

I John 2:1-6 - Earnest Striving and Effortless Rest

To Read:

1. Ephesians 4:17-32
2. Romans 3:21-31

I. Introduction

A. This morning we are continuing in John's letter of I John looking at I John 2:1-6

1. Last week we consider the verses just before this and saw that Christ brought the light of God into this world so that now we have seen the glory of God
2. And if Christ has brought the light of the glory of God into this world, then if we claim to have fellowship with God we must be walking in His light
3. And then we talked about what walking in the light means - it means being honest about ourselves, not denying sin in our life, but honestly confessing sin in our life
4. And walking in the light means exposing our sin to God so that His infinitely intense light can burn away the darkness of our sin - that His light would destroy us so that we can be remade in the image of Christ

B. The break between I John chapter 1 and chapter 2 is very artificial

1. So our passage this morning is intimately related to our discussion last week
 - a. I mentioned this last week, saying that we are starting with an honest confession of sin, but we will be marching toward I John 2:1 as we finish chapter 1
 - b. So we saw that honest confession of sin can't be the same as excusing sin or resting in sin, but it must be exposing it to God for the purpose of Him destroying that sin
2. I John 2:1-2 is, in many ways, the climax of John's thought here, having prefaced his message with several statements about who God is and who we are, John is going to give us a call to live our lives in conformity with who God is and then give us a hope in Jesus Christ that this is possible
3. So, I've title our message this morning 'Earnest Striving and Effortless Rest' because we're going to see both truths juxtaposed together in I John 2:1-6 and I want to consider how these two truths sound exactly opposite but are completely true in Christ

C. I John 2:1-6 - 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. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

D. Proposition and Outline

1. Proposition: Honest acknowledgement of continuing sin does not mean that we allow sin to continue in us but instead we fight hard against sin by resting in Christ.
2. Outline:
 - a. Earnest Striving
 - b. Effortless Rest
 - c. Test #1
 - d. Test #2

II. Earnest Striving

A. Last week we meditated on I John 1:5-10 and the fact that if God is light, then we must walk in His light

1. And John defined what walking in the light meant - it doesn't mean we that we pretend that we are perfect like God is perfect
2. Instead, walking in the light means that we are honest about our sins, we acknowledge them before God in confession and expose our sinfulness to His light in order to burn it away
3. And we can do this because Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, has cleansed us from sin so that we no longer fear God's justice but can rest and rejoice in His justice and His faithfulness
4. To deny the necessity of Christ's continuing cleansing in our life and to hide our sin under a pretended righteousness is to hide from God's light and demonstrates that we have no fellowship with Him

B. As we enter chapter two, John lets the other shoe fall, as it were

1. In chapter 1, John calls us to an honest acknowledgement of the continuing sin and sinfulness in our lives
2. But, John is not excusing sin. He is not condoning our sinfulness. He is not making light of sin. He is not disregarding the true evil that sin is. He is simply being honest about sin, exposing it to God's light
3. To make this clear, he makes a strong statement at the beginning of chapter 2 - *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin!*
4. Sin may still be present in the redeemed as long as we are on this earth, but we shouldn't be at peace with it - we shouldn't lie about it, but we shouldn't be at peace with it

