

“SIN, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THE BELIEVER,” PART 2
1 JOHN 3:4-10

The story is told about Calvin Coolidge — nicknamed “Silent Cal” for his reticence to talk — that after returning to the White House from attending worship one Sunday morning he was asked by his wife Grace about the sermon. “It was good.” “What did he preach on today?” “Sin.” “Well go on, what did he say about sin?” she prodded him. “He was against it.”

It’s easy and somewhat tempting to take a simplistic approach like that about the topic of sin. Of course we are against it. But it’s more complex than that, isn’t it?

For the believer in Christ, we *are* against sin, yet at the same time, we find our flesh attracted to it at times and we constantly battle against it, and sometimes become discouraged with the ongoing battle. We know we shouldn’t sin, we don’t want to sin, but every day there are evidences of sin in our lives and every day there are even more battles against temptation. Is there hope for us?

In 1 John 3 the apostle provides great hope for the believer in his battle against sin.

In this passage are two important realities that serve as the theme of these verses:

SIN AND THE BELIEVER ARE INCONGRUOUS.
GOD HAS GIVEN EVERYTHING WE NEED NOT TO SIN.

And because sin and the believer are incongruous and because Christ has given us what we need not to sin, in these seven verses, John provides eight reasons why believers should not (and don’t have to) live in perpetual and habitual sin:

- 1. Do Not Practice Sin Because of What Sin Is (v. 4)**
- 2. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ SATISFIED God’s Wrath Against Sin (v. 5)**
- 3. Do Not Practice Sin Because of Your FELLOWSHIP with Christ (v. 6)**
- 4. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ is RIGHTEOUS (v. 7)**
- 5. Do Not Practice Sin Because Sin is from THE DEVIL (v. 8a)**
- 6. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ DESTROYED the Devil’s Works (v. 8b)**
- 7. Do Not Practice Sin Because God’s Children CANNOT Perpetually Sin (v. 9)**
- 8. What You DO Reveals Whose You ARE (v. 10)**

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CONTEXT:

- Heretical teachers had arisen in the church and said that there was an inherent dichotomy between their bodies and their spiritual being and that led to two false conclusions:
 - ✓ “Because I am a believer, I no longer sin.” (which is the error John was addressing in chs. 1-2)
 - ✓ “Because I am a believer, what I do with my body doesn’t matter; I can sin as much as I want.” (which is the error that John was addressing in ch. 3)
- So there is no contradiction between what John says in chapter 1 and what he says here; he is addressing different implications from the teaching of the heretics who had left the church but were still trying to influence the church members (2:19, 22).
- Remember also that John is writing to give assurance to those who were believers (5:13). And at the same time he was writing to undermine the false assurance of the false believers. So be careful about thinking, “I sinned today; I must not be a believer.” And also be careful about thinking, “I intentionally sinned a great many times today, but God doesn’t care about what I do with my life.”
- One more item to notice about what John says:
 - ✓ In 3:4-10, there are 31 verbs. Of those 31 verbs, 22 are in the present tense and five more have the sense of something that has previously happened but still is going on presently. So effectively 27 of the 31 verbs have the force of a present tense.
 - ✓ Now what does that mean? It means that John is not talking about individual sins, but he is talking about *patterns* of sin — a habitual lifestyle of sin. So ***everyone who practices sin*** (v. 4) is talking about those who habitually practice things that are rebellious against God...
- So even as we begin examining this passage there is hope and encouragement for us —
 - ✓ We will still sin, but we don’t have to live in perpetual sin.
 - ✓ We can know that in spite of our sin we are redeemed and saved by Christ.
 - ✓ Christ has given us everything we need so that we don’t have to sin. And that’s why John can repeatedly say, “do not practice sin” — because Christ has made it possible for us not to sin.

1. Do Not Practice Sin Because of What Sin Is (v. 4)

- The truth about everyone who *sins* continually is that he is continually practicing ***lawlessness***.
 - ✓ The nature of *sin* itself ***is lawless*** — to sin is to deliberately and rebelliously act against God’s moral law; the sinner willfully does not do what God has commanded to do.

