**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**The Christian's Incompatibility with Sin, Part 3**
Scripture: 1 John 3:9-10
Code: 62-27

We have a little bit of abbreviated time tonight but I think it will be sufficient to look again at 1 John chapter 3. We really are wrapping up a look at verses 4 through 10 under the title of, "The Christian's Incompatibility with Sin," 1 John chapter 3 verses 4 through 10. And maybe it would be good for us to just listen to this portion of Scripture again, starting in verse 4.

"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins. No one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin cause His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Now just to go back and sort of rehearse again the theme here, I want to begin with an obvious axiomatic self-evident statement, and here it is, "Becoming a true Christian results in a life that is dramatically different from the former life." Simple enough? Let me say it again, "Becoming a true Christian results in a life that is dramatically different from the former life." It is new life. That simple statement, by the way, has been assaulted by many who say they believe the Bible. Such an assault is frankly amazing to me because it's so basic and so absolutely clear in the text we have just read. But the current assault and the assault that's been pretty much around for the last couple of decades in the evangelical world in America isn't by any means new. Assaulting the idea that true salvation results in transformation is an old assault. And, in fact, that's why John wrote his epistle because the believers to whom he was writing were under such an assault. There were those false teachers who came along espousing that they knew God, that they were the possessors of eternal life, even though their lives were characterized by patterns of unbroken sin. They wanted to say that salvation was just a change in status, not nature. It was a change in eternal destination, not desires.

But John is very clear that true believers are transformed in mind and they are transformed in emotion and they are transformed in will. And we've seen all that, that regeneration, conversion, salvation has such a dramatic effect that one has a new nature, a new disposition, new attitudes, new motives, new

longings, new desires, new loves, new hates, new goals and new behavior. And we have been looking at this, seeing it all over the New Testament actually, 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away, new things have come." Romans 6:22, "Used to be the servants of sin but now you are the servants of righteousness." Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "Saved by grace through faith, not of works, but unto good works which God has before ordained that you should walk in them." You are His workmanship and the manifestation of the work that He has done is seen in good works." Ephesians 5 talks about, "The Lord washing us, cleansing us as His bride by the washing of water with the Word that He might present to Himself a church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing but rather holy and blameless."

And Colossians chapter 3 is another text along these same lines, unmistakable clear. Tell us that, "We have died, our life is hid with Christ in God, therefore we are to consider the members of our earthly body as dead to immorality and impurity, passion, evil desire and greed which amounts to idolatry." All of these things are part of the past. And verse 10 says, "You put on the new self." Scripture is very clear that salvation is not just the change in status, it is a change in nature. It is a change in how we live, how we think, how we speak. Satan obviously is the deceiver. Satan the deceiver is the infiltrator who seeks to destroy this central gospel truth and teach people that they can have salvation and their sin.

I always remember the rock singer, years ago, that I quoted years ago who said, "Jesus has come into my life, but don't think it will change my life or my act." Well if He didn't change your life or your act, He didn't come into your life.

A no-repentance gospel, a no-holiness gospel, a no-submission gospel, a no-transformation gospel is the devil's lie to give false security to damned people. So for the protection of the church from the false teaching agents of Satan, the New Testament is crystal clear on how you can determine whether one is a believer. And that is John's very specific purpose in writing so there's no mistaking the fact that true Christians are transformed people and their new life is very different than their former life.

Look for a moment at chapter 2 verse 26, just so that you can see what is behind John's writings. He says, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you." This is always the problem. Satan is the liar and the father of lies, he wants to move in among the people of God and bring about his deceptions. Chapter 4 verse 1, he warns them again, "Do not believe every spirit, test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world." And obviously the primary area which occupies the attention of false prophets is the area of the doctrine of salvation. Anything else is peripheral in the sense, to eternal destiny. False prophets then are preoccupied with that which damns people and therefore they are preoccupied with

deceptions related to the doctrine of salvation, to the gospel.

It's very clear that behind the scenes in 1 John were false teachers espousing that people could have a relationship with God and be in the light of God, possess eternal life from God and still live lives that were no different than before. John essentially says this is a lie, this is the devil's deception. If anybody claims to be a Christian, you need to test the claim. And the way you test the claim, John gives two categories of tests: first, doctrinal tests and then behavioral tests. Test them on their view of Christ. We've seen that. Test them on their view of sin because if you don't have the right Christ and you don't understand your sin, you're not going to come to salvation. Right doctrine is important, essential.

