an act of grace, not an act of merit or just desert either.

So righteousness is God's DNA. And if we're born of God, the family likeness ought to become more and more evident in us to that final day when we will be like him, for we'll see him as he is. Well, finally, John restates all this again, adding slightly different idea. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way. All who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

He's adding the idea of love of brothers and sisters. The theme of love will recur later in the letter as well in the next section. So again, it's transitional into the next bit where John will now develop a theme of love and so on as he keeps sort of recycling, recircling around his themes.

Well, Christians live their lives in a tension. In a sense, the structure that we got to see ourselves in is that we've begun in the relationship with God by grace when he adopted us in his family.

[50 : 35] We look forward to the coming of Jesus when we'll be perfected in Jesus likeness. We're in between those two events. We look to the future. Well, we look to the past with thankfulness to motivate us.

We look to the future with hope, which purifies us so that finally on that on that last day, we will be completely cut off from or separate to sin in our life in any form.

Before that, we can never claim that. It will never happen. But we're not to just sit and wait. We're to hope and to purify ourselves in the meantime as we hope.

We remember that our sin, when we do sin, we confess it. We turn back to the cross. We know that God's grace is forgiving us our sin and cleansing us from our sin.

And we keep looking to the future as we look forward and long for that day when we will be morally perfect and pure. I find that an amazing concept to think about, to be honest, because I know how riddled my life is with impurity and sin and uncleanness in my thinking, my motivations, my actions, my behavior, my lack of behavior, my lack of words, and so on.

[51 : 54] And I think, goodness, how can I now be the same person who will be purified on that final day? And yet by God's grace, that will be the case, not only for me, but for all of God's children.

So there is a tension. We're to be children of God, children of the light, living pure, righteous lives, and yet knowing that we're not yet perfect.

Not giving up, becoming complacent, as probably these readers were, but rather all the more hoping and longing for that great and final day.

Well, let's pray to God.