

# Sin's Defeat—Virtues Triumph

a sermon in the series  
Life in the Son

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I John 3:4-5

*“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”*

Why another sermon on sin? I confess that on Thursday morning, as my habit is to go to the text and begin preparation, I sighed and said, The text is about sin and these dear people don't need to hear another sermon on sin, they need to be encouraged. Why does John in this epistle talk so much about sin? It's a constant theme throughout this short epistle. Why? Why should we pay so much attention to it?

I want to give you a three reasons why John keeps bringing it up:

1. Because we see it so little in ourselves.

We don't see sin in ourselves except when we sin and then we have the tendency to call it something else. We have the tendency to blame someone else for our sins, He provoked me. He pushed me. Had he or she not done this I would have not done that. We really don't believe our capabilities of sin.

Malcolm Muggeridge, an influential journalist and author in the twentieth century said,

*“The depravity of man is that once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectual resisted fact.”*

We just don't want to admit how wicked we can be. So John wants to make sure we remember, because it's our natural tendency not to.

2. Because a better understanding of sin leads to a greater dependency on God.

The more readily I am willing to admit my sinful tendencies the more I will depend on the glorious virtue of Christ. The more I can admit that within me there is no good thing, the quicker I will run to Jesus knowing that He is good. It creates a greater dependency on God. So let us remember our sinfulness today, not to be discouraged or condemned, but rather to run to Jesus

all the more quickly and praise His goodness.

3. Because we cannot grasp the profoundness of God's grace until we understand the perversion of sin.

Until you really understand how wicked sin is you never really need God's grace. As long as we justify our sins and make excuses, we never depend upon the grace of God because in the end sin cannot be defeated by human effort or morality. It can only be swallowed up by the grace of God. So remind us all the more, dear John.

## **I. John's Definition of Sin**

Sin is not just a failure to do what is right. Surely you've heard the Greek definition of the word sin—to miss the mark—which is an archer's term that simply means you missed the bulls eye. Sin is to miss the mark of God's righteousness, it is a transgression of God's commands. But John says sin is more than this, it is lawlessness. Meaning a purposeful rebellion against God.

### **A. Sin is Rebellion Against God.**

The law of God is more than rules to regulate your behavior and conduct, the law of God is the very reflection of the nature and the essence of God and tells us what God is like. Therefore, when you violate any command of God it is a violation against the very nature of God.

For example, when you hear the command, "You shall not bear false witness," that ought to tell you something about God. It tells you God is trustworthy and He cannot lie. I can take what He says to heart and believe it because God is trustworthy.

"You shall honor your father and mother," bespeaks of God's sovereign rule. Because He sovereignly rules He places into your life certain authorities that He requires you to submit to. When you submit to them you are ultimately submitting to God.

The command not to steal tells me God is kind and I can trust Him to provide everything I need, so that I don't need to steal from my neighbor. I don't need to take matters into my own hands.

For John to tell us that sin is also lawlessness is to tell us that sin is a personal act against God. When you get in an argument with your spouse or child and sin by losing your temper, you just haven't sinned against the person with whom you have an argument, you've sinned personally against God. It's a rejection of His authority to reign over us. It's a rejection of Him.

Apologist and evangelist Ravi Zacharias tells of a woman and her husband who came to him for counsel for nine months after she had been savagely attacked. They had seen counselors and therapists trying to get help and to return to some kind of normalcy in their lives. But she was still having difficulty coping. They evidently knew Zacharias and got an appointment and the story

was relayed to Zacharias that about three months after she delivered their third child, a man was hiding in some bushes in the backyard, pulled a gun and forced her by gunpoint back into the house. He then he locked the doors, lowered the shades and took the 3-month-old baby, put a gun to its temple and said, “Unless you do what I say I will blow this baby’s brains out.” Then he mercilessly raped her.

After listening to the horrid account of what had happened to the woman, Zacharias asked her to summarize in one sentence everything she felt by that experience. Her answer came through tears and convulsions. “I’ve been violated! I’ve been violated!”

That’s what sin is. It’s a violation against God. An act against Him; it’s a violation of His pure, loving, good heart. So how can that be? How can you make sin to be such a big deal in such terms as a violation of God? Here’s why:

### **1. Sin says God is unwise in His affairs with you.**

When you sin, that act says God, “I do not believe that You are all wise and omniscient. You don’t know all there is to know about me, this situation, or how the outcome will be.” It attacks the very wisdom of God.

