

The Nature, Origin, and Conqueror of Sin - *1 John 3:4-10a*

Introduction – John returns to the argument of the moral test of abiding in Christ, a subject he covered in 2:3-6. There, he made the point that you couldn't say that you know Christ while not keeping His commandments. Here, he addresses the lie that one could be walking in sin and at the same time assured that they are abiding in Christ. The false teachers seemed to have elevated a class of Christians to an enlightened status where morality was a matter of indifference. Today, our sins are often excused in our unbelieving culture as disorders, genetic makeup, or poverty; and Christians often fall into the same excuse-making habits. However, if we will acknowledge the hard truth of our sin, we open the way for the liberating truth of the gospel in what Jesus Christ accomplished for His people.

The Text (ESV) - ⁴Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever 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. ⁹No 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. ¹⁰By 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....

The Nature of Sin (vv4-7) – The law of God is a leveling tool of equality. There is no dual standard of morality in Christ. It is not enough to see that sin is “falling short” or “unrighteousness,” a deviation from what is right. Nor is it enough to evaluate sin by whether or not someone else is hurt by it. Sin is lawlessness. What that means is that all sin is rebellion against our Sovereign King (Psalm 51:4). This is why when you break one command, you have broken them all (James 2:10f). True repentance is not simply stopping the sin; it is turning in loyalty to your Lord.

Why Did Christ Come? (v5) – His appearance (the word is the same as in 2:28, 3:2) was to take away the sin and lawless rebellion of the world (John 1:29, 2 Cor 5:21) by taking that sin upon Himself.

The Nature of Abiding in Christ (vv6-7) – The logical deduction follows. If the eternal nature of the Son of God is sinless, and if the purpose of His coming was to remove sin, then no one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. If we continue our practice of rebellion then we have not seen Him or known Him (with faith). *Sin and Christ are irreconcilably at enmity with each other* (Stott). Therefore, “let no one deceive you...” v7. And do not deceive yourself.

The Origin of Sin (vv8-10) – Righteousness is as consonant with the character of Christ as sin/rebellion is consonant with the character of the devil, who “*is sinning from the beginning*”. The deception was (v7) and continues to be, often in our own excuse-making, that you could “be” righteous without necessarily bothering to practice righteousness. In our day, one of the manifestations of this has been the Lordship-debate (accept Jesus now as your Savior, later you can decide to make Him Lord). This line of thinking is from the devil.

The Work of our Savior/Lord (v8-9) – John wants to make the antithesis very clear: the characteristic work of the devil is to sin/rebel, and the characteristic work of Jesus is to destroy those works by saving the world. In Christ, we escape from the tyranny of the devil and his works.

We Don't Practice and Persevere in Sin (v9) – His seed abides in us (v9) as we abide in Him (v6) as we have an anointing from Him (2:20). All of this is pointing to the radical new birth that is ours in Jesus Christ and therefore it is impossible for us to be born again and be indifferent to sin. The implication is that those who are in Christ have gone through a deep, radical, inward transformation that turns us towards holiness, the holiness of Jesus.

The Personal, Practical Issue – We may not be hearing from some false teacher that it is fine to go on sinning. Even so, this is what the devil continues to do; he is constantly deceiving. Perhaps you are entangled in some vice, or possibly there is a cold lethargy upon you towards holiness, or you have grown worldly. This is not proof that you are lost, but having heard the Word, if you do not turn to Christ you have no assurance of your salvation. True assurance knows that salvation is by grace through faith alone, but that faith produces a heart of obedience and loyalty. False assurance says that it is legalistic to worry about obedience – “we are under grace!” Obedience grows in the faithful. Excuses grow in the presumptuous.

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 – v10a. – If you sin and turn around you have an Advocate and it is all taken care of. If you sin in rebellion and remain there, how could you possibly find any assurance that you have an Advocate? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.