But then conduct, you look at their lives and you look for two things. You look for submission to the Word of God, obedience to the Word of God, righteous patterns of behavior, and manifest love for the brethren, for God and even for the unconverted. The doctrinal tests then have to do with appropriate doctrines of sin, that is a sound anthropology, understanding the sinfulness of man, and a sound Christology, understanding the reality of who Jesus is and what He had done in His death and resurrection. Those are the doctrinal tests. If anybody errs in the doctrine of sin, if anybody says that they are not sinners, such as we saw in 1 John 1, they lie and they do not the truth. And the second is the doctrine of Christ. If anyone comes and does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," chapter 4 verse 2, "that is antichrist, not the truth by any means.

Then you come to the behavioral tests and those are two, as I just said. One is righteousness, obedience to the Law of God, submission to the will of God, the other is love. Love will become the theme if you go back to chapter 3, love will become the theme starting in verse 11. It's really introduced at the end of verse 10, "The one who does not love his brother," and that transitions into the subject of love which occupies the rest of the chapter. But we're in the first part of the chapter which gives the attention to this matter of righteousness. This is the test.

Notice chapter 3 verse 6, "No one who abides in Him sins." Verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin." And that defines what he meant in verse 6. No one sins...what do you mean no one sins ever? No, verse 9, "Practices sin." That is has an ongoing, unbroken pattern of sin. And then finally verse 10, "The children of God are manifest as those who do not practice sin. The children of the devil are those who do not practice righteousness."

So the simple principle is this. True believers have a pattern of righteousness in their life. The pop gospel is void of this truth. It only wants to acknowledge an emotional moment, an event, and affirm people's salvation on the basis of that event, that prayer, that moment rather than on life transformation.

This is not new even in the New Testament.  If you were to go back, we won't take the time, but if you were to go back to say Jeremiah 31 and read the New Covenant, you would find that in the New Covenant, which is the covenant by which God saves, ratified in the blood of Christ on the cross, in the New Covenant God promises to give us a new heart, to take out the old heart, to give us a new heart.  He promises to write His Law in our hearts so that there's a dramatic transformation of the inner person.  I t's not just a matter of status, it's a matter of nature.  If you go to Ezekiel 36 you're going to find the very same kind of language.  Ezekiel 36:25 to 27 says essentially the same thing. "Takes away the stony heart, gives you a heart of flesh, puts His Spirit in you, writes His Law in your heart.  The old life is gone, the new life prevails.  Sin has no more dominion, righteousness does." That's just basic.

Do Christians sin?  Yes.  Do Christians have to sin?  No.  We do sin, 1 John 1 verses 8 and 10, "If you say you don't sin, the truth isn't in you.  If you say you haven't sinned, you make God a liar and His Word isn't in you."  Yes we sin.  Do we have to sin?  No.  Chapter 2 verses 1 and 2, "I'm writing to you these things that you may not sin."  You don't have to sin.  We do sin, we don't have to sin.

Thirdly, we don't habitually sin.  That's what John is saying here.  That relentless, unbroken pattern of iniquity is shattered.  And those verses that I read to you, 6, 9, 10, indicate that we do not go on practicing habitually the patterns of sin that mark our former life.

And then John gives three absolutely complete arguments based on the Trinity.  You can't have more arguments than this, there are only three members in the Trinity.  This is a complete argument.  And what he says, and I'll just review very quickly, believers cannot continue in sin because, number one, sin is incompatible with the Law of God.  It is incompatible with the Law of God.  And in verse 4, "Everyone who practices sin, practices lawlessness.  Sin is lawlessness."  And so it is absolutely inconceivable that a Christian would practice sin which is lawlessness which is rebellion against the Law of God when they have come under the Law of God, seen that the Law is holy, just and good, confessed their sins and come to love the Law of God and obey it.  John 15, Jesus simply says, "The people who obey My commandments are the people who know Me."  We are doers of the Law, not just hearers, James 1. We build our house on the rock because we don't just say, as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, we do those things that please God.

