

Why Did the Son of God Invade Planet Earth?

1 John 3:4-10

Introduction: 1) As the storm clouds of World War II were approaching, German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached a sermon on November 26, 1939 entitled “Death is Swallowed Up in Victory.” He brought his message to a close with these words:

“And when the darkest hour comes over us, then we want to hear the voice of Jesus Christ calling in our ear: Victory is won. Death is swallowed up in victory. Take comfort. And may God grant that then we will be able to say: I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. It is in this faith that we want to live and die.”

While his text on that occasion came from I Corinthians 15, his words surely resonate with these verses in I John which remind us that Jesus Christ appeared to both take away our sins (v. 5) and to destroy the works of the devil (v. 8). We can indeed hear the voice of Jesus in this text calling in our ear: “Victory is won.”

2) John has informed us that we have been born of God and are now His children (2:29-3:2). He also taught us that the practice of righteousness provides evidence that one is a child of God. Now he proceeds to show how being a child of God is

incompatible with the practice of sin (Akin, 139). The two just do not go together. They are enemies to the death.

3) John has challenged us to live a life of righteousness (2:29) and purity (3:3) based upon or grounded in the promise of the 2nd coming of Christ. Now he gives the same challenge based upon his 1st coming (3:5, 8). John Stott puts it in proper perspective: “If Christ appeared first both to ‘take away our sins’ and to ‘destroy the devil’s work’, and if, when he appears a second time, ‘we shall see him’ and, in consequence, ‘we shall be like him’, how can we possibly go on living in sin? To do so would be to deny the purpose of both his “appearing’s” (pages 132-33). Thus His “two comings” serve as theological, eschatological bookends to inspire and motivate us “to walk in the same way in which he walked” (2:6), to practice righteousness (2:29; 3:7, 10), to purify ourselves (3:3) and to love our brother (3:10) as we abide in Him (3:6, 9).

4) My friend Thabiti Anyabwile points out the apostle John addresses basically 4 different groups of people in his letters. They are: 1) Fully assured Christians, 2) Christians struggling with assurance, 3) Falsely assured non-Christians and 4) Known Non-Christians. These verses are, of course, for all of us, but John especially has group #3 in his sights. His goal is to shock them and wake them up to their true spiritual status.

I. He came to deliver us from sin. 3:4-6

- 1) Sin is the great enemy and problem of humanity and only God can rescue us and solve our problem. That is one reason that when I teach Bible interpretation (also called “hermeneutics”), I always teach my students to ask these 2 questions as they begin to examine a passage: 1) What does this text teach me about God (His character and ways)? 2) What does this text teach me about fallen, sinful humanity (that requires the grace of God)?
- 2) John addresses both of these questions in vs. 4-6, though he will do it in reverse order. First he notes the problem. Then he provides the solution.

1) Christ appeared and dealt with sin 3:4-5

- 1) There is a universal truth John sets before us in v. 4: “Everyone (no exceptions) who makes a practice of sinning (pre. tense) also practices (pre. tense) lawlessness (Gr. *anomia*)”. And, sin is lawlessness, rebellion, a defiant disregard and rejection of God’s rightful rule as Lord over your life. In your practice of sin you rebel against your rightful King and say, “I hate your law.” Sin is nothing less than personal treason against the Sovereign of the Universe. And it is not a onetime offense, it is the habit and settled disposition of your heart and your life. Thabiti says you are “an outlaw against God.”

- 2) Because our predicament was so great, a great rescue was required. We know this is why Christ came in the incarnation. This is why “he appeared to take away sins” (v. 5). Can’t you hear John the Baptist at the Jordan River heralding to the top of his lungs, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). By his bloody death on the cross Jesus lifted up, removed and carried away our sins. The Son of God came to provide full and forever forgiveness of sins to all who trust in Him.
- 3) And, do not miss this: He could do what He did because He is who He is: sinless. “In him there is no sin.” Not even one! This is a consistent theme that resounds throughout the Bible. John, himself, has already taught us he is the righteous one (2:29) and the pure one (3:3). Now he affirms Jesus in the sinless one.
- 4) Paul agrees for in 2 Corinthians 5:21 he writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The author of Hebrews agrees. In Hebrews 4:15 he tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” and in Hebrews 7:25-26 he says, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a

high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” And, Peter agrees because in 1 Peter 2:22 he writes, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”

Transition: Christ has indeed appeared and dealt with our sin.

