

WEEKEND Edition 22/23 October 2022 "Repeat Offender" (1 John 3:4-6)

Good weekend to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

All around the world prisons are filled with 'repeat offenders'. These are criminals who have a habit of criminal activity, a pattern of breaking the law over and over again. In far too many cases after prisoners have 'done their time' it doesn't take long and they find themselves back with their old friends, caught up in the same familiar illegal activity. So, what does that tell us about the human character?

Join me again this weekend as we sit with the apostle John who is writing his first letter to Christians in the first century. John has been dealing with one simple but powerful question: "How can I know if I truly am, "born again", a genuine Christian?" Here's another version of the same question but it's applied to others: "When I watch the life of another person who claims to be a Christian, should I doubt the legitimacy of their salvation if I see them repeating the same sins over and over?" John has picked up his stylus and parchment and is writing now in his third chapter: ***"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that Jesus appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in HIM is no sin. No one who lives in Jesus keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Jesus or known Him."*** (1 John 3:4-6) John sets down his stylus and looks you and me right in the eye. What do we think about what the Holy Spirit just led John to write?

The apostle John is right... anyone, everyone who sins breaks the law, sin is lawlessness. Every society has laws which define what is right and wrong in that society. And because so many people sin, we need judges and courtrooms and prisons. Sometimes innocent people are falsely accused and end up in prison paying for a sin they did not commit. Sometimes guilty people are set free by judges. That's the frailty of human justice. *But with God His standard of right and wrong, and His justice are always perfect!* Have you noticed that often guilty people go to prison as they should, serve some time, and are released...only to commit a crime again? John said it clearly... sin is a product of our sinful nature, and we are all guilty. Paul wrote it this way: ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...there is no one righteous [sinless] not even one..."*** (Romans 3:23,10) We all know this truth from personal experience, don't we, my friends?

But one sin or several sins is not what John is talking about in 1 John 3:4-6. *John is specifically talking about 'repeat offenders'. Sinners who repeat their sin over and over.* Even if found guilty and paying their penalty, they repeatedly sin with no remorse and no repentance. That's one evidence of the sinful nature we all have which in some people controls them. *But in these verses John is more specifically talking about a person who claims to be a Christian, claims to have trusted Jesus to be their Savior, and claims to have the Holy Spirit living within them, but they simply can't help themselves from continuing to sin, repeatedly and without confession or repentance.*

John is challenging the legitimacy of the salvation claim of such a person! Why? Because, as John writes: **"Jesus appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in HIM is no sin. No one who lives in Jesus keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Jesus or known Him."** It's clear isn't it, my friends? **An authentic relationship with Jesus should break the stronghold of sin in our lives!**

Sinless Jesus, God the Son, came to break our slavery to sin through the power of God's truth which HE proclaimed, and His death and resurrection power, and the power of a new spiritual nature the Holy Spirit awakens in us as part of our salvation experience, and finally the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit alive in authentic, 'born again' Jesus followers. ALL this power is unleashed into a person who fully trusts Jesus to save them from their sin bondage and sin condemnation! **Satan and evil cannot withstand this avalanche of God power!** So when a person is a 'repeat offender' sinner, continuing to sin over and over without repentance, that is evidence they have not yet been delivered by Jesus from their sin bondage, and the Holy Spirit is not yet alive in them empowering them to say NO to temptation and sin! Do you understand this my friends?

1 Corinthians 10:12,13 is a powerful truth speaking to this: **"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful, He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what He knows you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."** Paul is writing to authentic, Holy Spirit indwelt Christians. One role the Holy Spirit has in all Christians is to warn us when temptation is coming our way and lead us in how to victoriously resist the temptation and empower us to do so. *If a person is not experiencing that, it is evidence the Holy Spirit is probably not living within them.*

Now we need to be careful here my friends. *John is not saying that once a person becomes an authentic, 'born again' Christian they will never sin.* No, when we trust Jesus Christ to save us and God does all His salvation work in us, that transformational experience does NOT kill our sinful nature and turn us into perfect, sinless Christians! Our sinful nature remains very much alive in us and that's the tension we feel as authentic Christians frequently tempted to sin. *But John is here talking about the 'repeat offender', the person who repeats the same sinful pattern over and over and feels no conviction of the Holy Spirit and does not repent of their sin. When this person is being tempted to sin, they do not sense the Holy Spirit warning them and enabling them to resist the temptation victoriously.* If that person claims or believes they are a "Christian", John is challenging them to look closely at themselves and see that the evidence of their life denies Jesus and His life transforming power. Now pause right here a moment and let that sink in. It's a staggering concept, isn't it?

Now this is such a powerful truth, John will address it several more times in this, his first little letter, but for today let's pause right here and ponder the shocking reality of what John has said.

Authentic, born again, Holy Spirit filled Christians will not live in unrepentant, repeated sin. It is a contradiction, an antithesis. Because Jesus is sinless, and the Holy Spirit is sinless. Therefore, a person who has genuinely experienced the redemption power of Jesus setting them free from the stranglehold of sin and they have genuinely received a new spiritual nature from God and are indwelt by the HOLY Spirit of God, and they are living in a committed, redeemed relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord... this person simply cannot continue to sin without repentance. *Unrepentant sin and Jesus and the Holy Spirit cannot coexist in the same person without a tremendous internal battle of their soul and spirit.*

Now let's get this right my friends. *My redeemed soul, which is my mind, heart and will, if filled with the Holy Spirit of God, will naturally rebel against evil in me.* If my mind and heart are not filled with the Holy Spirit, then of course my sinful nature leads me to sin, and I feel no Holy Spirit conviction. So, which is it for me? Does my spiritual nature, birthed in me by the Holy Spirit during my genuine salvation experience, **naturally revolt** against any wicked sinful thought or plan of action or word or attitude or behavior in me? *Do you agree that if I experience No internal REVOLT against my sin, then I should question my claim to be a Christian!?*

Oh my, we need to ponder and pray about that, don't we?? And we'll return to join John, right here, again on Monday.

Today's Scripture is 1 John 3:4-6.