

1 John 3 – Part I

1 John 3:8

In [1 John 3:8](#) there are two very powerful statements,

1Jn 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

The first statement is that “**He who sins is of the devil**”, and the second statement is that Christ was “**manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil**”. Now, this is the only verse in [1 John](#) that speaks of the devil (3 times) with the exception of v10 which mentions him one time. V10 states that the person who “**does not practice righteousness is not God, nor is he who does not love his brother**”. So, according to v10, if a person claims to be a Christian, but does not practice doing that which is right before God, and / or if they have no love for other Christians, then John says that that person simply is not saved. His conclusion is that they are “**manifest**” as being “**children of the devil**”.

It seems apparent that the activity of Satan in the world has been dramatically intensified in the past several decades through all of the media options available to people. We actually have current television programs called “Lucifer” and “Angel from Hell”. The video games that many young children are allowed to play are unquestionably demonic both pictorially and in their influence on their young minds. Much of the modern secular music is demonic in its influence on people’s lives. The names of many of the bands have demonic implications and many have been associated with Anton Lavay who was the satanic high priest in America and started the Church of Satan. Their symbol was sticking their tongue out – a common practice today. The rock band Eagles of Death were playing their song “Kiss the Devil” when ISIS attacked the concert in Paris. Pictures show that most of the people had raised their hands with the satanic hand signal. Witchcraft, Wicca, the occult, and satanic worship are experiencing a global revival. In order to try and counteract all of this, there has been a dramatic increase of books by Christian authors on spiritual warfare and demonology. However, this kind of fascination and almost obsession with the “**devil**” is not really a healthy spiritual antidote to sin or to demonic activity. Many in the charismatic movement often seem infatuated with the false teaching of “taking authority and rebuking the devil”.

From a purely pastoral perspective, I do not personally see any real benefit in spending too much time studying about Satan. He would fall under the theological category and doctrine of “Fallen Angels”. Obviously, there are places in the Scriptures which encourage the believer to be knowledgeable and cognizant of how the devil actually works and what some of those works really are. [Ephesians 6:11](#) speaks of the “**wiles of the devil**”, or his “**schemes**”.

Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The Amplified Bible calls it the “**strategies and deceits of the devil**”. [2 Corinthians 2:11](#) talks about his “**devices**”, or his “**intentions**” or “**designs**”.

2Co 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

[2 Timothy 2:26](#) talks about the “**snare of the devil**”.

2Ti 2:26 and *that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

The NIV calls it the “**trap of the devil**”. [1 Peter 5:8](#) declares that he is seeking to “**devour**” the believer.

1Pe 5:8 **Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.**

Unfortunately, however, the more that we place Satan in our minds, the more of a foothold he can gain into our thinking. The mind is the battlefield, so the devil attacks people mentally and he does that through false teaching and biblical error. He is constantly trying to get people to doubt in the truthfulness of God’s word. God confronts our minds and controls our hearts through the truth, and so the enemy places doubt about that truth in a person’s mind. He did that in the Garden of Eden, and it has been his tactic since that time. So, whichever one we feed into our minds, God’s truth or Satan’s lies, is the one that will eventually control our lives. Every time that we hear something that is not true and is contrary to God’s Word, that error in the person’s mind has been strategically placed there by the enemy in some form or fashion. The devil is the source of that which is not true, and God is the source of that which is true. It really is that simple.

It almost seems that some segments of the Christian population are more focused on how they can control Satan than how they should be controlled by Christ. All of the rebuking that goes on with the devil is actually absurd simply because the devil is a single creature who is neither omnipresent, omniscient, nor omnipotent. He can only be in one place at one time and he certainly is not afraid of anything that we say or do. It is certainly unscriptural for a believer to think that Satan responds to that Christian’s words when Satan does not even know that he spoke to him. It would be a lot more important as well as fruitful for the believer to spend his time talking to God. What ultimately is important to the believer is not what the devil does or can do, but what Christ has already done and what we know that He will do to him in the future. We know that God has provided the devil with some level of power and authority, but we do not know the actual details of what those limits really are. We have to be content living within the boundaries that God has established for Satan. We can neither quantify those limits nor even define them. What we do know, however, is that whatever Satan is doing or can do, the power of God over those activities is able to cancel, annul, and overthrow them completely. The worst sin that man could ever commit was to nail the Son of God to a cross and in that vicious act, the devil believed that he had pulled off his greatest victory. In reality, however, in the wisdom, will, and sovereignty of God, that hideous and repulsive act became the very source of salvation for any man or woman who comes to Christ by faith. What Satan thought was his greatest victory actually was his greatest defeat.