2) Christians abide in Christ and do not live in sin 3:6

1) Verse 6 logically and necessarily flows from v. 5. Because there is no sin in Jesus, no one who abides in him keeps on sinning. In fact if one does continue in a pattern or practice of sin another logical and necessary conclusion must be drawn: the one who keeps on sinning has never seen him or known him (in a personal, saving relationship). John’s theology is flawless and “spot on.” If the sinless Son of God appeared in history to take away sin, how is it possible to abide in Him and sin at the same time? The answer is you can’t. It is impossible.

2) Some have understood vs. 6 and 9 to affirm sinless perfection in this life.

This, however, would contradict what John said in 1:8 & 10. No, the use of the present tense verb in vs. 6 & 9 help us see what John is saying. Because of the new birth we have a new nature. Because Christ has taken away our sins we have a new liberty and freedom. Sin no longer dominates us or enslaves us. Sin is no longer the character and conduct of my life. Because I

now abide in Christ in the power of His person and work in the gospel, I may fall into sin but I will not walk in sin. Sin will not be my habit, it will not be my normal practice. I no longer love sin, I hate sin. I no longer delight in sin. I despise sin.

- 3) In union with Christ, which is another way of saying abiding in Christ, I have experienced a definite and decisive break with sin. It no longer rules me. Christ does! A life of living in sin and living in the Savior is an oxymoron! It does not make sense. It is spiritually crazy.

II. He came to destroy the works of the devil 3:7-8

- 1) If sin is personal enemy #1, then Satan is public enemy #1. The flesh is our internal foe and the devil is our external foe.
- 2) We now, in Christ, wage a titan spiritual war on 2 fronts. But do not fear or be discouraged. The Warrior Lamb (see Rev. 5 ff) who defeated sin is also our champion who has defeated Satan. The devil is doomed, even if he is too dumb to know it! False teachers are behind the lie that one can be born of God, born again, and still practice a lifestyle of sin. Behind the false teachers is the father of lies himself, the devil (John 8:44).

- 1) The devil is a deceiver so pursue righteousness 3:7

- 1) Getting confused and wrongheaded about the seriousness sin can be a real problem, a serious spiritual problem, especially when satanic sirens of our age sing that sin is no big deal. John, therefore, with fatherly firmness (“Little children”) warns his spiritual children against being deceived. “Let no one deceive you” is a present imperative. It is a word of command calling for persistent vigilance. It echoes the prior warning of 2:26.

- 2) Deception can take many forms. In particular it can trap us both doctrinally and morally: believing wrongly about the Savior and living wrongly in a lifestyle of sin. It can also capture us socially as we fail to love others as we have been loved by God (v. 10).

- 3) John’s counter is quite simple and to the point: “Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [Christ] is righteous.” Deception is defeated by a righteous life that gives tangible, visible evidence we have been born again through faith in Christ. We will live out who we are. It is inevitable. Now, the practice of righteousness is not what enables us to be righteous, but it, again, is proof that we are righteous, just as Jesus, in whom we now abide, is righteous. Christ is my righteousness positionally and experientially. He is my redemption and my sanctification. Christ is my pattern (2:6) and my power (4:4) for

righteous living. Galatians 2:20 provides a very helpful insight on this truth, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Do not be deceived into thinking you can practice sin and be righteous before God. That is a great big Satanic lie.

2) The devil is a sinner who has been defeated 3:8

- 1) Verse 8 is one of the clearest statements in all of God’s Word telling us why Christ came. For the 1st time in the letter John refers specifically and directly to our archenemy the devil (cf. 3:12; also 2:13-14; 5:18-19). The word “devil” appears 4 times in vs. 8-10. Devil (*diabolos*) means accuser or slanderer. Satan, a Hebrew word, means adversary. These words well describe the character and tactics of our ancient foe. Jesus appeared to take away sin (v. 5) and He also appeared “to destroy the work of the devil.”
- 2) In verse 8 Jesus is referred to as the “Son of God” (the 1st of 7 occurrences in 1 John; see 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20). The 2nd person of the Triune God invaded enemy territory and took our enemy down in a complete and total victory. John Piper says “Christmas is because God

aims to destroy something...[it is] God's infiltration of rebel planet earth on a search and destroy mission." He came, searched out, and destroyed the works of Satan. He blew him up!