C. So John starts chapter 2 with an intense call to combat sin in our lives

1. As we considered last week, combatting sin in our lives must start with honesty about the sin that is still in our lives and seeking God's light to burn it away - but this doesn't imply a passive or permissive state of warfare, we don't, as the overused saying goes, 'let go and let God'
 - a. We start by seeking the sovereignty of God to destroy the sin in our life by applying the power of the cross of Christ in our lives, but then, in the continuing paradox of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility, we act - we put in human effort to eradicate the sin in our life
 - b. If we are seeking and trusting God to destroy the sin in our life, if we are exposing ourselves to God's light with the purpose of letting His light burn away our sin, then the practical effect of that is struggling hard against sin - James says it this way:
 - c. James 1:5-8 - *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
 - d. Notice the logic of James' statement
 - i. If we ask for something, like wisdom, then God will give it generously.
 - ii. But, we have to ask with faith - I have thought about what that means at length and I think it means that we need to live as though God is going to give us what we asked for - we need to believe that God hears us and acts
 - iii. So, if God has promised to give us wisdom, then we need to try to live wisely - otherwise we are asking for one thing and practicing another thing - we are being double-minded
 - iv. The same goes for destroying sin in our lives - if we are asking God to burn away our sin, then we need to act as though God is going to do that and try to destroy sin in our lives
2. So to walk in the light is working to fight against the sin in our lives - we need to think about the practical ways that we can combat sin in our lives by changing our habits, our settings, our practices, our possessions, and whatever else needs to change to discourage the power of sin in our lives
3. And then, when temptation comes, we work hard, we put in effort, to resist sin even to the point of shedding blood in order to destroy sin in our lives - Hebrews tells us this clearly, Hebrews 12:4 - *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood*
4. We need to take John's exhortation seriously - *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin* - we need to put in effort to destroy sin in our lives

D. But, as we hear John's exhortation, we need to take it in the tone that it was given

1. John's message to us doesn't come from a dispassionate commander who is barking orders at his troops
2. John isn't being a nitpicker, calling us to do things he knows are impossible to show us how bad we are
3. Instead John's message starts with three important words - *My little children*
4. He is writing a message to those whom He cares about, he isn't trying to be an overbearing commander or a nitpicker, he has a deep desire for the good of those whom he is writing to
5. He wants them to have a deep and abiding fellowship with God and he knows that this is the only way to do it, fighting sin in mortal combat is the only way that a believer is going to have joy in fellowship with God

E. Walking in the light of God means being honest about sin

1. It means confessing our sin to God and seeking His power to destroy it in our lives
2. But our confession must be followed up by earnest striving to destroy sin in our lives
3. This isn't opposed to resting in God's sovereignty, it is the outworking of our faith in God's sovereignty
4. And our fight against sin isn't a joyless duty, it is the only way we can have joy in fellowship with God

F. So this verse relates to my second desire for I John

1. You'll recall that I had five desires as we went through I John that I wanted to guide our study together
2. The second desire was: As you know Christ more, I want you to have a greater desire to be in Christ and to live as though you are in Christ
3. If we have seen Christ, the incarnate one, as we studied last week and we have seen in Him the light of the glory of God, then we will desire to live in accordance with God's light
4. Struggling hard against sin is our testimony that we want to be in Christ, it is living the life that Christ has bought for us and provided for us by His life and His sacrifice
5. So as we hear John call us to fight against sin, let us devote ourselves to that struggle, not because we have to but because we love Christ and we want to live out His work in our lives

III. Effortless Rest

A. If we are fighting hard against sin, to eradicate it from our lives and if, as John has told us, we are going to sin as long as we are in these earthly bodies, then we are going to have a lot of disappointing days

1. Our fight is going to be long and weary, and at the end of many days, it may appear that we have lost
2. Many days we are going to find that we failed in our fight against sin, many days we are going to look back and see that the sin that we have specifically set our face against has risen up and won the battle, many days we are going to look back and wonder if we have made any progress against sin at all
3. What do we do when John, and more importantly Christ, has called us to cease from sin and everyday we look back and see that we haven't ceased from sin?
4. We can't pretend that we haven't sinned - we saw that last week. But when we do sin, what do we do? Should we just throw our hands up in despair? Should we slink back to the shadows where God's perfect light won't burn us to a crisp?

