

Destroying the Works of the Devil

I John 3:4-8

Introduction

John MacArthur: 'I recently read a book about Christians and sin that began with an unusual account. The author of this book was acquainted with a pastor who had been sent to prison for robbing fourteen banks to finance his dalliances with prostitutes! The author was fully convinced the bank-robbing Lothario was a true Christian, and so he wrote a book to explore how such a thing could be possible.'

MacArthur: 'Call me old-fashioned, but I think it is fair to raise the question of whether someone who regularly robs banks to pay for illicit sex is truly saved!'

The Apostle John would certainly agree

I John 3:7-8 - '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.'

John introduced the topic of sanctification last week – when he spoke of the return of Christ

The Christian who has his hope fixed upon Christ – purifies himself – or grows in sanctification

I John 3:2, 3 - '... We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.'

While we look forward to that day of being made sinless - - - Scripture reminds us that we enter into and taste of that righteousness now

We do not attain to any kind of sinless perfection - - - sinlessness will not be a reality until the beatific vision/ we are changed

But we do begin to manifest the new nature given us in Christ

Jonathan Edwards: 'True salvation always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert.'

Saving faith makes a real impact upon the way one lives their life

II Corinthians 5:17 - 'Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.'

I. Sin is Lawlessness - v. 4

John moves us into a treatment of sin and righteousness

What do we mean when we say that man is a sinner?

What is the nature of sin?

John gives us a definition

I John 3:4 - 'Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.'

One of the common words used for sin – αμαρτια = missing the mark / every departure from the way of righteousness / to err / to go astray

Wayne Grudem: 'Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.'

We are reminded - - - We live in a moral universe – there are things that are morally right and things that are morally wrong

It is wrong to commit murder / to steal / to commit adultery / to bear false witness

AW. Tozer: 'A moral God created a moral universe, and the breaking of moral laws results in chaos and destruction.'

Robert Jeffress tells the story of Sister Mary Margaret

Robert Jeffress: 'None of the parents suspected Sister Mary Margaret of any impropriety. Nor could they account for the school's continued shortfall in funds. For twenty-eight years, Sister Mary Margaret had been the beloved principal at St. James Catholic School in Torrance, CA. But in 2021, a federal judge sentenced the nun to one year and one day in a federal penitentiary for wire fraud and money laundering. He also ordered her to repay the \$835,339 she'd embezzled from school funds - money intended to educate the children placed under her care and to keep the school's facilities clean, safe, and up-to-date. "I have sinned. I have broken the law," the eighty-year old nun confessed. "I have no excuses."

Stealing is a form of lawlessness – it is a violation of God's laws

Not all sins are quite that dramatic or newsworthy – but . . .

Every act of sin is an open challenge to God's authority

Sin says – 'God will not tell me how to live – I tell myself how to live.'

Sin is rooted in defiance and self-will

People get mistaken notions of liberty and freedom that fail to account for the fact that we have been created by God to function in a certain way

A fish is not at liberty – when it leaves the water God created for it to swim in – He was created / designed to swim in the water – take his oxygen from the water - - - it actually becomes a loss of freedom / to leave the environment he was created for

When we depart from God's ways - - - we ourselves lose freedom

C.S. Lewis: 'There is a story about a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. He replied that, as far as he could make out, God was 'the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it'. And I am afraid that is the sort of idea that the word **Morality** raises in a good many people's minds: something that interferes, something that stops you having a good time. In reality, moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine.'

The Ten Commandments – 'Thou shalt not . . .' - - they sound like restrictions on our freedom

But - We bring harm upon ourselves [and those around us] – when we depart from His ways

But they are wisdom principles – for our good - - - We function according to the Creator's design – when we walk in paths of righteousness

II. Taking Away Sin - vv. 5-6

John reminds us of why Christians – are to be those who are growing in sanctification / living righteous lives

He points us to Jesus

Why the incarnation?

Why the cross of Calvary – the empty tomb?

Jesus came to deal with sin!

He came to take away sin / to destroy the works of the devil

He didn't just die so that we could be forgiven of our sins – but so that sin no longer rules over us

Martin Luther: 'He appeared in the flesh to take sins away, not to give license to sinning.'

II Corinthians 5:17 - 'Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.'

We become new creatures in Christ - - our new nature manifests itself in righteousness - - - a desire to obey and honor God with our lives

People live according to their nature

A little while ago – a ten year old boy was bitten by a shark in the Bahamas - - - then we find out – the boy was actually in some kind of under water sea exhibit – called: 'Walking with the Sharks' - - - for \$110

Tv pundits got on the news and said – “These are wild animals – this is what they do’ - - - it's in their nature

Sea World – a while back stopped using Orcas [Killer Whales] – in their Sea World shows – because of several trainers have been attacked and died while working with the animals

They are referred to as 'Killer Whales' - - - that tells us something of their nature

If we refer to ourselves as *Christians* - - - people should be able to expect from us Christ-like behavior [a Christian is a follower of Christ]

As Christians - we can never be settled and content in a lifestyle of sin - - - God Himself convicts us by His Holy Spirit

As our Shepherd – He leads us into paths of righteousness – Ps. 23

It is the nature of those who are outside God's family - - - to ignore the moral law / dismiss their sin / to rationalize sin / to call good evil and evil good

Proverbs 30:20 - 'This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done nothing wrong."'

