

Child of God / Child of Satan

1 John 3:4-10

Introduction

1. John Chrysostom lived from c. A.D. 344 – 407. He was the bishop of Constantinople and one of the greatest preachers to ever live. So powerful was his preaching that he earned the name *Chrysostomos* meaning “golden mouthed.” Tradition has it that he was arrested by the Roman emperor whose wife Eudoxia despised John. The emperor sought to make John recant of alleged heresies but without success. So the emperor discussed with his advisers what could be done to the prisoner. ‘Shall I put him in a dungeon?’ the emperor asked. “ ‘No,’ one of his counselors replied, ‘for he will be glad to go. He longs for the quietness wherein he can delight in the mercies of his God.’ “ ‘Then he shall be executed!’ said the emperor. “ ‘No,’ was the answer, ‘for he will also be glad to die. He declares that in the event of death he will be in the presence of the Lord.’ “ ‘What shall we do then?’ the ruler asked. “ ‘There is only one thing that will give Chrysostom pain,’ the counselor said. ‘To cause Chrysostom to suffer, make him sin. He is afraid of nothing except sin.’” What a testimony. What a witness. He is afraid of nothing except sin.
2. The apostle John knew that our attitude toward sin is important. He knew it was also revealing, giving evidence of whether we are a child of God or a child of Satan. John saw no middle ground on this. This was not a gray area open to debate. If you love sin and it is your life you are a child of Satan. If you love righteousness and it is your life, you are a child of God. John made this clear in 2:29 and 3:3. Now he drives home that truth again as he divides the world of humanity into 2 categories, 2 families: children of God and children of Satan.

Transition

Looking at things from the child of God’s perspective John addresses 3 subjects: 1) the wickedness of sin, 2) the work of the Savior and 3) the walk of the saint.

I. Recognize the wickedness of sin. 3:4, 7, 8

John begins with the problem that plagues all of humanity, the problem of sin. Furthermore, he provides a definition and a description of sin.

1. Sin is disobedience. 3:4

× Whoever – is all-inclusive.

Commits – lit. [cont.] does sin (*hamartia*)

Also lawlessness (*anomian*) commits – lit. [cont.] does

And sin is lawlessness – a spirit of rebellion

× In 2:29 John spoke of those who practice or do righteousness. Now in 3:4 John speaks of those who practice or do lawlessness. Sin and lawlessness (rebellion) is their lifestyle, their way of life. It is their continual, habitual action.

× Sin – to miss the mark

Lawlessness – only here in John’s letter, law (*nomos*) does not occur at all in 1 John. It is more than the absence of God’s law. It is a willful rejection and an active disobedience against God’s moral standard, which is a characteristic of the child of the devil. Indeed in verse 8 John makes this connection directly. The false teachers

who reject John's moral test may be foremost in mind, but the "whoever" which begins the verse leaves out no one. John wants to be clear and he leaves no room for confusion.

- × Sin is not amoral it is an abomination.
Sin is not a weakness it is wickedness.
Sin is not a defect it is disobedience.
- × Sin is a defiant will, a clenched fist and a set jaw in the face of God. It is saying no to God in attitude and action. You know what you are doing and you willingly choose what you are doing. It is rebellion. It is disobedience.

2. Sin is deceptive. 3:7

- × Little children (*teknia*) – term of tender affection and fatherly concern.
- × Deceive (pre. imp.) – Lenski paraphrases it, "Let no one engage in deceiving you, i.e. even try it!" The word means to lead astray and recalls the previous warning of 2:26. The false teachers attempt to lead us astray 1) doctrinally – concerning who the Savior is and what the Savior did and 2) morally – concerning sin, our need to acknowledge it and our need to avoid it. They minimized sin, if not denying it all together.
- × John counterpunches and his point is plain: The one who practices, lives a life of righteousness, is righteous. We will act out who we are. The practice of righteousness is not what enables us to be righteous, but is the evidence that we are righteous, righteous just as He [Jesus, the Son of God] is righteous.
- × Do not be deceived. If you belong to Christ, Christ will be the pattern of your life (2:6). You will follow Him, imitate Him, and strive to be like Him.
- × The lost person will occasionally do what is right but he will continually sin. The saved person will continually do what is right but occasionally sin.
- × Jesus reminds us in Matt. 7:16, "You will know them by their fruit."
- × Paul would add in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

