

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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When Spirituality Meets Sin

First John 3:4-8

by

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SUBJECT: SIN IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

TITLE: WHEN SPIRITUALITY MEETS SIN

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:4-8

INTRODUCTION. The last time he remembers picking up a Bible was when his mother told him to dust the coffee table, and that was years ago. So, how does he know so much about the Bible? Better yet, how can he know so much more about the Bible than all those preachers who went to the Acemetry@? How does he know about all those contradictions in the Bible?

Well, are there really contradictions in the Bible? If the Bible contradicts itself can I trust it? There is a simple answer: There are many contradictions in the Bible, but at no place does it contradict itself, or the divine author of every verse. What the Bible contradicts that disturbs so many people is itself, but the way they live. Let=s face it, very few lost people could care less whether or not the Bible contradicts itself, as long as it does not condemn their way of life. Why would a lost person be concerned about whether or not the Bible condemns money, or the love of money? No, what disturbs the lost person is that the Bible reveals the truth about sin and its consequences. Just as Felix was shaken when Paul reasoned with him about sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come (Acts 24), the lost person today rebels against the revealed truth found in God=s Word. As a matter of fact, it is not enough to say the Bible contains revealed truth, it is the revealed truth.

Lost people would like to reject the Word of God because it identifies them as sinners, under sentence of eternal death. It also stands in shocking contrast to their world-view. That can be disturbing. For example, if you are an evolutionist, you are going to have to deal with some serious contradictions. Either the world was created by the Master Designer, or it appeared out of no where, created by no one, going nowhere - and then it all evolved from there. I can believe a watchmaker designed my wrist watch, but I do not have enough faith to believe one could evolve from a junk yard. I must choose one view or the other - or do what so many Christians do: adopt a compromise view.

Maybe you are thinking, AThat is all well and good, but what does that have to do with the First Epistle of John, the epistle written to provide us with assurance of our relationship with Jesus Christ?@ I=m, glad you asked! Because there seems - on the surface - to be a major contradiction in this little epistle. However, I am convinced that there is absolutely no contradiction from one passage to another. But there might be a contradiction between the God-breathed Word and some unfortunate and unscriptural conceptions held by some people.

I. JESUS CHRIST CAME TO TAKE AWAY OUR SINS, 3:4-5.

A. Whoever Commits Sin Also Commits Lawlessness, and Sin Is Lawlessness, 3:4.

1. The Bible teaches that all people sin.
 - a. "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked@ (Jer. 17:9).
 - b. AAll have sinned, and come short of the glory of God@ (Rom. 3:23).
 - c. AThere is none righteous, no, not one@ (Rom. 3:10).
2. AThe wages of sin is death...@ (Rom. 6:23).
3. Every lost person is under a penalty of eternal death (John 3:18).
4. Sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is rebellion against the law of God.
5. Now, let us look at the Awhoever@ part of this, which John has already addressed.
 - a. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, 1 John 1:8.
 - b. If we say we have no sin, we call God a liar, 1 John 1:10.
 - c. Here, as in the hymn, AWhosoever surely meaneth me.@

B. Jesus AWas Manifested to Take Away Our Sins,@ 3:5a.

1. He was revealed by the Father.
2. He was affirmed by the Holy Spirit.
3. He was proclaimed by miracles.
4. He was substantiated by the Resurrection.

C. In Him There Is no Sin, 3:5b.

1. Jesus knew no sin.

AFor He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him@ (2 Cor. 5:21).

2. He was without sin, Hebrews 4:15.

II. HE WHO ABIDES IN CHRIST DOES NOT SIN, 3:6.

A. There Is no Contradiction in the Scripture.

We are not going to gloss over what may seem to some to be a contradiction here. It is a fact that in 1:8, John says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* It is also a fact that he says in 1:10 that, *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.* And now, he is saying that *He who abides in Christ does not sin.* Is he not saying here right the opposite of what he has said in chapter one? Absolutely not. Let me explain.

In 1:8 and 10, John is dealing with the principle of sin that remains active in the heart even after one has received a judicial pardon for his sins. Justification is a metaphor of the court room. When you believe in Jesus Christ, God, the eternal and omniscient Judge, pronounces you just. When you sin from that time forward - and you will sin (come short of the glory of God, Rom. 3:23b) - we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (2:1b). When the lost person sins, he is in rebellion against the law of God and God will deal with him as his Judge. When the Christian sins, God will deal with him as Father, as a father dealing with a child.

