

Between two powers

1 John 3:4-10

Let's pray

1 Is the soccer's world cup in Germany still fresh in your mind? Come on guys, last game was on July. I was reminded of the chance I had as a teenager to attend the 1986 World Cup at the Azteca Stadium. That year, I had the rare opportunity to actually walk on the grass, and just think men; this is where some world-class soccer takes place.

Later, Iza and I had this common friend who's really a soccer's fan. Susie is her name and she came to visit Mexico City, where I am from. She insisted we all go and watch this soccer game at the Azteca Stadium. Indeed, the building is pretty impressive: it seats over 120,000 people and is just a very exciting experience. **2** Here's a picture of Iza and Susie. Moments later Iza started rooting for the wrong team and the crowd just roared at us.

3 Anyway, recently, as I was remembering these events I thought about, you know, what is the real purpose for the Azteca Stadium? You probably don't expend too much time giving thought to that, but let me share my amusing with you today. You know the architecture is impressive, seats are ok, the grass is outstanding, but when is all said and done this stadium is simply a plot of ground upon which two powers are seeking to prove their superiority. Season after season, week after week.

4 And you know what? I think that it very well parallels the purpose for planet earth right now. Planet earth too, is a place, a plot in the universe, if you will, where two rival superpowers are seeking to prove their superiority and there is a **cosmic warfare** colliding all around. And you and I live on war-torn territory, weather we are aware of it or not.

In this very community we have members that have family in Iraq, and thus understand war in a way that perhaps we can't. There are places on this planet where war is normative. Most recently, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq. But I want to suggest today that for us war is normative too. That, when the conflict in Iraq is over, war will continue on. Only a war of far greater consequences. Far greater casualties. Far more at stake.

And one of the differences in this war is that there is no place for neutrality. There is no option for being a spectator. There is no bench for time out. **5** That is why today's message is entitled "between two powers". Like it or not, everyone of us is playing a part on that plot of ground called planet earth. We are all on the playing field, one way or the other, for better or for worst.

6 Jesus put it like this in Matthew 12:30 "*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters*"

And every day, and every year you and I are scoring goals, or touchdowns, for either side. And I know is heavy. I didn't like coming here myself. But you know what? This is exactly, exactly where John is telling in 1 John 3:4-10. It is cold water in our face to wake us up, to tell us, you know what? Look around. There is a cosmic truce-less war going on, and you and I have a part to play. We cannot be spectators.

And because of that, sin is a big deal, and righteousness is a big deal, because both of those are goals in opposite directions. And that's the thesis of today's message.

7 Simply put it: our lives will display either the power of God or the power of Satan. Again, we wouldn't naturally go that far, but I think by the messages' end we will see that John, as well as the other New Testament writers, want us to see that our lives matter, that things of

eternal consequence are at stake and we only have little time on earth to score for God.

8 Robert Muffet put it like this: *We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but one short hour before sunset in which to win them.*

How the victories look like? Let's take a look. We will analyze this morning two basic ideas: the nature of sin and the nature of righteousness. *Note at the onset; salvation is taken care of WUTC*

9 1 John 2:29 says. *²⁹If you know that He is righteous; you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.* Another way to put it is: genetics show. Genetics show. You might meet a son or a daughter of somebody that you know and you find out is their child and you look at them and you say ok, I can see it, yeah. Genetics show. And this is true in the spiritual realm as well.

What John says here is: Those who have been born again, on the inside have the capacity that none other do, to reflect true supernatural righteousness on the outside. When he talks about righteousness here, he is not talking about mere morality. He is not talking about the honor code or a pharisaical kind of righteousness.

The kind of righteousness he is talking about is the supernatural, surprising, stoning kind of righteousness. Is the kind of righteousness described in the book of James. That would be an excellent place to go to see the kind of practical righteousness that John had in mind here.

10 And then in 1 John 3:1-3 he talks about the love of God and its effects in our lives. He ends up this section by saying: *³Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* And now, suppose we don't really want to go the excessive route of holiness that he is talking about here. That this is a little bit overboard. You know, is

it really that big a deal? Well, as a believer you certainly have that choice. To not go the way of purity.