B. So John immediately pairs his exhortation against sin with a word of immeasurable encouragement

1. He says in I John 2:1-2 - *But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*
 - a. Instead of denying or sin in order to appear perfect, or despairing over sin when we fail to meet the mark, John tells us that when we do sin we can rest in Christ
 - b. Effortless rest in Christ isn't the opposite of earnest striving against sin - resting in Christ is the basis, motivation and encouragement to striving against sin - earnest striving must be based in effortless rest
 - c. John starts and finishes with the propitiation of Christ - He mentions the cleansing work of Christ in chapter 1 verse 6 before He calls us to struggle against sin and then he brings Christ back to the forefront here in chapter 2 after he's called us to struggle against sin - he bookends the struggle against sin with the propitiation of Christ - we can't struggle against sin outside of the propitiation of Christ
 - d. The propitiation of Christ is why we can struggle against sin - we need to start by being washed by Christ, and the propitiation of Christ is why we can keep struggling against sin - when we fail, we need to keep being washed by Christ
2. So our struggle against sin isn't a struggle to gain favor with God, Jesus has already done that for us, He stands before His Father as our advocate, pleading the merit of His blood on our behalf so that the Father smiles at us as He smiles at His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased
 - a. Instead of a struggle for God's favor, our struggle is a response to the smile of God - if God is smiling at us through the advocacy of Christ then we have the freedom and the joy to run to God's light
 - b. And if we stumble, then we can look up and see that our Advocate is still standing there and God is still smiling at us so we can get back up and keep running
 - c. It doesn't mean, if we fall, we ought to stay on our faces and get entangled in sin, but it also doesn't mean that we need to despair and fear looking up if we fall down - God is still smiling at us!
 - d. When we fail and fall, we look up and see Christ continuing to plead His righteousness on our behalf - the only hope we had of God's favor is still there and it is still our only hope of God's favor
3. This is the great paradox of the Christian life
 - a. The Christian life is a life lived resting in all that Christ has done for us, but at the same time, the Christian life is a life of hard work, of striving to destroy the power of sin
 - b. To ignore or deny either side is to deny what Christ has done for us and why He did it

C. And here we come to another of our, 'the incarnation is the basis of...' statements

1. Two weeks ago we saw that the incarnation was the basis of John's testimony and the basis of true fellowship
2. And last week we saw that the incarnation is the basis of Christ's revelation and the basis of Christ's propitiation
3. This week we'll add another one: the incarnation is the basis of Christ's intercession
 - a. John saw and heard and felt the living Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and because he knows Jesus Christ he knows the advocate that we have with the Father
 - b. And John is looking back at the incarnate Christ and telling us that He is our Advocate, He is the reason that we don't have to fear God, He is the reason that we can get up again when we sin as a believer
 - c. And Jesus' incarnation, the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ is central to His advocacy

4. The author of Hebrews points this out several times
 - a. Hebrews 2:17-18 - *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*
 - b. Then, a couple chapters later in Hebrews 4:14-16, he says - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
 - c. The author of Hebrews understood that the incarnation of Christ and His experience of our frailty is essential to His work as our High Priest, our Advocate with the Father, His ability to make continuing propitiation for us before God

D. But, we might ask, how is the incarnation the basis of Christ's intercession? Why was the incarnation necessary to intercession?

1. So, John goes on to tell us - and he points us to two things: Christ righteousness and His propitiation
2. In his incarnation, Jesus led the righteous life demanded by God
 - a. John says, *but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*
 - b. When John thinks about the intercession of Christ, he points us to Christ righteousness
 - c. Jesus lived a perfect life, and not just a perfect life as God - God has always been perfect, but Jesus lived a perfect life as a man, earning righteousness as a creature before God, doing what a creature should
 - d. Peter puts it very plainly in I Peter 2:22 - *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.*
 - e. The incarnation of Christ, the union of the perfect God with man, is essential to Christ's intercession, because now Christ, as our advocate, can point God to a perfect life lived by a man
 - f. God can be happy with men because Christ lived the perfect life that mankind should have lived and Christ is always pointing His Father to that perfect life
3. But, it doesn't stop there, in his incarnation, Jesus made the perfect sacrifice demanded by God
 - a. John continues on, *He is the propitiation for our sins*
 - b. Jesus, in His incarnation, living a perfect life as a man is only half the equation
 - c. If it ended there, then Jesus would be the perfect man and God would be happy with Jesus and destroy all of us - but, in His incarnation, Jesus acted so that He could give us His righteousness
 - d. Jesus took on a body so that He could sacrifice that body and present it to God as a sacrifice of propitiation - a sacrifice that appeases the wrath of God, a sacrifice that makes an angry God happy
 - e. In His death Christ gave us His righteousness and bore the wrath of God on our behalf so that, as He stands before God as our intercessor, He has every right to point at His righteousness and call it ours
 - f. We meditated on this last week - Jesus' incarnation was essential to His propitiation and His propitiation is essential to His mediation because His mediating work is to continually point at His perfect life and His atoning death so that God can be happy with us - so Jesus' incarnation is essential to His intercession
4. So, in his incarnation, Jesus can represent man before God pointing at His perfect and His sacrifice
 - a. It is, as it were, as if Christ were standing before His Father simply repeating the truth of II Corinthians 5:21 over and over again on our behalf - *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - b. Christ is pointing at His righteousness and His sacrifice, the things He did in His body as a man, on our behalf, to make God happy with us
 - c. So our rest in the intercession of Christ is resting in His perfect life and His atoning death and His continuing pleading of those things before His Father on our behalf