- 3) Seeing v. 8 in parallel with v. 5, we see that the works of the devil that our Savior came to destroy is sins. By means of his atonement, sin's penalty has been nullified for the child of God. By means of the new birth sin's power has been neutered and dealt a death blow. And by virtue of his twin appearings, sin's presence will soon pass away forever. Jesus delivered a knockout punch, a death-blow to the devil on the cross. An empty tomb is an eternal monument to His victory and to ours!

III. He came to demarcate the children of God

3:9-10

- 1) As we have seen, the false teachers of John's day, as well as our own, will teach that it is possible, somehow, to be righteous without practicing righteousness. God's Word says "no way!" The one who abides in Christ will not, he cannot, go on living in sin as the consistent and prevailing habit of his life. Impossible says the Bible. It simply is not in the realm of reality. Conversion changes everything. Regeneration does not produce invisible or rotten fruit. If anyone is in Christ he or she is a new creation and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

2) As John closes out this paragraph, he highlights 3 crystal clear and definite descriptions of the children of God. Being a good teacher, he again uses a little repetition to make sure his children get his point.

1) God's children have experienced a new birth 3:9

1) Once more John draws attention to the new birth, to the doctrine of regeneration. One of the distinguishing marks of the Christian is the new birth, that he has been converted, born again, regenerated.

2) What is regeneration? What does being born of God mean? The *BF&M 2000* says, "Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour."

3) The *NBD* says regeneration is "a drastic act on fallen human nature by the Holy Spirit, leading to a change in the person's whole outlook. He

can now be described as a new man who seeks, finds and follows God in Christ.” (p. 1005).

4) John teaches us this happens because “God’s seed abides in him,” in the believer. Various views are held concerning what is meant by “God’s seed.” They include the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, Christ, God Himself and the new nature. In a sense all are true, though the new nature seems best. Perhaps we could say by means of the work of Christ revealed in the Gospel message, the Holy Spirit imparts a new nature into everyone who repents of sin and trust in Christ. I have no doubt John would affirm our thesis.

2) God’s children do not practice sin 3:9

1) Without the new birth it is impossible for us to live like new people.

Sin will dominate us. Satan will have his way with us. Hate and not love will fill our hearts.

2) However, as a result of the new birth, the Bible says we cannot “make a practicing of sinning” and we “cannot keep on sinning because we have been born of God.”

3) These are words of comfort and words of humility. I am comforted to know sin cannot and will not win, ultimately, in my life. I may

stumble, even fall on occasion, but I know “he who is in me is greater than he who is in the world” (4:4). He will pick me up and get me moving again in the right direction. I am destined to be like Jesus (3:2)! Neither sin nor Satan will have the last word.

4) These words also humble me because if it were not for Christ, His atonement, His advocacy, His victory, I would forever be enslaved to Satan and sin. Any righteousness I do flows from the righteousness of Christ poured into my life by means of the new birth.

3) God’s children love one another 3:10

- This verse summarizes a discussion that began all the way back in 2:3. It also prepares us for a more extended discussion to follow on the important subject of love. Two simple and fundamental 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 says it is that simple.

- John puts the issue in negative terms, not practicing righteousness and not loving others. Plummer is right, “Love is righteousness in relation to others.” (*Epistles of John*, 128). 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. Sadly, if the devil is your spiritual father then you will reveal your parentage by practicing sin and hating others. I guess the question really is, “whose your daddy?!” Your life will provide a clear and undeniable witness.

Conclusion

- 1) “And you know He appeared to take away our sins and to destroy the works of the devil.” Erasmus (1466-1536), a leading Christian humanist of the 16th century got it right when he said, “By a carpenter mankind was made, and only by that Carpenter can mankind be remade” (*Uplook*, Feb/Mar 1998, p. 6).
- 2) The carpenter from Nazareth, the Son of God, has indeed remade us. Redeemed by His blood, regenerated by the Spirit, reconciled with the Father and ready for service: what a joy to be a child of God. What a blessing to have been saved and set free from the shackles of sin and the tyranny of Satan. Jesus, thank you for coming.