

1 John 3:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This challenging verse requires careful interpretation consistent with 1:8. "Whosoever is born of God" (pas ho gegennēmenos ek tou theou) uses the perfect tense—having been born, continuing in that state. "Doth not commit sin" (hamartian ou poiei) uses the present tense for habitual practice. Those born of God do not make sin their practice or lifestyle.

The reason is "his seed remaineth in him" (hoti sperma autou en autō menei). The "seed" likely refers to the principle of divine life implanted at regeneration—God's nature, the Holy Spirit, or the word of God. This divine seed abides permanently, producing new nature and desires. Regeneration is permanent transformation, not temporary influence. The new birth creates a new person with a new nature that hates sin and loves righteousness.

"And he cannot sin" (kai ou dynatai hamartanein) doesn't mean absolute inability to commit any sin, but rather that the regenerate person cannot comfortably persist in habitual sin. The new nature makes continuing in sin impossible as a settled lifestyle. Hamartanein is present infinitive—continuous action. The born-again believer cannot practice sin characteristically because God's seed within produces a nature incompatible with willing rebellion.

Historical Context

The concept of divine seed had parallels in Stoic philosophy, which spoke of a "divine spark" within humans. However, John's teaching is distinctly Christian and biblical—the seed is not innate human divinity but God's gracious implanting of new life through regeneration. This recalls Ezekiel 36:26-27 (God giving a new heart and putting His Spirit within) and Jesus's teaching about new birth (John 3:3-8).

Against perfectionist interpretations claiming Christians achieve sinlessness, John's broader context (1:8, 2:1) shows he means habitual practice, not absolute perfection. Against libertine claims that Christians can live in sin, John insists regeneration produces real moral transformation. The Reformation doctrine of simul justus et peccator (simultaneously justified and sinner) balances these truths: justified before God, we're not yet perfectly sanctified, but genuine regeneration does produce holiness.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile this verse with your own ongoing struggle with sin as a Christian?
2. What's the difference between 'cannot sin' (as a habitual practice) and sinless perfection (which 1:8 denies)?
3. How does understanding that God's seed permanently remains in you affect your battle against temptation?

Interlinear Text

πᾶς	ὁ	γεγένυνται	ἐκ	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	ἀμαρτίαν	οὐ
Whosoever	G3588	he is born	of	G3588	God	commit sin	he cannot
G3956		G1080	G1537		G2316	G266	G3756
ποιεῖ	ὅτι	σπέρμα	αὐτῷ	ἐν	αὐτῷ	μένει	καὶ
doth	because	seed	him	in	him	remaineth	and
G4160	G3754	G4690	G846	G1722	G846	G3306	G2532
δύναται	ἀμαρτάνειν	ὅτι	ἐκ	τοῦ	Θεοῦ	γεγένυνται	οὐ
G1410	sin	because	of	G3588	God	he is born	
	G264	G3754	G1537		G2316	G1080	

Additional Cross-References

1 John 5:18 (Sin): We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

1 Peter 1:23 (References God): Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

John 1:13 (References God): Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

1 John 2:29 (Parallel theme): If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

1 John 5:1 (References God): Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

John 3:3 (References God): Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:17 (Parallel theme): For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

1 John 5:4 (References God): For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

1 John 4:7 (References God): Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

Romans 6:2 (Sin): God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

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