

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twelve
 Sunday, March 21st, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2086
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"HE APPEARED TO TAKE AWAY SINS"

1 John 3:4-10 - "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. [5] You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [7] Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. [8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. [10] By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

It's significant the way John talks about the two comings of Jesus into this world:

- a) He's already talked about Christ's ***second*** coming - **1 John 2:28, 3:3** - "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming....[3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."
- b) In today's text John writes about Christ's ***first*** coming - **1 John 3:5,8** - "You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin....[8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

So the purpose of both entries of the Son of man, Christ Jesus, into this world is the purifying of the people of God. This is God's heart. This is His passion. This is what God ***does***. Everything God does among mankind is directed toward the removal of every trace of sin from the human heart and life. Jesus will one day usher in a new kingdom in total. He has begun this work already. And its first manifestation in this present world is the replacement of all that ***dis-glorifies*** God with ***holiness and purity of heart*** in those who profess Christ Jesus as Lord.

This divine purpose gets frustrated and smudged, according to John, in two obvious ways:

First, **PEOPLE CAN DENY THE GREATNESS AND UNIQUENESS OF WHO JESUS IS** - **1 John 2:22-24** - "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he

who denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. [24] Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.”

And second, **PEOPLE CAN LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT DOESN'T LOOK AS THOUGH HOLINESS IS THAT IMPORTANT.** That is what John deals with in today's text. So there are *doctrinal* heresies about Jesus Christ and there is *moral* rebellion in the realm of personal holiness.

Notice the way in which he begins verse 7 - “**Little children, let no one deceive you....**” Those words, “*little children,*” show John’s writing to professing Christians, not the world at large. And he's talking about basic truths of righteousness and sinfulness. In other words, it’s not a *given* that Christians understand and live these ideas out. When someone stops, pulls our shirt-tails, and says, “Wait just a minute. Don’t allow your mind to distort these truths!”, that means I’m capable of being more wrong than I know. And John wants to set the record straight on several important issues.

1) **SIN MUST NEVER BE REDEFINED IN TERMS MORE COMFORTABLE TO THE SINNER**

1 John 3:4 - “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”

That word “*lawlessness*” is the strongest, most aggressive verb the New Testament uses to define sin. The same word is translated “*transgression.*” As the term implies, it's much more than just *failure*. We all fail in different ways at different times, but that’s not the *essence* of John’s description of sin. *Rebellion* is a much better term.

Remember John is writing to Christian people. “*If you're serious about pursuing holiness with a passion you must first recognize what it is that you must constantly deal with in your own heart.*”

It's like he's saying, “If you're wrong on the diagnosis you will be blind to everything else that’s important about Jesus.”

And this is the point where we are all the most blinded by deception. The depth and nature of our

own moral depravity is **unbelievably hard to accept**. O, I don't mind when I can just come and, in very general terms, while people are singing "Amazing Grace" and the communion emblems are being handed out, say to the Lord, "Yes. I'm just a sinner saved by grace. Amen. 'Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?'"

Everyone admits being **"a sinner."** That's just polite and doctrinally correct. But John's not talking about that churchy kind of recognition of sin in our lives.

I've noticed in **myself** and in **others** how rarely we characterize our own actions and especially our **reactions** as sinful. I talk with lots of people. I talk to people who have tough issues with other people in the church. I talk to people who are chewing at the bit to get out of their marriage. I talk to people who get into legal and financial battles. I talk to people who have angry feelings about other people in the church.

It would shock you how rarely people talk to me about their own **sin**. It is a very, very rare occurrence that half way through pouring out his heart, someone would stop and say, "You know, Pastor Don, I've just been flat out disobedient and sinful in the way I've handled this situation. Even if the other person was wrong as well, that doesn't justify my actions. I've just been stubbornly rebelling against God and His Word in this whole thing!" Believe me when I tell you, I haven't heard that kind of straight forward admission from church people in years.

Make no mistake about it. John is not putting together classroom material for some first year theology student. He's writing to the church. He's writing about the things that keep the purity and power of Jesus at bay in His church and in our lives.

It's not that this truth is hard to discover. The whole Bible is clear on this issue of defining and admitting our sin and guilt. There is so much at stake here. James says that even when I go to God with my need for ministry and healing I'm to instantly stop first and say, "Hold it! I've been wrong in this area of my life. I've sinned!"