### **2. Sin says God is unkind in His affairs.**

Sin always rejects the goodness of God and says God is not as good as He claims to be and that really in the end God is only trying to withhold some pleasure from you. You have this temptation, you know what will feel good, what will excite you and God has said no to that because in the end He is really unkind.

It castigates that God is not being good but evil. Remember what Satan said to Eve? “God didn’t really mean that. He knows the day that you eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you’ll be like Him. He’s trying to withhold that from you. He’s not as good as you have thought Him to be. He’s lying to you. His way is not perfect.” That was the essence of the temptation.

Sin impugns the integrity of God by accusing God of being dishonest with us.

### **3. Sin says God does not love you as He says He does.**

The thought is—If God is denying you pleasure and lying to you then He can’t love you like He claims to love you. Do you realize that when you sin that’s what you’re saying to God? God, I don’t believe you love me. If you loved me as much as I loved me You would not deprive me of this or let this happen to me.

### **4. Sin denies the love of God to discipline you.**

How many times have you sinned fully cognizant of what was going to happen as a consequence? Very seldom. We don't think through the consequences of our actions. Why? Because sin tells you that God won't do that, that won't happen. Nothing is going to happen, you're going to enjoy it. Sin denies the love of God to discipline us.

## **5. Sin says God is incapable of ruling.**

Sin convinces you that you can't trust the Lord, therefore you must not let Him have charge over you. Sin suggests that you know what's best for you, so God shouldn't rule. That's why I say sin or lawlessness is a rebellion against God personally.

## **B. The Rebellion is Continual.**

*“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness.”*

That is the exact Greek rendering. However, that doesn't translate into English the same way. To get John's meaning in Greek the English words should translate this way, “Whoever practices sin commits or practices lawlessness.” The kind of sin John is dealing with is continual. We're not dealing with you blowing it this week as a child of God; we're talking about a lifestyle of sin. We're talking about the man or woman who is not a Christian and is in continual rebellion against God. That is where God found all of us.

## **II. The Mercy of Jesus' Manifestation**

I like the apostle John the more I study him; he's becoming quickly my second favorite apostle following the Apostle Paul. The reason I like John so much is that he does what is natural to my heart, he takes us back to the cross. Preach the Gospel to me, John! That's what I really need to be reminded of and here he does it again. Here is where we were; we were continually in rebellion against God. Unholy insurgence against the love of God and then God did something. What did He do?

*“You know that He was manifested to take away our sins.”*

## **A. The Seriousness of Our Rebellion.**

That's a very powerful statement. But do you know why it's powerful? Here is the reason: You were locked in sin. This body was a prison of sin where we were held within bars of bones. Our sinful soul was held captive and there was no freedom because wherever you went there was your master. That's why Paul asks in Romans 7, “Who can free me from this body of death?”

This body and my fleshly appetites were controlled by a master warden called sin who had no key by which I could be set free, so my rebellion was perpetual against God. I lived out what I was.

## **B. The Loving Pity of God.**

His loving pity is seen here in verse five, “and you know.” What does John mean you know? I know because I’m free today. Someone delivered me from my sins. John assumes his audience knows not by theory but by personal experience the powerful deliverance of the grace and mercy of God. Do you know today, deliverance? I will not assume that of everybody in this room.

I do not assume that everybody listening right now knows what it is like to be set free from the prison of sin but I want you to know it’s better than I can describe. You only know it by experience. I can tell a blind man how beautiful the Grand Canyon is, but he can’t grasp it until he can see it for himself.

*“You know that He was manifested.”*

God brought Him on the scene, and He was declared publicly to take away our sins. In the body Jesus came. Don’t underestimate the incarnation.

Jesus became one of us. Don’t underestimate Him being born in Bethlehem. Don’t shove it back to the Christmas season on a church stage as children act out the nativity and say, “There’s Jesus coming, that’s all it’s about. That’s Christmas.”

Also, don’t assume the cross is more important. Without the incarnation there is no cross. Jesus becoming one of us is radically important today. He came in a body like ours, yet without sin. He was manifested—you could see Him. John says in the very first chapter, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life--” (1 John 1:1).

Hebrews 10:4-5 shows the value of the incarnation:

*“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin.”*

It’s not possible for religion to do that, not even sacrificial types of religion where animals were slaughtered on behalf of the sinner. Religion can’t do that.

*“Therefore when He came into the world He said, ‘Life and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.’”*

What religion could not do, only to leave you to sin again, God has come in a human body and in that body died for sin.

Hebrews 2:14:

*“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood,”*

In other words, those of us who were saved and received the deliverance of God from our sin, we were made of flesh and blood—all we are human beings.

