

Let No One Deceive You

He Who Practices Righteousness Is Righteous

1 John 3:4-9

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999*

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I. A Roman Error

What Christians Do

Our previous message ended with a statement made by John which was in the present tense, the active voice and the indicative mood. Simply put, 1 John 3:3 which reads, “**And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure**” (1 John 3:3), is not a command. It is a statement of fact. John is not telling Christians what they should do. He is telling Christians what they will do. This subject renders great confusion, especially among Roman Catholics.

The Works of Rome

As I was driving through the rain last Thursday I was listening to a radio show which was addressing the soon-to-be-voted-upon marriage initiative¹. A Roman Catholic caller asserted that the reason our society finds itself in the throes of this siege of immorality is because the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by faith and works is ignored. He contended that if Christians realized that their very salvation were hanging in the balance they would be more apt to get out of the blocks and begin establishing God’s righteousness on the earth.

Serving as Sons, Not Slaves

I must say, psychologically speaking, that this doctrine (or heresy) is the reason why many of my Roman Catholic friends live in a constant state of guilt and moral paralysis. For the scriptures do not teach us that we serve our Father as slaves—hoping He will find enough favor toward us to save us—but rather we serve our Father as sons and daughters, having beheld the manner of love bestowed upon us by His grace alone. So what about the works? Are they necessary? Absolutely! But certainly not in the way Rome teaches.

II. An Evangelical Error

The changed life of a Christian doesn’t secure his salvation. It evidences his salvation. And it is not merely Rome who has handled this doctrine improperly. Many evangelicals have also sloppily handled the law and the gospel. Some suggest that works are of no consequence at all. Others believe

¹ Proposition 22 which asserts that marriage should be between male and female only.

there should be works, but not with an eye upon the law as our standard. John addresses all these errors.

What is Sin?

Just in case there is any confusion as to what sin is, John makes it clear in verse 4.

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Unbelief—One of Many Sins

Some quote John 6:29 as an argument for the only work a Christian need concern himself with.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29).

They understand this verse to mean there is only one work with which Christians are to concern themselves—to believe. We must first understand that the context of sixth chapter of John informs us that the work of believing is clearly by grace. But more germane to our topic is the fact that Jesus never says this is the only work His followers were to do. Jesus assigned His followers to many more works than this. Truly, it is the sin of unbelief that finally consigns the sinner to hell, having rejected his only hope for salvation. But that certainly doesn't mean that unbelief is the only sin.

Sin is the transgression of the law. It is an objective moral standard which God committed to the written word. And our feelings about our behavior, whether those feelings² excuse us or convict us, must always be measured against the objective standard of God's word.

III. He Takes Away Our Sins

Not a Helper But a Savior

John now states the essence of the Christian faith. It is not that Jesus came to help us save ourselves. It is quite different.

“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5a).

² Often people will interpret these feelings as the law of God written on their hearts. Even if this is the case, the law written on our hearts would not be inconsistent with the written law.

Never Free From Sin in This Life

Jesus came to save us. He did not come to help us save ourselves or somehow be of aid in our salvation. He came to take away our sins. We must also realize that Jesus did not teach that we, in this life, would someday be completely free from the presence of sin. When John says He takes away our sins, John is referring to our being justified before God because of Christ's shed blood. I am never to think that I am justified before God because Jesus has made me such a good person. One need only read the previous chapter to see how impossible it would be for John to mean this.

“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

John is writing that we may not sin, (i. e. transgress the law.) But he also realizes what an impossible call this is, and therefore keeps the gospel before us. We have in this one verse (2:1) the Levitical instruction God gave to read the law and slay the sacrifice (law and gospel). John finishes this verse by directing our attention to the purity of the one sacrificed. He states, **“and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5b)**. Jesus was the perfectly sufficient and righteous sacrifice for the sins of men.

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

IV. The Character of a Christian

It is with our eyes directed toward the character of Jesus that John springboards into a discussion of human character.

“Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:6,7).

All Sin, All Need Repentance

Let me point something out that should be manifestly obvious to any student of the Scriptures. Everybody, except for Jesus, is a sinner. And everybody, except for Jesus, is a sinner from conception until the day they die. So any understanding of these verses which would yield a conclusion

inconsistent with that fact, is a wrong conclusion. So how are we to understand these words?

I think we need to understand these words in this manner: If you have been presented with a version of the Christian faith which teaches that sin is of no consequence—if you have been presented with a version of the Christian faith which teaches that repentance is unnecessary—you have not been presented with the Christian faith.

Understanding Verses Six and Seven—A Tree is Known...

