

“DESTROYING THE DEVIL’S WORK.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: I John 3:4-10

Introductions.

John is especially interested in encouraging and promoting holiness and righteousness. He is motivating us to walk just as He walked (2:6). Last week John did that using the second coming of Jesus.

I John 2:28 Abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

This week John will encourage and promote holiness and righteousness using the first coming of Jesus. This would work as a Christmas sermon.

I John 3:4-10.

I don't know about you, but when I read this passage at the least it is perplexing and at the most it is discouraging. It sounds like John is saying if we are Christians then we will stop sinning, and we won't be sinning anymore.

3:6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.

3:9 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.

3:10 whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.

5:18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning

I sinned yesterday, I sinned today, I keep sinning. What is John saying? Does he really mean if we are in Christ we will be righteous and we won't sin anymore?

We need help. And where should we turn for help? What is the number one rule for understanding and interpreting Scripture? *Scripture interprets Scripture*. Use God's truth to understand God's truth. Use clearer passages to shed light on less clear passages.

And guess what? We find help right in John's letter. What did he say in chapter one?

I John 1:8, 10 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

So what is John's meaning in these texts that say we no longer sin? Is John contradicting himself? Is John using exaggeration and hyperbole? Is John talking about an ideal state? Is John promoting the doctrine/heresy of perfectionism, that sinlessness is attainable in this life?

When John says the born-again believer does not make a practice of sinning, he is saying something different than the born-again believer does not sin. He is making a careful use of Greek tenses that are reflected in the ESV's repeated use of the word practice or keep on.

The Greek present tense means on-going, continuous action.

3:6 No one who abides in him *keeps on sinning*; no one who *keeps on sinning* has either seen him or known him.

3:8 Whoever *makes a practice of sinning* is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

3:9 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.

3:10 whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.

5:18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not *keep on sinning*.

He is not talking about our individual, regular sins, like when pride or anger or lust or greed rears its ugly head, and tempts us to fall into this sin or that, as we all repeatedly do. John is not denying that Christians can and do commit acts of sin.

He is denying the ability of born-again believers to habitually live in sin as the dominate characteristic and inclination of his soul. John is looking at habitual, persistent, unrepentant sin, the sort of sin that is the characteristic of non-believers and lovers of the world and the false teachers and preachers who are persistently tempting the believers into sin.

You can tell those who are born of God. When they sin they aren't indifferent, they don't dismiss it or excuse it or blame others for it, or make a practice of continuing in it. Rather they hate it, are convicted by it, are filled with grief, brokenness, misery, discontent, and all of this leads them to a ready repentance.

When Satan knocks us down, when we fall to temptation, we get up fighting, we get up repenting, we don't get weary in the fight or in well doing.

We all know people who are making a practice of sin, excusing it, defending it, and getting offended if you take issue or question. "I am fine, leave me alone, you are being intolerant, judgmental."

We will fall into sin, but no one born of God can be content to keep walking in sin. Christians can't go on sinning without feeling conflict in their souls and moving to confession. And they do so with increasing vigilance as they grow up into Christ. They love holiness, righteousness, purity, goodness and they pursue it.

This morning I made a plea for reading your Bible regularly and faithfully, a plea for marinating in the Scripture, becoming saturated with the Word of God.

But what do you do when you read hard to understand passages like this? Wait ten years until the pastor gets to it in his preaching? The answers are readily available to all of us and more so now than ever with the internet.

One simple, quick tool, Matthew Henry's one volume commentary of the Bible. Every Christian home should have one. In fact, I talked with a woman in our church who has this tool and uses it. It's practical and readable, down to earth, devotional even. I prefer my six volume set, but it is condensed and abridged to one volume on Amazon for about \$15, on Kindle for about \$5, or on several on-line sites for free.

Now that we have that cleared up we are better able to listen to what John is saying about sin and the sinfulness of sin. There are lots of general descriptions of sin in the Bible, but few passages are this clear, so pay extra attention here. He addresses the nature of sin and the origin of sin, and gives a call to holiness based on the first coming of Jesus and what He did to sin and its origin.

The structure of each argument is identical, both have an introductory phrase, a stated theme, an explanation of the purpose of Christ's coming, and a logical conclusion to be drawn.

3:4-7, Jesus came to deliver us from the nature of sin which is that it is lawlessness.

The introductory statement is that "everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness." So, sin is lawlessness. It is not just a failure to do something, it is an active rebellion against an authority, in this case God and His will.

But the good news is Christ came to take away sin and lawlessness by the sacrifice of His own life. He was sinless and perfectly obeyed the law of God.

II Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This brings us to the logical conclusion in verse 6. If Christ was sinless and if Christ came to remove sin, then you cannot abide in Christ and in sin at the same time. If you abide in Christ, then you are making an end of prevailing, persistent, habitual sin. And if you are abiding in persistent sin, then you are not abiding in Christ, in fact you have neither seen Him nor heard Him nor even know Him. It is impossible.

What is this lawlessness?