3. Sin is of the devil. 3:8

- × For the 1st time in the letter, John refers specifically and directly to the devil (cf. 3:12; and also 2:13-14, 5:18-19). The word will appear 4 times in verses 8-10. Devil (*diabolos*) means accuser or slanderer. Satan, from the Hebrew (*Satan*) means adversary.
- × The devil's fall is hinted at in Isaiah 14:12-15, which also records the fall of the king of Babylon and in Ezek. 28:11-15, which records the fall of the king of Tyre.
- × Stephen Olford points out that in his writings, John exposes the 3-fold strategy the devil uses to defeat humanity.
 - He operates as a liar – intellectual sabotage – John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

- He operates as a sinner – moral sabotage – 1 John 3:8, “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.”
- He operates as a killer – physical sabotage – John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” Also note 1 John 3:12, “not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”
- × Here in verse 8 John highlights the devil’s moral sabotage and makes plain that those who live a life of sin (sin is pre. tense) provide evidence that the devil is their spiritual father. His nature is their nature. Their actions are his actions. “He has been sinning” (*NIV*) all his life and so have they.
- × From the beginning – the beginning of sin when the devil first sinned against God. Specifically when we do not know, only that it occurred before Genesis 3, and possibly even before the creation of Adam and Eve. Satan is the source of sin. He is its originator, its instigator. Those who live in and enjoy the world of sin give irrefutable evidence that they are his children.

II. Remember the work of the Savior. 3:5, 8

John has exposed the truth about sin and the truth about Satan and the truth about those who live for and love sin. Now he moves to examine the truth about the Savior. Since sin and Satan is our problem, Jesus provides an answer, a solution for both.

1. Jesus delivers us from sin. 3:5

- × John gives attention both to the work and person of Christ. He again makes clear a basic theological truth:
He could do what He did because He was who He was AND because He was who He was He could do what He did.
- × First question: What did He do? Answer: He came, He was manifested (*NIV* “appeared”) to take away our sin. He was not born, He appeared, implying His preexistence.
He took away (lift up, bear away, remove) our sins (plural). As John the Baptist said in John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
- × Second question: How could He take away our sins? Answer: lit. sin in Him not is. John teaches us that:
 - Jesus is the righteous one (2:29).
 - Jesus is the pure one (3:3).
 - Jesus is the sinless one (3:5).
 As 2 Cor. 5:21 teaches, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
 As Heb. 4:15 teaches, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
 As Heb. 7:25-26 teaches, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.”

2. Jesus destroys the work of Satan. 3:8a

- × For this purpose – reveals the intention of His 1st coming.
Son of God – 1st of 7 occurrences in the letter (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20). It emphasizes the deity and divine nature of Jesus Christ and the gravity and severity of the cosmic conflict with the devil. No one but He could have stepped onto the stage of human history and dealt with our archenemy.
- × Destroy the works of the devil. – Looks to the decisive defeat of the devil at Calvary and the cross. Victory over Satan is one aspect of the multifaceted work of Christ. He is our satisfaction, justification, redemption and reconciliation. He is also our righteousness and our example. He is also our victor, the one who has set us free from the enemy who held us as captives of war. By invading the enemies' territory, He dealt him a deathblow at Calvary, the empty tomb an eternal monument of His victory.
- × Hebrews 2:14, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."
- × Jesus "the captain of our salvation" (Heb. 2:10) came and saved the day at the cross. At that moment, everything the devil had done or will do was destroyed.
- × Robert Funk of the infamous "Jesus Seminar" is way off base when he says "Jesus was a subversive sage. His witticisms tended to undermine the everyday view of things." No, he was not a subversive sage. He was a liberating Savior who destroyed the works of the devil.

