

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

What does God mean when He says things like, "He who sins is of the devil"? Is He saying that those who live in sin are not really His children, that they are not really Christians? If that's not what He's saying, then what does He mean? Why would He say such harsh things to us?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

Chapter 5

5:5-6, we started looking at whether or not someone's sinful life can disprove their Christianity because Ephesians 5:5-6 appears to say just that. However, we've seen that Ephesians 5:5-6 and other such passages don't actually say that. What about 1 John 3:4-10, 14-15? Certainly, this passage does say that one's sinful life indicates that they're not really a child of God. After all, 1 John 3:8 says "He who sins is of the devil"!

Does God either question or threaten our eternal salvation? An often-cited passages some use to say that those who live in sin are nor really Christians is 1 John 3:4-10. Why? Because in it, God says things like, "Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him," "Whoever has been born of God does not sin...and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God," and "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."? It sounds pretty clear: if you sin, you're of the devil and if you don't practice righteousness, you're not God's child. What more is there to say? Is God actually saying that those who continue in sin are not really His children and therefore the devil's? Absolutely NOT.

1 John 3:4-10, 14-15, once again, we must look at two key questions: who's the audience and what is God talking about? So, who is John's audience? John considers them his children, God is their Father and Jesus Christ is their Advocate who intercedes on their behalf before God the Father, 2:1. Jesus paid for ALL their sins, 2:2. Their sins have been forgiven, they have known Him (Jesus, 1:1-3) who is from the beginning, they have already defeated Satan, they have known the Father, and the Word of God abides in them, 2:12-14. They have an anointing from the Holy One, they know all things, and they know the Truth, 2:20-21. The anointing they received from the Lord abides in them, the anointing they have teaches them all things, and John is certain that they will abide in Him, 2:27. Finally, in the very passage in question, God the Father showered them with His love when He made them His children and although they are God's children now, when Jesus returns, they will be conformed completely into Jesus' image, 3:1-2. In light of all this, the ones John is writing to are without question God's beloved children, who have overcome Satan, who have the Lord's anointing, who have God's Word abiding in them, and they know the Truth. Therefore, whatever God says to them, it's not designed to question or threaten their status as Christians. In fact, nothing related to their sins can threaten their salvation because ALL of their sins have been paid for and forgiven!

What is God talking about in 1 John 3:4-10, 14-15? The key to understanding what God says here is that He is speaking to His children. Every “you are a devil’s child” sort of comment is made to His children. These are not Satan’s children; they are His children and yet He says these things to them. Why? It has to do with what the entire letter is about:

God is your loving Father and you are His beloved child whom He wants with Him 24/7. BUT there’s one giant condition: God cannot have anything to do with sin, NOTHING! When you sin, you grieve Him and break fellowship with Him. When you do this, you’re behaving contrary to your true identity: you are God’s child! This means you’re to stay away from sin and love people the way He does. When you sin and hate, instead of copying your Father’s righteous behavior and His love, you copy the behavior of the devil’s children. You mimic the wicked ways of this world which is under Satan’s spell.

This is what John is saying in 1 John; let’s trace the argument from the beginning:

1:1-4, “I want you to clearly understand who My Son is because He and I want you to always hang out with us [not Satan].”

1:5, “I am light, I cannot have anything to do with the darkness of sin, period!”

1:6-10, “If you want to live life with Me, you can’t live in sin. You can’t ignore your sin, deny your sin, or call Me a liar when I point it out. Instead, you have to admit the sin My light reveals.”

2:1-2, “I’m telling you all this so you won’t sin. But if you do, no worries, My Son is your Advocate. And BTW, He’s already paid for all your sins, in fact, for the sins of the entire world.”

2:3-6, “To know Me is to obey Me. So if you claim to know Me but you refuse to obey Me, you’re a liar and My Truth is not in you. I perfect My love in those who obey Me; this is how you know that you’re living in Me. In other words, if you claim to live in My Son, then you ought to live the way He did.”

2:7-11, “You’ve known from the beginning that you’re supposed to love each other. This is nothing new; what’s new is that the light in Me is now in you, the same light that’s pushing away the sinful darkness of this world. So if you hate your brother, know that you’re living in darkness, blind, and clueless about how to love anyone. But if you love your brother, know that you’re living in My light and even the most unlovable person won’t cause you to stumble.”

2:12-14, “The reason I’m saying things that are so hard to hear is because you’re My children: My Son forgave your sins, you’ve known Me and My Son, you’ve already defeated Satan, and My Word lives in you.”

2:15-17, “The world is full of lust and pride so you can’t love Me and the world at the same time. If you love the world, My love is not living in you. BTW, this world is on its last hour.”

2:18-25, “You know it’s the last hour because there are many antichrists running around saying that My Son isn’t the One. But you know the Truth; you know that My Son guarantees eternal life and if you have Him, you have Me. So just keep living in the Truth you heard from the beginning. If you do that, you’ll live in My Son and in Me.”

2:26-27, “I tell you these things so you won’t be fooled by the antichrists. Remember, My Son’s anointing lives in you and it’s true. So you don’t need anyone to teach you; His anointing will teach you everything and as it’s taught you, you will live in Him.”

2:28-29, “So, My child, live in My Son so that when He returns, you’ll stand confidently and not be ashamed. You know that My Son is righteous, so it follows that those born of Him, take after Him and practice righteousness.”

