

## A Contradiction in First John?

### Commentary for January 15, 2023 — Is There Really A Contradiction?

**Question:** Hi, Can you please help me figure out a contradiction between 1 John 3:9 and 1 John 1:8-10?

I will be very grateful. Thank you.

**Answer:** What **is** going on in these passages regarding sin? The order the verses were written must be considered, as well as the context of John **1**:8-10 and 1 John **3**:8-9. Both involve the topic of sin. Whose perspective is important, the perspective of God or man?

### **1 John 1:8-10, King James Version**

**First**, the verbs in the passage below involve speaking (or not speaking) truth about committing sins.

**Second**, the topic changes to confessing our sins before God, not public confession.

**Third**, there is a danger of dishonoring God, if we publicly say, **"we have not sinned."**

**"If we say that we have no sin** [in the present],

[1] **we deceive ourselves, and**

[2] **the truth is not in us.** [However, ...]

**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just**

[1] **to forgive us our sins, and**

[2] **to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

**If we say that we have not sinned** [in the past],

[1] **we make Him [God] a liar, and**

[2] **His word is not in us."**

• **1 John 1:8-10, KJV**

In each of these instances, the consequences are two-fold. In these verses, the subject is our attitude about sinning or righteousness. We sin because we have sinful flesh (Romans 8:1-3). The world, our flesh, and the devil lead us to sin. (The devil is dealt with in 1 John 3:8-9 below.) Adam's sin brought on death to all his descendants, inherent in every human being (Romans 5:12-21). Such is the reality into which we are all born.

### **1 John 3:8-9, King James Version**

**"Sin is the transgression of the law"** (1 John 3:4). This defines "sin." Next, 1 John 3:8-9:

**"He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning** [the devil's beginning]. **For this purpose the Son of God was manifested,**

[To what purpose?] **that He** [God's Son] **might destroy the works of the devil.**  
**Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for His seed** [God's Holy Spirit]  
**remains in him: and he cannot sin,**

[To what purpose?] **because he is born of God.**"

• *1 John 3:8-9, KJV*

First John 1:8-10 and 1 John 3:8-9 seem to contradict each other. When one commits sin, that person **"is of the devil."** That is the case before one **"is born of God"** which occurs through the work of the Son of God. After that, one **"does not commit sin"** and **"cannot sin."** Being born of God keeps a person's sins from being counted against him or her.

God makes us righteous through Christ no matter what we do if we acknowledge the faith that He gives to us. Until we are glorified and made immortal we will continue to sin according to God's design. This requires God's continual intervention of His Spirit within us. Not many people are aware of this situation.

Some day God will fully inform all creation of the work He and Christ have done to save every human being. God's Son was manifested in part to undo the work of the devil. That purpose of God is not yet completed. It will be finished when death is abolished, and all creation will be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20).

Remember, our faith is a gift from God (Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:5-10; and 2 Timothy 1:9), as is our belief in Christ's sacrifice and His resurrection. We all will someday believe the Gospel of God given briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. That Gospel comes to us from God through Christ. From the moment we believe God forgives our sins, His ongoing forgiveness has the effect **"to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** [injustice]." In fact, it makes us righteous. Through God's cleansing, we are sinless in His sight, even as we continue to sin until we are resurrected. God is perfecting us, and is not lying in either 1 John 1:8-10 or in 1 John 3:8-9.

1 John 1:10 states, **"If we say that we have not sinned ..."** we are lying because we continue to sin until we die, but we are also forgiven and cleansed until we die. After that, we will be resurrected to glory, given immortality, and the power to remain sinless, no more requiring forgiveness of sin nor cleansing for righteousness.

1 John 3:8-9 tells us the devil (identified as Satan, elsewhere in Scripture) has a role in causing us to sin. When we do sin, we are **"of the devil."** We are like him, an adversary of God. One role God's Son has, will be to remove the influence of the devil. That process is not yet completed, just as your glorification has not yet happened. Both will occur and be fulfilled when Christ returns.

If we are born of God and have God's Spirit in us, the devil's influence on us is nullified. Truly, **"you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise"** (Ephesians 1:13) and are now **"born of God."** We are justified and not sinners. That is God's view of **YOU** at this moment. Only God's perspective and assessment of us is important. If God's Spirit is within us (**"His seed,"** 1 John 3:9), God considers us to be righteous and declares us to be sinless.

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