*“He Himself, likewise shared in the same,”*

Good news! Jesus was manifested as a human being,

*“That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death that is the devil and release those who were all their lives subject to bondage.”*

Oh, I wish with all my heart that I could tell the youngest of you to the oldest of you how radically important it is for you to grasp this today, especially, if you are not a child of God. If you are not my brother and sister in Christ, you are in bondage. You are in a prison far worse than any man could construct.

They say in some places in the world you don't want to be thrown in a prison or a jail because they're not like American prisons, and American prisons are bad enough I would believe. In the day of Paul, if you were imprisoned, you hoped you got something to eat and when it came it was usually something leftover from the kitchens of the authorities, already passed its prime and rotten. But you were glad to get it, because if you didn't get that you had nothing at all.

If your clothes had been torn in your arrest, if you had been beaten, they would not carefully remove your clothing, they would rip it off you. If you were to have any type of clothing after that, it was not provided for you. No orange jumpsuits, no stripes. You would lie naked in your cell until somebody from outside the jail took pity on you and brought you another set of clothing.

If in the process of being beaten for your crimes, whether you were innocent or not, don't worry about a fair trial, they didn't know much about that yet. If you were beaten and your wounds were severe, do not look for the prison doctor because there were none. If you were to be tended it was because somebody from the outside took pity on you and came and doctored you.

These prisons were very bad places and it was this kind of severity that Paul uses to describe the sinners bondage. The apostle wanted you to know that if you have not yet trusted Christ you are locked inside a prison that is far worse than anything man could construct or do to you. You are a slave. You are a piece of property to this thing called sin. There is no exaggeration in the use of these words.

Let me prove it to you.

Try to break free from it. See how far your prison escape goes. Go ahead and try. Today. Make a commitment that you're going to turn over a new leaf and that you're going to do better from this moment on. See how long that lasts.

Take it from me, for twenty-six years I tried to do that. I preached the Gospel in order to break free from my incarceration. I was in pulpits preaching because I was trying to break free from my prison of sin. You know what? I just dug myself deeper and deeper in it. Even my preaching became sin and an abomination to God.

Friends, let me tell you something. You subjected to a lifetime of bondage; you ought to be happy I'm telling you good news. Today could be your release day. Today a pardon has been written, signed in the blood of Jesus because in His body He bled His blood for you and you can go free today because of it.

How, you ask, can He take my vilest sins away? Surely my blood must be required. I know that argument. It was mine. I thought somehow, God, I have to pay for what I've done. I just couldn't grasp grace. I just couldn't get it though I'd preached it to others. I've got to do something. Surely, Lord, my blood is required. I did it, so I ought to pay for it. That's how we think. With the shedding of our blood, God's justice could be satisfied and the law silenced, but what if more royal blood was shed for us? What if a purer blood was spilled? What if a blood more clean than yours is shed to wash away your sins?

If God required our own blood at our hands, then surely the blood of the spotless Lamb will do sufficiently and make you white as snow. Do you hear the argument? Do you hear what I'm trying to say? If God required blood at my hands, if me dying eternally in His everlasting hell would satisfy His justice, how much more the royal spotless blood of the Lamb of God?

God Himself shed His blood on Calvary for you. How much more effective and more powerful will it be in removing you of your sins? Nothing more is needed than the blood of Jesus. Surely His wounds will close our wounds. His broken body will make you whole. His sacred scars will heal your scars of sin.

We have a glorious substitute. Rejoice in Him today. How? By taking advantage of what He has done for you. I don't think God is more honored and worshipped than when a sinner humbles himself and says, "I surrender." God is so happy.

In fact, did you know holy angels will literally rejoice? That when you as a sinner humble yourself and say "My blood will not cleanse me of my sins, but Your blood will do," did you know around the throne of God the trumpets of angels begin to sound? Do you know anything about the trumpets of God? If you've ever read the last book of the Bible, Revelation, you will know. Mountains begin to tremble when they get sounded. The earth begins to shift. These are some serious trumpets. And some serious lips blowing those trumpets. They blow a melody of joy over you. Come right now! Come to Christ and let heaven's party begin and rejoice in what God has done on Calvary for you. Rejoice by plunging deep within its cleansing tide and be made well today.

But there is a difficulty you have, and I understand it.

### **C. The Difficulty of Mercy.**

You didn't know mercy was hard, did you? It is really difficult because pride will never accept mercy.

I heard a story about a prideful man who could hardly admit he was wrong. One day he went to a local blacksmith shop and the blacksmith watched the man reach down into some sawdust and pick up a horseshoe that he had just put down after having forged it.

As soon as he picked it up he dropped it because it was still too hot and the blacksmith said, "Kind of hot, ain't it?" The man replied, "Naw, it just doesn't take me long to look at a horseshoe."

Now that's a proud man. He couldn't even admit that the horseshoe was too hot and that he'd made a mistake. Pride doesn't want to admit wrongdoing. In order to get mercy, it means you don't deserve the goodness of God. You don't deserve His kindness because you are a sinner and have violated God.

You've accused God of a lot of bad things. You've literally said to God, "You are not who you claimed to be, you are evil to me. Therefore, you deserve the justice of God. You deserve God coming down very hard on you. But pride says I can't admit that I was wrong. I don't want anybody to know I'm wrong. Do you know whom the last person you don't want to know is wrong? It isn't your mother or father; it isn't your husband or your wife. It's you. That's the person you don't want the bad news to be broken to. You want to keep this illusion, this deception that down deep you're really good."

One day I was watching a documentary on a channel, I think it was the PBS Channel. They were literally interviewing people in maximum-security prisons. The worst of prisons and the worst of criminals: rapists and serial killers. You couldn't just kill people once; you had to kill someone more than once.

The interviewers asked all the prisoners the same question: "Are you down deep, basically good?"

The majority of those men answered "Yes, I think I am."

You see, that's just human nature. You can't help being that way. We're all born that way. We're born with this illusion that we're good and we don't want to admit that we're not. That's the difficulty of mercy; you've got to admit it.

That's the great problem. That was my problem. I didn't want to have someone else, even Jesus do it for me. I wanted to at least have a hand in it. Pride can never accept grace. Pride always wants to withhold and say, "No, I don't mind your assistance, but at least let me have some hand in this."

In order to receive the mercy of God, my friend, you have to say no to your pride. You must take



the hatchet and bury it deep into the heart of pride if you're to know freedom from sin. You've got to sever this deep root of pride, and if you do, you'll know what John is saying. Jesus was manifested to take away our sins.

### **III. The Extent of Sin's Defeat**

How great a victory over sin and deliverance we have been given! However, right here we see the failure of much of evangelical Christianity. The whole thrust of the modern evangelist is to see the sinner come to Christ for the removal of the guilt of his sins and thus qualify him to go to heaven. The preacher proclaims, "Come to Jesus and be free of the guilt of sin and go to heaven when you die." Well, the removal of guilt is very important, but the guilt of sin being removed cannot be as important as sin itself. Can it? As bad as the guilt of committing sin really is, what can be worse than the sin within me from whence the act of sin came?

Every spring, river, and creek has a fountainhead. It has to start somewhere. What is responsible for the water of the Ohio River? You have to trace the Ohio River back to its origin and find the source. What's more important, the river or the source? To me, logically, it's the source because without it there'd be no river. Your actions of sin are very terrible, absolutely, we've already acknowledged it's rebellion against God, but where do they come from?

The Bible tells us it comes from a heart within me enslaved to sin. Sin is not confined to my actions. There's a reason why before I was a Christian I sinned, the reason is that I was a sinner. I was fallen, infected by sin, and bound to it. I could not be righteous. In fact, Paul told the Romans in Romans 6:20, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."

Let me give you the translation: When you were running with sin, bound and imprisoned, you couldn't do anything with Jesus; you were completely free from righteousness. Righteousness didn't know you and you didn't know it. But Jesus came and in order to take away your sin, that means to free you from the power, not just the guilt.

Believers, you need to see this. Romans 6:17-18, "But God be thanked that though you were,"—listen to his terminology, you're not this way any longer. We'll deal with your sin problem in a minute, but I want to acknowledge that you were at one time a slave of sin. But not anymore.—"Yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine in which you were delivered."

In other words, Paul preached a Gospel that said you are sinners and there is no hope of getting out of your prison of sin unless you believe in Jesus. They obeyed that word.

Then verse 18 Paul said "And having been set free from sin you became slaves of righteousness." You traded masters. I want you to know my Master is very awesome. He doesn't mistreat me. In fact, He's never made me do one thing that I didn't want to do. Never. He's even let me throw temper tantrums and disobey Him. That's the kind of Master He is. That's why you cannot say that now you're a Christian sin doesn't really matter; because what John is saying is that the rebellious

nature is broken. It's not just the guilt; it's the sin itself that God is dealing with.

You've been set free from sin. God has unlocked the key to the prison of your heart with His grace and now you are free to be His child and do what He wants you to do. I'm still happy today because I still want to do things for God. I fail, but when I get back to the Gospel I'm told once again and reassured, "Michael, it's Christ in you." I have a New Master! And for that reason I can't say that sin doesn't really matter. John says it's still lawlessness and as I showed you earlier that's rebellion against God. Is rebellion against God of no consequence? I don't think so. I'm sure you would agree with me that because you are a child of God rebellion takes on an even more serious tone. I think of Absalom and David.

Absalom disobeyed his father David and tried to overthrow his father's kingdom. That was a kind of treachery, but because he was the king's son the act of treason had to be more reprehensible.

John is stating emphatically sin is rebellion, but, please watch this—here is the good news—I've done all of this to get you to this point, here it is: John is telling us that we are children of God. We are not rebels anymore. We are not in rebellion against God anymore.

*"And we know that He was manifested to take away our sins and in Him there is no sin."*

We are like our Lord. It doesn't mean we never sin, it means we don't continually practice sin. Children of God don't live in rebellion because Jesus was manifested to take away our lawlessness, which is rebellion against God. We are no longer rebels. What's a rebel? One who completely rejects the authority of those who govern him. I don't do that. I'm one of the redeemed, I like Jesus' rule. I need His authority. Christ has taken my rebellious and treasonous heart and has replaced it with one that is loyal and loving to His gracious crown. I submit.

Dear child of grace, you may joy in your King today because He is also your Savior. Jesus is the kind of Savior that not only forgives your sin but deals with the sin problem. To limit His saviorship to the forgiveness of sin is defenseless—He's a better Savior than that!

Let us suppose while Shawn was at the beach last week, he was out in the ocean wading around and one of those riptides got a hold of his feet and carried him way out. He's a good swimmer but he can't fight his way against the riptide, it's carrying him out further and further. His strength is about gone and he knows he's about to drown. He's about to cry out but at the same time a lifeguard on duty has already recognized the situation and has jumped in to save Shawn.

By the time he gets out there, Shawn is about ready to go down for the last time, the lifeguard grabs him and saves him. Shawn isn't going to drown. Well, praise God, Shawn has been saved. But he's not rescued yet. Because neither he or the lifeguard are safe on the shore. Let us further suppose that another strong current comes and rips Shawn from the grip of that lifeguard and he is never to be seen again. The lifeguard makes it back to shore, however, my question is this, will they write of him and talk of him on the news, "What a great lifeguard, he saved Shawn Rice!"?

No. Why? Because he didn't get Shawn to the shore safely.

The word savior simply means rescuer, deliverer. I have a deliverer who will not only keep me from sinking in my sin but will get me safely home so that one day I am finally just like Him.

You can't have justification without having another big word sanctification. You can't be saved from the guilt of your sin without also being delivered from the power of it. That's what happened to us. I know you want to argue a little bit and say to me, I still sin, I'm a Christian, but I still sin. Yes, I'm sure of it. I still act out of disobedience. However, this Bible tells me now my disobedience is not considered an act of mutiny. I'm in a new category, new class of person, not a rebel.

My disobedience, my sin now is never an act of treason against the sovereign God of the universe. It's seen as the naughtiness of an erring child. I'm not minimizing my sin; I'm maximizing what Christ has done in my life. Sin is no longer seen as the act of treason but as the act of a disobedient, self-willed child. It's seen as the rebellion of a son, not the sedition of a traitor and it's treated with the loving hand of correction, not the penalty of the law. My sin gets my Father's tender discipline not the condemnation of death given to every insurgent and traitor. Praise God!

I'm not a slave to it.

Let me illustrate it this way. A little over a year ago on a January morning I walked in here at 5:30 in the morning to a foul odor called "skunk". I'll never forget that morning and the panic in my heart because I knew we wouldn't be able to have services, at least not here, because of the sickening smell. So we closed the building down and did not have services that day.

Now my first assumption was on that morning, it's still here. Somewhere under that building that skunk is still here leaving his presence to be known. He is really manifesting himself. So I went to all the places that possibly I could find in the foundation where he could be but saw no evidences of it. I tried to find it the best I could under there, praying I wouldn't see any beady eyes looking back at me and I didn't. He was gone. But the foul odor remained.

Listen closely; if you're a Christian, sin's power is gone. Its foul odor still remains, but sin and its power are gone. Jesus has committed to take away even the foul odor. Praise God for this Savior of ours.

Let's heed His Word today. If you need Jesus Christ to remove the power and odor of your sin, humble yourself and let Him take away the power of your sins. Amen.