3:1-3, “I want you to know that making you My child means that I love you tremendously. And when My Son returns, I’m going to conform you more completely into His image. Since that is your future destiny, shouldn’t you strive to be pure now just as My Son is pure?”

3:4-6, “When you sin, you’re committing lawlessness because sin is complete disobedience.”

3:5, “Do you know why I sent My Son? To take away your sins and in Him there is no sin. If you live in My Son, you won’t sin. But if you sin, you’ve never seen Him or known Him.”—**when you’re sinning in Satan’s darkness, can it be said of you that you see Jesus, that you know Jesus? NO, you’re nowhere near Jesus; you’re in Satan’s darkness. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all,” 1:5.**

3:7, “Don’t let anyone fool you: if you want to be righteous like My Son, you have to behave righteously.”

3:8, “If you sin, you’re of the devil because sin is his realm; he originated it. But that’s why I manifested My Son, to destroy the devil’s works.”—**what does God mean by this? Is He saying we’re not His children? NO! We are His kids, no question about it, 3:1-2! What He means is what he’s been saying from the beginning: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all,” that is, when you sin it cannot be said of you that you’re of Jesus because you’re clearly hanging out with the devil in his sinful darkness, therefore, you’re “of the devil.”**

3:9, “If you’ve been born from Me, you don’t sin because My seed lives in you. You can’t sin because you’ve been born from Me.”¹—**is He saying that Christians can’t sin? Or that Christians can’t live in sin? NO. Christians clearly can sin and they do, which is why God’s talked about sin from the beginning of this letter, 1:5, and why He gave Christians a way to recover from sin, 1:9. What He’s saying is the same thing He said and has been saying from the beginning: when you live in Jesus, you cannot sin, 3:6 (1:7; 2:5, 10, 24, 27).**

3:10, “This is how my children and the devil’s children manifest themselves: whoever doesn’t behave righteously or love his brother is not from Me.”—**is He saying that if you’re sinful, you prove you’re not His child? NO. He’s repeating the same message to His children: “This is what My children are supposed to look like: they behave righteously and love their brother. Those who don’t look like Satan’s kids.”**

¹ The way some explain this verse and 3:6 is by saying that what God means here is that if you “continue to sin,” then you’re not born of God, i.e., His child, which is how some translations render 3:9, e.g., the NIV renders it, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin.” They appeal to the Greek present tense participle in 3:6 and 3:9. They say that these Greek present tense participles contain continuous action. It is true that the Greek present tense participle can communicate continuous action, but you can’t make that determination based on the participle’s form alone. The context will determine whether or not it should be rendered with continuous action. And there’s nothing in this context that mandates continuous action. If that’s the case, then why don’t they render the other present participles in the passage with continuous action, e.g., the participle that begins 3:8? Because if they did, it would lead to absurdity. In 3:8, it would mean that the one who sins occasionally is not of the devil.

3:11-12, "You've known ever since Cain and Able that you're supposed to love one another not murder one another. When you let the wicked one control you, you'll murder."

3:13-15, "Don't be surprised if this wicked world hates you; expect it. But know for certain that you've gone from death to life when you love your brethren. The one who refuses to love his brother lives in death. When you hate your brother, you're a murderer and no murderer has eternal life living in him."—*your good behavior can show that you're God's child. What about your bad behavior, what does it show? That you're living in death and that you don't have eternal life living (abiding) in you. Notice: your bad behavior can't prove that you're not a Christian. It can only prove what God's been saying from the beginning: when you live in sin, you live in Satan's darkness, you're living in death. And you're also not expressing the eternal life that's beating inside you; it's there but it's not thriving in you.*

Instead of God pointing to our bad behavior and saying, "That proves you're not My child!" He's pointing to our bad behavior and saying the opposite, "Don't behave like that! Don't you understand that you're My child! That is not how My children are supposed to behave; the devil's children live like that, not Mine." This has been clear from the beginning of this letter. Two giant themes in this letter are *abide* and *love* (the original Greek word for *abide* means *to remain, to stay*. it's someone who stays in a certain realm and doesn't leave). God wants us desperately to stay in His realm, to not leave His side so that His light will transform us into people who live and love the way He does instead of living the way Satan wants us to live. That's why He makes all those "devil's children" comments, i.e., it's precisely because we are His children that He says them!

In other words, if your father (not a pretend-father but your actual father) sat you and your siblings down to talk about your bad behavior and said,

"You're all my beloved children. I am proud of for the way you have listened to my guidance. Every time those bad kids down the street or their drug addict father tried to get you to hate your siblings or do drugs you resisted. That's awesome. So it's clear that you know the way I want you to live your life, by my love and my voice not that drug addict father's voice. Everywhere you go, I want it to be my voice that guides you not his. Now, I cannot have anything to do with bad behavior. You're not going to find me lying, doing drugs, or hating anyone. And as you can see, whoever lives by what I say, doesn't misbehave. Therefore, those of you who misbehave, you don't know me nor have you ever known me. This is how I know who my children are: Those who behave are mine; those who don't belong to that horrible father down the street."

Now if your father said this to you, is he saying, "I've got some bad news for you; I've come to realize by looking at your bad behavior that you're not really my child. You actually belong to that drug addict father down the street." Is this what he's saying or is he saying, "My kids are not supposed to behave like the drug addict's kids down the street. You're my kids; I've taught you better than that. Please don't live like them."

III. Conclusion

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.