

The sermon

Intro

This morning we turn to 1 John to discover why Jesus came. John's black and white. John isn't concerned about nuance and saying everything that could be said. John isn't going into complexities. John's simple and straightforward.

I'm going to share where John's coming from and why he's saying what he's saying.

I'm not going to give caveat after caveat. I'm going to stress the heart of John's conviction.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Fight for purity with heavenly longing (3:1-3)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

God the Father gives love to us. How? By making us his children.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Becoming God's children creates relational challenges for us.

Those who are of the world (non-Christians), don't know God. Meaning they don't know the Father relationally. They might have heard about God. They might know some true facts about God. But they don't have a personal, saving relationship with God.

John's situation is revealed in 2:19.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. – 2:19

There were people who fellowshiped in the church for a period of time. Their stay was temporary. They didn't stick around. They left. John's verdict? *"they were not of us...they all are not of us."* Those who left aren't born again believers. They were unsaved people fellowshiping in the church. The world in the church.

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. – 3:2

We're God's children right now, but we haven't yet felt the full effects of salvation. Something's going to change when Jesus returns.

We will be like Jesus, but not equivalent to Jesus. Not God. We won't be omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), or omniscient (all-knowing).

We'll possess glorified, imperishable, resurrected bodies that eat and drink but can't die or decay.

On that day, we'll see Jesus as he is. We'll see Jesus in his shining radiance that makes the sun unnecessary (Rev 21:23).

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. – 3:3

This is our hope. Our confident expectation. What we're waiting for.

John draws a connection between our hope and our behavior. If we hope in Jesus, we purify ourselves in the direction of Jesus' purity. John's black and white. No beating around the bush. No exceptions. No clarifications. Hoping in Jesus leads to personal purity in this life.

How does hope result in purity?

I think of it like this. What will the kingdom of God be like? No death. No decay. No sin. No suffering. Submission to Jesus. Worship. Kindness. Unity. Peace. Truth.

If our longing is for this type of world, isn't that what we'd want in our lives today? Longing for the heavenly city leads to longing for purity today. We want our lives today to be a foretaste of heaven. We want our homes, our relationships, our church to be like the world to come: submission to Christ, worship, harmony, love, peace.

What you long for affects what you live for!

Practical question: how is your longing for the world to come affecting your purity today?

Point 2: Jesus came to take sin out of our lives (3:4-5)

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. – 3:4

John's characterizing the person who belongs to the world. The person who doesn't know God. This person "*practices lawlessness.*" Meaning they habitually break God's commands.

John defines sin: "*sin is lawlessness.*" To sin is to live contrary to God's commands. Failure to trust God's word. Failure to love. Failure to be humble. Lying, coveting, lusting.

Sin is doing what's prohibited: lying. Sin is failure to do what's commanded: give thanks to God. Sin is behavior: slander. Sin is our heart attitude: hatred.

You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. – 3:5

Here we have a clear reason why Jesus came: Jesus "*appeared to take away sins.*"

If you're like me, I'm guessing you're programmed to think John's saying Jesus came to take away the guilt our sins have caused. Jesus came to take away our sins so that we won't face God's wrath. Jesus came for forgiveness of sins. These are true. I think I say these things every single week.

But I think John means Jesus came to transform us so that sin wouldn't be present in our lives. **Titus 2:11-14** puts it this way:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Jesus went to the cross:

1. So that we'd turn from worldly passions.
2. So that we'd have self-control
3. So that we'd live godly lives.
4. So that we'd experience purity.
5. So that we'd be zealous, passionate for good works.

Like John, Paul connects hope in Christ's return with purity today.

John's concern is practical righteousness in this life. Jesus died to get sin out of our lives today. Pure thoughts. Pure desires. Pure speech. Pure behavior. So that we wouldn't be ruined by self-inflicted consequences. So that our hearts wouldn't be enslaved to the wrong things. So that we'd experience relational harmony. So that, through good works, we'd be salt and light (Matt 5:13-16) in a sin-enslaved world.

Practical question: where have I seen God take sin out of my life?

Point 3: True believers don't habitually practice sin (3:6-10)

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. – 3:6

No one who knows Jesus in saving relationship has a life that's habitually characterized by sin. **"keeps on sinning"** is best understood as the habitual present tense. Meaning the ongoing, regular, repeated pattern in their life is sin. John's saying if a person habitually sins, they're not a Christian.

Is this unsettling?

Remember, John's black and white. John's trying to make a clear distinction between those who left the church (habitually sin; don't belong to God) and those who are the church (habitually practice righteousness, do belong to God). He wants these Christians to be absolutely clear that those people who were once with them were not Christians.

John isn't saying Christians never sin. Earlier John acknowledged Christians do sin.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. – 2:1-2

John told Christians how to deal with their sin. Remind yourself that Jesus propitiated your sins. Jesus has appeased the Father's wrath against my sins. Jesus took my place. I won't be punished.

So John isn't saying Christians never sin.

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. – 3:7

This is the flip side. Those who habitually practice righteousness belong to God. John's saying you can judge a book by its cover. Jesus said the same: *"You will recognize them by their fruits...A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit"* (Matt 7:16, 18). James said, *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him (Jas 2:14)?"* Implied answer: no.

