

Sin...or No Sin

1 John 3: 1–10

Nov. 15, 2009

I. Introduction

- A. In case you are wondering if the title for the message this morning
 - 1. Was inspired by a popular TV show – you're right
- A. But don't get any ideas that the Apostle John was writing about a game of chance
 - 1. About beating the odds, or even some mysterious force called fate
- A. The only similarities I can see between our text, and the "Deal...or No Deal" show
 - 1. Is that they both have to do with making choices
 - a. And the fact that the choices we make, moment by moment in life
 - (1) Will lead us closer to, or farther away from, the grace and mercy of God
 - 2. And an outcome that is infinitely more important in light of our eternal destiny
 - a. Than the possibility of winning thousands of dollars, or even a million bucks
 - 3. After all, that's only money – this is **your life/my life** that John is talking about here

II. Our text this morning was written by one of the closest friends of Jesus

- A. During the time of his earthly ministry
 - 1. John was an eyewitness to much of the teaching and miracles of Jesus
 - a. As well as his arrest, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension
- A. And as he writes this letter, or epistle, John is still looking back at those events
 - 1. And trying to help his readers/us understand what it means
 - a. To accept as truth the claim that Jesus was/is the Messiah, the Savior of the world
 - 2. And how believing in his death and resurrection makes a real difference
 - a. In the choices that we make and the way that we live our lives today
- A. We should remember that by the time this letter was written, the gospel has been spread
 - 1. To people throughout a wide portion of the known world at that time
- A. There has been resistance to the message, particularly from the Jewish leaders
 - 1. Who continued to hold on to their preconceived ideas about the Messiah
 - a. Coming to lead the nation of Israel to freedom and victory over her enemies
 - (1) Ideas that this simple carpenter turned teacher
 - (a) From the tiny village of Nazareth, in Galilee, just didn't fit
- A. There were also people, Jewish and non-Jewish, who heard the message of Jesus

1. And believed it, but they found certain parts of Jesus' teaching
 - a. About God's kingdom and how citizens of that kingdom are to live
 - (1) Difficult to understand, and in some cases, even more difficult to accept
 2. And so, in the way that is common to people of any age
 - a. What they didn't understand, or what they didn't want to follow
 - (1) They tried to rationalize away
 - b. Or they tried to make it fit with human wisdom/reasoning
 - (1) Rather than to simply trust and obey
- A. One of those rationalizations that seems to have gained some popular acceptance
1. Was the teaching that, since a person is saved, and made right with God
 - a. By what Jesus accomplished on our behalf on the cross
 2. And since we can't do anything to earn God's grace and forgiveness
 - a. Then it doesn't really matter how a Christian lives
 - (1) As long as he/she believes in salvation through Jesus
- A. We can see that issue addressed by several of the NT writers
1. And that seems to be one of the false ideas that John is addressing in our text
 - a. Set within the larger framework of many other warnings and admonitions
- III. Our verses from Chapter 3 are probably connected to the thoughts
- A. Found at the end of Chapter 2 regarding the believer's relationship with God
1. John makes frequent use of the language of "abiding" in Christ
 - a. In a similar manner to the way that a branch is attached to a vine
 2. We heard that illustration in John's gospel account of Jesus' teachings
 - a. It must have become a favorite
- A. And so our text begins with the words – See what love the Father has given us
1. Bestowed, as a free gift upon all those who believe -
 - a. Those who are attached to, or abiding in, Jesus -
 - (1) So that we should rightly be called "children of God"
 - b. Have you ever thought about what it means to be a child of Almighty God?
- A. Someone has likened our situation to a hypothetical one – Say, a prince or a millionaire
1. Finds a ragged, vicious orphan boy scrounging around in the city garbage dump
 - a. Takes him home, adopts him into his own family, and gives him all the same privileges and honors as his own sons
 2. What a wonderful gift that would be, we might say

