

DESTROYING THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL (I JOHN 3:8)

Notice how John deals with sin, and with those who are continuing in sin. Previously it was referred to as lawlessness against God, (I John 3:4) now it is referred to as governance of Satan's dominion (3:8). John's argument here is clear, since Christ was manifest to destroy the Devil's work one cannot be a true child of God and continue as a servant of the devil, he is working in opposition to Christ.

The striking paradox of the two phrases juxtaposed in Vs. 8 teaches us an important lesson concerning the nature and purpose of evil. Christ was "*manifested to destroy the works of the Devil*" but "*the devil sinneth from the beginning.*" God could have destroyed sin in an instant of time, but the "*the devil sinneth from the beginning*" (see notes on this phrase in previous study). Sin and the resultant evil did not take God by surprise or put heaven into a state of emergency. God foresaw all, restrains all (Job 1:12), and is always (I Peter 1:20) working towards the final destruction of all sin and evil (I Corinthians 15:24-25).

We may well ask the question then, what does John mean when he says that Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the devil? How is that work accomplished and when if Satan is still operative today? What is the purpose of "ongoing destruction" of Satan?

1. THE MATERIAL OF SATAN'S WORK

John does not say that Christ is destroying the devil. His works are referred to specifically because of their proximity to our lives. We are the material Satan uses in his assault against the Kingdom of God. This is what the Lord meant when he said to Peter "*get thee behind me Satan*" (Matthew 16:23). Satan will always be sinful but he will not always work his evil through us. There are two elements of Satan's person in view in Vs. 8; the evil nature of Satan (that which he is) and the evil works of Satan (that which he does). The sad reality is that he accomplishes his work through human lives.

2. THE NATURE OF SATAN'S WORK

Some commentators limit the work of Christ to the sins mentioned in verse 5. They would have this phrase in Vs. 8 to be synonymous with the phrase "*to take away our sins*" in Vs. 5. I rather believe that there is somewhat of a difference. Taking away sin is destroying the works of the Devil, but

destroying the works of the Devil includes more than taking away sin, in the sense that John intended here (See previous study). While it may be argued that the works of the devil in relation to the child of God are dealt with here yet John broadens the scope of his thought by the use of this phrase. The works of the Devil are not only opposed to men as God's children (who are in focus here), but also opposed to the works of God (John 9:3) and the works of Christ (Matthew 11:2). There are two general aspects of the work of Satan; offensive and defensive. It is these works that God is destroying, the complete and universal work of Satan.

3. THE DESTRUCTION OF SATAN'S WORK

The word destroy here does not mean that an absolute destruction has taken place. The meaning here is that Christ is taking to pieces, this is the translation of the Latin Vulgate. It is the *λυω* which means to loose, break up, dissolve or to undo (See Matthew 21:2; John 11:44). The work of Christ is not only opposite to that of Satan, but opposed to; it is the counterpart, counteracting everything Satan has done and is doing, Christ is undoing.

Death is that last great enemy to be destroyed, (I Corinthians 15:26 "*destroyed*" here is final, 'to put an end to' *καταργέω*) until that happens Satan continues to work. If God were to absolutely and finally destroy the works of Satan this moment, Hell would be filled with all those in rebellion against God and heaven would be populated with all those who were born again and both would be sealed for all eternity in that state (Revelation 22:11).

But God in his wisdom has ordained that this work of "*destroy[ing] the works of the devil*" is an ongoing process; God is presently overthrowing the works of Satan, depriving him of his strength and rendering him inoperative in the lives of his own children. This work was effectively begun at Calvary and will be concluded at the end of the age. Victory over death was accomplished at Calvary (I Corinthians 15:55-57). The implementation of that victory is still in progress in this world in you and me. God is slowly pulling the fingernails of Satan, unwinding the plots and plans of the destroyer (*Apollyon*, Revelation 9:11). Christ will one day absolutely and finally destroy the works of the Devil. Hell is the final solution.