- ✓ John is warning the readers that to engage in ongoing patterns of sin is not merely “to miss the mark,” but it is to engage in lawless behavior — not only acting *against* the law of God, but also setting himself up as the standard of what is acceptable and right. He intentionally does the opposite of what is righteous and flaunts his defiance against God (in contrast w/ the believer in v. 3 — ***purifies himself***). The habitual sinner not only does lawless things, but he sets himself up as his own law (and his law is unrighteous and contrary to God).

“Nothing is so evil as sin; nothing is evil but sin....No evil is displeasing to God or destructive to man but the evil of sin. Sin is worse than affliction, than death, than Devil, than Hell. Affliction is not so afflictive, death is not so deadly, the Devil not so devilish, Hell not so hellish as sin is.”

[The Sinfulness of Sin]

- And that is why the believer should always work to purify himself and always work to mortify sin — not because avoiding sin makes God like us more, but because sin is an act of rebellion against the One whom we claim to love. Do not practice sin because of what sin is.

2. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ REMOVED the POWER of Sin (v. 5)

- Sin is antithetical to the believer because of what we know about sin and about Christ’s purpose.
- Christ ***appeared in order to take away sin***. Christ has removed and eliminated sin from the life of the believer. And the reason He can do this is that ***in Him there is no sin***. As the perfect Man, He can stand in our place and as the perfect God He can absorb the wrath of God for our sin without spending eternity in Hell. Only the infinitely perfect God-Man could do this. And He has.
- W/out Christ we could do nothing but sin, but with Christ there is power not to sin (2:1; 1 Pt. 2:24).
- Christ appeared on earth and went to the cross and endured God’s wrath and was placed in the tomb and was resurrected so that we would be freed from sin, not so that we could indulge it more.

3. Do Not Practice Sin Because of Your FELLOWSHIP with Christ (v. 6)

- Because Christ came to remove sin, John draws the conclusion in verse 6 that ***no one who abides in Him sins***. We’ve seen this word “abide” before — cf. 2:28-29 — What does the word mean (notice that it is a present tense, so John is again talking about the pattern and habitual practice of a person):
- When the NT uses the phrase, ***abide in Him***, it means “don’t quit.” Don’t stop having fellowship with Christ. But there is an even more specific sense in 1 John — cf. e.g., **2:6, 24**. The one who abides in Christ lives in harmony, fellowship, and union with Christ.

- When John talks to his beloved believers who have been influenced by false teachers and who are feeling the weight of the world and the attractive pull of sin, he reminds them, there is nothing better than being obedient to Christ (e.g., 3:24; 4:12).
 - ✓ Love Christ and imitate His behavior. And you can't love Christ without also...
 - ✓ Avoid sin.
 - ✓ Love other believers.
 - ✓ John is calling them to a genuine and authentic and deep relationship with Christ. Don't be superficial in your relationship with God. The world is filled with superficial hypocrisy. Genuinely love Christ and others.
 - ✓ So in this verse (3:6), the one who stays out of unrepentant sin is the one who stays in fellowship with Christ — pursuing the unity that God has given him.
- So in this verse (3:6), John is saying this: the believer in Christ — because of his union with Christ, his new heart that has made him a new man, the indwelling of the Spirit — will still battle against sin, but his life is no longer marked by a pattern of willful, rebellious ongoing sin. “By living in Him, in His sinlessness, one can expect conformity to His righteousness.” [*Expositor's*]
- Again, John doesn't mean, “the Christian never ever sins again,” but he does mean, the follower of Christ does not live in unrepentant sin; the Christian doesn't continue in an ongoing pattern of sin.
- Notice again the extent and inclusiveness of John's statement — ***no one*** (twice!).
 - ✓ If we are in Christ, we will not remain in sin.
 - ✓ If we are in sin, we are not in Christ — we haven't ***seen Him*** by faith and we don't know Him. We may call Him by name, but we don't know Him (Mt. 7:21).
 - ✓ The first group has a continuing relationship with Christ, the second a continuing relationship with sin; the first group does not practice sin and the second group does not know Christ.

4. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ is **RIGHTEOUS** (v. 7)

- There were ***deceivers*** in the churches in Asia Minor who were attempting to confuse believers about sin and the believer. These are men who taught that one could be righteous without also practicing righteousness. John exhorts the readers to constantly be on guard against them. It's still necessary. Do not be deceived by those who say you don't need to live righteously. God is clear about this.
- If someone ***is righteous*** — has been justified and saved by God — then He will ***practice righteousness***. He does not do righteous acts to become righteous, but because he has been declared righteous by God he is able to do righteous things — and he does them.

- ✓ His righteous acts are regular (habitual and continual), not occasional.
 - ✓ His righteous acts are a result of the new birth (2:29; 3:9-10; Mt. 7:16, 20).
 - ✓ His righteous acts correspond to (*just as*), though are not equal to, Christ's righteousness. The word *just as* is important — in the same way that Christ is righteous, the person who is in Christ and does righteousness *is also righteous*. We know who is righteous by what they do (Jn. 13:34-35). This is John's way of saying that because Christ is righteous, those who are in Him are also righteous. We derive our righteousness from Him and because He is righteous, those who are in Him will be righteous and will do righteousness.
 - ✓ This is another way of stating the truth of our union with Christ (**Rom. 6:8-13**).
- Because Christ is righteous and Christ is our groom and our preeminent brother and our Savior and our friend and our Shepherd, and because we have been created to be conformed to Him, then we also do the things that are righteous.
 - This means there is no such person as an unrighteous believer. He may be immature; he will still commit isolated acts of unrighteousness; but the character of his life cannot be identified as being unrighteous and willfully unrepentant.

5. Do Not Practice Sin Because Sin is from THE DEVIL (v. 8a)

- In verse 7 he makes the positive statement that righteous person does righteousness because of his connection to Christ. Here is the opposite statement — the one who lives a life style of sin does so because of his connection to the devil — he *is of the devil*. That is, his state and position is that he lives in the realm of the devil who is the originator of sin. The one who lives in sin gives evidence that he is identified with the devil, not Christ. Those who are of the devil do what the devil does (which was what Jesus said in Jn. 8:44).
- The problem with sin is that it is “devilish.” It comes from *the devil*. Even that name means he is the one who lives to slander and accuse believers. And even more than that, he is the one who has been entirely opposed to God *from the beginning* — i.e., since his fall from Heaven into sin.
 - ✓ In heaven the devil attempted to overthrow God's eternal kingdom.
 - ✓ In the Garden of Eden he attempted to subvert God's plan through Adam and Eve's rebellion.
 - ✓ In the temptation of Christ the devil attempted to exert superiority over Christ.
 - ✓ At the cross Satan used Judas to attempt to accomplish his evil purposes.
 - ✓ Even today he seeks to devour and destroy the lives of men (1 Pt. 5:8).
 - ✓ Satan is about sin and always has been about sin.

- So, to engage in a pattern and lifestyle of sin is to be opposed to God as much as Satan, who loves nothing good and wants no portion of God. He is in full and willful rebellion against God and everything he does is incompatible with God. To engage in ongoing sin is to be opposed to God, in rebellion against His purposes, to want nothing of Him, and to be incompatible to Him. And to engage in willful sin is to identify with the devil — to wear his uniform and cheer for his success. (We don't think enough about that when we are tempted to sin.)

“All sin that is in you is originally the spawn of the very devil...and originally comes from him. As all sin originally comes from his temptations and suggestions, so also the devil helps forward and further all sin that is in your souls. That is the evil of it.” [Burroughs, Evil of Evils, 203.]