And so John writes a letter that both comforts and warns. What marvelous words of encouragement we studied last week - **"Behold what manner of love the father has lavished on us - that we should be called the children of God!"**

But in this passage he's sounding the alarm. I will get nowhere in my walk with Jesus if I'm lax on

defining my own sin. My problem isn't my **failure**, or my **weakness**, or my **temperament**, or my **environment**. My problem, says John, is I'm a **lawbreaker**. I'm a **rebel** who doesn't like the light of the truth.

I have to tell myself that frequently. I have to do it daily. Many times I have to do it in front of you - in front of my wife - in front of my friends. We have fallen totally out of the habit of admitting sin and guilt to anybody in the church anymore. We have learned from the world the skills of getting our way and getting even and sticking up for our rights. And the whole concept of being a group of **confessing sinners** doesn't blend well with a trendy, upbeat, culturally friendly church.

When was the last time you went up to anybody and actually said, "**Pray for me. I've sinned badly this week. I'm in desperate need of God's forgiveness and grace. I'm so dirty inside.**" I would guess most church people today live their whole lives **never** doing anything like that - not even **once**.

And when was the last time you really felt you were made new by the Spirit of the Lord at the core of your being? That will happen about as often as you bring your sins, properly defined and named, into the light of confession. Confession and renewal usually come at the same time.

By the way, there are some practical closing lessons on this first point. There are two situations that make personal confession of sin more difficult.

A) FIRST, CONFESSION AND DELIVERANCE BECOMES MORE PAINFUL WHEN I'VE LET A SITUATION FESTER MUCH LONGER THAN I KNOW I OUGHT TO HAVE.

Confession feels more ridiculous when I know I should have done it months ago. Like all stains, sin sets.

B) SECOND, CONFESSION AND DELIVERANCE BECOMES MORE AWKWARD WHEN I MUST GO TO SOMEONE WITH WHOM I AM PERSONALLY CLOSE.

In these situations confession is more difficult because these people know me best. Also, I tend to just assume those relationships don't need personal confession to sustain them. Such are the deceptive arguments of the spirit of antichrist.

Then John strikes a second point about which we can easily become blind and deceived:

2) **REMEMBER THAT JESUS CAME TO TAKE AWAY OUR SIN**

1 John 3:5, 8 - "You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin....[8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Notice, He didn't come just to take away the **guilt** of my sin. He came to take away my **sin**. I suppose the greatest distortion of the atonement was birthed in our minds by some of our gospel songs and hymns. I love to sing "What can wash way my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." And that's true. But if I'm not careful those words can leave me with the impression that this is what sin is. It's just a **stain**. And after all, **washing** the clothes doesn't actually **change** the clothes.

And it becomes easy to think of the washing of my sins in just the same way. It's something on my **record** before God that needs cleaning and erasing. And that's true too. But it's not the **whole** truth about the cross of Jesus Christ. Go back to the texts and you'll find more than just **forgiveness** in the plan of God's present salvation:

John 1:29 - "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Hebrews 9:26 - "....But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

Titus 2:14 - "....who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

1 Peter 2:24 - "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

All these verses say the same thing. Jesus came and Jesus died, not just to change my **record**,

but to change my **actions**. He died not just to change my **standing**. He died to change my **character**. And nothing short of this is authentic New Testament salvation.

The cross is neutered when it becomes something merely **doctrinal** or merely **mystical**. It was never meant to be something admired in the mind only, or believed to be true in some church. The power of the cross is power to change the life. Primarily it changes the **affections** of the life. It comes to people who used to **love** sin and causes them to **hate** sin. It comes to people who used to love **pleasure** and it causes them to love **holiness more** than they love pleasure.

Look at what John says in these very verses - the power of the cross comes to people who used to resemble their **father the devil** and it makes them to grow to **resemble Jesus - 1 John 3:8** - **“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**

3) **WE MUST ALLOW GOD'S SEED TO ABIDE AND GROW**

1 John 3:6-10 - “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [7] Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. [8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. [10] By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

John seems to want to deal with several important subjects in these verses:

A) **HE DOESN'T WANT PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN THEIR HEARTS UNLESS IT'S ALSO REACHING THEIR HANDS AND FEET**

1 John 3:6-7- “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [7] Little children, let no one deceive

you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.”

