

Sermon 27, Questioning Your Salvation, 1 John 3:8-10

Proposition: Jesus came to destroy the Devil's works, including your sin, which is why you need to be righteous now.

Christ's work destroyed the Devil's by showing the glory of submission as a creature and as a Son!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the text before us this morning is a terrifying one. How on earth can John say that no Christian practices sin, and even that the God-begotten cannot sin? Earlier, in equally strong terms, he has insisted that all Christians sin. As this text has baffled the commentators, so it has baffled the ordinary Christian. The way out of this thicket, though, is simple. The verse is true in an eschatological sense. That is, at the end, its truth will be manifested. Then, and in one sense not till then, Christians will truly be unable to sin and the Devil's progeny and God's children will be fully manifested. Yet to say that this will be true at the end is, of course, to say that it is true now. We will not suddenly become something essentially different when Christ appears; rather, the strong light of His presence will show with

absolute clarity what we, and what Satan's seed, really are. You are growing into that final version of yourself even now. Perhaps in the single leaf sticking out of the ground you can't see the mighty gnarled oak tree (think of Angel Oak on Johns Island, South Carolina!). But God can. And that's how John is speaking. He is folding the future back into the present and reminding us of our origin and destiny right here in this moment when we want to forget both. Born of God? Spawn of Satan? Can't sin? Won't sin? These things aren't relevant to me right now, preacher. I am not in the neonatal unit; I wasn't born yesterday. The funeral home, not to mention the Second Coming, is a long way away. I don't need to think about beginning-of-life and end-of-life realities. My genesis and my destiny are not helpful right now!

To which John replies "Oh yes they are." Brothers and sisters, in order to get through today you need to look back to your (new) birth and forward to your Heavenly destiny. So look with me to the Son of God, who came to destroy the Devil's works. That includes your sin. Do you think Christ could fail in that? No. Jesus came to destroy the Devil's works, including your sin. Through His work, you will ultimately be delivered from sin entirely, which is why you need to be righteous now.

I. Two Issues

So let's sink our teeth into this meaty text. Essentially, there are two issues here.

A. Who's Your Daddy?, vv. 8-10

The first thing the text talks about is the question of parentage. Who is your daddy? Are you the spawn of Satan, or are you a child of God? The answer is important — radically important, indeed, all-important. Everyone is either one or the other. You can't choose to opt out of this any more than you can opt out of having an earthly father. You must, and you will. Period. Either you're a child of God or a spawn of Satan. That's why John uses this phrase "of the Devil." What does that phrase mean? It means that the Devil is your source. You come from the Adversary. Now, obviously the Devil can't give you a new birth. You aren't regenerated as a child of Satan. You are actually *generated* as a child of Satan. To be born here on earth is to naturally be the Devil's offspring. What does that mean? Not that he literally gave birth to you. We're not talking about an incubus who impregnated your mother, thus making you the biological child of the Devil. Rather, you are the ideological or spiritual child of the devil by nature. When you're born as a fallen human being to fallen human parents, you belong to Satan unless and until God intervenes to change that. In other words, being a Devil's child is the default. That's what you are unless something happens to change it.

We know, of course, what has to happen to make that change. What has to happen is this: You have to be born again, this time as a child of God. John talks about that both in his gospel and his letter here. If you're born only once, you're a child of Satan. You need the new birth in order to be a child of God.

Why is this issue of parentage such an issue? The answer is that your begottenness drives your righteousness, or lack thereof. John is insisting that your genesis, your source in God or in

the Enemy, determines your behavior today and your destiny tomorrow. Those born of God don't practice sin. Those begotten by Old Scratch act just like him.

So that's the first issue. Where do you come from?

B. Who Do You Look Like/Will You Look Like?, v. 10a

The second issue is not far removed from it. John insists that your parentage is obvious. By your everyday behavior you manifest whether you are a child of God or Satan. Your conduct declares your origin. More than that — it declares your destiny too. What you look like now is a smaller version, a not-yet-full-grown version, of what you will look like in the future. Hence John's statements that the child of God does not sin and the child of the devil does sin. That's true — but it's a future truth. It *will be* true, and because it will be true, it is true. We'll talk about that more in just a moment. But that's the second issue — manifestation. The first issue is source, the second is appearance.