The unbeliever says, 'sin – what sin?'

The Christian is one who hates sin in his own life / fights against it

Martin Luther: 'We are all sinners, and now and then we fall into sin; but if a true Christian falls, he soon comes back, turns about, and fights against sin.'

We see two errors combatted in Scripture in this area of behavior

One is the error antinomianism - - - the idea that a person can believe in Jesus for salvation and simply live how they please – ignoring God's laws / God's Word – they feel no need to address sins in their own life

The error on the other side of the equation is that of sinless perfectionism

I John 1:8 - 'If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'

Sinlessness will not be a reality until the beatific vision

In the Lord's Prayer – we are taught to pray [daily] – 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.'

Phillip Yancey grew up in a strict religious household – one from which his brother turned away from Christianity altogether - - - Phillip says that his mother once claimed to have not sinned in 12 years

Phillip Yancey: 'If this is what a person who hasn't sinned in decades looks like - then I want no part of it.'

Anyone who claims to be sinless as a Christian is going to be someone highly deluded about their character

What is John saying here?

John MacArthur: 'John is not referring to occasional acts of sin, but to established and continual patterns of sinful behavior.'

We are going to blow it at times

Hebrews 12 – speaks of laying aside the sin which so easily entangles us – sin is like getting tripped up in barbed wire – entangles

What distinguishes a Christian is that he gets back up - - - and gets back on track

When Peter sinned – denied knowing the Lord - - - and Jesus turned and looked at him - - - conviction struck his heart - - - he went out and wept bitterly

He knew he had blown it - - - but he repented - - - he grieved

C.S. Lewis: 'A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble - because the Christ-life is inside him.'

Jonathan Edwards: 'Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.'

He says – even if I meet with a great deal of failure - - - I'm going to keep up the fight – because sin dishonors God / pleases Satan!

The Christian is one who puts on the armor God / who wrestles and fights and prays – He looks to God for enablement and victory

Are there sins that you are fighting against in your life?
Have you identified them? / made them a topic of prayer? / 'Lord – keep me from . . .'

That is to be part of our Christian calling – that we take up arms against sin

Matthew 26:41 - 'Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.'

Matthew Henry: 'Let us not serve or indulge what our Lord came to destroy'

Some theologians define sin as a kind of treason against God / a betrayal

Sproul: 'Sin is cosmic treason. Sin is treason against a perfectly pure Sovereign. It is an act of supreme ingratitude toward the One to whom we owe everything, to the One who has given us life itself . . . We are saying, "God - your law is not good. My judgment is better than yours . . . I have the right to do what I want to do, not what you command me to do.' [The Holiness of God, p. 116]

Robert Hanssen – was an FBI agent with top security clearance – who had been betraying his country for over two decades as a double agent. Starting in 1979 – he began selling thousands of US classified files to the Russians – including detailed military plans for responding to nuclear war. He betrayed American operatives working in Russia – 3 of whom were put to death by the Russians. He even told the Russians about a secret multi-million dollar eavesdropping tunnel under the Soviet embassy in Washington. – which was constructed in the 70s and 80s.

For His work – it is estimated Hanssen sold out his country for \$1.4M over a 20-year period

Hanssen died in a US prison last year

We might think of Judas selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver

When we sin – it is a kind of betrayal of God – and His expressed will for our behavior

Because of that – we hunger and thirst for righteousness

We hate to see sin in our lives – because we know it dishonors God / gives occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme

We love God / hate sin

We see the wisdom of God's ways and the folly and deceitfulness of sin

John MacArthur: 'I can't believe how many times I have talked with people in the homosexual movement who insist they're born-again Christians because they believe in Jesus, can recite their creed, tell you the date they were saved, and so forth. My answer to them is, 'If you were Christians, you wouldn't sin continually as you do, and defend it. You would be brokenhearted and repentant, and you would pray to have your life changed.' [Hard to Believe, p. 98]

The new nature looks to God to make us righteous

Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q: What is sanctification?

A: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

III. Be Not Deceived - vv. 7-8

Jesus came to destroy the kingdom of Satan

We cannot be neutral in the conflict - - - we belong to one side or the other

The bible teaches that there is a spiritual enemy – one who promotes evil / fuels the fire of sin in the world

Satan

We cannot understand our world without taking into account the person of Satan

Coming to know Christ brings us into conflict / all out war with the devil and His works

William Gurnall: 'holiness is the flag which the soul hangs out to declare open defiance of Satan and friendship with God, even as the devil strives to shoot it down.'

All who remain outside of Christ - are in rebellion against God and reflect the nature of Satan

When we sin – we are taking our cues from Satan - - - we are doing his bidding and not God's – [at that moment – we are acting as though he were our lord!]

When you are tempted you should say – Satan is not my lord – he is on his way to hell and it can't come too soon!

We have a new king!

Paul described salvation in these terms

Colossians 1:13 - 'He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son'

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis: 'I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside . . . they enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.'

People at times resist the Christian gospel – because they want to keep their sin

Or – they come up with a false gospel – that promises them forgiveness – but allows them to continue on in their sin

But when someone puts their trust in Christ – embraces the gospel in truth - - - God is at work in them – creating a new man / woman of God - - - we begin to see the awful nature of sin - - - and the price Jesus paid to set us free - - we abhor the sin that once held us in bondage - - - and we follow the Savior who sets us free!