So when God transforms a soul, defiance is replaced by compliance.  Rebellion is replaced by submission.  Lawlessness is replaced by obedience.  Hate for God's Law is replaced by love for God's Law.  And so the argument that we already studied, we're not going to go back over it again, is the simple argument that we cannot continue in an unbroken pattern of sin because we have a new relationship to the Law of God.  We love it, we submit to it, we don't rebel against it, we don't despise it.

Secondly, continuing to review, sin is, first of all, incompatible with the believer because it is incompatible with the Law of God, and secondly, sin is incompatible with the believer because it is incompatible with the work of Christ. It's incompatible with the work of Christ.

First of all, we have a changed relationship to the Law of God. Therefore, we have a completely changed relationship to sin which is lawlessness. Secondly, we have a changed relationship to sin by the work of Christ, that's verses 5 through 8, which very clearly lay this out. Look at verse 5, "He appeared in order to take away sins." That's why He came. If He came to take away sins, to lift sins from your life and mine, then we couldn't possibly be the same sinners after He did His work. And that's why in verse 6 it says, "No one who abides in Him sins. And no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. And, little children, let no one deceive you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous, His death removed sin. His death joined us to Him and we died, as it were, and we are buried in our sin but we rose to walk in newness of life." And furthermore, verse 8 says, "The one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil is sin from the beginning, but the Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil. Salvation had an effect on your sinning. It had an effect on your life by joining you to Jesus Christ, the righteous one. And it even had an effect on your relationship to the devil. On your behalf it destroyed his works. So if we understand the work of Christ and how we relate to that work, and if we understand the Law of God and how we relate to that Law, then we understand that it's impossible to be a true Christian and have the same relationship to the Law of God that you had before you were saved. And that is one of rebellion and hatred. It's impossible to have the same relationship to sin you had before you came to Christ. He took away your sin, joined you to Him as the righteous one, and destroyed the works of the devil on your behalf.

Now finally, thirdly, and here completes the work of the Trinity that John draws on, sin is incompatible with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's incompatible with the Law of God, the Father. It's incompatible with the work of Christ the Son. And it's incompatible with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the trinity.

Notice verse 9. "No one who is born of God practices sin."

Now let's just talk about this for a moment. If you're born of God you cannot practice sin. Why? "Because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God." You cannot sin because you are born of God. A sinner is dramatically changed through this birth.

Now he's a little bit detailed in what he says, so let's look at it in verse 9, "His seed abides in him." The new birth involves the acquisition of a seed...a seed, very seed, the *sperma Theos*, the seed of

God.  And that is to say there's a new life principle imbedded in us, just as in human birth there is a seed planted that grows into life, new life, so there is the spiritual realm the very seed of God's divine life is planted in us, *sperma Theos*, the seed of God.

So that we are really new in the truest sense.  John 3 says we are born of the Spirit, John 3 tells us that this is the Holy Spirit's work in us, it is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the new birth.  And if you remember that, you can just listen because the words are very familiar, but let me read from John chapter 3.  "Jesus answered and said, 'Truly, truly I say to you,'" Nicodemus He was speaking to, "'Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'" And then in verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."  And then referring again in verse 8, "The wind blows where it wishes, you hear the sound of it, don't know where it comes from or where it goes, so is everyone born of the Spirit."  Three times born of the Spirit, born of the Spirit, born of the Spirit.  So the new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit.  So when we read then in verse 9 about being born of God, we're talking about God the Holy Spirit.  He is the agent by which the new birth takes place.  The work of the Father in bringing us under His Law, producing in us a different attitude toward the Law.  The work of the Son in lifting sin away, joining us to His righteousness and destroying the sovereign dominance of Satan in our lives.  And now the work of the Holy Spirit to produce life in us, all evidence the fact that we cannot continue to be the same kind of sinning people.  The Holy Spirit operates in the new birth.

You remember back in Genesis, just a very wonderful picture is given there.  "God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void, darkness was over the face of the  deep. And the Spirit of God was brooding over the surface of the waters."  Very much like Deuteronomy where you have the same word, "fluttering," an eagle fluttering over the nest and urging the fledglings to fly.  The Holy Spirit is the one who nudges creation into motion.  The Holy Spirit is the one who plants new life and, as it were, generates and regenerates.  We are born of the Spirit.

The Spirit of God uses a tool to do that.  And what is the tool the Holy Spirit uses? It's the Word of God.  It's the Word of God.  The Spirit begets us, as it were, by the Word.  We have become partakers, 2 Peter 1:4, of the divine nature.  This is the work of the Holy Spirit.  He plants the seed. And how is that seed planted?  By the Word of God.