Chapter one teaches that even after we are saved, there is a sin principle (some call it the old sin nature) which remains in operation until we are glorified. Because of the sinful nature, the believer will commit acts of sin, and at times those acts may be shocking, not only to others, but also to the individual who commits them. Paul, in the section of Romans dealing with Sanctification, shares his personal testimony with us:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man (Rom. 7:19-22).

Christians do, and will continue to commit acts of sin. There is never a day that we do not need to confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). Now, John is going to make a statement that may seem to contradict 1:8 and 1:10, but in fact, there is no contradiction at all.

B. Whoever abides in Him does not sin, 3:6.

Well, one may say, that certainly sounds like a contradiction! Just read 1:8-10; 2:1-21; and 3:9 and see if you do not see a problem. Let us begin by admitting that this is not easy for one who is reading this in the English. However, in this text the key that unlocks the mystery to the truth is in the meaning of the Greek tenses.

This verse does not claim that Christians will never commit any acts of sin (which would contradict 1:8). The verb here denotes continuous action. This passage does not teach that a Christian never

sins at all after his conversion. Those who claim that they can reach sinless perfection in this life cannot point to this verse as a proof text. The note in the Believer=s Study Bible states, AThe present tense, in this context, indicates the breaking of the perpetual hold of sin in the life of the disciple.@

C. Whoever Abides in Him Does not Continually and Habitually Sin.

In Justification, we are delivered from the eternal penalty of sin. In Sanctification, we are being delivered from the power of sin. In Glorification, we will be delivered from the very presence of sin - for ever! The lost person, because he is a slave to sin and Satan, is presently under a sentence of death (John 3:18). His only hope is in receiving Jesus Christ by grace through faith. The Christian is one who has been born again, and is being nurtured and developed by the Holy Spirit. As you are being conformed to the image of Christ, there are many sins that should no longer be a problem for you. That does not mean that we do not sin, for we do (1 John 1:8). We must confess our sins and seek God=s forgiveness (1:9).

There is no contradiction here, however. What John is saying here is that the born again believer in Jesus Christ will not continue in sin so as to make it his lifestyle. He will not sin habitually. That does not mean that we have some magic formula we can use to determine whether or not our neighbor is really a born again believer. The Believer=s Study Bible Notes may help us:

A The power to overcome habitual sin is based on the invulnerability of the believer to the ravages of satanic influence (5:18), and on "His seed" remaining in him (v. 9). The expression "His seed" is a reference to the divine principle of life that abides in a man after regeneration in Christ. This principle prevents slavery to Satan and sin.@

D. AWhoever Sins Has Neither Seen Him nor Known Him.@

The person who continually sins so as to make it his lifestyle demonstrates that he has never known Jesus. Sadly, some have taught that one sin will condemn the believer to hell. A friend told me of the sermon he heard in his youth that troubled him for years. An evangelist stated a hypothetical situation in which the pastor of his church might be called on to visit a dying church member. He went on to say that if his buggy wheel hit a stump and he was thrown out of the buggy and hit his head on another stump and was killed, the pastor would spend his eternity in hell if he uttered a profane word before his head hit the stump.

This is not what John is teaching. He says that when a person continues in sin, that is, sins habitually, he is demonstrating that he has never known Jesus Christ. He has no saving relationship with Him. You either abide in Christ or you abide in sin. Now, I would suggest that before we apply that to all the other members of our church, we apply it to ourselves first. If I can continue in sin, I must ask myself if I really know Jesus Christ.

III. HE WHO PRACTICES RIGHTEOUSNESS IS RIGHTEOUS, 3:7-8.

A. The Warning Implies the Danger That Some Might Be Deceived, 3:7a.

1. Paul amplifies the warning in Galatians 6:7-8.
2. Some are deceived as to what makes one a Christian.

In a recent edition of the *The O=Rielly Factor*, Bill O=Riely interviewed a man he introduced as a former Muslim leader in America who had converted to Christianity. Asked to explain what had happened, the young black man stated that he had been Aborn a Christian,@ and then he had converted to Islam, and now he had returned to Christianity - and was entering politics. One may be born a Jew, or he may be born a Muslim, but no one is ever born a Christian. One can only become a Christian by being re-born, or born-again.

