

Jesus Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil (1 John 3:4–10)

Why He Came: Advent in 1 John

Zionsville Fellowship | December 21, 2025 | Drew Hunter

Our text this morning is 1 John 3:4–10. Kids, you can use your kids worship guide during the sermon. And can come up front after the service to talk with Kate Stevens about the message.

We're taking these Sundays in Advent to answer the question, *Why Did Jesus Come?*

And we're finding answers in the letter of 1 John. This was written by one of Jesus's closest friends. John wrote it to clarify who Jesus is and what it means to be a true Christian.

We need this same clarity today. Many people misunderstand why Jesus came.

- Some believe Jesus came just to be a teacher and example. They believe that what this world needs is to be taught how to love. And Jesus came to teach this, and to give himself as an example. And so once we decide to take morality seriously, we can learn from Jesus.

There is truth to this—Jesus came as the supreme example and teacher of love.

But once you start actually reading what Jesus said, you realize this is incomplete. One of his central messages is that our problem is much deeper than behavior. And we can't fix it by turning a new leaf and getting religious and making commitments. His example of love exposes just how impossible it is for us to become like him on our own. And he also told us that our sin is so deep we deserve eternal judgment for it.

- So, many recognize that Jesus came to bring forgiveness. Our failure doesn't mean that we need to try harder; it means that we need a savior. We deserve the judgment of hell, and Jesus bore that penalty on the cross for us. He died in our place to bring forgiveness.

Now, that gets to the heart of the purpose of Advent—but even this is not the full picture.

- John shows us that Jesus came not just to forgive our sin—but to eradicate it from our lives.

He came as a warrior against sin. He came to renovate our hearts and completely change our desires. He came to change us at the core of our personalities—in a way we could never do on our own.

Advent means Jesus did not come to just give us an example—he came to bring both forgiveness of sins and the transformation of our hearts and lives.

[Read 1 John 3:4–10]

Did you hear the radical claims that John made here?

He says that true Christians no longer live in habitual sin. They change to such a degree that they do not continue to practice sin as a way of life.

How can he make that claim? How is it that those who trust Christ not only can change, but inevitably do change?

John shows that Advent answers this question. Advent answers this in three ways—and this is what we'll see this morning.

So, how is it that those who trust Christ not only can change, but inevitably do change? John gives three answers: Because Jesus came to take away sin, he came to destroy the devils works, and he came to give us new birth.

1. Jesus Came to Take Away Sin (v4–6)

Why is it unthinkable for Christians to continue to live in habitual sin? The first answer is because Christ came to take away sin. This is verses 4–6.

John first explains the deep problem of our sin in verse 4. He says, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”

When he refers to “everyone who makes a practice of sinning,” he is not referring to sinners in general. He does not just say, “everyone who sins” here. He emphasizes the ongoing nature of this sin—it refers to those who are habitually making a practice of sinning in their lives.

And he explains what this means—it means that they “practice lawlessness.” The word for “lawlessness” is not just another word for typical sins; it is a word that refers to rebellion. This is no longer occasional or accidental or minor sin. It refers to a rebellion that comes from our character.¹ John is saying that those who make a practice of sinning are rebellious to God. It is not minor issue.

And now John shows us how Advent is the solution to this.

This is next in verse 5: “You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.” John says—when you think about Advent and Christmas—do you know why Jesus came? He came to get rid of sin. He came to take it away.

This is comprehensive. Jesus came to take away sin in two senses.

1. First, he came to remove the penalty of sin by taking it upon himself at the cross. He took our eternal punishment of hell on the cross, so that we could be forgiven.

2. But second, he came to get rid of the practice of sin from our lives.ⁱⁱ This is John's emphasis here. He just said that sin is lawlessness; it is rebellion. And now he says that Jesus came to change us. He came to make lawless people actually begin to obey God. Jesus did not just come to forgive us, but also to transform us. He came to get rid of sin from the world.

Here's a way that we like to summarize how Jesus removes sin: He came to remove the penalty, power, and presence of sin. When you trust in Christ, he removes the penalty of sin by forgiving you. He also removes the power of sin so that even though you still sin, you are no longer lawless and rebellious to him. And one day when Jesus returns, he will remove the presence of sin altogether. This is the purpose of Advent—Jesus came to take away our sins.

And notice that John also adds that Jesus's own character was sinless—at the end of verse 5, "and in him there is no sin." John is making a case for why Christians no longer make a practice of sin—and it's because Jesus came to get rid of sin, and he himself was sinless. When you trust in the sinless one who came to get rid of sin, you change.

So John summarizes the practical implication here in verse 6.