Let me show you that.  Turn to 1 Peter 1:23 and we'll look at this text and it will sort of fill out our understanding here.  First Peter 1:23, "You have been born again," this is similar language, obviously, "You have been born again and it's not of a seed which is perishable." The point being, if you've been born again it's permanent.  Once new life is planted in you, it can't perish.  This is the security of the believer.  This is the perseverance of the saints.  This is the perpetuity of the work of God.  Once you're born again the seed is placed in you, it is an imperishable seed.  And it is placed there, notice verse 23, through the living and abiding Word of God.  And then in verse 24 he writes, borrowing from

the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, "All flesh is like grass, all its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, the flower falls off, but the Word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the Word which was preached to you." The Word of the Lord is eternal, the Word of the Lord is permanent, and when it comes and is believed, it plants an eternal and permanent seed of life in the heart of the believer. This is the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. You have been born again. You have been reborn, *anagennao*, born all over again, born a second time, very familiar New Testament language. The miracle of regeneration, we heard about it tonight in the testimonies and we're very familiar with it.

But let me just kind of give you a little bit of theological breath to grasp this. Regeneration in Jesus Christ, the planting of the seed in this new life that comes through the hearing and believing of the Word, this work of the Holy Spirit changes the disposition from lawless and godless and self-seeking as defined, for example, in Romans chapter 3 to one who loves the Law of God, is a servant of righteousness such as Romans chapter 6 and 7. Prior to your salvation you're dominated by wickedness. After your salvation you're dominated by righteousness.

This new birth enlightens the blinded minds so that we can discern eternal realities, spiritual realities. We now have the mind of Christ. I love that passage in 1 Corinthians 2:16, we think the thoughts of God, we think with the mind of Christ. It liberates and it frees and energizes the enslaved will, never able to obey God and now freely able to obey God and longing to do so. In fact, you could say that the regenerate mind has forever ceased to be the man he once was. And that's okay with him because he doesn't ever want to associate with the man he once was. There's a decisiveness in salvation. It's not a foggy, hazy transformation, there is a decisiveness. The regenerate man has forever ceased to be the man or the woman he or she was. The old life is absolutely over, the new life has begun, he's a new creature in Christ. Buried with Christ, out of reach of condemnation, raised into a new life of righteousness.

There also is, how can I say this, to borrow a theological word, there is a monorgism(??)in this, there's a monorgism in regeneration. That is to say infants do not reproduce themselves, they do not cooperate in their own production, or in their procreation or their birth, and neither do we. No one who is dead in trespasses and sins can contribute to his coming to life. It is God's Spirit alone quickening us. Theologians like to call it spiritual vivification. It is mysterious. It is the work of divine power. It is the mighty work of the Holy Spirit making us alive. And in Ephesians, for example, chapter 2 verse 1, it is said in unmistakable language, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." That's how you were. "But God being rich in mercy because of His great love in which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive." That's the monorgism of it. In other words, the energy comes from one source, and that is from God.

And again, going back to 1 Peter 1:23, the means that the Spirit of God uses to plant the seed is the living and abiding Word of God. There's no way to be saved except through the truth, except through the gospel, the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit who does the work but the gospel is the means by which that work takes place. This seed planted in us is of a heavenly origin not an earthly one. And it is a permanent and eternal seed through the preaching of the Word of God.

And so, what is Peter saying? Well he's just saying what we hear John saying, there cannot be any continuing unbroken pattern of sin because this dramatic Holy Spirit miracle has taken place in which the Spirit of God has utterly and completely and absolutely and forever transformed your nature by planting in you the seed of God, divine life through the means of hearing and believing the gospel. In James 1:18 it's put this way, "He brought us forth by the Word of truth." He brought us forth out of death, out of blindness, into new life through the Word of truth. There is no other way for anybody to be converted other than through the Word of truth. Titus, Paul writes familiar words, chapter 3 verse 5, "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration." Regeneration is a washing and that's the picture you have in Ezekiel that we are washed there in our regeneration, we are purged and cleansed. And this, he says, this washing of regeneration and renewing is by the Holy Spirit whom He pointed out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

When you think about your salvation, you have to think about it in terms of the work of the whole trinity. The Father, crushing you, as it were, under the weight of the Law, awakening you to your sin and so transforming you that you have a completely different attitude toward His Law. You love the Law of God like David, "O how I love Your Law." You are obedient to the Law of God, you long to obey, you desire to obey.