Now, given that these two issues are in play in this text, where do we go from here? Well, we need to look more closely at each of the issues. So we'll look first at the sources and the characteristics they impart to their offspring, and then at how those characteristics play out in an obvious way. John insists that they *do* play out in an obvious way, that God's children and Satan's children are easily recognized and distinguished. This truth, in turn, drives our pursuit of holiness. We should want to live the lifestyle appropriate to a child of God if we have really been born again — and we should reject the lifestyle appropriate to the spawn of Satan. It is to that lifestyle that we now turn.

II. Two Seeds

The second thing we need to really understand to understand our text today is the basic principle at work in each of the two kinds of people.

A. The Spawn of Satan, v. 8

The spawn of Satan are recognizable by this: They sin.

1. They Sin, v. 8a

Not only do they sin, they practice sin. They just keep sinning. The one doing the sin is of the Devil, John literally says. Doing the sin, in an ongoing way, is *the* mark of Devil-children.

2. Their Daddy Sins from the Beginning, v. 8b

Why is this? Because their father the devil sins from the beginning. Again, this is John using language in an arresting way. The past time referenced by "beginning" is filled in with the present time represented by "sins." Not "he sinned from the beginning," but literally "he sins from the beginning"! That's how totally sin has control of the Devil. Now, we know that this does not mean that God created him sinful. Rather, from the beginning of human history, Satan has been a fallen angel. He has always been for us what he now is — the archenemy and archtempter of the human race. He sins from the beginning.

B. The Children of God, vv. 9-10

So that's the one set of folks descended from their father the Devil. They are characterized first and last by evil — not by coolness, or sexiness, or wittiness, or daring, or any other quality the

world considers attractive. The spawn of Satan are evil from head to toe, from first to last, from beginning to end.

1. Sin Is the Uttermost Contradiction of God-Begottenness, v. 9

And if there is a single point we can make from v. 9, it is that God-begottenness is the opposite of all that. Sin is the ultimate and final contradiction of being born of God. That is what v. 9 means.

Now, the problem is already starting to materialize for us: The Bible tells us that we have been born again. We are children of God. John has said it very clearly at the beginning of this chapter, as well as in numerous other places. And yet, as John himself has said and as we all know, we sin. I sin and you sin. So how can we actually be God-begotten when there is this total contradiction between God-begottenness and sinning?

2. Jesus Came to Destroy Sin, vv. 8b-9

The answer to that question, as I've already said, lies in the future. In time, your new birth will manifest itself by completely conquering your sin. Why is this? Because the Son of God appeared to destroy the Devil's works, of which sin is the most prominent. Let me ask you this, brothers and sisters: Do you think that the Son of God can fail? Will He succeed in overthrowing Satan's works? Yes He will! Praise Him! Christ cannot fail, for He has the anointing of the infinitely powerful Holy Spirit and is Himself the Son of God. The works of the Devil, John says. What are those works? What does the Devil do? He tempts us to sin and then accuses us when we fall. He lured our first parents into eating the forbidden fruit. And, by far his greatest triumph: he got Jesus Christ crucified. Those are his works. They all circle around this theme of doing evil and getting others to do evil. The fact that Jesus came to undo Satan's works means that He is undoing the evil the Devil does and He is undoing our own participation in evil.

Too many times I've read this passage and said "Yes. Jesus is destroying Satan's works" and then failed to think about whether that was relevant to me. Brothers and sisters, it's incredibly relevant to me, and to you. The Devil's works include my sin — not in the sense that he makes me do it, but in the sense that he wants me to do it, tempts me to do it, and cheers me on when I'm doing it. Jesus came to put a stop to that. Jesus came to stop Satan from tempting me to sin and cheering me on in sin. Indeed, He came to stop me from sinning altogether — and by God (I mean that in the most respectful and truthful sense) He's going to succeed.

a) In Heaven, the God-Begotten Won't and Can't Sin

When? In Heaven. There, as we know, you and I will not sin. We will not be able to sin. Our wills will be free to good alone in the state of glory. Already hundreds of millions of our fellow saints have gone on to glory, and there they have found it to be literally true that they do not sin and cannot sin. Christ's work has triumphed in them. His destruction of the Devil's works is complete in their lives.