This is the same kind of exhortation Paul brought with force in **Galatians 5:25** - “**If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**”

In other words, make sure all this talk about the new nature - about the new birth - about God's seed in you - make sure that reaches the surface of your life. Make sure this isn't fiction. We **receive** grace through **faith**. But that same saving grace is **manifested** in reality, not in some invisible, spiritual realm.

That this isn't to be some kind of inner, mystical spiritual life is obvious from the way Jesus described it. He said it would be like a **light set up on a hill** - like a **lighthouse that everybody could see**. People would see it and glorify your Father in heaven.

Paul talks about examining ourselves every time we come to the communion table. Is there evidence of a brand new nature at work in my skin? Did people see the striking, unusual difference Jesus makes last week? Is all of this really happening in a growing way in my heart?

B) THE SECOND THOUGHT IN THESE VERSES IS THE CHRISTIAN CANNOT CONTINUE IN KNOWN SIN WITHOUT SELLING OUT TO THE DEVIL

1 John 3:8-9 - “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”

John has said the same thing in **verse 6** - “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”

Those are troubling words for many Christians. We aren't sure what to do with words like “...**he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God**”(3:9b). What kind of moral perfection does John have in mind here?

But those words are actually *life-giving* rather than *threatening*. Like *all* of God's Word, they bring light when properly understood. There's a particular *kind* of sin John is dealing with here. He's talking about high-handed, rebellious sin - sin against our own knowledge of the truth. He's talking about those times we have all had when we'd rather fight then switch and yield to the voice of God.

That's one of the reasons he mentions the *originator of sin, the devil*, who has been sinning from "*the beginning*" - "**Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning....**"(3:8). John wants to remove my blinders. He wants me to finally see there is nothing slight or unimportant in my continuing in any sin, ever. The orientation toward sin *grows* as it is *indulged*.

"Don't be deceived about this!"(3:7). Whenever you indulge any sin you only *think* you're pulling your own strings. You're not. You're becoming a puppet of the devil himself.

And so John makes two important contributions to a proper understanding of sin in these verses:

- i) **FIRST, SIN IS TRANSGRESSION, A HIGH-HANDED CONTEMPT FOR GOD HIMSELF AND HIS AUTHORITY OVER MY LIFE.** I must never call it anything else.
- ii) **SECOND, IF CONTINUED IN, SIN PLANTS ME CLEARLY IN THE DEVIL'S CAMP.** The Bible actually calls it "*giving place*" to the devil - **Ephesians 4:26-27** - "**Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil.**"

That word "*opportunity*" - "**give no opportunity to the devil**" - is the Greek word "*topos*." Can you think of the English word we get from that? Think of the making of maps. We study "*topography*" and recognize the marking out of "*places*" and "*areas*."

That's what Paul says happens when Christians think they can sin with immunity.

They take a specific **“place”** of their lives and turn it over to the devil. And, as we all know, he **always** takes more **“place”** than we initially intended. No wonder John says, **“Please, please! Don’t be deceived about the seriousness of this!”**

Finally, John makes one more important contribution to the seriousness of sin and the grace that comes from walking in the light of confession and purity:

4) **RELATIONAL SINS ARE BY FAR THE MOST DAMNING**

1 John 3:10 - **“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”**

John sees no other way to say it. When we’re taking the blinders off about the seriousness of sin, John says there is one kind of sin that does more damage to our souls than any other. The most dangerous sins are sins of anger and hatred toward a brother.

Now the thought of the verse would be just as complete if it ended right after **“whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God....”** But John knows if that’s all he says there is something we will likely miss. We will miss the **most common way we miss practicing the righteousness of God**. We will think to be righteous **just** means focusing on our relationship with God. So John adds the last part of the verse - **“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother”(10).**

Your devotion to God passes **through** your brother or sister. That’s why this group in the sanctuary today is called the **“body”** of Christ. You love **Him** when you love **it**. Otherwise, you’re just loving a ghost. Don’t take my word for it. When you get home today get your own Bible out. Use any translation you prefer. They all say the same thing. And, if you have the courage, get all alone and read that tenth verse over about five times, very slowly. It just may be the tool the Holy Spirit uses to remove something carcinogenic from your soul.