Now, as we begin this verse that mentions the “**devil**” on three separate occasions, there are three simple facts about the devil that we need to mention. [1 John 3:8](#) is not intended to be a commentary on Satan, but rather a commentary on continuing sin in a person’s life, so this study will not make the devil the focus. The word “**devil**” is the Greek word “*diabolos*” which literally means slanderer or accuser.¹ He is actually called the “**accuser of the brethren**” in [Revelation 12:10](#),

Rev 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Obviously, one of Satan's strategies is to separate men from God and drag them down into the Lake of Fire with himself – and that he seems to do quite well. He is excellent in getting people to trust in something other than the atoning blood of Christ for their salvation and has created deadly religions all over the world.

Now, the first thing that we want to understand about the devil is that he is a created being just like we are. He was created during the seven days of creation, but he was not created as Satan, but as Lucifer – probably the most beautiful of all of God's angels. In all likelihood, he originally had access to the earth and was in the Garden of Eden as Lucifer and not as a serpent. All of that is simply conjecture, but it is reasonable to assume. Most likely he was sent there to be a blessing to Adam and Eve. He was not sent to the earth to tempt Adam and Eve, but to be a great blessing for their life – to minister to them and to serve them. He was still in his perfect state, but somewhere along the way, he transgressed against God and carried out the consequences of that transgression against Adam and Eve. [Ezekiel 28](#) is one of the Old Testament passages that speaks about what happened and [Ezekiel 28:15](#) declares the following

Eze 28:15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.

[Hebrews 1:14](#) says this about angels,

Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Neither Lucifer nor any of the other angels existed prior to creation. As a fallen angel, he has been given some degree of power and authority by God. Those limitations are not completely known or understood, but we do know that the primary weapon that he uses is deception. [John 8:44](#) declares the following,

Jn 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Certainly someone may ask as to what was it that caused the most exalted angel in God's creation to turn against God. No one knows exactly, but Scripture does provide some insight into what happened. It seems that one of the primary works of God that incensed Lucifer was when God did something that was unique to His entire creation. He not only made man in His own image, but at the same time He gave man authority over all of the earth. [Genesis 1:26](#) declares what God actually did,

Ge 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Now, if Lucifer was the most exalted angel in God's kingdom, but did not have authority over anything, it appears that what God did somewhat angered Lucifer. Most likely he became jealous and envious. They had a kind of unconditional authority over something and Lucifer did not have that. Unfortunately, Lucifer became disgruntled with all that God had given to him, so in his arrogance and pride he devised a diabolical plan to try and subvert God's plan. Obviously, there were some strategic things that he did not understand about his Creator. [Psalm 115:16](#) says,

Ps 115:16 The heaven, *even* the heavens, are the LORD'S; But the earth He has given to the children of men.

Because Lucifer was not satisfied with what God had given him he decided to rebel. [Isaiah 14:13-14](#) says,

Isa 14:13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

What Lucifer wanted was to become the god of this world so he could be worshipped (which he is today) and then use that authority against God. His envy and his jealousy ruined him – and it will ruin anyone who follows in his footsteps.

Secondly, we know that Satan was lifted up in pride sometime after His creation and rebelled against God and was permanently cast out of heaven to the earth where he is now called the “**ruler of this world**” in [John 12:31](#) and “**the prince of the power of the air**” in [Ephesians 2:2](#). It seems somewhat reasonable to assume based on various verses, and especially the one in [Isaiah 14](#), that before his rebellion that Lucifer had access both to heaven and to the earth, but he became very disgruntled with God's oversight of the earth. So he rebelled.