E. These verse, then, call us to my first desire: to know and appreciate the person and work of Christ more

1. As we see Christ held up here as our advocate because He lived a perfect life and died an atoning death, we should rejoice in Christ!
2. So this week meditate on Christ our intercessor and how His incarnation has made Him the perfect intercessor
3. And rest in Christ this week, especially as you struggle against sin, rest in Christ - make His work on your behalf your hope, not your feeble efforts to destroy sin

IV. How do we know?

A. So far in his letter, John has told us that true faith is marked by walking in the light, honestly confession our sin, struggling hard against sin and resting in Christ's intercession

1. But, if this is what marks the believer, how do we know that we are a believer? How do we know if Christ is our advocate? How do we know if we are being honest about sin without failing to struggle against sin?
2. As we have considered, these things are kind of a paradox - how can we tell if we are living out a paradox?
3. John's first test was an honest confession of sin, as we discussed last week
4. But now, John adds the pair to that, an honest confession of sin is not enough, if a Christian struggles against sin, then there should be a growing obedience in their life
5. In fact, this is how we know that Christ is interceding for us, because we see the result of His intercession in our life - we can test if we are in the faith by seeing if the result of Christ's propitiation is worked out in us
6. So John continues by giving us two closely related tests to determine if we have come to know Christ - if we are resting in Christ and therefore striving in Christ according to the light of God
7. Both of these tests are going to focus on obedience:
 - a. The first test is: Do we do what He said?
 - b. The second test is: Do we do what He did?

B. Do we do what He said?

1. John continues in I John 2:3-5 - *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.*
2. The first test is do we listen to Christ's commands and obey them - do we have a desire to do what Christ has told us to do? This is what the New Testament keeps coming back to - do we do what Christ said?
 - a. Jesus Himself says in John 14:21 - *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*
 - b. And Matthew records Jesus' words in Matthew 7:24-27 - *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."*
 - c. James says it this way in James 1:21-25 - *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*
3. In none of these instances is perfect obedience the standard, otherwise John could not have written the last paragraph in I John 1 about honest confession of sin - those in Christ will still sin
 - a. Instead, what these verses are calling us to is a life that is marked by a desire and an effort to know and to obey the commands of Christ; they call us to listen and to care about whether we are living under Christ
 - b. James may have said it the clearest - these verses call us not to hear the commands of Christ and turn away, but when we hear the commands of Christ, we act because we love Christ
 - c. A Christian will fail often, but we don't fail because we don't try, we hear Christ's voice and attempt to follow - our hearts are responsive to the commands of Christ, not perfect, but responsive
 - d. So the first test this morning is: when you hear the commands of Christ do you act on them in love for Christ? If you do you are demonstrating that you do know Christ and the power of His intercession

C. On the other hand, if we claim to know Christ but ignore everything that Christ told us to do, we are demonstrating that we do not know the power or the purpose of Christ's work

1. In verse 4, John characterizes a person that claims to know the power of Christ's propitiation and intercession but doesn't obey Christ's commands as a liar - *Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,*
2. It is impossible for someone to know Christ and to disregard what He says, the two things cannot go together
3. To claim to know the power of Christ's propitiation but disregard His command is to ignore the purpose of Christ's propitiation - He died to cleanse us from sin, not to excuse us from sin, to ignore His commands and continue in sin is a renunciation of Christ's work for us
4. And Christ died that He might reclaim Lordship over His people and establish the Kingdom of God, to ignore His command and do what pleases us is a renunciation of Christ's purpose in the atonement
5. If you say that you rest in the work of Christ and trust in His intercession but don't obey His commands then you have deceived yourself, you are lying about knowing Christ
6. So we can use this to test ourselves and others - do we or do we not care about the commands of Christ? Do we have a tender responsiveness to the desires of our loving Lord, or do we have a callous disregard for the commands of the one who washed us from sin?

