

What does the word “seed” mean in 1 John 3:9:

A digression

For his seed remaineth in him - There is much obscurity in this expression, though the general sense is clear, which is, that there is something abiding in the heart of the true Christian which the apostle here calls “seed,” which will prevent his sinning. The word “his” in this phrase, “his seed,” may refer either to the individual himself - in the sense that this can now be properly called “his,” inasmuch as it is a part of himself, or a principle abiding in him; or it may refer to God - in the sense that what is here called “seed” is “his,” that is, he has implanted it, or it is a germ of divine origin. Robinson (Lex.) understands it in the latter sense, and so also do Macknight, Doddridge, Lucke, and others, and this is probably the true interpretation. The word “seed” (σπέρμα sperma) means properly seed sown, as of grain, plants, trees; then anything that resembles it, anything which germinates, or which springs up, or is produced.

It is applied in the New Testament to the word of God, or the gospel, as that which produces effects in the heart and life similar to what seed that is sown does. Compare [Mat 13:26](#), [Mat 13:37-38](#). Augustin, Clemens, (Alex.), Grotius, Rosenmuller, Benson, and Bloomfield, suppose that this is the signification of the word here. The proper idea, according to this, is that the seed referred to is truth, which God has implanted or sown in the heart, from which it may be expected that the fruits of righteousness will grow. But that which abides in the heart of a Christian is not the naked word of God; the mere gospel, or mere truth; it is rather that word as made vital and efficacious by the influence of his Spirit; the germ of the divine life; the principles of true piety in the soul. ...The exact idea here, as it seems to me, is not that the “seed” refers to “the word of God,” as Augustin and others suppose, or to “the Spirit of God,” but to **the germ of piety which has been produced in the heart “by” the word and Spirit of God**, and which may be regarded as having been implanted there by God himself, and which may be expected to produce holiness in the life. There is, probably, as Lucke supposes, an allusion in the word to the fact that we are begotten (Ὁ γεννημένος Ho gegennēmenos of God. The word “remaineth” - μένει meneî, compare the notes at [1Jo 3:6](#) - is a favorite expression of John. The expression here used by John, thus explained, would seem to imply two things:

- (1) That the germ or seed of religion implanted in the soul abides there as a constant, vital principle, so that he who is born of God cannot become habitually a sinner; and,
- (2) That it will so continue to live there that he will not fall away and perish. The idea is clearly that the germ or principle of piety so permanently abides in the soul, that he who is renewed never can become again characteristically a sinner.

-- Albert Barnes

for his seed remaineth in him; not the word of God, or the Gospel, though that is a seed which is sown by the ministers of it, and blessed by God, and by which he regenerates his people; and which having a place in their hearts, becomes the ingrafted word, and there abides, nor can it be rooted out; where it powerfully teaches to avoid sin, is an antidote against it, and a preservative from it: nor the Holy Spirit of God, though he is the author of the new birth, and the principle of all grace; and where he once is, he always abides; and through the power of his grace believers prevail against sin, and mortify the deeds of the body, and live: but rather **the grace of the Spirit**, the internal principle of grace in the soul, the new nature, or new man formed in the soul, is meant; which seminally contains all grace in it, and which, like seed, springs up and gradually increases, and always abides; and is pure and incorruptible, and neither sins itself, nor encourages sin, but opposes, checks, and prevents it.

--John Gill