

1 John 1:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Analysis

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. John concludes the chapter with the most serious form of denial: claiming we have not sinned at all. This differs from verse 8 (denying we have sin/sin nature); this denies any sinful acts. The present perfect tense "have not sinned" (οὐχ ἀκαθάρτηκαμεν, οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν) suggests denying a history of sin with continuing effects.

The consequence is severe: we "make him a liar" (πειστὴν ποιοῦμεν αὐτὸν, ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν αὐτόν). God's Word declares that all have sinned (Romans 3:23). To deny our sin is to contradict God, calling Him a liar. This is cosmic arrogance—setting our self-assessment above God's declaration. It reverses the serpent's temptation: the serpent called God a liar; claiming sinlessness does the same.

"His word is not in us" indicates more than intellectual rejection—it means the living Word (Christ) and the revealed Word (Scripture) have not taken root in our hearts. Genuine encounter with God's holiness and truth produces conviction of sin (Isaiah 6:5, Luke 5:8). Those who claim sinlessness reveal they haven't truly met the God who is light. This sobering warning concludes the chapter's tests: walking in fellowship with God requires walking in light, confessing sin, and receiving ongoing cleansing—never claiming we've arrived at sinlessness.

Historical Context

Some Gnostic teachers claimed they'd transcended sin through their enlightenment. Others redefined sin so that their behavior didn't qualify. Some argued that actions performed by the body didn't constitute sin for the enlightened spirit. All these positions effectively called God a liar by contradicting His revealed truth about human sinfulness.

The early church faced this challenge repeatedly. Pelagius denied original sin and claimed humans could achieve sinlessness through willpower. Augustine refuted this, establishing Christian orthodoxy: all humans inherit sin from Adam, all commit actual sins, and none achieve sinlessness in this life except Christ. The Council of Carthage (418 AD) condemned Pelagianism as heresy.

Throughout history, perfectionist movements have claimed achievable sinlessness, from some medieval mystics to certain Pentecostal and Holiness groups. Reformed theology consistently maintains that believers remain simultaneously justified and sinful (*simul justus et peccator*) until glorification.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. In what ways might you be minimizing your sin or comparing yourself favorably to others rather than to God's standard?
2. How does growth in sanctification reveal previously unseen sin rather than leading to claims of greater righteousness?
3. What would it look like practically to acknowledge that claiming sinlessness makes God a liar?

Interlinear Text

ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι οὐκ ἡμαρτήκαμεν ψεύστην ποιοῦμεν

If we say that not sinned a liar we make
G1437 G2036 G3754 G3756 G264 G5583 G4160

αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν

him and word him not is in us
G846 G2532 G3588 G3056 G846 G3756 G2076 G1722 G2254

Additional Cross-References

1 John 1:8 (Sin): If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 5:10 (Parallel theme): He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

1 John 2:4 (Word): He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Psalms 130:3 (Parallel theme): If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

2 John 1:2 (Parallel theme): For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

1 John 2:14 (Word): I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.