- What John is emphasizing is that sin is a danger not because of its quantity (*many* sins committed) or because of its magnitude (the kinds of evil sins committed); sin is a danger and an evil because of its nature — all sin and every lifestyle of sin has its foundation in the devil who lives in opposition to God.
- When I was in college, we found a snake in the garage and though small (under 12 inches), it had the markings of a rattler; I took him to school and asked a prof to identify the snake. “That’s a pygmy rattler.” “Oh, then he’s not as dangerous,” I suggested. “No. He’s every bit as dangerous as a standard rattle snake; he has the same kind of venom and he can wound greatly.” The danger in a snake is not in the size, but in the nature; so it is with sin. The danger of sin is not in the size or even quantity of the sin, but in the nature of it.
- Do not practice sin because it is from the devil. And there is a corresponding truth to this —

6. Do Not Practice Sin Because Christ DESTROYED the Devil’s Works (v. 8b)

- Against the attempts of the devil who has always sinned, God made a provision —
- ***The Son of God appeared...*** Several things to notice here:
 - ✓ John emphasizes the deity of the God-Man, but here refers to Him by a title of deity — He is God. He is incarnate, but He is God. (In contrast to the heretics, 2:22).
 - ✓ An inference of His deity is not only that Christ did this, but that *only the Son of God* could have done this work. No one else could have accomplished this work
 - ✓ He was pre-existent and at the right time He ***appeared***. Jesus was not a man who was created for this purpose, but He is the eternal God who came, having been prepared for this work.
 - ✓ His appearance was ***for this purpose***: God came to earth to ***destroy the works of the devil***.
 - It was necessary to destroy Satan’s works (sin).
 - Christ *did* destroy Satan’s works.

- Satan will accuse and slander; he will tempt and blind. He will roar like a prowling lion; but he will not win. He is a vanquished foe. He is **destroyed**. Even now, while he is seeking the destruction of believers, he knows his time is limited and his end is secured in Hell.
- Cf. Heb. 2:14; Rev. 20:10-15. There is no escape for Satan. He has been destroyed and he will be destroyed. “He still assaults man’s soul, body and mind...the devil is still busy doing his wicked works, but he has been defeated and in Christ we can escape from his tyranny.” [Stott, 125.]
- All that is to emphasize that there is no good end in sin. Nothing good comes from sin. There is no rebel against God who will rejoice at the end. There are passing pleasures in sin; but they are just that — they are passing and when they are past, all that is left is anguish of soul and torment.
- One implication of this truth is for us to consider how we (as believers) can continue to live in sin when Christ died to vanquish sin from our lives. Christ did not die so that we would have the penalty of sin removed from us (slate wiped clean) so that we could continue to live in sin. He died so that we would be liberated from the activity of sin.

“...the least sin you commit (if ever it is pardoned) is that which stabbed Christ to the very heart. I say, your sin was that which pierced Christ and brought forth blood and water from Him. It was that which whipped Christ; it was that which put Christ to death, which shed the blood of Christ, which crucified Christ.” [Burroughs, 54.]

“What would become of all your souls if it were not for Jesus Christ, were it not for that glorious Mediator sent to be a propitiation for sin and to make an atonement to the Father for sin? Christ is set up as that brazen serpent, that all those stung in conscience with the venom and poison of sin might look up to the brazen serpent and be saved. ...The greatest work that God ever did was in sending His Son, and in the offer of His Son to sinners that their sins might be pardoned. Therefore, do not think it is a small thing, and hear when I call upon sinners to come and cast their souls upon Christ. It is one of the most glorious works ever done for a sinful soul to come and close with Christ the Mediator; and once you come in, your hearts will be so full of the glory of God that immediately all the glory of the creature will be darkened in your eyes and you will be so filled with the glory of God that you will come to see the filthiness of sin...” [Burroughs, 302, 305.]

- Those ensnared in lives of sin look only at the allurements of the sin and they are kept from seeing the goodness and provision of Christ to keep them out of that sin. Do not practice sin, John says, because you don’t have to since Christ has destroyed Satan’s works. Look to Christ...

