

15. The Epistle of 1 John—3:9-15

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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In 1 John 3, John is contrasting the children of God with the children of the devil.

And even though there will always be 'exceptions' to the rule (i.e.—carnal Christians who live for the world more than for God; and unbelievers who are moral and loving)—in general these traits and behaviors identify Christians from non-Christians.

1 John 3:4-8 (NKJV)

⁴ Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not sin [practice sin—live in habitual sin]. Whoever sins [deliberately, habitually sins as a lifestyle] has neither seen Him nor known Him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸ He who sins [practices sin] is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Warren Wiersbe—

“To “practice” sin is to sin consistently and as a way of life. It does not refer to committing an *occasional* sin. It is clear that no Christian is sinless (1 John 1:8–10), but God *expects* a true believer to sin less, not to sin *habitually*.

Every great personality mentioned in the Bible sinned at one time or another. Abraham lied about his wife (Genesis 12:10–20). Moses lost his temper and disobeyed God (Numbers 20:7–13). Peter denied the Lord three times (Matthew 26:69–75). But sin was not the settled practice of these men. It was an *incident* in their lives, totally contrary to their normal habits. And when they sinned, they admitted it and asked God to forgive them.

An unsaved person (even if he professes to be a Christian but is a counterfeit) lives a life of *habitual sin*. Sin—especially the sin of unbelief—is the normal thing in his life (Ephesians 2:1–3). He has no divine resources to draw on. His profession of faith, if any, is not real. This is the distinction in view in 1 John 3:1–10—a true believer does not live in habitual sin. He may *commit* sin—an occasional wrong act—but he will not *practice* sin—make a settled habit of it.

The difference is that a true Christian knows God. A counterfeit Christian may talk about God and get involved in “religious activities,” but he does not really *know* God. The person who has been “born of God” through faith in Christ *knows* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And because he *knows* them, he lives a life of obedience: he does not practice sin.”

As we said last time—there are people today that consider themselves Christians but who are actively practicing the homosexual lifestyle—John says they are deceiving themselves.

There are people who attend churches that are more concerned about their ‘felt needs’ than in teaching them to obey God’s Word and holding them accountable when they violate what God has commanded—in that regard, they are basically giving them ‘license’ to sin.

Galatians 6:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” (verse 8b)

Here in verse 8 and also in verse 5, John gives two reasons why Jesus came and died:

1. *To take away our sins and;*
2. *To destroy the works of the devil.*

We already dealt with the first one—but what exactly does John mean by saying that Jesus came to **“destroy the works of the devil?”**

The works of the devil are many and nefarious, but they all revolve around his one main goal—to keep people in darkness so that they remain cursed and condemned.

In Acts 26 when Paul is giving his testimony before King Agrippa of how the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and called him into the ministry—

Acts 26:16-18 (NLT2)

¹⁶ [Jesus said] Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. ¹⁷ And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me.’

Jesus said that the purpose of His coming to earth was to *“seek and save those who were lost.”* (Luke 19:10) or in other words to—*“destroy the works of the devil”*.

Of course, the only thing powerful enough to destroy the works of the devil (set people free from bondage to him)—is the gospel of Jesus Christ!

1 John 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ **Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God**

Some have used this verse to teach the doctrine of *“Christian Perfectionism”* (that true Christians don’t sin).

John is not teaching that, because he already said—

1 John 1:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**

Besides, if that doctrine was true, it would negate the need for all the admonitions in the New Testament for Christians to live a righteous, holy life—which would be unnecessary if we didn’t sin any longer once we got saved!

1 John 3:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Warren Wiersbe—

“Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin!” Why? Because he has a new nature within him, and that new nature cannot sin. John calls this new nature God’s “seed”...

Physical life produces only physical life; spiritual life produces spiritual life. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Christians have been born again, “not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23)... We are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9), and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). In the miracle of the new birth, the Holy Spirit imparts new life—God’s life—to a believing sinner, and as a result the individual is born into the family of God. Just as physical children bear the nature of their parents, so God’s spiritual children bear His nature. The divine “seed” is in them...”

Now it is true that once we are born-again and receive a new nature—the old nature doesn’t leave us; it remains and seeks to still dominate us and keep us living in sin (Galatians 5:17).