- a. And yet that would be a mere trifle compared with the honor that God has bestowed on us when we become his children
 - A. The world, that is the unbelieving world, doesn't recognize our status that way, John says
 - 1. But then they didn't, and still don't, recognize/accept Jesus for who he was, either
 - A. And this position, as God's adopted children, is a present reality
 - 1. And it's not just something that we look forward to in the future, according to our text
 - a. We are children of God now; what we will be has not yet been revealed
 - A. In other words, the state or condition in which we will live in the hereafter
 - 1. Has not been made completely clear to us, but what has been made clear
 - a. Is that, when that time comes, and we see Jesus face to face
 - (1) Then we will be made just like him, for we will see him as he is
 - (a) In all the perfection and purity of his heavenly glory
 - b. What a glorious future we have to look forward to!
- A. Then John slips in this little zinger – And all who have this hope
 - 1. That is, the hope of seeing Jesus and becoming like him **someday**
 - a. Purify themselves, or work at being made pure, here and now, just as he is pure
- A. And that brings up the question we asked earlier – if we are saved simply by believing
 - 1. In the sacrificial blood of Jesus, and we are made righteous before God
 - a. Because of what Jesus has done for us, then how can we do anything more
 - (1) To purify ourselves, or to make ourselves pure, like Jesus
- A. That's a question that was wrestled with among the early church believers
 - 1. And I believe it is at the root of many discussions across the church today
 - a. A question about making choices - What I have called – “Sin...or No Sin”
 - 2. And I will admit up front that I don't have any easy answers for us this morning
 - a. But I believe we need to ask ourselves the question
 - (1) Because the answer we give forms the basis for much of how we live
- IV. The Apostle John lays it out for us in simple terms here in these verses –
- A. Righteousness is from God, sin is of the devil
 - 1. Those who do what is right are following God's ways
 - a. Those who commit sin are following the ways of the devil
 - 2. In fact John says, as opposed to being children of God, as he mentioned earlier
 - a. Those who commit sin could be considered to be children of the devil
 - (1) Because sin has been a characteristic of the devil from the very beginning

- A. Sounds pretty straightforward doesn't it – and it would be if any one of us could say
 - 1. Since I became a believer I've lived a totally pure life, I've never sinned
 - a. In word or thought or deed, I've never been anything short of perfection
 - 2. Anybody here want to make that claim this morning?
- A. So what is John saying to us here?
 - 1. That if we find ourselves even a little bit short of perfection
 - a. Then that means we are not really Christians, not really children of God?
- A. Biblical scholars have a way of taking simple texts and making them really complicated
 - 1. I found at least three different ways to interpret John's message here
 - a. Let me share them with you briefly for your consideration
- A. The first is the simplest – that John meant exactly what it sounds like he meant
 - 1. A Christian does not sin – cannot sin, in fact
 - a. Because a person who truly believes in Jesus is given a new heart
 - (1) A new life, and a new spirit that comes from God
 - b. If we have truly been transformed in this way then we cannot sin
 - 2. In other words, just as we were saying
 - a. If I commit any sin, it means that I have never really become a child of God
 - 3. One commentator, who was promoting this understanding, made the statement –
 - a. I do not believe that since I became a Christian, I have ever done anything
 - (1) That would grieve the Holy Spirit of God in any way
 - b. I'm glad that I do not have to be the judge of the accuracy of that statement
 - (1) I believe that I am a saint in God's eyes, but I am not perfect yet
- A. A second interpretation is that John was speaking about a condition of the Christian
 - 1. In which he cannot commit a sin in the way that we usually think about sin
 - a. Because, when a person becomes a believer, his/her sins are forgiven –
 - (1) Sins of the past, sins of the present **and** sins of the future
 - b. In other words, anything that a Christian does that would be considered sinful
 - (1) Is already covered by the blood of Jesus, so it is not counted as sin
 - 2. I believe there's at least a grain of truth in that understanding
 - a. But again, the danger is that we take it too far
 - (1) And assume that no matter what we do
 - (a) It will not affect our relationship with God, or our eternal salvation
 - b. That is the basis for the argument in favor of "once saved, always saved"