D. Coming to verse 5, John repeats the encouragement of verse 3 - if we do obey His commands, we know Christ

1. But he phrases it differently - he says that the love of God is perfected in the one who obeys - what does this mean?
2. To understand this phrase, I think we need to open up the rest of I John, for example we could go to I John 4:9-10 - *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
3. John tells us that the propitiation and thus the intercession of Christ are the evidence of the great love that God loves us with
4. But the love of God in the work of Christ has a purpose - as we have already discussed, God's purpose in His love is to cleanse us from sin and bring us back into fellowship with Him
5. So, God's love expressed in Christ's propitiation is perfected, that is it is brought to completion, (the word perfection in Greek can mean complete or not lacking anything) when our lives demonstrate the fruit of Christ's propitiation in turning from sin to obey our risen Lord
6. When we obey Christ, the full fruit of Christ's propitiation is being demonstrated and thus the love of God is being perfected in us - so when we obey, we are demonstrating that Christ's propitiation on our behalf, His intercession for us is real
7. As I've said already, careful and loving obedience is not opposed to resting in Christ, but an evidence that we are at rest in Christ, an evidence that the love of God is having its full effect in our lives

E. So, the first test is very simple - if we are in Christ we should obey Christ, otherwise we are liars

1. And as we pair this with everything else John has been teaching us, we see that this isn't perfect obedience
2. But, as we look back at our lives, we should see a general progression toward lovingly obeying Christ
3. Perhaps you'll have to look back over a long section of your life, but if you are resting in Christ you should see that there is obedience growing in your life
4. So use this as a test - a test that hopefully encourages you and strengthens you in your faith - you are going to fail a lot as you run after Christ, but John is writing to give us assurance, not to beat us down
5. We need to take the test honestly, if over time you aren't seeing any growth in obedience, then you do need to take honest assessment of whether you are really resting in Christ
6. But, when you fail and are discouraged, look back at your life and take note of how Christ has grown you and led you in obedience and in faith, and rejoice that Christ is working out His power in your life
7. Maybe right now you've fallen, but you can see that Christ is working in you so you can get up again and keep going

V. How do we know? (part 2)

A. Like I said a few minutes ago, John gave us two very closely related tests

1. The first was the one we just considered - do we do what He said?
2. The second comes in verse 6 - do we do what He did?
3. I John 2:6 - *By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

B. Christ not only gave us commands, through His own words in the Gospels and through the teaching of the apostles in the Epistles, but He gave us an example of what a life lived in fellowship with God looks like

1. And this is the second test - really it is the same as the first test, but it gives us a clear picture to look like
2. Peter says it very clearly in I Peter 2:21-22 - *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.*
3. We considered verse 22 a few minutes ago when we saw that the incarnation was the basis of Christ's intercession because in His body He lived a perfect life
4. But Peter says that now that perfect life is our example - Jesus lived among us and showed us what it means to live in fellowship with God
5. Anyone who lives in fellowship with God, anyone who is in the light of God, anyone who knows the power of Christ's intercession, should live like Jesus lived
6. So, again, the second test is very simple - if we are in Christ then we should look like Christ!
7. If we don't live like Christ lived, how can we claim to know Him in any intimate way? How can we claim to know Him in His intercession for us if we are running in the opposite direction away from Him?

