

## IMPECCABILITY IN 1 JOHN: AN EVALUATION

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The First Epistle of John confronts us with a dilemma which, since its inception, has challenged many students of the Bible. On one hand, the Christian must not deny his sinfulness—for which, however, there is a ready solution in the expiation wrought by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the one who abides in God and is born of him does not sin and, indeed, cannot sin.

Many solutions, discussed and evaluated in chap. 1, have been set forth in an attempt to harmonize this apparent contradiction. Though some are more satisfying than others, a common weakness exhibited among them all is a lack of comprehensiveness which does not do justice to the categorical language of the epistle.

The background study of the document, examined in chap. 2, aims to discover the nature and character of the opponents reflected in the epistle, and their possible relationship to the statements of impeccability. A negative answer is found in that the problem of the epistle is not directly related to the opponents of the community. An examination of the structure of the document, given in chap. 3, confirms the finding that such statements are rather paraenetic in nature and addressed to the members of the writer's own community.

A more fruitful enterprise, undertaken in chap. 4, is found in the examination of the Johannine terminology for sin, wherein the concept of *anomia* provides a useful clarification for the categorical statement of impeccability in 1 John 3. *Anomia*—as a sin concept referring to opposition to God with eschatological overtones—becomes relevant.

The last and major section of this study, chap. 5, is devoted to exegeting the three blocks of material related to the problematic statements of the document. As a result, it becomes apparent that four concepts should qualify the statements of impeccability: (1) The concept of *anomia*, which epitomizes rejection of, and apostasy from, Christ. (2) The concept of "abiding." (3) The idea of "being born of God." (4) The "sin-unto-death" terminology. A multiple approach which combines these concepts is a reasonable solution to the problem of why, at the same time, a Christian can and cannot sin.