

FIRST JOHN PART 6 "Does Salvation Transform One's Life?"

1 John 3:4 thru 10

It is so good to see all of you this morning as we start a brand new year... 2022. We made it to yet another year! I wanted to start out by showing you several New Year's quotes that I came across and get your reaction to them...

"May this New Year bring you more problems, more tears, and more pains. Don't get me wrong. I just want you to be a stronger person."
—Unknown [*James 1:2-4 basically says, "Is your life full of difficulties and problems? Then be happy! For when the way is rough, you have an opportunity to mature spiritually, to develop strong character."*]

"Many years ago I resolved never to bother with New Year's resolutions, and I've stuck with it ever since." —Dave Beard

"A new year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other." —Unknown

"I made no resolutions for the New Year. The habit of making plans, of criticizing, sanctioning and molding my life, is too much of a daily event for me." —Anaïs Nin

"You know how I always dread the whole year? Well, this time I'm only going to dread one day at a time." —Charlie Brown

Note our scripture passage for today. The whole idea behind First John is that as Christians we should NOT live our lives dreading one day at time. There is no reason why we Christians should live uncertain, fearful, confused and joyless lives. John's four purpose statements reveal his heart, which is also Jesus' heart: (1) we CAN know for sure that we are saved, that we ARE God's children; (2) we CAN have victory over sin; (3) we CAN know the truth and recognize false teaching when we hear it; we CAN experience joy in our lives. And in this letter John explains how.

I'm actually going somewhere with this, so go ahead and identify your favorite Bible character if you haven't done so already.

Before I read our focal passage which deals with sin in the life of a Christian, it is important to remind ourselves of what John said earlier in First John. It gives us a good foundation to build on as we discuss the serious topic of sin.

READ 1 John 1:8-10 and 2:1. ["For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23)]

So even though we're saved, the bad news is that we're still sinners. We are still in human flesh. Sin remains a part of our fallen nature. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). We struggle with it. But the good news is that by His grace God has provided us a way to deal with our sin whenever we do give in to temptation.

So, how are we supposed to deal with the sin that is in our life? Make a new year's resolution that we'll never do it again (whatever it is)? Do we just ignore it? Do we continue to hide it? Do we just accept it as normal and move on? No, no, no and no. First John 1:9 tells us how we are to deal with our sin and it starts by recognizing our sin as sin and then confessing it to God.

So that sets the stage for today's passage. We know that sin is a problem for us, but frankly we don't like to talk about it very much. Well, this morning we're going to talk about it as we look now at our focal passage.

John is contrasting the behavior of Christians and unbelievers. As I read this passage and you see these words and phrases ask yourself is he talking here about a Christian or is he talking about an unbeliever. Identify them on your sheet. It should be easy.

READ 1 John 3:4-10.

In evangelical Christian circles two extreme approaches to the issue of the Christian and sin have been put forth by various groups.

The first one is known as "Perfectionism." It suggests that we Christians can eventually achieve sinless perfection as we grow spiritually and progress in our walk with Christ. This view is usually associated with Arminian theology which also believes that you can lose your salvation. So it says you get saved, then you sin a little and you become lost; then you pray and get saved again, you sin a little later and you lose it again. And then you pray and you get it back. And you're making a little progress in your life. Finally you get to the point where you're not losing it anymore and then you keep progressing and you get to the place where you've reached perfection and you don't sin at all. Then that's the locked-in Christian. You can't lose it when you reach that point because you've been perfected. This is often called the doctrine of eradication, as if our sin nature can be eradicated. Is that what this passage is suggesting? That a true Christian is one who reaches a point of sinless perfection? No. The verses we just read in 1 John 1 refute this.

On the other extreme is the idea that we Christians can sin and we do sin but it doesn't matter because we can't lose our salvation. We are eternally secure, so don't worry about it. This view, "Antinomianism" (big word which comes from the Greek meaning "against the law" says that Christians live without regard for the law of God. They say that a Christian's sin doesn't matter because we're no longer under law but under grace – eternal security and all that. Grace covers absolutely everything. In fact, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. Obviously the people who have adopted this easy belief-ism, this "feel good" form of Christianity either haven't read this passage or they ignore it or they attempt to explain it away. They ignore the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus Himself said "If you love me you will keep my commandments (obey what I taught you)"

The bottom line is that neither of those two extreme views that I just presented is right. They are both severely flawed and they both ignore the clear teaching of scripture.

When we read about the great men in the Bible we discover that even though they were true believers in the Lord, they sometimes sinned. And some of their sins were really bad! Even Paul in Philippians 3:12 admits that he was not perfect. And we know that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. But if you read the teachings of Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and John clearly our behavior DOES matter. So then, in this passage that we just read, what is John telling us? What's the truth about us Christians and our sin? Can I be a Christian and still sin? Do we have to sin? Can we help it? Did my salvation transform my life or not? Am I really a new creature in Christ and, if so, how? Do real born-again, redeemed Christians act any different from unbelievers? Do they?

A proper interpretation of what John is saying here in the verses I just read will help us to answer these questions. It is important, as Paul tells Timothy, that we rightly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Right doctrine matters. So let's look at these verses...

READ 1 John 3:4.