C. So if there is any question about what Christ commanded us, we can look at what Jesus did

1. This is a powerful use of the gospels and the record of Jesus life, not the only use, but one important use - they record for us what a perfect life lived in fellowship with God looks like
2. If there is a dispute about what a command means - for example, what does the command to love one another mean and how is that worked out, then we can look at Christ to see how He lived that out in His life
3. If we are in Christ then we will be looking more and more like Christ all of the time
4. Paul gives us a command from Christ to pray always, to pray without ceasing, to devote ourselves to prayer, but Christ shows us what that looks like when He gets up early and goes by Himself to seek His Father in prayer
5. The two are the same, but we can use them to clarify each other, the commands and Christ's actions are in harmony, so we can obey the commands in the same way Christ perfectly obeyed the commands

D. This brings us to one more 'the incarnation is the basis of...' statements

1. As John is laying out tests to assure the believer of their faith, John points back to the incarnation once more
 - a. John is connecting everything in his letter back to the incarnation
 - b. We saw that the incarnation is the basis of John's testimony
 - c. The incarnation is the basis of all true fellowship
 - d. The incarnation is the basis of revelation
 - e. The incarnation is the basis of propitiation
 - f. The incarnation is the basis of intercession
 - g. And now, the incarnation is the basis of obedience
2. In talking about obedience, John can't fail to look back to Christ, the God-man, and see how He obeyed
 - a. The earthly, incarnate life of Christ provides the basis of all obedience, because it was the incarnate Christ who perfectly obeyed in everything, who stood where everyone else had fallen
 - b. So now all obedience must be traced back to this obedience, all obedience must be traced back to the incarnation, otherwise it is not true obedience
 - c. And all obedience is rooted in the incarnation in at least three ways
 - i. The incarnation is the basis of obedience because it provides the example of obedience
 - ii. The incarnation is the basis of obedience because it provides the motivation for obedience
 - iii. The incarnation is the basis of obedience because it provides the power for obedience

3. The Incarnation provides the example of obedience - it shows us what obedience should be
 - a. This is what we have already considered - Jesus left us an example so that we might follow in His steps
 - b. So now, all obedience must be rooted in the incarnation, because Jesus has not only left us an example, He has left us the only example of what obedience looks like
 - c. In the incarnation, Christ is the only man who has walked in perfect obedience before His Father, so now, as men and women desiring to obey, we need to look back at Christ and follow His example
 - d. Our obedience is rooted in Christ's incarnation because the incarnation shows us what it means to obey
4. The Incarnation provides the motivation for obedience - it gives us hope that sin is not the ultimate power
 - a. Jesus' perfect life shows that there is a power greater than sin that makes obedience possible, so that, even when faced with every temptation of mankind, Jesus was able to obey
 - b. So the author of Hebrews says, in Hebrews 4:14-16 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
 - c. Jesus gives us confidence, confidence in His perfect life to seek God for grace to continue in the fight against sin - the fact that Jesus lived a perfect life in the face of temptation gives us hope and motivates us to fight sin, and especially to fight sin by resting in our intercessor
 - d. And as Christ's perfect life gives us hope, we can hear Paul's words in I Corinthians 10:13 and think about how they were absolutely true of Christ and now are true of us as well - *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*
5. The Incarnation provides the power for obedience - it makes us able to obey
 - a. Paul says in Romans 6 - What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.
 - b. Paul tells us that we can't continue in sin, but must pursue obedience - but He also tells us how we do that
 - i. Notice that Paul ties our necessity and our ability to obey back to Christ and the incarnation, specifically the propitiation which we already have seen is rooted in the incarnation
 - ii. Christ took a body and sacrificed that body to destroy sin - if we have been united to Christ then our flesh has also been put to death so that we no longer have to obey the power of sin
 - iii. And Christ took up His body again in His resurrection so that He now exists eternally as the perfect and exalted God-man - if we have been united to Christ then the power of His resurrection flows through us so that we now have power to obey
 - c. The power to obey flows from Christ's incarnation - in the incarnation Christ brought the perfect power of God into flesh to empower flesh to obey and through His death and resurrection He has defeated the power of sin and grants all who are in Him the power to obey

E. So this morning, I call you to rest effortlessly in the salvation of Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, to strive earnestly to defeat the power of sin in your life and we can do this because Christ's incarnation has given us an advocate that pleads our case before the Father and Christ's incarnation has given us the hope of a renewed obedience before God