But let's think about this for a second. Why can't the blessed in Heaven sin? For the same two reasons that John advances here. They are children of God, and that birth is totally incompatible with sin. They have God's seed, and that seed is totally incompatible with sin.

That's why, in Heaven, they don't sin. But brothers and sisters, we have those same things right now!

(1) They're God-Begotten

We are God-begotten. As we've talked about, that means that God has fathered us. He has brought us forth. We are His children, spiritually born again.

(2) They Have God's Seed

And we also have God's seed. What is this? It is a bold and striking metaphor: God's sperm, His genetic material that forms the blueprint for our life and is communicated to us in the new birth, abides in us. God's seed is in you, Christian. And of course, that seed is completely opposed to sin. And it determines who you are.

You're God's child, the product of His seed.

b) No One God-Begotten Lives a Life of Sin Now

No one begotten by Him lives a sinful life now. What does John mean by this? Clearly, he acknowledges that the Christian life is growing, developing. That first green shoot of new life is not yet a fully mature tree. That new birth from God has not completely routed and destroyed the old Adam yet. And so, in one sense, we can and must make sense of this passage not by saying "Everyone who commits an act of sin is not a child of God." If we say that, we are saying "God has no children except Jesus Christ," a proposition which is clearly false. The whole Bible speaks to and about God's children. Instead, we must say "Everyone who lacks a principle of new life which is radically opposed to all sin is not a child of God." I paraphrase "lives a life of sin." The ESV paraphrases "makes a practice of sin." The NIV paraphrases "will continue to sin," "go on sinning." Eschatologically, you will not and cannot sin. That will become perfectly true at the end, when you see Christ and become like Him. But because it will be true of you at the end, in some sense it is true of you even now.

c) No One God-Begotten Can Live a Life of Sin at all

And what does this mean? You cannot live a life of sin. If you start to sin, something in you will rebel and say "No! I don't want to do this. I can't do this. I have got to turn away from this. This is making me sick." And it will keep on saying that, and you will listen to it within minutes, perhaps hours, maybe a few days or months or years. But you will eventually listen to it! You can't go on sinning. The new birth, your God-begottenness, stops you. You can sin, and do sin. But you do not give yourself over to sin and remain in it indefinitely. If you do, then you have never been born again.

III. Two Lifestyles

Hence, then, John's insistence that God's children and the Devil's children are manifest. They can be told apart, at the end perfectly but even in this life with a strong degree of confidence, by whether they are given over to sin or to righteousness. What drives and defines your life? Even a wicked gangster or drug lord can still do something nice once in a while — but his life is defined and dominated by his evil-doing. Similarly, even a sanctified believer can still do something horrifically evil — but his life is defined and dominated by his godliness and moral uprightness.

A. Sin

So don't live a lifestyle of sin. Jesus came to earth precisely to keep you from living in a way that looks like — that *is* — the way the spawn of Satan live. We all know what that looks like. If you don't remember, turn on your television. Open your browser. Pick up your phone and get on social media. It will all come rushing back, I promise.

B. Righteousness/Brother Love

No, no, no! That's not how the Christian lives. Your life as a child of God and bearer of divine seed must be marked by being right, acting right, and doing right. It will be marked by this at the end, so it must be marked by these things *now*. If it's not marked by righteousness now in any meaningful way, then it won't be shown as righteous at the end either. The most important piece of righteous activity that John's concerned with is brother love. We'll talk more about this in the coming weeks, but for now, recognize that failure to love your brothers and sisters in this church is a sure sign of failure to be God-begotten. If you don't have time for these people, don't have space for these people at your table, then you don't have any claim to God-begottenness. You can say you're born again, and the angels will laugh. I'm serious! Brothers and sisters, how you live shows what family you're from. I praise God that your righteousness and God-begottenness are so obvious. And, with St. John, I urge you to live now in a way that manifests them even more clearly.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.