Notice how he emphasizes how truly knowing and trusting Christ is a powerful thing—it changes the way we live. And if you are not changing, if you are still habitually sinning, then you haven't really come to know Christ. He says, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him."

In other words: if you really grasp the purpose of Advent, if you have really seen Christ with the eyes of faith, if you really do remain in him—then you are changing. The more we know Christ, the more we will hate sin. The two are incompatible.

Now, it could sound like John is saying that Christians don't sin at all—they are perfect. Some Christians believe that—and they teach a doctrine called "Christian perfectionism" or "complete sanctification." They believe that Christians can actually start living sinlessly in this life.

I appreciate that they are trying to take this seriously. But that's not what John means. He has already said in various ways in this letter that Christians still do sin sometimes. But here he says that they do not "keep on sinning." This is a way of referring to this ongoing, chronic, habitual kind of sinning.ⁱⁱⁱ When we become Christians, there is a real break from the power of sin.

John makes no exceptions here. He only has two categories of people.

- There are those who have truly seen Christ, know Christ, and abide in Christ—and therefore they do not keep sinning in this chronic, habitual way.

- And there are those who do habitually sin in this lawless way, and therefore they do not really know Christ. They may profess to be Christians, but they don't really know it. Because all true believers make a break from this kind of entrenched life of sin.

John is clearing up a misunderstanding that still lingers today.

Some people believe that you can be truly saved even if you never change. But this leads many people to think they are saved when they are not. That is like saying Jesus only called us to trust him, but not to repent of sin and follow him. But he called for a whole reorientation of life—he said, “repent and believe” the gospel. And “follow me.”

Now, I want to be clear: You are not saved by trying to overcome sin. In fact, you cannot overcome patterns of sin in your life on your own, anyway. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But the truth is: If you receive Jesus as your savior, then you also receive him as your Lord. If you truly trust him, you also turn from your sin.

John is setting his truth between two errors: On one side, some people think that if you're a Christian, you can become perfect in this life. On the other side, some people think that if you're a Christian, you may or may not change. John says every Christian truly changes.

To welcome Christ at Advent is to welcome his war against any sin in your life. You will not be perfect until he returns, but you will gladly join his war against your sin.

This is the first reason why true believers begin to live transformed lives—because Christ came to take away sins.

2. Jesus Came to Destroy the Works of the Devil (v7–8)

The second reason is next, in verses 7–8: Christ came to destroy the works of the devil.

This is what sin is—it is a result of the works of the devil, and it is like the works of the devil. So John says there are two kinds of people—those who practice righteousness, which reflects God's own character. Or those who practice sinning, which reflects the devil's character.

This is verses 7–8, “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”

John is clearing up a misunderstanding that the false teachers taught this church.

He says, “let no one deceive you.” That's because there were false teachers trying to deceive them. There were false teachers who were saying that Christians could go on living in sin. They could believe Jesus and have eternal life, and their lives don't need to change.

So John clears it up. He is not saying that there are only perfectly righteous people, or devilish people. All of us sin, all of us do the works of the devil. But John is again talking about the overall behavior, the overall motives and life. And he says there are two kinds of people: True believers are those who begin to reflect God's character in righteous works. And those who are not true believers—even if they profess to know Christ—are those whose life is marked by sinning.

And he then answers our question here—why is it that Christians no longer habitually sin?

And the answer is the end of verse 8—because “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

What are the works of the devil? It is everything the devil has done to get people to turn away from God. He tempted humanity to sin in the beginning, and he still tempts us today. He also leads us to feel guilty and hopeless so we don't even try to go to God; we just wallow in shame, feel hopeless to change, and so we keep living in sin.

But Jesus came to destroy his works. Jesus is the only person who perfectly resisted Satan's temptations—he never participated in the devil's works. And then he offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins—which removed our condemnation. This means that Satan's strategy of accusing us is removed; he cannot accuse us because we are completely forgiven. And then he transforms us to resist temptation. He breaks the power of sin in our hearts.

So, what does Advent mean? What did that little baby come to do? Why was he born to Mary to become one of us? It was to destroy the works of the devil. It was to set you free from the devil's power so you could become more like Christ.

3. Jesus Came to Give Us New Birth (v9–10)

This leads to one final reason. We're asking, why is it that true Christians no longer make a practice of sinning? And the third Advent reason is because Christ came to give us new birth.

This is verse 9. Notice how John refers to Christians as those who are born of God—and notice what he says is true of every single person who is born of God: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Everyone who truly trusts Christ is born of God, and this means that they will no longer continue to live a life of habitual sin. That's his point.

John is referring to the new birth. He learned this from Jesus, who said that we must be born again. Theologians use the word “regeneration” to refer to this. The Old Testament prophets use the language of being given a new heart.