We are not created independent, autonomous creatures free to do whatever we want and be a law unto ourselves. We are created theonomous, bound to the Law of God who created us for Himself. This was no problem until the fall, and then it became a huge problem. From then on we hated the law and rebelled against it and became lawless.

The Law is like a mirror, it reflects the holy character of God. When you get to Exodus and Leviticus in your OT reading and you start to bog down wondering what it's all about, remember the Law reveals the holy, righteous, pure character of God. As you read it ask God to give you a greater hunger for holiness and a greater awe of God and a greater love and appreciation for Jesus who perfectly keep the Law and as a result His obedience is credited to us as righteousness.

Lawlessness is living as if we are superior to God and His will. Lawlessness is rebelling against God's right to govern His creatures. Lawlessness is Satan getting us to reject God's authority. Lawlessness is the essence of all sin, an arrogant rejection of the authority of our creator. Sin is an act of treason against the Sovereign Lord of the universe. Sin makes us outlaws.

Jesus came to destroy this. It is ***first*** destroyed by His coming, by His death and resurrection. ***Then*** it is destroyed by our rebirth, being born again. Sin is conquered when we become children of God.

Then comes the second argument against sin and the sinfulness of sin and why Jesus came.

3:8-10, Jesus came to deliver us from the origin of sin which is from the Devil.

Again he starts with the introductory statement, "whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil." The Devil is the author of sin. Sin begins or originates in the Devil and

he has been persistently practicing sin and evil from the very beginning. He is a liar, a deceiver, a counterfeit, a fraud. He is public enemy number one.

But again there is good news, Christ came to destroy all the works of the Devil.

This brings us to the logical conclusion in verse 10. If we are born of God and no longer a child of the Devil, then we will not go on practicing sinning the way the Devil does. And if we continue to abide in sin we are doing the Devil's work and treating Christ's work lightly.

The sum of the whole text is if the whole purpose of Christ's first coming was to take away sin and to destroy the works of the Devil, then Christians must never compromise with either sin or the Devil. If they do they show they are not abiding in Christ. Living in continual sin is incompatible with Christ's sinless nature and with His saving work on earth.

Holiness is agreeing with this understanding of the nature of sin and its origin and seeking to abide in Christ and to make a practice of righteousness, as He is righteous.

Jesus came on a search and destroy mission.

We don't usually think of Jesus in those terms. He came to show us the Father, He came to forgive our sin, to show us love, but not to destroy. Christmas was the beginning of a search and destroy mission. The incarnation was the beginning of God's invasion of hostile, enemy territory to destroy Satan and sin.

It was Luke Skywalker destroying the Death Star in Star Wars.

It was Gandalf destroying Saruman in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.

It was the Allied forces crushing Hitler in WWII.

It was General Pershing in the Argonne Forest putting an end to WWI.

Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan's only weapon against us is unforgiven sin. Sin deserves death and if we are in our own sin then we are dead. But Jesus stripped that weapon out of Satan's hand. Without sin and the law to condemn us, Satan is disarmed, powerless, humiliated, defeated.

Why hasn't God thrown Satan into hell already? Because the humiliation of his defeat is ongoing. With every conversion Jesus is glorified and Satan is shamed. With every

prayer of confession and repentance, every time someone turns to God in prayer, in humble dependence on Him, every time someone calls sin what it really is and hates it and asks God for forgiveness and cleansing, it is glorifying Jesus and His cross to the humiliation and shame of Satan.

Every person who turns their back on Satan, humiliates him and to show the superior worth and beauty and power and authority of Jesus. God is glorifying Christ every day as the destroyer of Satan.

Implications and application.

Jesus came to enable us to stop sinning and He came to die to make atonement for our sins when we do sin.

Jesus came to give us victory in seeking to live for Him and to resist the Devil and flee from sin.

Jesus came to give us hope when we fail to do that, to forgive our failures. This doesn't make us want to give up, rather it makes us want to keep fighting, and Jesus having fought against the Devil and won, will fight for us and win.

So with Christ we continue the work of destroying the Devil's work.

We destroy the works of the Devil by loving God and worshiping Him with all our heart.

We destroy the works of the Devil by trusting completely in Jesus for all we need.

We destroy the works of the Devil by believing the truth of the Word of God.

We destroy the works of the Devil by hating sin and evil, by confessing and repenting, by searching our hearts for any evil way or thought or desire and rooting it out.

Live in hope. God is committed to helping us change and grow. No one is more committed to our holiness than God. He is in the fight for you and with you. He wants us to see ugliness of sin and beauty of Christ. Greater is He that is in you than he in world. We belong to the righteous one, he will bring to completion the good work He began.

We are set free from the enslaving bondage of sin. Sin's grip is broken and will not win the day. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (4:4). Sin and Satan cannot and will not have the last word.

If it wasn't for Christ and His sacrifice, atonement, death and victory, we would all be destined for hell forever. The victory is won. The empty tomb is forever a monument to the Devil's defeat.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.