

**Lesson 13: “The Pursuit of Purity”****1 John 3:3-8****Craig Crawshaw**

Of all the pursuits in which a child of God might engage, none pleases our Heavenly Father more than the pursuit of purity – the purity that emulates and exemplifies the purity of our Lord Jesus.

John has already told us in his epistle that he is writing so that we may not sin (2:1). He wants our purity. And Peter urges, *“like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.”* (1 Peter 1:15) He too wants our purity. The apostle Paul was concerned that we *“be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 11:3). He too wants our purity. And Jesus Himself taught us to *“be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48). Clearly our God wants His children to be pure in all their ways. And John begins today’s passage with this same thought of purity on his mind. **1 John 3:3-8** *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

The general theme of purity is evident from a number of phrases we have just read:

- √ *“everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”*
- √ *“He appeared in order to take away sins”*
- √ *“no one who abides in Him sins”*
- √ *“the one who practices righteousness is righteous”*

You will recall that in verse 2, from last week’s consideration, we learned that when we, God’s children, see Jesus face to face, we shall be made like Him in sinless perfection. And then in today’s verse 3 we are told that *“everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure.”* No, we won’t become perfectly pure in this life. For that we must wait until we see Jesus face to face. But, John tells us here that the more we think about that glorious day, the more we are helping our pursuit of purity in this life. How is that? Well, John is teaching that the more we abide with Jesus, which includes thinking about Him and His purity, the less we will sin, and thus the more we will be pure in our behavior.

You have heard about a “clean room” haven’t you? This is a room that is set up with meticulous care to keep out any contaminants. Typically it is a laboratory facility utilized as a part of specialized industrial production or scientific research. It is a room designed to maintain extremely low levels of dust, airborne organisms, or vaporized particles. To use our word of the day, it is a room made as *pure* as possible, to keep out any pollutants.

Well, in this context, God wants our life as much as possible to be a “clean room” – keeping out the contaminant of sin. And God wants us to be meticulous about keeping sin “at bay”, that our life might be as pure as possible in this life.

Now the contaminant of sin comes from two primary sources: SELF and SATAN

- (1) SELF – We have a sin nature passed down from our sinning forefathers. And we cannot escape from this nature with which we were born. But we can’t just blame Adam and Eve – we are also sinners by personal choice and practice, which means if it had been us in the garden of Eden, we would have rebelled also.
- (2) SATAN - Satan is the angel who rebelled against God back before the creation of the earth (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28). His name of “Satan” means “accuser” and he and his demonic army are continually out to trip up the followers of Christ in sin any way they can, accusing us before God as “losers” and “sinners” worthy of his family, rather than God’s.

Today’s passage given to us by the Holy Spirit, via the writing of John, is essentially a God-analysis of sin and how to avoid it, so as to be in pursuit of purity. Here he teaches us:

1. What sin is
2. What sin does
3. Why sin occurs
4. From whence sin comes

## 5. How sin is to be conquered

### 1. WHAT SIN IS (v. 4)

I find verse 4 to be the most concise definition of sin: “*sin is lawlessness.*” Now it is one thing to break the laws of man, and that certainly is sin. But this verse is speaking of being a lawbreaker of God’s moral law. “Practicing” sin speaks of continual and repetitive choosing to break God’s law. And more than breaking the law of God, it is breaking the very heart of God.

The Greek work for “sin” literally means to “miss the mark” as in missing a “bull’s eye” in a target. So sin literally means to fail to hit the “bull’s eye” of God’s perfect will for our life.

If we are going to pursue purity, keeping a “clean room” that keeps out the contamination of sin, we must ever strive to seek the will of God in our decision-making. Notice, we are not talking about trying to meticulously keep the Law of God – we have been set free from that impossible task through the gracious provision of Christ. We are not to be “law-keepers” in order to be pure. Rather we are to be “will-seekers” – ever allowing the Spirit of God within us to guide us into “hitting the mark” of God’s will.

Now that’s an appropriate message for Pentecost Sunday!

### 2. WHAT SIN DOES (v. 5)

Then we see in verse 5 that sin undoes the work of Christ on the cross. We are reminded that Christ appeared to take away sins. So to engage in sins, one is doing the very thing that Christ came to take away. Sin then opposes the work of Christ. Have you ever thought of it that way? John leads us to that sober consideration.

I have heard it said with this visual image: sin is like throwing manure in the face of God. It is going my way and ignoring God’s way. When we sin, we are indeed like “sheep gone astray” and refusing the gentle leadership of the Heavenly Shepherd. It is the ultimate selfishness – demonstrating, in essence that I want to be in charge of my life rather than submit to God’s Lordship.

