

HALLELUJAH, WHAT A SAVIOR
(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2018)

Scripture: 10 Commandments; 1 John 3:4-8

INTRODUCTION

Before I started my study of 1 John, I think I had the view that 1 John was simpler in its theology than for example the book of Romans.

I no longer hold this position.

While John's style is different than that of Paul, I don't think that John is simpler than Paul.

There is incredible depth of thought in the book of Romans, we know. And there is incredible depth of thought and theology in 1 John.

This is not surprising given the man God called to write this book.

I mentioned the following in my first sermon introducing John and this letter.

God in His infinite wisdom and mercy took one of the cousins of our Lord, a rough and tumble fisherman and possibly a priest.

For three years, our Lord patiently taught and trained him and put up with his, at times overly harsh, self-seeking, and hasty spirit. He then died on the cross to pay his sin while his beloved cousin watched.

John and Peter later ran to the tomb on Resurrection Sunday and then later spent 40 more days with our Lord before His ascension.

This man who knew Jesus probably for most of Jesus' life would live and minister in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension and later Ephesus.

He suffered for our Lord and for a time was exiled on the island of Patmos.

Along with Peter, he played a vital role in the finalization of the entire canon of Scripture.

So, with all this as background it is not surprising that although John's writing has a simple style in some ways there is great depth and much in this letter that makes us think.

What comes across so clearly is the glory of our Lord and Savior.

There are some challenges in the verses that we consider today, but most of all may we see afresh the beauty and power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Borrowing from the great hymn writer, Philip Bliss, **Hallelujah, what a Savior!**

We are going to look at 1 John 3:4-8 in two parts:

- 1) Danger and Defiance, verses 4, 6, and 7
- 2) Purpose and Victory of Christ, verses 5, 7, and 8

1) DANGER AND DEFIANCE, VERSES 4, 6, 7

1 John can be difficult to outline. You are going to find differences among scholars in terms of an outline.

The outline that I have been following takes 1 John 2:18-3:8 as the third major section of the book which focuses on warning and the call to abide.

There was a real danger facing John's first readers.

John who knew Jesus from the very beginning was dealing with those who denied the truth of Jesus and were causing serious problems for the church and Christians John was overseeing.

What Jesus warned about was happening.

John echoes the warning that Jesus gave during his ministry about the times of testing that would come for first century believers and those that would follow.

Starting with 1 John 2:28, I ended last week showing that there are five aspects of hope for the true believer.

- 1) 2:28 – The hope of Christ's return produces the effect of continual abiding in every true believer as they long for the glorious future prepared for them.

2) 2:29 – The hope of Christ’s return should enable to make doing what is right a pattern in our lives.

3) 3:1 – Our hope is strengthened knowing that God in His love and mercy has made His children.

4) 3:2 – Our hope is fixed on the glory to come – we shall be like Him.

5) 3:3 – What is perhaps the key verse in this section. Since the promise is that we will be like Him, the desire should also be to live like He did now!

Now in verses 4-8 John focuses again on the dangers facing his congregation as well as the blessings that we have in Christ and His victory!

In these verses we have several key words repeated.

The verb translated as **commits** in verse 4 is used 4 times in these verses.

The verb **to sin** is found 3 times.

The word **sin** is used five times.

The word **lawlessness** is used 2 times.

The words **righteous** or **righteousness** are used 3 times.

And finally **the person and work of Christ** are mentioned 5 times in these five verses.

I have entitled this first point Danger and Defiance.

The danger is the easy to see in these verses – verse 7.

1John 3:7 ¶ Little children, let no one deceive you.

The verb deceive is used three times in 1 John.

We can deceive ourselves – 1 John 1:8.

1John 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who *try to* deceive you.

This is such a fundamental but important warning for every believer since the beginning of creation.

God’s good creation was invaded by a deceiver.

And although we rejoice in the finished work of Christ on the cross, we rejoice in the truth of God's Word, we know there will always be a battle for truth and against deception.

When Jesus was with His disciples in the Garden before His great testing, what did He command His disciples to do?

To Peter, John, and James, Jesus said, "Stay here and watch with Me."

He repeated his command to them after finding them sleeping, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

You are to be watchful against temptation, against false teaching, and against those who would threaten and harm those entrusted to your care.

So clearly, John is warning against danger in these verses in connection with verse 26 and also earlier verses 18 and 19.

As best we can we must keep in mind the larger context of this section as we look at verse 4 and verse 6.