John instructs us that people who live unrepentant lives have not seen, and don't know Jesus (verse 6). John is instructing us that people who teach you that the law is of no consequence and that repentance is unnecessary are deceivers (verse 7). When John writes, "**He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous**" (verse 7) he is basically re-stating what he wrote in 2:29, "**If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.**" In short, a tree will be known by its fruit. I might point out that a tree never decided to be a tree, nor did an apple tree ever decide to make apples. Only God can make a tree and when God makes a tree an apple tree, it, by its very nature, produces apples.

V. The Devil

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Revealing The True Master

In verse 8 John directs our eyes toward the character of the devil who sinned from the beginning. Those who continue in unrepentant sin are demonstrating who their master truly is. Sin arises from a contempt of God. Quite frankly these are people who do not fall under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They are not grieved by their sin, nor do they view their sin as much of an issue at all. They do not wish to repent of their sin (unless it can be shown to be of pragmatic value) and their sin certainly does not push them to recognize their continual need for the cross of Christ.

Following a Defeated Master

John finishes verse 8 with the statement, "**For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**" Those who have an understanding of the Christian faith which excludes any focus on

human behavior, John indicates, are following the devil. Those who follow the devil follow a defeated master. Paul pursues this idea in Romans 6.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it” (Romans 6:1,2)?

The Torture of the Treatment

People who have diseases will often times find that the treatment for the disease is more painful than the disease itself. I think what John and Paul are both teaching is something to the effect, “If you have been cured of the disease, why are you still putting yourself through the torture of the treatment?” Some treatments (like drugs) are addicting and difficult to discard and you might find yourself in a lifelong battle. But they must be discarded nonetheless. The disease is no longer master over us. We are not to live as if it is.

VI. Born of God

Let’s finish with an examination of verse 9. John writes,

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).

Born Again, Not Something We Do

Whoever has been born of God is in the perfect tense (an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated.) It is also in the passive voice (which represents the subject as being the recipient of the action.) In other words, when Jesus was telling Nicodemus (in John 3) that unless a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, He wasn’t telling Nicodemus to do something. He was simply telling Nicodemus what the case must be.

Seed Remains Versus Single Religious Experience

What John seems to be pointing out here is the external evidence of the rebirth—the person doesn’t not continue in sin. He then explains why. Because the same seed that opens the Christians eyes to recognize his sin—to recognize his need for a Savior—and to believe in the Savior—remains in him. We must not be deceived into thinking that a single past religious experience is a legitimate conversion.

How often I talk to people who believe their fate is sealed (in a positive way) because they attended a Christian school or went through a childhood church experience or because they walked forward at a crusade and were given assurance that Jesus would never leave nor forsake them, regardless of what road they took for the remainder of their lives. The Christian is incapable of living the way he used to live because he has been born of God.

Not Merely Free to Choose

I must also point out, over and against Arminianism, that the Spirit of God does not merely work in a person to the extent that they are now free to choose good or evil. The Spirit works in such a way as to assure the choice of good over evil. The saved person is incapable of continuing in the sin of unbelief. At conception, the sperm and the egg aren't merely given a choice, they actually become a person. At the second birth, we are not merely given a choice, we're given a new life.

A Persevering Seed

And finally I must point out the eternal nature of the seed. It does remain. The saved person will persevere. Although David's life became so abominable that the joy of his salvation was not to be found, the seed remained and the joy of his salvation was restored. So it is with all who are saved. They will persevere to the end.

Summary

To summarize, we read John's words thus: Sin is a transgression of the law. Jesus came to take away our sins so the truly saved person will no longer walk in them. People who preach a gospel devoid of repentance are deceivers and are not preaching the gospel at all. Those who live a gospel devoid of repentance are evidencing that they are following their true master, who is the devil. It is Christ and Christ alone who saves a person. And that salvation is made manifest (it is revealed) by that person's repentance and perseverance in the faith. Amen

Questions for Study

1. According to 1 John 3:3, what will Christians do?
2. Discuss the Roman Catholic disposition toward good works.
3. What are some evangelical errors regarding works?
4. How do we know what sin is?
5. Is unbelief the only sin with which Christians are to concern themselves?
6. Why was Jesus “manifested?”
7. Will Christians ever be completely free from the presence of sin in this life?
8. How are we to understand John when he says things like, “Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him?”
9. Does the Christian faith include repentance? Why is this important?
10. According to verse 8, what does the unrepentant sinner reveal?
11. Discuss the Apostle Paul’s reasoning in Romans 6:1,2.
12. Is being born again something people do? Explain.
13. Is a single, past religious experience enough to secure salvation, no matter what a person thinks or does for the remainder of his life?
14. Does being born again merely give a person the freedom to choose good and evil?
15. How long does God’s seed remain?