John's concern is that Christians won't be deceived. When people come into the church and act like sin is no big deal. You can be a Christian and live just like the world. You can live however you want if you say a prayer. John says don't buy any of that garbage. Those people don't know God.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. – 3:8

Those who habitually sin belong to the devil, not God. If you live like the devil, you belong to the devil. If you live like God, you belong to God. Very simple logic. Black and white.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. – 3:9

John's saying being born again ("*born of God*") makes a radical difference in a person's life. When the Holy Spirit indwells a person, they change. Without fail.

It's not that the born again person never sins. It's that the born again person's life isn't characterized by habitual rebellion against God.

They've repented and believed. They have a new attitude towards sin. It's bad. It ruins me. It's rebellion against God. Jesus had to die so I could be forgiven. Jesus died so I would be zealous for good works. Anyone who truly understands the cross has a changed stance towards Jesus and sin. So they live differently. John's black and white.

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. – 3:10

"evident" means clear, plain, easily known. You can judge a book by its cover. You can tell who's God's child and who's the devil's child by how they live. First test, do they obey God's word? Second test, do they love fellow Christians? True Christians practice righteousness!

You might be saying, but I still struggle with sinful thoughts? I must not be a Christian. That's not my goal. God wants Christians to have total assurance. To hope for something we believe is true for us (3:1). God wants non-Christians to have zero assurance.

How can I know I'm a Christian?

1. Is my life characterized by habitual obedience?
2. Do I love Christian people?
3. Has God changed my heart?
4. Do I share God's attitude towards sin?
5. Do I love God?

Practical question: can I tell the difference between a Christian and an impostor?

Point 4: Jesus came to destroy Satan's works (3:8)

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. – 3:8

Satan "***has been sinning from the beginning.***" Satan was created very early on. Satan sinned very early on. Satan has been sinning since.

1. In the garden, Satan questioned God's word (Gen 3:1).
2. In the garden, Satan called God a liar (Gen 3:4).

Satan's work is creating doubt and disbelief.

3. In the garden, Satan told Eve disobedience will be good for you (Gen 3:5).

Satan's work is tempting us to sin (Gen 3:6).

4. Satan "***has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ***" (2 Cor 4:4) by instigating the fall, which brought sin and death (Rom 5:12) into God's "***very good***" world (Gen 1:31).

Satan's work is universal blindness that impacts all the cultures of the world.

5. In Job's case (Job 1:12), Satan destroyed a man's property (Job 1:16-17).
6. In Job's case (Job 1:12), Satan killed a man's children (Job 1:18-19).
7. In Job's case (Job 2:6), Satan physically afflicted a man from head to toe with sores (Job 2:7).

Satan's work is afflicting Christians so that they'll turn against God.

8. Satan creates division in the church (Jas 3:14-16), which includes using our righteous anger against us (Eph 4:26-27).

Satan's work is creating problems between Christians.

9. In 1 Peter 5:8, our "*adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" Meaning persecution. In Revelation, demonic Babylon (Rev 18:2) was "*drunk with the blood of the saints*" (Rev 17:6).

Satan work is turning us away from God through threats and intimidation.

10. 1 Timothy 4:1 speaks of "*teachings of demons*" (1 Tim 4:1) and 2 Timothy 2:26 speaks of false teachers "*being captured by him [the devil] to do his [Satan's] will.*"

Satan's work is creating false beliefs that oppose God.

11. In Revelation, Babylon = Rome (Rev 17:5-6, 14, 18), "*a dwelling place for demons*" (Rev 18:2), enticed people with sexual immorality (Rev 17:2, 4; 18:2-3, 9).

Satan's work is shaping human cultures so that we pursue stuff and sexual immorality instead of God.

Jesus came to rescue us from these attacks.

Do you see how the end of Satan's works fits with John's repeated black and white assertion that believers don't habitually sin? **Jesus came to rescue us from Satan's influence so that our lives would be righteous and pure.**

Jesus came to overturn Satan's work in our lives so that we would trust God and reject false beliefs. Cling to God in calamity. Stand firm under intimidation. Handle our anger well. Have harmonious relationships in the church. Reject the immorality of the world because we love God's ways. In short, Jesus came to make us new creations whose lives flourish because of devotion to God. To make us a people zealous for good works.

Practical question: in what areas of my life have Satan's works been destroyed?

Christian, rejoice in the destruction of Satan's works in your life!

Conclusion

Maybe you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. Maybe you're considering Christianity. What does John have to say to you?

First, we don't come into the world as children of God. We came into the world as children of the devil. We have to move from child of the devil to child of God.

Second, sin is our problem.

So how can we be rescued from sin and the devil?

Jesus came *"to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt 20:28). Jesus died as a substitute so that whoever believes will be forgiven of their sins and have eternal life. If you trust in Jesus, not yourself, no more fears about whether or not your good is good enough for a holy God.

This same Jesus rose from the dead, furnishing proof that you can take his word to the bank.

Jesus also came to make us new people. New thinking, new desires, new passions, new behavior.

Jesus said, *"Whoever believes in me... Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38).

How can Jesus' promises be true for you? Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Believe that Satan has ruined you through sin. Believe that Jesus will rescue you from sin.

Tell us if you believe.