- A. And a third understanding is that the language John uses indicates a pattern
 - 1. A habit, or inclination if you will, either toward sin
 - a. Or a pattern of righteous living in which any sinful behavior
 - (1) Is the exception, rather than the rule
- A. While I would not necessarily rule out any other interpretation
 - 1. I would lean toward this last way of understanding what John was saying
 - a. In part, because it seems to be more in line with an earlier verse
 - (1) Found in the beginning of the second chapter of this same letter
 - b. Where John writes – My little children, I am writing these things to you
 - (1) So that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate
 - (a) With the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous
 - i. And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins
 - c. And later in this same chapter that we are looking at, we find these words –
 - (1) Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action
 - d. And **by this** we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts
 - (1) Before him [God] whenever our hearts condemn us
 - (a) Because God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything
- A. Along with other scriptures that we might look at, I believe these passages tell us
 - 1. That while we are living here in this world, we are not immune to temptation
 - a. And that we do not live perfect lives
 - 2. But, we dare not use our imperfection as an excuse to not care about sin
- A. Along with John, we should say – Jesus came, or was revealed, to take away sins
 - 1. And in him, that is in Jesus, there was no sin
 - a. So then, if we abide with him, and he abides in us through the Holy Spirit
 - (1) There should also be no sin found in us
 - 2. It's not Jesus' fault, or the Spirit's fault, if we do not live perfect lives
 - a. And it doesn't even help to say – The devil made me do it
 - 3. If we sin, it simply means that **we** have given in to temptation
 - a. Either by an intentional choice, or by lack of attention
- A. There is also, within these verses, more than a little hint that the power to escape sin
 - 1. Is a part of becoming a believer, or a child of God
- A. Those who have been born of God, John says, do not sin
 - 1. Because there is a part of God that takes up residence within the believer

- A. Again, there is some disagreement about what John is referring to here
 - 1. But the most common assumption is that this “seed” represents the Holy Spirit
 - a. And it is the presence of this Spirit of God that makes it possible
 - (1) To resist temptation and sin, and to live a righteous life
 - A. It might also refer to God’s word living within us
 - 1. As someone once commented - All I really want in life is for the Word of God to take up residence inside of me and form me into Christ-likeness
 - a. I believe that would be a worthy goal for each one of us today
 - A. The fact of Jesus’ resurrection means very little to us in this life
 - 1. Unless we also accept that believing in a risen, living Savior
 - a. Makes it possible/attainable for us to live like him
 - A. A fellow by the name of Paul Rees put it this way - The real accent in the New Testament is not on how human I am, but on how Christian I can be.
 - 1. Likewise, the focus of John’s discussion of sin here is not to point out our failures
 - a. But to point us to the possibility of right living – doing those things that Jesus did
 - (1) Bringing light and goodness into a dark world
 - (a) That often sees the human tendency to sinfulness as inevitable
 - i. In our personal lives and in the world situation in general
 - A. Arden K. Barden says it this way - It is not the way we deal with our human situation that is the basis for hope--hope is the basis for how we deal with our human situation.
 - 1. And that hope is more than just optimism, but hope in the person of Jesus Christ
- V. It would not do to leave this subject this morning without also being reminded
- A. That the way in which our sinful nature and our sinful behavior is dealt with
 - 1. Is one and the same – forgiveness based on the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood
 - A. It’s called grace because we don’t in any way deserve God’s forgiveness
 - 1. And it is freely available to us, for our salvation
 - a. And as a way to deal with those times when we fall into sin
 - A. It is the only way to deal with our broken relationship with God
 - 1. And it is the only way to live in the kind of harmony that we are called to
 - a. As God’s people, children of God
 - A. So we should not be at all bashful about asking for God’s forgiveness
 - 1. And neither should we be bashful about seeking the forgiveness
 - a. Of our sisters and brothers when our imperfection causes hurt and pain

- A. Of all the sins John could have pointed to here, it is the lack of love that he mentions
 - 1. As an indicator of the person who is following the ways of the devil
- A. May God grant us the grace and power to love as Jesus loved
 - 1. And to the extent that we allow the Spirit to move us in that direction
 - a. To live as Jesus lived
 - 2. If we can do that, the choice is already made for us – NO SIN!