11 But John wants us to know, in no uncertain terms, that if we abdicate and forfeit purity there is only one other option. Verse 4 ⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. And what he is going to do in this section is to give us at least 5 significant reasons for why we ought not tolerate sin in our lives, describing in greater degree the nature of sin.

First of all we find that sin is defiance against God. **Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness**. Why would he even need to say that? I mean how obvious is that? We need to remember a crucial issue that actually runs through the book of 1 John and that was the pre-Gnostic heresy that crept in and was being tolerated. And a major part of it, was that some people were saying that God's character was divided.

We briefly touched on this on our study of Mark, just recently, but it was a huge issue in that day. Some, were beginning to believe that God was both righteousness and unrighteousness, God was both light and dark, and essentially that God was just like those Greek and Roman gods that were familiar to the culture of those days and if you read Greek and Roman mythology **12** and stories of Zeus and Atlas and Aphrodite and on and on, you find that they had good days and bad days. Some days they were on and some were off. You would hope they are "on" on your day.

So, they had awful traits and wonderful traits, but they were very much a mixed bag. So this heresy was brought in to say, you know what? Sin is not such a big deal, because it is part of God's nature as well.

13 And that is why, right after greeting his readers in 1 John, the very first thing he says in verse 5 is ⁵This is the message we have heard from

Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all (**whatsoever**). Don't think for a moment that sin has anything to do with God because God is not tempted by evil, nor does he tempt any man. God is light and in Him there is no darkness whatsoever.

14 James 1:13 ¹³When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

15 Oswald Chambers says in his devotional for Nov 21: Jesus Christ hates the wrong in man (sin) and Calvary is the estimate of His hatred. That's a very strong way to put it.

And so the first thing John does is to remind his readers of the heinousness (hey-nuhs-ness) of sin. John used the word Greek "**anomas**" for lawlessness, it literarily means "against the law"

What is interesting is that this single Greek word was used to translate 24 different Hebrew words for sin in the Septuagint. 24 different words are translated by a single word. So John takes the one word that summarizes defiance against God and says: listen, remember this, when you and I sin it is not a mistake, is not an oversight, is not a genetic predisposition, is not middle life crisis, is not a temperamental flaw, is not part of growing up in a dysfunctional home, is not somebody else's fault.

When we sin it is **lawlessness**. It is defiance against the person and the provisions and the commandments of God. And that is a starting point.

16 But then John is going to move on and show us that this thing called sin is incompatible with abiding, in verse 5, ⁵And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

And again his point is this: it is not possible, not conceivable, that Jesus Christ would have anything to do with producing sin, because He came to take away sin and in Him there is no sin. And then John says whoever abides in Him does not sin. Verse 6 ⁶Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

You need to know that this is a very **debated** passage among Bible scholars and it really comes down to a one simple question and the question is this: is he talking here about sin as a lifestyle, sin in terms of an ongoing, persistent habit? Or is he talking here about sin even one time, sin at any point, as an event?

17 The reason this gets a bit confusing is for instance the NIV translates this verse as "whoever abides in him does not continue in sin" Now, you need to understand that one limitation of the Greek language (I wish Basel was here) is that there is no word for continue in Greek.

The reason they translated this way is because they are using a present tense for sin and many assumed, well it must be what is called a continuous present and therefore, what John must be saying here is that anyone who abides in Him does not persist in an ongoing lifestyle of sin.

Again, the word continue is not in the Greek and quite candidly, whenever they translated here "continues in sin" practices sin, and so forth, that is a theological judgment call, it is not a linguistic call.

In other words, a theological belief is taken and tried to make more understandable, but is not what it says in the original Greek. The present tense can be used in many, many ways besides a continuous present.

Another option, equally viable, is that what John wrote here can be translated as: "whoever is presently abiding in Him, at that point in time, there is no possibility for sin to be coming forth".

What is the basis for saying that? When we studied the Gospel of John and particularly John 15 we found that the word "abide" was an incredibly powerful word, much more than simply believing.

Certainly believing in Christ is a starting point for abiding but it goes so far beyond abiding. At that time I remember saying that the word abide was the key word, really the theme of the book of 1 John found 23 times in 5 chapters.

Now why would be that, when someone is abiding, they can not be sinning at the same time?