Now verse 4 by itself doesn't seem to be all that much of a challenge. It is verse 4 taken with verse 6 that presents the challenge.

Let's look first at verse 4.

1John 3:4 ¶ Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

The word sin is found 17 times in 1 John. So here in verse 4, the word does not stand out.

On the other hand, the word lawlessness is used 15 times in the NT but only here in 1 John.

The word lawlessness is in Greek *anomia*, the basis for the word antinomian.

Listen to a few other uses of this word, lawlessness.

Matt. 7:23 And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

Matt. 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

In some contexts, sin and lawlessness are basically synonyms. In other contexts, lawlessness is used to describe rebellion so serious that the one engaged in such is living in total darkness, outside the body of Christ.¹

We always have to be careful when dealing with sin and how we characterize it. We know even the smallest sin deserves eternal punishment.

James said if we break the law at just one point, we are guilty of breaking all of God's Law.

We also know that we can easily see sins in others, the speck in another person's eye, and we miss the log of sin that is in our own eye.

In verse 4, John might be describing those who were arguing that sin was no big deal, something not to worry about, or he was describing the false teachers and those who sadly followed them of being guilty of ultimate treason and rebellion against Christ.²

One commentator, Stephen Smalley writes,

“The act of sin (John seems to be saying) involves a rebellious alignment with the devil, rather than with God in Christ (cf. vv 8, 10). It implies not merely breaking God's law, but flagrantly opposing him (in Satanic fashion) by so doing. As such, it is to be renounced by the children of God.”³

Look at 1 John 5:16-17.

1John 5:16 ¶ If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

1John 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

¹ Yarbrough, 182.

² See Smalley, 154-155 and Yarbrough, 181-182.

³ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 155.

The warning of Jesus again from Matthew 24:12 is particularly important in the context here of 1 John 3.

Matt. 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

The next section of John warns about this very thing, the loss of love for brothers.

So let's recap and consider verse 4 before we move to verse 6.

All sin is serious. It is lawlessness, rebellion against God.

The believer seeks forgiveness in Christ. We rest in our advocate.

The false teachers John was confronting may have been teaching that sin was really no big deal. Maybe they were even twisting the precious nature of the gospel.

Another possibility is that John's language, reflecting the warning of Jesus, is saying that the false teachers in their denial of truth and their failure to love have crossed a line. They are joined with the devil in his rebellion.

This then brings us to verse 6.

1John 3:6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin

John has already spoken 6 times about forgiveness of sins. He cannot be talking about sinless perfection in these verses without contradicting what he has written earlier.

So how do we understand this first part of verse 6?

This is a great question.

Stephen Smalley writing in the Word Biblical Commentary series has a very long discussion where he reviews quite a few explanations for verse 6.

In brief, there is a **grammatical** solution that some take.

Some understand that John is saying that a believer no longer habitually sins. This understanding is based on the present tense verbs used in verse 4 and verse 6.

Some propose a **theological** explanation of various forms: deliberate sin vs. involuntary sin, or the difference that we see in 5:16-17, or that John is speaking about what is possible rather than what is actual.⁴

Another approach is to explain this in terms of the **situation** that John was dealing with, the danger of the false teachers and those who were following them.

The Christian does not sin in the way that John especially warns against in this section, joining league with the antichrists and with the devil.

Robert Yarbrough writes:

John may be assuming a definition of “sins” that extends primarily to the transgressions that threaten his readers and have already led some to desert the faith (cf. 2:19), as John sees it. This is, in other words, a contextual solution to the problem. Some run aground at points of doctrine (2:22), others at points of ethics (2:4), and still others at points of love for God (stressed later in the epistle) or for other people (2:9–11).⁵

All the approaches have some evidence for them. In my opinion, the better understandings are the theological and situational (contextual). There is some overlap in these explanation though there are some differences.

Now in the midst of our questions, we should not miss here the truth, challenge, and duty of verse 6.

The call for the believer is a life of active faith and fellowship with the Triune God.

We never must make the mistake of thinking it is just our own efforts or attempts to improve.

At the same time, let us never be content with the sin and failings that still afflict us.

1 John 2:27 assures us, you will abide in Him. And 2:28 commands you to abide in Him so that we when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

⁴ Smalley, 161.

⁵ Yarbrough, 183.

Before we move to our final point focused on the work of Christ, let us consider the end of 1 John 3:6.

Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

We must understand the word sins in light of what we have already discussed lest this verse be a source of stumbling or confusion.