A Christian has an old nature from his *physical* birth and a new nature from his *spiritual* birth. As God said with the original, physical creation that—*“everything would bring forth after its kind”*—so to with the *new* creation.

Those who are born-again are called “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17) who have received the nature of God and as such, they naturally want to imitate their Father in heaven because they have His nature (“Seed”) within them.

**True children of God *can* and *do* sin—but they *can’t go on living habitually in sin*—
the Holy Spirit won’t let them.**

The Spirit of God will make them so miserable with conviction—that they will eventually be broken and want to get their life right with God. If you doubt that—listen to what David went through that year he was backslidden because of his sin with Bathsheba—

Psalm 32:3-5 (NLT2)

³ When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. ⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. ⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

At the end of verse 10 John says that those who don’t practice righteousness are not of God—nor are those who don’t love other Christians.

Now, as we said a few weeks ago—in this Epistle, John is not speaking categorically—he is speaking in general terms and presenting the ideal. (Explain)

1 John 3:10-11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ **For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...**

When John says, **“this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another”**—he is saying that this message (first given by Jesus to His disciples in the upper room the night before His crucifixion (John 13:34-35)—was *“taught to you from the moment you received Jesus as your Savior and is at the very heart of what it means to be a child of God.”*

1 John 3:10-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² **not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.**

John holds out Cain as a prime example of what he is talking about—someone who professed to know God but hated his brother—and murdered his brother because his works (Cain’s) were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

Genesis 4:4-8 (NKJV)

And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry (Hebrew-“burning with anger”), and his countenance fell. ⁶ So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.” ⁸ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

These verses in Genesis 4 teach us, as John stated in his first epistle that, starting with Cain killing Abel (first recorded murder on the face of the earth) those who feel their good works (religious observances, sacrifices, sacraments etc.) should earn them God’s favor and a place in heaven have persecuted and often killed, over the centuries, those who believe they are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

In other words, those who believe and obey what God commanded as to how a person is made right with Him, can have fellowship with Him and live with Him forever in heaven—have often suffered greatly at the hands of “Cains” down through the history of the Church.

Religious, phony, self-righteous ‘Christians’ have martyred more of God’s true saints than any other group in history (Roman Catholic Church Inquisition etc.).

Abel approached God through faith and obedience to what He had prescribed—whereas Cain came on his own terms and felt that God should be happy he came at all!

As John points out—the way of true righteousness (the way of Christ and the cross) is good, whereas any other way (human works) is evil.

John 10:1 (NKJV)

¹ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

1 John 3:13-15 (NKJV)

¹³ **Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

“Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you...”

John 15:18-19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Matthew 5:10-12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I realize that most people when they read this (verse 15) would probably think—*“I have never murdered anyone!”*

However, they are either ignorant of or have forgotten what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22) that—God doesn’t only consider the outward actions of a person’s life as sin but also the inward attitudes of their heart!

All sin begins in the heart with a thought or desire—and God looks upon the heart so that even if they never actually murder anyone, if they have harbored hatred in the heart towards another person—in the eyes of God they *have* committed murder against them.

Wiersbe made a humorous but penetrating point with regard to this—

“A visitor at the zoo was chatting with the keeper of the lion house.

‘I have a cat at home,’ said the visitor, ‘and your lions act just like my cat. Look at them sleeping so peacefully! It seems a shame that you have to put those beautiful creatures behind bars.’ ‘My friend,’ the keeper laughed, ‘these may look like your cat, but their disposition is radically different. There’s murder in their hearts. You’d better be glad the bars are there.’

The only reason some people have never actually murdered anyone is because of the “bars” that have been put up: the fear of arrest and shame, the penalties of the law, and the possibility of death. But we are going to be judged by “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). The question is not so much, ‘What did you *do*?’ but ‘What did you *want* to do? What would you *have done* if you had been at liberty to do as you pleased?’ This is why Jesus equates hatred with murder (Matthew 5:21–26) and lust with adultery (Matthew 5:27–30).”

Caveat—even though *lust* in the eyes of God is adultery and *hatred* is murder—you can’t take sins of the heart and apply the consequences of outward sins to them.

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