Thirdly, we know that God has pronounced a judgment on the devil and eventually he will be cast into the Lake of Fire as noted in [Revelation 20:10](#).

Rev 20:10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

He is also called a “**deceiver**” who one day will deceive “**the whole world**” as stated in [Revelation 12:9](#).

Rev 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

That verse is one of the verses that has convinced me that there will be a rapture before the seven year Tribulation. Obviously there will be people in the Tribulation who do respond to the gospel and are not deceived by Satan. We know that the 144,000 servants who are marked by God will not be deceived, but certainly the majority of the people from all parts of the entire world will fall under Satan's illusions. His powers of deception will prevail over the majority of people on the earth during that time. What amazes me personally is how easy it seems for people to believe a lie, and at the same time fully reject that which is true. In essence, it is the powerful influence of Satan's lies that has created such a spiritual imbalance in the world.

Now, John's first statement that "**He who sins is of the devil**" has to be the most emphatic and resounding statement in the entire letter. It almost seems that John has been talking about this whole topic of who is saved and who is not saved for 2 ½ chapters, and it is as if he finally reaches a place where he just wants to make his point and then move on, so he simply says that "*He who practices habitual and ongoing sin is simply of the devil*". Every time that I read that verse, I know that my jaw must drop. When I read it, it is like I go into a kind of spiritual shock with the utter boldness and brashness with which John delivers this simple sentence. This is such a profound declaration that John is making. Obviously, he is not fumbling for his words or soft-peddling his message. To the utter contrary he is as up-front as anyone can be with such a statement. There is absolutely no wiggle room here in the Greek language. The Greek Interlinear translates it as "**the one practicing sin of the devil is...**" Someone could just guess based on everything that has previously preceded this statement that the verb "**practicing**" is in the present tense representing continuous action. The ESV says "**whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil**". The NASB says "**the one who practices sin is of the devil**". I love the way that the ISV says it – "**the person who practices sin belongs to the evil one**".

Now, I have to be very candid and open about this, but at a pastoral level, it does not seem to me that most people actually believe what we have just read. It is just much too direct, seems much too unforgiving, somewhat insensitive, and much too quick in assessing and judging. So, that actually becomes the dilemma and impasse in which many people find themselves. For them it is just too blunt of a statement to actually always mean what it says. So, the tendency is always to water it down and / or to divert the exposition to how the teaching of "sinless perfection" is not an accurate doctrine – which it is not. However, to do either one completely misses the point.

It seems that what John is doing is giving his final wake-up call to everyone. He is drawing his teaching on this subject to somewhat of a close in the next three verses, and he simply does not want anyone to miss the point. He is simply and emphatically making his point. It is like John is actually shouting this, raising his voice, and intentionally intensifying his message. He does not want any of his readers to walk away unmoved by what he has been trying to get across. John does not want their human reason or their fickle emotions or their faulty discernment to mislead them, so he just boldly states what he has been saying all along. It is not that John is unmerciful. It is not that John is just in some kind of "preacher" mode. It is not that John is angry or frustrated or impatient. To the contrary, John is making profound doctrinal statements that should effect every believer, raise their sensitivities to people's real spiritual standing before God, and motivate them to be as godly in their life as they can possibly be so that when they speak to others that their words may have God's anointing on them and speak with power into that person's life.

I hope that we have heard John's message that "**he who sins is of the devil**". He has been utterly relentless in this message. He will not let it rest. Why? It is because people's lives are hanging in the balance, and the church so often just seems indifferent and unconcerned. The problem with open sin is that it is habit forming. When a person begins to engage in things that God's Word clearly says ought to be sacred, pure, and holy, they are only deceiving themselves if they think that that sin will not actually begin to possess them. The devil knows exactly what kind of bait to use to draw people away from God and ultimately drag them into hell itself.

Now, all of this so far has been intentionally very strong and it should be to retain the tone of this portion of the text. However, the next study will be looking specifically at the work of Christ to destroy the works of the devil and how that practically benefits the believer's life.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mounce, 179.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mounce, William D. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006.