

## 1 John Series – Chapter 3:4-10 December 20, 2009

Alright good morning. Merry almost Christmas. I'm glad you are here to worship Jesus together this morning. Grab your Bible and turn back to the book of 1<sup>st</sup> John. This month we are studying chapter by chapter through this little book – looking at what is going on in each chapter in light of the book as a whole and then focusing in on a few verses in each chapter for more understanding. Today we'll look at chapter 3 and I need to remind you of the theological arguments going on.

Remember, at the church in Ephesus there was a group of people who left the church based on a wrong view of Jesus among other things. Those that are left are struggling with the assurance of their salvation and the truth that they have been taught. John has been rebuilding their sense of security in Jesus.

We talked about in chapter 1 how these false teachers were teaching a dualist doctrine – an idea that taught that the flesh, the material world, is essentially evil and that the spiritual world is righteous and good. So they concluded that since our bodies are material and therefore evil and will eventually be burnt up, it doesn't matter what you do with them because the spirit is what lives on. So as long as you're all right in your spirit, you can do what you want with your flesh. That's also why they said what they were saying about Jesus when he was here – that he didn't have a real physical body – he just appeared that way – because he was good and good can't be physical.

So to them rules didn't matter – they taught you didn't have to keep any of the rules of the Old Testament or even the New Testament and principles of Christ. All that matters is spirit, so indulge the flesh. Which you can guess happened then – there were people running around taking the name of Christ but living a depraved existence in the flesh.

So what John does is build a biblical case to reason with the believers left in this little church that what is done in the flesh matters greatly. In fact it is a matter of spiritual life and spiritual death. So let me be very clear again today – **our works, the things we do that are bad or good in the flesh do not determine and cannot decide whether we WILL BE saved.** That's not what John is teaching. But rather he is telling us as Christians our works display and demonstrate whether or not we have been saved. We hit this a little last week but be sure you make the distinction – our works cannot save us, but **our works are to be the determining factor to show whether or not we HAVE BEEN saved.** That's what chapter 3 is all about – from a negative standpoint of sin. So let's focus in on **verses 4-10** and then even more on verses 4-6.

### TEXT

Now the first thing we need to do this morning is look at **verses 6, 8, and 9.** Because if you just casually read this it would be easy to think that John is saying that a Christian will never sin. That if you're a Christian – if you're really saved – you won't sin. Now anybody here want to raise their hand and say “yeah – that's right – I'm proof – I'm a Christian and I never sin”? No – of course not. We know intrinsically and practically that we sin just as certainly as we know that we are saved, right?

So we need to figure this out. What does he mean in verses 6, 8, and 9 when it sounds like Christians don't sin? I mean that even goes against what John himself wrote in chapter 1 verse 8 and 10 where he says *“if we say we have no sin or that we have not sinned then not only are we liars, but we make God out to be a liar.”*

Now we know that the Word of God does not contradict itself. Jesus himself said in John 10:35 that scripture cannot be broken. So when we have an apparent contradiction like this, there's always an answer – a true answer.

And how the NIV words these verses is on purpose and helps us get the picture. Verse 6 uses the phrases *“keeps on sinning”* and *“continues to sin.”* Verse 8 *“does what is sinful.”* Verse 9 *“continue to sin.”* All of the words in Greek behind those English words are in the present continuous tense. That means someone who is doing sin now and continues to sin as a continual behavior. It actually means a sinful lifestyle whenever you find this in 1 John. **Wherever in 1 John he talks about committing sin; it is speaking of a sinful existence, a HABITUAL practice of sin.**

In John's mind what is impossible for a Christian is not that a Christian would sin but that a Christian would live a life of unchanged continuation in sin the same as when he was not born of God. It means **Christians don't go on sinning without CONFLICT and confession. Christians see it, hate it, confess it, and fight it and they do so with increasing VIGILANCE as they grow in Christ.**

So here John gives them and us another rule of thumb or you might call it a test of how we can know we have assurance and are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. If we are not habitually living in a lifestyle of sin, a sinful existence, then in that you can find assurance of your salvation in Christ.

Alfred Plummer – another commentator – put it like this: *“Although the believer sometimes sins, yet not sin, but opposition to sin is the ruling principle of his life. For whenever he sins he confesses it, he accepts forgiveness and perseveres with self-purification. The habitual sinner does none of these things, sin is his ruling principle and this could not be the case if he had ever really known Christ.”*

Now before we can really apply that rule of thumb to our lives as a test of assurance, we need to go a little deeper with the text about what sin is. Look back at **verse 4** with me. It says *“sin is lawlessness.”*

I think the best way to define **lawlessness here is REBELLION against one who should be obeyed.** So if we are rebelling against God in our actions and in our existence, we're wanting our own way, what should we conclude about our state before God? See **sin is not just an outward act, it is an inward ATTITUDE.** You could do everything right in a legalistic fashion on the external and in religious ritual and rules and all, but in your heart it could be rebelliousness that is shaking its fist in the face of God.