In scripture there are several definitions of sin that are given. This is one of them. "Sin is lawlessness." Sin violates, it transgresses, it goes against the law of God. It goes against His commandments. Simply stated, sin is rebellion against God. The attitude of a sinner is, "I don't care what God wants. I want what I want more than I want what God wants." Sin is selfish behavior. So John lets us know why sin is so bad and why we need to strive toward a life of purity (what he said in v 3). If you remember from our study last time we left off with a question that asks, "The return of Jesus one day should motivate us to what?" To purity, to holiness, to righteous living, to being more like Christ, to walking like Jesus walked. So what John is saying is that as Christians we should not make a practice of sinning. The terms "practice of sinning" (v 4, 6, 7, 8, 9) and "keeps on

sinning” (v 5). In the Greek the tense is active and continuous action. The idea here is continual, habitual sinning, a sinful lifestyle. Whenever you start a compass course the first thing you need to do is to take the proper heading. That’s what John is doing here – pointing us in the right direction.

READ 1 John 3:5.

Why did Jesus come? He came to save us from our sin. Here John tells us that Jesus appeared, He came down from heaven to earth to “take away sins.” And we all know that He did this ultimately by His death on the cross. Among the many things Jesus did at the cross, He completely dealt with the sin issue. In John 1:29 John the Baptist sees Jesus coming and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Hebrews 9:26 says, “He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” On the cross Jesus dealt with your sin and my sin. He dealt with our old nature, our rebellious heart, our guilt and the penalty of our sin when He died on the cross. Jesus died not only for sin, but for YOUR sin. No wonder we have so many hymns about the cross. It changed everything for us! Jesus has already dealt with our sin.

READ 1 John 3:6-8 (first part).

Throughout First John he contrasts Christians from a non-Christian, true believers from deceivers. Here we have yet another example of this. Christians, those who abide in Him (Jesus), “Little children,” those who know Him – they do not keep on sinning. Instead they practice righteousness. That’s their lifestyle.

By contrast deceivers, those who do not know Christ, those who are of the devil, unbelievers, they make a practice of sinning. What is John saying? He is not saying that Christians will never sin. And he is not saying that unbelievers will never do what is good and right. He is talking about a habitual behavior, a lifestyle. I was thinking about the best way to explain this. Let me give you a sports analogy. Do you all know who Tom Brady is? Many call him the GOAT, greatest of all time. He is statistically at least the

greatest quarterback to ever play the game. Aaron Rodgers, Joe Montana, Johnny Unitas, Roger Staubach, Troy Aikman and others were great. But Tom Brady stands out above the others based on his career stats and longevity. But I remember earlier this year, just a few weeks ago, that he and his team, the defending SB champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers had an awful game. Tom Brady threw for only 214 yards (half of his career avg) and he had no touchdowns and he threw an interception and his team lost, was shut out by the not very good New Orleans Saints. But that was one game. Overall that is not who Tom Brady is. The practice, the norm is that his teams generally win and usually by a comfortable margin. Generally, Tom Brady does well, throws more touchdowns than interceptions and for nearly 400 yards per game. What's my point here? Even a great player like Tom Brady is going to have an occasional bad game. That does not mean he is a bad player. That does not define who he is! Back in Q5 the question asked did that [person you named]'s sin define who they were? Of course not!

All that being said, we don't have to sin and here's why...

READ 1 John 3:8

Who is the tempter? Satan. I'm not saying that when I sin "the devil made me do it." That is a major copout. I sin because I choose to sin. Adam and Eve willfully sinned. But who was the evil instigator? The old serpent, the devil. This verse is one of those PTL verses. When Jesus died on the cross one of the things that He did was to defeat Satan. John says it strongly – He (Jesus) destroyed the works of the devil. Do you know what that means in regard to my sin and your sin? Jesus defeated the devil and He defeated sin (the works of the devil). Therefore, we can live a life of victory – we sing that hymn "Victory in Jesus." We don't have to sin anymore. We have the ability to not sin. But again, it is a daily struggle of our will. Daily submit my will to God's will.

READ 1 John 3:9-10

This continues the same general thought that we saw before but John introduces a new phrase, twice. "Born of God" is a reference to our salvation. We were "born again." We became children of God, His seed. And with that came a new nature which remains in us. This is an important point because this new nature sets us apart from unbelievers. As believers we now have two natures that war with each other – what Paul discusses at length in Romans 6 and 7. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul describe our old sinful nature which we got passed down to us from Adam. He also talks about our new nature in Christ. These two natures battle within our minds and spirit. We have a willful choice (point to your head and heart) to either be dominated by our old nature or by our new nature. On the other hand, unbelievers have only one nature, which is, their old fallen nature. V 10 says that "it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil." It is evident by the way they act, by their behavior.

John mentions two behaviors of a genuine Christian in verse 10, which is a transitional verse: (1) a practice, a lifestyle, of righteousness, Christ-like behavior and (2) a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will talk about this second one next time beginning in v 11.

To close out our thoughts let me read to you what John wrote in his gospel. READ John 1:11-13. At the end of the day our salvation is the work of God. We were not saved by our own will. God saved us. Jesus saved us. Now, having received Him into your hearts, live for Him! Look, I have nothing else I can give Him except ME. And I can give Him ME as a gift each and every day of my life – or not.