18 Very simply, Jesus said in John 15:5 ⁵*If you abide in me and I abide in you at this point in time you will be bearing much fruit.* He did not say hopefully you would bear fruit or there is a pretty good chance that you would bear fruit.

Extension cord

What Jesus is basically saying is: if you are plugged, if your extension cord is tightly plugged in, there will be light coming forth. Now, if you are not tightly plugged in, it doesn't mean that you are not a lamp anymore. It doesn't mean that you are a false lamp. No, you are a true lamp but you are not fulfilling the purpose for which you were designed, because the only way that the light of our Lord can come to our lives is to be tightly plugged in or to be abiding.

You need to know that many use 1 John as proof text for saying that is not possible for any genuine believer to live in persistent sin. Many good godly men hold this opinion. They have a real heart to see the Church of

Christ purified. But I don't think that you can live for very long as a believer and not personally struggle with the issue of sin.

David and Joyce can tell you that you cannot pastor a church for very long without seeing people struggling **intensely** with the issue of persistent sin.

I don't even think that you can read the Bible without seeing numerous cases of genuine, born-again believers struggling and living in persistent sin.

Go all the way back to Lot, Lot in genesis, from day one he keeps moving closer and closer to Sodom and Gomorrah. Ends setting up shop within the city and, finally, the angel has to drag him out. And yet in 2 Peter 2 we are told 2 times that he was a righteous man because he trusted the same promise that his uncle Abraham did.

Solomon, who knows how Solomon ended up? Certainly he had many good years. Temple, wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. Do you understand that Solomon ended his days, worshiping in the temples of the foreign gods that he built for his wives for several years? That is pretty persistent sin. But we can still expect to see Solomon in heaven.

Moving into the New Testament, Paul says of Dimas: he has forsaken me, having love this present age. Earlier he said that Dimas was his fellow coworker.

The disciples in John 6:58, when Jesus said He was the **bread that came down from heaven**, it says that from that point on they walked with Him no more; although they were disciples. 1 Corinthians 11, you have a group of believers that were getting drunk at the Lord's table.

So it is not only possible, it is a reality of living in this planet that genuine believers, at times, persist in sin. It is always wrong, it is always an abuse of the Grace of God, there will be consequences in terms of the Lord's discipline, it may be an early death and there will be consequences at the judgment seat of Christ. But, that doesn't take away the fact that they are genuine believers.

So I think John explains here how powerful abiding is: And that is, at the moment you and I are truly abiding, the plug is tight, and what is coming forth is the light of the Lord, without exception.

19 Now let's skip to verse 8, I wish we had more time to cover them all. Verse 8 says ⁸He 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.

Is John saying here that the one who sins, the one who has a persistent lifestyle of sin, was never born-again, and therefore is of the devil?

Or, in contrast, is he saying that a genuine born again-believer, whenever he sins, is temporarily playing for the devil? Based on the scriptures, I tend to believe that that is what John is saying.

You say, wait a minute. That is too far, I mean I can see him saying is the flesh, but, why take it that far? Very simple reason. God wants us to understand the seriousness of what is at stake. And that you and I live on a plot of ground, and you and I are players between two superpowers, and we do not have the option of sitting on the bench. And you and I will score goals in one direction or the other.

In the 1994 Soccer World Cup, hosted by the US, Team USA was playing Colombia when Andres Escobar was unfortunate enough to get the ball, he turned around and accidentally scored on his own goal. For a

week he was known as Wrong Way Escobar. Wrong Way Escobar was shot in the street, soon after returning to Colombia by an unsatisfied better.

Sad isn't it? But a similar think can happen to us. **20** One of the best examples of this in the Bible, that I think beyond any shadow of a doubt shows that is possible for a genuine born-again believer to temporarily be playing for the wrong team is found in Matthew 16. Peter, in response to the Lord's question "Who do you say I am? Scores a goal. Peter says "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, well done YES! Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. Way to go Peter, great job!

Perhaps even moments later, he tells the same disciples: now, you need to understand something, I am going to Jerusalem and I am going to be crucified and I am going to be buried and on the third day be raised to life. And Peter says, bad idea, bad game plan. Terrible strategy. Because is really hard for you to be Messiah of the world, death, you know? And we kind of need you to set up the political kingdom here. "Never, Lord!" Peter said. "This shall never happen to you!"