This verse is not speaking of a sincere believer who confesses His sins and trusts in the mercy of Christ for complete forgiveness.

Rather we are dealing with the one who has never come to appreciate the absolute holiness of God and therefore has never come to the point of seeing or knowing Christ.

John is obviously speaking of spiritual sight and knowledge.

The believer sees and knows the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore seeks to walk just as He walked.

2) PURPOSE AND VICTORY OF CHRIST, VERSES 5, 7 AND 8

In the midst of some of the questions that we have about our verses we must not miss the glorious truth that John shares concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is all very familiar, but may it never become ordinary. All of our faith and hope holds together or falls with this precious truth.

1John 3:5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

The verb **to know** is used at least 15 times in 1 John. It speaks of important matters that we confess related to doctrine, ethics, and how we are called to live with each other. And there is an often an overlap of these three areas.⁶

The verb manifested is also an important verb in 1 John. It doesn't always have the same usage.

⁶ Yarbrough, 185.

In some cases it speaks of His incarnation and in other cases of His final return.

Here it speaks of course of our Lord's incarnation.

The Son of God came to earth, He was manifested, to take away our sins.

The language of **take away** is not often used in the context of taking away our sin, but here and in maybe just two other places it has that meaning.

John 1:29 ¶ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,
"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Another interesting use of this verb is Col. 2:14.

Col. 2:14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Here we consider the glorious truth of sins forgiven and yet even more.

How do you enjoy even more than just forgiveness of sins?

God's work of salvation is more than just the fact that God's justice is satisfied and you are forgiven.

Now, we should never downplay how precious this is, but Scripture speaks of even more.

The crucifixion of Christ also means that through him our old man is crucified too.⁷

Gal. 2:20 I have been **crucified** with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;

Gal. 5:24 And those *who are* Christ's have **crucified** the flesh with its passions and desires.

Let us also not forget to rejoice in the glorious truth at the end of verse 5.

and in Him there is no sin.

⁷ See the comments of John Calvin here.

It is probably best to see that John is speaking this of Christ and not the believer who is abiding in Christ.

Now one reason I emphasize this truth is that I think in some ways it is under assault today.

Really?

Not long ago, a woman named Rachel Held Evans, who is very popular in some Christian circles, tried to argue in a tweet of all places, that Jesus was basically a racist as he dealt with the Syrophenician woman who came to him asking for her daughter to be healed.

Now, she did later apologize and try to clarify her previous statement, but I do see this as one sign of how much the ideas of the world affect how we interpret the Scriptures and understand our Lord.⁸

We do rejoice in the full humanity of our Lord. He came in human flesh.

He was truly tempted and tested. But he was absolutely pure and unspotted.

And this is both amazing and so important for us to constantly confess.

What a refuge for you to cling to.

Cling to Christ. That is how you know with assurance your sins are removed!

In Him there is no sin.

He is righteous.

He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.

Here in verse 8 is the first place in John's letter where he speaks of Christ as the Son of God. That stands out, but of course we know that John also wrote John 3:16 so it is not the first place where John has confessed this truth.

It might be that John uses this term to emphasize in opposition to His opponents the full divinity of Christ and His pre-existence.⁹

⁸ <https://twitter.com/rachelheldevans/status/1066335016073003008>

⁹ Smalley, 170.

But here let us also consider how beautiful is this description of the work of Christ.

Where the devil's work has brought endless ruin, death, and destruction.

The work of our Lord is to destroy this wicked work.

And this should convict and encourage you.

It should convict you that there is no place for entertaining sin in your life.¹⁰

It should encourage you to know that this life, even as we know the world is still in great rebellion, is not lived in vain.

You cannot control the future.

We cannot in our power change the world nor another person.

But our Lord came to earth to bring salvation to His people and to bring destruction to the devil's work.

No, we have not seen the climax of this work.

We can't say how tomorrow or next year are going to work out.

But we can say with absolute assurance, though the devil is an enemy, it is not his plan that will dominate the future.

Our Lord reigns and rules. Unprofitable servants though we be, we must serve Him.

Hallelujah, what a Savior!

CONCLUSION

And what a blessing now we enjoy in eating a meal that speaks of our Lord's purpose and victory.

As we close this message and prepare for the Lord's Supper, I want to do so reading the first 8 verses of 1 John 3.

It is this glorious truth that is part of our celebration of the Lord's Supper as children of God and joint-heirs with Christ

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Letter of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 19; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 128.

Prayer

Hymn 365

BENEDICTION: HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.