7. Do Not Practice Sin Because God's Children CANNOT Perpetually Sin (v. 9)

- In verse 9, John alludes to the rebirth of the believer three times —
 - ✓ The believer is ***born of God*** — like Christ told Nicodemus in John 3, the Spirit of God brings new life to the believer (God causes the rebirth of the believer).
 - ✓ ***God's seed abides*** (present tense) ***in [the believer]*** — i.e., God has made the believer His own and implanted His spiritual DNA in the believer. God's child is not only adopted externally, but he is transformed internally and permanently.
 - ✓ ***He is born of God*** — again, God has regenerated Him with a new kind of life (1 Pt. 1:23-25).
 - ✓ And because of these three realities, John concludes, none of those who are regenerated by God live a life of perpetual sin, and in fact, they ***cannot sin*** — they are powerless to live in a state of unrepentant sin. Prior to salvation the unbeliever is powerless to live righteously; after salvation, the believer is powerless to live in a state of unrighteousness. The Spirit of God indwells him, and the Spirit of God will produce what only the Spirit of God can produce and that is a righteous life.

"Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony." [John Stott]

- Again, this does not mean that you will never sin again. And it does not mean you won't be tempted and that you won't have to fight temptation. In fact, the believer may feel the strength of temptation's power more than the unbeliever because he is resisting that temptation. But this verse does mean that because of the work of God to regenerate the believer, it is impossible for a believer in Christ to live a continuing willful pattern of sin.
- So what about those who prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, were baptized, and went on a mission trip when they were 14 and have given no evidence since then? John says the assurance of faith is rooted not in the praying of a prayer, but the demonstration of the fruit of regeneration. A believer will not and cannot continue to live in rebellion against God without repentance. So the conclusion:

8. What You DO Reveals Whose You ARE (v. 10)

- It is **obvious** — clear, evident, and conspicuous — who belongs to Christ and who does not.
- If the habitual pattern of someone's life is unrepentant unrighteousness, then they **are not of God**. This is true of everyone — **anyone who...** There are no exceptions. Show me a man who is in rebellion against God and I will show you a man who is not God's child, saved, or in fellowship.
- It really is clear who are children of God and who are children of the devil; those who have a lifestyle of no righteous fruitfulness (**does not practice** = present tense) do not belong to God. Those whose lives are characteristically sinful belong to the originator of sin, the devil.
- And one simple test of his **righteousness** is whether he **loves his brother**. If someone does not love the people of God, he fails the most basic test of the faith (Jn. 13:34-35). (That's an intro to next message.)

CONCLUSION:

- This is a hard section. The realities are clear and unwavering.
 - ✓ A righteous life (and that includes repentance from sin) is the result of the life-giving work of God. He does life-giving things because he is alive.
 - ✓ Unrighteousness is the result of a lack of the life of God in the soul of a man. He does dead and deadly things because he is dead.
- So here are two implications:
 - ✓ Is your life characterized by unrepentant, ongoing, willful, rebellious sin? Then this passage says that you are from the devil and your end is hopeless. And yet, your end has not yet been finalized. There is hope for you if you go to God and ask God for forgiveness and transformation. Your hope is not that you will ever do enough good things to satisfy God. You will not and cannot satisfy God. Your only hope is that someone else could satisfy God and absorb God's infinite wrath for you; and that is exactly what Christ did (3:5; 2:1-2). Repent of your sin and ask God to change you from a rebel against God to a friend of God who loves Him and loves to obey Him.
 - ✓ Do you still sin? (The answer for all of us is "yes.") Do you still sin, but you hate your sin and you long to be rid of it and yet while you sin you also see patterns of righteousness in your life?
 - Give thanks to God because it is only His work in your life that has enabled you to do anything righteous.
 - Whenever you sin, confess and repent of that sin, knowing that God will continue to forgive you of every sin and continue to cleanse you from every act of unrighteousness.