And Jesus, looks at Peter, and to the same tongue that perhaps moments earlier had score big time for the kingdom of God Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." You are scoring for the wrong team. You are being used by the wrong superpower. He who sins, is carrying at that point in time the **ethics of hell**.

This has not been easy coming through but is reality. That is why you may have noticed that it is possible to abide one day and not abide the next day. Anyone noticed that? It is possible to abide one hour and not

abide the next hour. We all know what that is like. Best of intentions...down the drain.

21 On to 1 John 3:9 ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; This is crucial he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. What he is saying here, is that there is always something deeper in the believer than sin. There is always something deeper and ultimately, more powerful, than persistent sin. *Costume jewelry*

Let me use an illustration: what do I have here? What is costume jewelry? Is metal that is inherently worthless and it is covered by something attractive so they can sell it. Well, so many believers see themselves as sinners through and through, who are fortunate enough to be covered by the blood of Christ, and that is a blessed reality.

But I want to submit to you that according to 1 John, Romans and so much of the New Testament, we are not costume jewelry. I think a more accurate Biblical image is that we are tarnished silver.

And what I mean by that is that until the day we die, we will all struggle with the tarnish, the tarnish isn't going anywhere. The tarnish is what we call the flesh, the sin nature, the old man, whatever you want to call it, but to the day we die is going to be a very real part of us and we are going to battle with it. That is why if we could show up on the screen some of the thoughts that probably most of us have had during the week we would die, wouldn't we?

But it doesn't define who we are, and that is the key issue. It just shows the flesh is alive and kicking. What defines who I am, is the silver.

And is what John defines as **the seed that has been born of God, ***** and that new nature is incapable of sin. Here then is the great issue: the great hope for the Christian life is never getting untarnished, never getting the flesh fixed, because the flesh is not going anywhere.

The great hope for the Christian life is getting the new nature RELEASED, that new seed coming to the surface. And that is our only hope for overcoming the downward pull of the flesh.

And so, what John reminds us of is that when we become believers, something of such radical proportion takes place, something of such a drastic God dimension that the deepest part of you and I are not capable of sin. Because the deepest part of you and I, is Jesus Christ dwelling within, and that is our fundamental identity.

That is why Paul says: **Is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.**

Augustine, before he became a believer was very, very sensually immoral and the story is told of a time, little after he became a believer, and he went back to Milan and was walking down a street and turned into an alley and one of the girls he used to sleep with came up behind him and whispered to his ear: Augustine, it's I,.....And he turned at her and look her in the eyes and said yes, but is not I.

If any man be in Christ he is not a forgiven sinner, is a new creation. **All things have passed away, old things have become new.**

Now, Why is this important? Because it reminds us when we are tempted to score for the wrong team, when we are tempted to get the ball and shoot in the wrong direction. That there is within us not just the power but actually the desire to go in the direction God made us for.

So beneath the pleasure of lust is always the joy of purity. Beneath the enjoyment of sensual indulgement is the satisfaction of spiritual control. Beneath the gleam of revenge is the freedom of forgiveness. Beneath the safety of lying is the contentment of truth telling. Beneath the perverse enjoyment of gossip is the genuine satisfaction of protecting another person's name and speaking the truth.

What it also tells us is this: becoming a Christian, really messes up sin. You noticed that? You know why? Because becoming a Christian spikes the punch ball. And you can't get rid of the after taste. Before you were believer, there was the passing pleasure of sin. There were still consequences, but when we become believers is not that we can't sin anymore, but we can not sin the same way. You know why? Because the Holy Spirit always tags along to the party. And we can't get rid of him, he just won't go home.

And so, in this passage John, I think, invites us to give in, to glut that part of your inner being that you long for in the first place. That ultimately, a life lived feasting on supernatural righteousness is going to bring you greater joy anyways, and is for sure going to bring more glory to God.

So the question becomes, which superpower is having dominance way in our lives today, because when is all said and done, sin is a big deal and righteousness is a big deal, because one comes from hell and one comes from heaven, and you and I were place on this little plot of earth for a very short time to score goals in the right direction, and then retire for eternity.

21 We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but one short hour before sunset in which to win them.

Lets pray: