THE UNADULTERATED GOSPEL

A Study Guide on 1 John 3:4–6

Based on the sermon outline

Scripture Text

1 John 3:4–6 (NASB)

4 *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*

5 *You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.*

6 *No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.*

Overview

John writes to distinguish true Christianity from false teaching. In his day, false teachers claimed that lifestyle and conduct had no bearing on spiritual life. John counters this error with the pure gospel. This passage presents three great truths:

- **Our Condition** — the universal and unbroken reality of sin (v. 4)
- **Our Comfort** — Jesus as sin-bearer and our righteousness (v. 5)
- **Our Conversion** — the evidence of a changed life through knowing Christ (v. 6)

I. Our Condition (v. 4)

John begins by naming the human crisis: we are sinners and law-breakers. Sin is not a small matter to God. Sin separates us from Him, makes us His enemies, and places us under His wrath. The remedy required God Himself to enter our world.

A. Sin Is Universal

Key truth: "Everyone who does sin also does lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."

The Greek word for sin (*hamartia*) means to miss the mark—an archer's term. Scripture is clear: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). None are righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10).

A robust doctrine of sin is essential. Without it, the gospel loses its necessity and beauty. We cannot preach mercy to those who feel no need of it.

B. Sin Is Unbroken (Habitual)

The present tense in the Greek indicates ongoing, continuous action. The natural person is a "sin factory." Sin is the heart's default setting and governor. John Calvin observed that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory.

This continual practice of sin is what separates the unregenerate from the regenerate. Those born of God do not continue in sin because God's seed abides in them (1 John 3:9).

Not all sin looks outlandish. Many people are polite, charitable, and morally upright by human standards—yet they reject Christ and the gospel. That rejection is the most egregious sin.

Discussion Questions

1. How does a weak view of sin diminish our appreciation of the gospel?
2. In what ways do people today create their own standards of "goodness" and measure themselves by those instead of God's law?

3. Why is the rejection of Jesus and the gospel more serious than other sins we tend to rank as "worse"?

II. Our Comfort (v. 5)

God could have left us under just condemnation. Instead, in grace He provided a Savior. The heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ—God who became flesh and entered a sin-wrecked world to rescue His people.

A. Jesus Is Our Sin-Bearer

Key truth: "He was manifested in order to take away sins."

Jesus' primary mission was not merely to set an example. He came to deal with our sins—to bear them substitutionally, in our place. He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), bore the curse (Galatians 3:13), and was pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5–6).

This was foreshadowed by the scapegoat of Leviticus 16: the High Priest confessed Israel's sins over the goat, and it carried those iniquities away into the wilderness. Jesus truly bore our sins in His body on the tree.

B. Jesus Is Our Righteousness

Key truth: "And in Him there is no sin."

Jesus' active obedience means He fulfilled every requirement of God's law on our behalf. As the second Adam, He represented us in righteousness just as the first Adam represented us in sin. Through His obedience, many are appointed righteous (Romans 5:18–19).

His perfect righteousness is imputed to the believer by faith. God accepts nothing less. Our best attempts are filthy rags; only Christ's righteousness is sufficient.

Discussion Questions

4. Why is it important to emphasize that Jesus came primarily as a sin-bearer rather than only as a moral example?
5. How does the Old Testament scapegoat help us understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross?
6. What does it mean practically that Jesus' righteousness is given to us as a gift received by faith?

III. Our Conversion (v. 6)

How do we know our sins have been taken away? Those who have been forgiven have a new relationship with sin. Where once we loved and pursued it, we now loathe and flee it. When we do sin, we grieve and repent. Conversion breaks sin's power and rhythm.

A. Conversion Is Proven by Holiness

Key truth: "No one who abides in Him sins."

"Abides" speaks of ongoing relationship and discipleship (see John 15). The present tense again indicates continuous action. Christians are not sinless, but the pattern and practice of sin is broken. New affections produce new practices.

Those who claim Christ verbally but deny Him in lifestyle have never truly seen Him. Saving grace is always accompanied by good works that glorify God (Ephesians 2:10). Holiness becomes the new normal and the heart's new aim.

B. Conversion Flows from Knowing Christ

Key truth: "No one who sins has seen Him or has come to know Him."

The word "know" (*ginōskō*) speaks of intimacy—union and communion, not mere information. The absence of holiness reveals the absence of real communion with Christ. Those who abide in Him bear fruit (John 15:5).

We grow in this knowledge by seeing His supremacy, valuing His worth, surrendering to His authority, learning of Him in Scripture, and communing with Him in prayer. The Spirit must reveal Christ to our hearts as Lord.

Discussion Questions

7. How would you explain the difference between a Christian who still struggles with sin and a person whose life shows an unbroken pattern of lawlessness?
8. What does it look like in daily life to "abide" in Christ?
9. How does intimate knowledge of Christ (as opposed to mere knowledge about Him) produce holiness?

Personal Application

1. Where have you minimized the seriousness of sin in your own heart or in the culture around you?
2. In what specific ways does the truth that Jesus bore your sins and provides His righteousness bring you comfort right now?
3. Is there a pattern of sin that the Spirit is highlighting as inconsistent with abiding in Christ? What would repentance look like this week?
4. How will you pursue deeper knowledge of and communion with Christ in the coming days?

Memory Verses

- **1 John 3:5** — "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin."
- **Romans 5:19** — "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were appointed sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be appointed righteous."
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** — "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Prayer Points

- Confess specific ways you have treated sin lightly and ask God for a clearer sight of its seriousness.
- Thank Jesus specifically for bearing your sins and for clothing you in His perfect righteousness.
- Ask the Spirit to deepen your communion with Christ so that holiness becomes increasingly the desire and pattern of your life.
- Pray for those who trust in their own goodness and see no need for the gospel—that God would open their eyes to their true condition and to Christ.

Closing Reflection

John presents the unadulterated gospel with clarity and power. It exposes our condition, offers the only true comfort in Christ, and produces the evidence of genuine conversion. This message will be either an aroma of life to life or of death to death. Receive it. Rejoice in it. Live from it.

"Jesus! The name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease; 'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace."

— Charles Wesley

Amen.