III. Rejoice in the walk of the saint. 3:6, 9, 10

John has instructed us on sin, Satan and the Savior. Now he gives us a lesson on the walk, the life of the saint, the believer, the child of God, who has been set free from sin and delivered from Satan by the perfect work of the sinless Son of God. What is life in Christ like? 3 wonderful blessings are ours.

1. Enjoy a new liberty. 3:6

- × Verse 6 logically flows from verse 5. Because there is no sin in Jesus then there will be no sin in the child of God. Now, "what on earth does that mean?!" Is John contradicting what he said in 1:8 & 10? Numerous interpretations of this verse have been set forth. They include:
 - 1) Sinless perfection
 - 2) Christians do not commit certain sins (e.g. the sins of the false teachers).
 - 3) Christians do not sin in their new nature.
 - 4) John is describing the theoretical and ideal, not reality.
 - 5) Christians do not commit willful or deliberate sin.
 - 6) Christians when abiding in Christ do not sin.
 - * 7) The Christian does not commit habitual sin.
- × This last view is reflected in the *NIV* translation, "No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning," and gives attention to the emphasis in this context of the present tense verb. This is the most satisfactory explanation. The Christian has a new liberty because sin no longer is the character and conduct of his life. It is the exception not the rule.

Set free from the bondage of sin and Satan and the child of God will not live in continual sin and rebellion. He may fall into sin but he will not walk in it.

- He does not love sin; he loathes it.
- He does not delight in sin; he despises it.
- × Those who do live in sin reveal that they have 1) neither seen Christ or 2) known Christ. Both are perfect tense verbs. Never at any time have they spiritually envisioned the Savior so as to know Him in a personal, saving relationship. Sin and Satan is their life, not righteousness and Jesus. In contrast, the child of God has experienced a decisive break with sin. Sin no longer controls their life, the Son of God does for they continually abide in Him.

2. Enjoy a new life. 3:9

- × Born of God is in the perfect tense and speaks of a past action with continuing results. It looks to the new birth of our regeneration / conversion, to what Jesus called being “born from above” in John 3.
- × Born of God, we do not continue in sin (pre. tense), we do not practice sin. Why?
- × His seed remains (cont.) in him and he cannot sin (cont.) because he has been born (W.A.R.) of God. Seed is 1) Holy Spirit, 2) Word of God, or 3) the new nature. The new nature is the best view. The believer cannot continue in sin because of the divine nature that he received through the new birth. Jesus said in John 3:3, “...Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Transition

Enjoy a new liberty. Enjoy a new life.

3. Enjoy a new love. 3:10

- × This verse summarizes a discussion that began in 2:3, and it also prepares us for a more extended discussion to follow. Two tests are set forth that distinguish a child of God from a child of the devil:
 - 1) Do you practice righteousness?
 - 2) Do you love others?
- × John puts the issue in negative terms, not practicing righteousness and not loving others. Plummer is right, “Love is righteousness in relation to others.” Those who hate sin, who have been set free from the devil and are born of God will practice righteousness and love others. This is what our God does. This is what His children will do. You see, “the child has the distinguishing marks of his parents. What he sees his Father do, that is what he will do. What he sees His Savior do, that is what he will do too.”

Conclusion

- × Vance Havner, the wonderful and witty North Carolina evangelist summed it up beautifully, “Jesus is all we have; He is all we need and all we want. We are shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence!”
Erasmus (1466 – 1536), a leading Christian humanist and somewhat timid reformer of the 16th century, was certainly on target when he said, “By a carpenter mankind was made, and only by that Carpenter can mankind be remade.” (Both quotes in *Uplook*, Feb./Mar. 1998, p. 6).
- × And you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins and to destroy the works of the devil.
- × “Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came. Ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah! What a Savior!” (Philip Bliss, 1838 – 1876).