What does sin do? It removes one from fellowship with God, because we undo the very work that He has provided to keep us from sin. Sin essentially says, “For this moment I reject your salvation, God.” That’s why a life of rejection is the “unforgivable sin” that will keep one apart from God forever. Such a life shuts the door on fellowship with God forever.

### 3. WHY SIN OCCURS (v. 6-7)

We continue our God-analysis of sin by observing why sin occurs. These two verses give two answers to that question that are clearly related. Sin occurs ...

- (1) by failing to abide in Him (Christ-the one who came to take away sins) and
- (2) by failing to practice righteousness

The first is a falling away from relationship with Christ and the second is a falling away from continual right-living. To use our “clean room” analogy, we keep the contaminant of sin out by (1) keeping close to the perfect Savior. Listening to Him speak through His Holy Word keeps the contaminants out.

**Proverbs 119:11** *Your Word I have treasured in my heart that I might not sin against You.*

And talking to Him in a continual sense of thankful prayer keeps the contaminants out .

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** *In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

As we are continually thankful in prayer, we are doing God’s will and not committing sin.

And secondly, we keep the contaminant of sin out of our “clean room” by (2) practicing righteousness – meaning we strive always to do what God wants rather than what we want. We do things His way. Father knows best. We seek His face and His will. “*Not my will, but Yours be done*” is our continual mantra – just like Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This is “practicing” righteousness. And like all practice, we don’t always get it right. But the more we practice seeking God’s for wisdom and direction, the better we’ll get at it, and the less we will sin.

#### 4. FROM WHENCE SIN COMES (v. 8a)

It should not surprise us to be reminded that Satan (our adversary), otherwise called the devil (our accuser) is the origination of sin – which is rebellion against God = lawlessness. Satan is a created angel who rebelled against God long before the creation of the earth, we are told in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. His rebellion was passed on to many of the other angels who then in their rebellion became demons.

And then that sinful rebellion was passed on to our ancestors Adam and Eve, who passed in on to the entire human race. Sin is indeed the ultimate deadly plague. And John tells us that *“the one who practices sin is of the devil.”* Now again, “practices” indicates repetition and continual intent. John is not talking here about a few wrong decisions by a believer. John has already said that we can confess and be forgiven and restored. A sin does not make “of the devil.” But “practicing” sin as a lifestyle of rebellion against the Father and the Son does make one “of the devil.”

Thus, we keep a “clean room” by continual confession of those sins that beset us. We don’t allow the devil a foothold into our life by letting sinful behavior become a “practice.” We return quickly and often to our Heavenly Advocate, Jesus, and restore relationship before continual sin gets “out of hand.” We regret and repent of any sin that creeps in, and by so doing we “resist” the devil, as we are called to do by James:

**James 4:7-8a** *Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

#### 5. HOW SIN IS TO BE CONQUERED (v. 8b)

As John concludes his brief but powerful analysis of sin, he gives the secret to conquering sin.

**1 John 3:8** *The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*

This is cryptic, but oh so instructive. We must know with confidence that we can never push back the devil in our own strength of will – however noble and well-intentioned we might be in our self-efforts. The devil’s temptations and his sinful ways can be defeated by one work and one work only, and that is by the completed work of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Jesus came to die. That was the triune God’s plan from the beginning. Jesus’ death on the cross was the crushing of the serpent’s head that was prophesied in the garden of Eden in God’s curse of the devil:

**Genesis 3:15** *He (Jesus-the seed of the woman) shall bruise (crush) you on the head, even though you shall bruise him on the heel.*

At the very moment of “it is finished,” Satan “bruised” Jesus by putting Him to physical death as a man. But also at that very moment, Jesus “crushed” the head of Satan, and his ultimate doom was sealed. At that moment, Jesus, in the words of John, “destroyed the works of the devil.” He still flails around, seeking as a roaring lion whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), but his doom is sealed and his works are minimized by the hand of God to be only what the Christian can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). The devil has been robbed of power and rendered virtually inoperative. And one day he and sin will be annihilated forever.

Christian, keep your “safe house” as you strive for purity. Remember, that quest is the pursuit that pleases God more than any other. Keep the contaminants of sin out, as you conscientiously choose to “abide in Christ” and “practice righteousness” by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. May all who love the Lord Jesus be diligently in pursuit of purity. And may God help us in our pursuit.