It's like the story of the little boy whose mother put him in the closet for being bad – which I wouldn't advise you doing that of course – but she didn't hear him for a while and went to check on him and opened the door and said, “What are you doing in here?” And he said “well I spat on your coat and I spat on your dress and I spat on your shoes and now I'm waiting for more spit.”

Rebelliousness – he wasn't sorry! It's like the little girl who was in the car jumping up and down on the back seat and her mom told her to stop it and sit down and put her seatbelt on. Eventually she did and a few miles down the road she said “Mom, I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside.” That's what sinners are like – that's what we all once were but cannot continue to be if we are now in Christ.

**John is saying the sign of a Christian is a SURRENDERED will to God's will.** That's like what we saw last week in **chapter 2.** In **verses 3 and 5** where John wrote if we know Jesus we will obey his commands, we will keep his word. Remember – and the heart of that wasn't just an outward obedience to the letter of the law but an inward delight in what God says.

So as you hear this today and look at your own life and heart, is the ruling principle of your life a lawlessness before God or a desire even if you fail at times to be obedient? If it is to rebel, John says then you are not one of God's children. Why can he be so serious or black and white with that? Because of what he explains in verse 5.

And **verse 5** explains why. **A sinful lifestyle is a denial of Christ's CHARACTER.** Verse 5 says, *“But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.”*

John is saying how can you call yourself a Christian – a little Christ – then continue in a lifestyle that is a complete denial of the incarnation – that God Himself – the Holy God – became flesh – became one of us and in him there is no sin?

Peter said in **1 Peter 2:22** that Jesus committed no sin.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:21** said that Jesus had no sin.

John here says that in Jesus was no sin. And his point is how could anyone take the name of Jesus and claim to bear his likeness and then relish a lifestyle of sinfulness? It is impossible – it is a denial of Christ’s character.

But it also is a denial of Christ’s **CROSS**. In that same verse John says Jesus came that **he might take away our sins**. In fact the first time John the Baptist – not the author John – the first time he saw Jesus what did he say? He said *“Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* The Psalmist said *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sin from us.”*

John’s point is there is something wrong if a so-called Christian goes looking for sin again. I know we all backslide – I know we all fall at times – I know the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 and I know where he found himself after he spent all his inheritance in habitual sinful living. He finds himself among the pigs – eating their slop. But I also know it wouldn’t fill him. He couldn’t be satisfied with it. So he came to himself and he got up and he went to his father.

I’m saying there is something wrong if you can live a lifestyle which is a complete denial of not only the character of Jesus but of his cross and it doesn’t eat at and weigh on and prick and convict you at all. The prodigal didn’t stay with the pigs.

Now the positive in this point of John’s for us is that if we are defeated, if we are constantly falling into sin - well, first of all, we need to question whether we’re truly saved - but whatever the condition is that we find ourselves in, there is an answer. It’s inherent in this verse 5, the answer is found in the victory of the cross of Jesus. This is why Christ has been manifested: to take away our sins, for in Him was no sin. The message is this: there is deliverance – there is hope – there is victory – there is forgiveness! My friend, whatever your particular sin is, even if it is a habitual lifestyle of sin and you’re not even saved today, the wonderful message of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is that you can be. The power of God’s Son at the cross is the dynamite of God that is able to deliver all men.

But let me say this as well. While there is forgiveness, we have to be warned that **a sinful lifestyle can never ever be an ALTERNATIVE lifestyle for the child of God**. We hear an awful lot about alternative lifestyles today, don’t we? Some are even saying that you can be a practicing homosexual or a celibate homosexual, and be a Christian. Some are propounding that you can practice idolatry and be a Christian, you can engage in constant drunkenness and be a Christian, you can live in gossip and slander and be a Christian. Let me tell you what God’s word says in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

God’s word is clear: you can do those things, but if you’re going to become a Christian you’ve to repent of them. Now I’m not saying that you’ll not fall into some of those sins, God forbid that you should, but all of us fall into sin at some time in our Christian life, if not an awful lot - but this is the point: **these lifestyles of sin must change and CEASE to be your lifestyles, cease to be the ruling, dominating factor of your existence.**

Paul agrees with John in **verse 11** where he says: *“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* John and Paul are both saying, **if you’re truly saved, your life will not be a denial of Christ, of His character and of His cross and by that you find more ASSURANCE of your salvation.**

Now let me take you back to the text today and show you why I chose this text on the Sunday before Christmas – the time we are celebrating and looking back at the historical and miraculous incarnation of Jesus Christ. **Verse 8** says: *“The reason the Son of God appeared – the reason God himself clothed himself in humanity, was born of a virgin, walked in obedience, laid down his life and rose from the dead was for this purpose - was to destroy the devil’s work.”*

What does John have in mind as the devil's work? The context we've already seen shows us. **Verse 5** is the clear parallel where John also says why Jesus appeared. *"But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin."*

And when you put that along side the truth of **chapter 2 verses 1 and 2** where John says: *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Then what all this means is that Jesus appeared in the world for two reasons. **Jesus came at Christmas so that we might not go on sinning and he came to die so that there would be an ATONING sacrifice for our sins if we do sin.**

Now ponder this remarkable situation with me in these few closing minutes. If the Son of God came to help you stop sinning – to destroy the works of the devil – and if he also came to die so that when you do sin, there is a sacrifice already offered for your sin, what does that imply for how we live life?