B. Now, Let Us Look at the Biblical View of Righteousness, 3:7b..

1. God demands righteousness of all who would come into His presence.
2. No one is righteous (Rom. 3:10ff).
3. Our highest attempt at righteousness is as filthy rags (Is. 64:6).
4. The righteousness of God is imputed unto those who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3).
5. The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17).

C. Those Who Live By Faith Practice Righteousness.

Herein is true spirituality: AHe who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.@ The key to Sanctification is found in Romans 8:29: AFor whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...@ In other words, God has predestined all who are justified to be so conformed to the image of Jesus Christ that he will practice the righteousness of Christ. While man=s highest attempt at righteousness is as filthy rags, once the righteousness of Christ is imputed unto him he will be righteous, Ajust as He is righteous.@

D. This Is the Key to Spirituality.

1. The spiritual person is a believer who abides in Christ.
2. The truly spiritual person is Christ-like.
3. He practices righteousness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

E. There Are Some Specific Results of Spirituality.

1. The spiritual person glorifies Christ.
2. The spiritual person has a perception of the Word that lost people lack.
3. The spiritual person has the power to witness for Christ.
4. The spiritual person has divine guidance through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
5. The spiritual person has assurance of salvation and God=s presence.
6. The spiritual person may worship His Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.
7. The spiritual person can pray to the Father.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you@ (John 15:7).

8. The spiritual person ministers to others.

Volumes have been written in recent years on the Spirit-filled life. The Scripture is very clear on the subject: the Spirit-filled person is a Christ-like person. Is there anything in the world you desire more than you desire to be like Christ? If there is, you are carnal, not spiritual. If you are spiritual, your life will manifest it. People may be paying a lot more attention to your life than you think.

MY LIFE

My life is an open book,
Open wide for all may see.
Each day it must be a little better,
For someone may follow me.

My life is an open book,
Open wide that you may know,
With but one quick look,
What kind of seed I sow.

The print is large, the type is bold,
And easy for you to see.
So, when my life you behold
I ask your prayer before you judge me.

---- Johnny L. Sanders

F. He Who Continues in Sin Is of the Devil, 3:8a.

1. The devil has sinned from the beginning.
2. If you continue in sin you are of the devil, no matter how loudly you profess faith in God.

G. Jesus Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil. 3:8b.

CONCLUSION. We need to understand this within the context of this epistle. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and He came to destroy Satan and everything that is of the devil. While He delivered the death blow to Satan at Calvary, Satan is still active on planet earth today. However, when Jesus Christ returns, he will ultimately destroy Satan (Rev. 20:10). While this true, I thank God that we do not have to wait for the return of our Lord in order to see Jesus Christ destroy the work of Satan.

Jesus is destroying the work of the devil in the hearts of believers every day. When you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus won a mighty victory over the devil. Through the ministry of His Spirit and His Word He equips you for warfare against the devil. In other words, He is defeating the works of the devil in your heart daily as you abide in him. And as you continue to abide in Him you continue to practice the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is what He wants to do for you, and through you right now. The question is, are you ready to let Him do it?

Let me share with you a poem I copied - as I recall - from a wall in the main lobby of camp 4 at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman some 40 years ago:

NO TIME FOR GOD

You=ve time to build houses and in them dwell,
And time to do business - to buy and to sell,
But none for repentance, for deep earnest prayer,
To seek your salvation you=ve no time to spare.

You=ve time for earth=s pleasures, for frolic and fun,
For her glittering treasures how quickly you run,
But care not to seek the fair mansions above,
The favor of God, or the gift of His love.

You=ve time to take voyages over the deep sea,
And take in the gay world=s jubilee;
But soon our hopes will be lost in the gloom
Of the cold, dark river of death and the tomb.

You=ve time to resort to woods, mountains, and glen,
And time to gain knowledge from the books of men,
Yet no time to search for the wisdom of God;
but what of your soul when you are under the sod?

For time will not linger when helpless you lie;
Staring death in the face, you will take time to die!
Then, what of the judgment? Paul, think, I implore!
For time will be lost on eternity=s shore.