The work of Christ also weighs in to transform you so that sins are lifted from you. You are joined to the righteous One and the power of Satan over you is destroyed.

And the work of the Holy Spirit completes the picture. You couldn't possibly be the same because the Holy Spirit has regenerated you. You have been born all over again and you've come out as a new creation through the Spirit by means of the Word of truth. And then, of course, Peter says it's that powerful Word that never fades away. It's not like grass and it's not like flowers, it lasts forever and this is the Word of God which abides forever, the Word that was preached to you that brought about the new birth.

I don't think that there's any way that this could have been said by the Apostle John more magnificently than it has been said. The whole Trinity comes together, we've seen in these three

messages, to force the conclusion, the only possible conclusion that a true Christian is manifestly recognizable by characteristic patterns of righteous behavior. And if that's not what is there, then whatever might have been the event in the past, whatever, as we heard in the testimony tonight, you might have done, or whatever prayer you might have prayed, or whatever assumptions you might want to make, they're not legitimate. And it is important, as we heard in the testimonies today, to examine yourself to see whether you be in the faith. And what you're looking for is not an event in the past, what you're looking for is a pattern in the present.

And then John concludes this section in verse 10 with a summation statement, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...are obvious." It shouldn't be that difficult, it should be absolutely obvious. The one who has His seed in him can't go on in this unbroken pattern of sin because he's been born of God, verse 9 says. The one who practices sin, verse 8, has to be of the devil because in the behalf of those who are Christ's, the power of the devil has been broken and sin has been lifted. And as we said, the attitude toward the Law has changed. So it's obvious, it's not mysterious. Anyone, he says it finally, who does not practice righteousness is not of God. That simple, no matter what they claim, no matter what events they look to.

Is this some kind of perfection? No. But it is a direction THE direction of the life of a true believer. John knows how important this is because Satan consistently will sow in the church tares, right? False believers to weaken and corrupt the church, leaven, the New Testament talks about, that spoils, poisons the church.

So two things are at stake here. One, your own soul is at stake so you need to understand whether you're a real Christian or not. Secondly, the church needs to be observant about this so that we deal with the people for their own sake and for the protection of the church. Anybody who preaches a gospel that says it's only a change in your status and not a change in your life is preaching the devil's message. We who know the truth are, I trust, faithful to proclaim the truth. And we have every right, don't we, out of love to call people into question who have a pattern of sin? We're not being loving if we don't. So examine your own heart. Look at the hearts of those around you. You that are parents, it's easy for you to cling to some childhood confession because you want so much your child to be saved. Don't foolishly cling to a childhood confession against the reality of the pattern that's obvious. And don't kid yourself with regard to your spouse, either, or anybody else. It may be the boldest thing you do but it's the kindest and most loving thing you do to confront those kinds of people, to point out the fact that whatever may be their claim and profession, there isn't any evidence that there's any new life. This we have responsibility to do before God and in the church.

Well, Father, as we close tonight, it's been such a rich day, so much more needs to be said about this, so many of these passages can be opened and elucidated, but suffice it for the moment that we

understand the glorious reality that salvation is a transformation, it is a total transformation, it is a dramatic life-changing transformation so that the pattern of sin is broken.  O we still sin, but we don't have to sin and we don't sin habitually.  And even when we do, we are grieved by it and so even in our sin we manifest a righteous response.  How wonderful is that?  How evidently true is our salvation when the response to our own sin is hatred of it?  For therein lies a righteous response to our own unrighteousness which shows that the pattern has indeed been broken.  We thank You, Lord, for saving us and for giving us a love for Your Law, for lifting sins from us and breaking the power of Satan and uniting us to Your Son.  We thank You that Your blessed Spirit has given us new life, planting the seed of eternal life in us through the truth.  And we desire, Lord, to live faithfully to Your glory.  We desire as well to proclaim this true message of what salvation really is in a time when a cheap gospel in a marginal, minimalist message is so common.  Help us to proclaim a true gospel that no one would be deceived.  We pray in Your Son's name.  Amen.

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