Let me give you three things this morning – what John Piper called **three Christmas gifts from John.**

First, a clear **PURPOSE** for living.

This means we have a clear purpose for our living each day – simply, **don't SIN.** *"I write these things to you so that you may not sin."* *"The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil."*

If you want that positively instead of negatively, let me take you to **chapter 3 verse 23.** *"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."*

Those things are so closely connected in the mind of John that he calls them the one commandment of Jesus.

Don't sin. Instead **trust JESUS and love PEOPLE.** Purpose in life. Merry Christmas.

Secondly – the next gift is **hope that our failures will be FORGIVEN.** As we don't sin, trust Jesus, and love people – and as we fail in that process, he gives us hope that those failures will be forgiven. And that is huge because if you don't have hope that God will forgive your failures, when you start fighting sin, you just give up.

I'm sure many of us are thinking of changes we need to make as we hear this because you have fallen into sinful patterns and want out. You want some new patterns of eating. New patterns of TV watching. New patterns of giving. New patterns of relating to your spouse. New patterns of family devotions. New patterns of sleep and exercise. New patterns of courage in witness. But you are struggling, wondering whether it's any use.

Well here's your second Christmas gift: Christ not only came to destroy the works of the devil - our sinning - he also came to be an advocate for us when we fail in our fight.

So let the freedom to fail give you the hope to fight. **But beware! If you turn the grace of God into LICENSE to sin,** and say, "Well, if I can fail, and it doesn't matter, then why bother fighting?" - if you say that, and mean it, and go on acting on it, **you are probably not saved and should tremble.**

But that is not where most of you are. Most of you want to fight sinful patterns in your life. And what God is saying to you this morning is this: let the freedom to fail give you hope to fight. Merry Christmas. We come to the Word together each week so that we might not sin, but if you do sin you have an advocate, his name is Jesus Christ.

And lastly today, the third implication of the double truth that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins is this: **Hope that Christ will really HELP us in our fight.** He really will help you. He is on your side. He didn't come to destroy sin because sin is fun. He came to destroy sin because

it is fatal. It is a deceptive work of the devil and will destroy us if we don't fight it. He came to help us, not hurt us.

So here's your third Christmas gift: Christ will help overcome sin in you. We haven't gotten there yet in our study, but **1 John 4:4** says, "*He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world.*" Jesus is alive, Jesus is almighty, Jesus lives in us by faith. And Jesus is for us, not against us. He will help you. Trust him.

Live with the purpose of don't sin – trust Jesus – love people. When you fail in that fight, know that you will be forgiven. So fight that fight knowing that Jesus will help you in it.

And in that this morning we see another reason for or against the assurance of our salvation. And I want you to take it home in a simple and **a consistent test** for yourself by asking just two questions: **how SENSITIVE to sin am I? How SEPARATE from sin am I?**

But in this we also see a tie to our celebration of Christmas this week – that Jesus came and his plan from the beginning was to destroy the work of the devil – to put an end to our habitual sinning and be our advocate when we fall in the process.

See **as much as in chapter 1 we didn't want to miss CHRIST this Christmas, in chapter 3 we don't want to miss that Christmas is intimately connected to the CROSS.** In fact you can't separate them. And that's why we come to the Lord's Table today.

We'll read the verses in a moment, but when Jesus held up the cup He said drink this in remembrance of me and when Paul explains it, he says that every time you do so, you proclaim the death of Jesus until He comes again.

So I want to invite you to join me in connecting the dots – in celebrating and not missing the fact that Jesus came – but celebrating in humble thankfulness the reason that He came.

So first of all...

- if you believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, to life, to heaven by faith and you have put your faith in him for that purpose.
- If you understand that the bread and the juice that we will take today are symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus that were broken and shed on the cross for our sins and that they are only symbolic in nature.
- And if you are able to come to the table in good standing before Jesus Christ so as not to eat and drink judgment on yourself.

Then you are invited to join us in this celebration.

So let me encourage you while the elements are being passed out, to take this time to pray – to thank God for all we have seen in his word today – to thank Jesus for the forgiveness that is ours in him – to confess where you have lived contrary to the name and character and cross of Jesus so that you can take these elements in faith and joy and thankfulness and right standing before God.

## **Communion**

Servers come forward during focus time and pass out elements

1 Corinthians 11 verse 23 & 24 tell us:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Then in verse 25, the Bible says:

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Last week we saw that the by-product of passing the tests that God through John has been giving us to build the assurance of our salvation is that we exhibit the real presence of Jesus Christ in our world day to day.

Again- by living a life free from habitual sin – a life of trusting Jesus and loving people – not only do we know that we know Him, we know that we show Him to any who are watching.

Let's pray.