It all points in the same direction: there is a fundamental and decisive change that happens at the core of our personality. It is change that is so profound that it can only be described as becoming a new person. We are no longer rebels to God, but his friends. We no longer love sin; we hate it; even if we still feel it's tempting pull.

If you are true Christian, you don't just have a new *ability* to fight sin that you can take or leave. This says you *cannot* live in sin anymore. It's an impossibility. Why? Because you have been born again. You are now part of God's family.

The way John put it is that "no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him."

There are two different ways to understand what John means by this.

1. First, he could be referring to God's seed as planted in the believer, and which remains in the believer, and which is a new power in us to fight sin. The seed is like a life-producing, powerful seed that grows inside of us.
2. Or, second, the word "seed" may simply refer to children, and here it would refer to us as God's children. So this could be understood to say, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's children abide in him."^{iv} It's saying that if you are born again, you are God's seed—his children—and so you will abide him. He ensures that you do.

The point is the same either way: God has caused you to be born again, so you will now live differently.

We watched the Fantastic Four a couple nights ago. The backstory is four people who went up into space and encountered cosmic radiation. They got back to earth and found out they each had changed. They had superhuman abilities. One became stretchy, another could become invisible, another became a human torch, and the fourth became rock-like. They experienced a permanent change in their DNA.

When you become a Christian, you experience a permanent change in your moral and spiritual DNA.

This all leads to the conclusion of verse 10.

John says that this new birth is what separates humanity into two families. He puts it quite starkly here—contrasting children of God with children of the devil: "By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

He says that it is evident who is in each family. This is because he's working with the idea of family resemblance. This was especially prominent in the pre-industrial world—children did what their parents did. If a father was a baker, the son would be a baker. If the father was a shoemaker, the son was a shoemaker. The behavior of the children reflects the parents.

So John says that those who are born of God have God as their Father—so they begin to live like him. They begin to have their character transformed to be like his. Not perfectly, but progressively.

And those whose lives are marked by sin have lives marked by the behavior of the devil. So the devil is their father.

Implications

So, these are the three ways Advent answers our question.

The question is: why is it that true Christians no longer live lives characterized by sin? And the three answers all flow from Advent. It is because Jesus came to take away sin, to destroy the works of the devil, and to give us new birth.

Let's bring this together with a few implications for us.

First, some of you need clarity about yourselves.

Maybe you are not sure where you are. You want it to be true of you that you are born again; but you aren't sure. It's not clear to you.

Here are some questions to ask yourself to give you clarity about yourself:

- If you do not see that your problem is deeper than anything you can fix; if you think you could maybe try hard and earn your salvation; you are not yet born again.
- If you cannot see any evidence of the new birth—there is no sincere obedience to Jesus in your life (not perfect obedience, but a true change)... you are probably not born again.
- If you hear about how Jesus came to take away sin and destroy the work of the devil—but that does not at all make you want to sin less, you are probably not born again.
- If you know about Jesus and believe the truth about him, but you don't know him personally, and you aren't eager to know him more, you are not born again.

On the other hand...

- If you are trusting Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and you long for him to change you, this is a sign of being born again.
- If you are often bothered by the fact that you still sin and aren't growing as fast as you'd like, you are probably born again.

- If you hear that Jesus came to take away sin and destroy the work of the devil—and you're grateful for that and it makes you want to sin less, you are probably born again.
- If you don't just believe the truth about Jesus, but you trust him personally, you seek to know him personally, and you want to know him more, you are probably born again.

Here's the point of these questions: It's simply a way of asking yourself if you believe the gospel and have been born again.

Second, some of you need to receive this new birth.

Maybe you have heard this and realize that you have not experienced this change. Maybe you have appreciated Jesus's ethical teaching. Maybe you have gone to church your whole life. Maybe you've celebrated Christmas for years. Maybe you haven't doubted the facts of Jesus's life and death and resurrection.

But you realize that you misunderstood your problem and the solution of Advent. You thought we just need to be taught to love so we can try harder. But you realize now that your problem is deeper. You are still, in your heart, rebelling against God. Sin is still the mark of your life—maybe in a hidden way, maybe it's pride and lust and greed—but you see that it's the pattern of your life.

You realize now that you don't just need to try harder to obey Jesus; you need to become a real Christian. You need Jesus to forgive your sins and transform your heart.

You need to believe Jesus not just as a truth to agree with, but a person to know. You need to turn from your lawlessness, trust Christ as your savior, and receive his renewing work. Then, receive his forgiveness and transformation to day. Confess your sins and ask him to save you.

Third, some of you who are born again need to let this encourage you.

John is writing this to a church of real believers. They have just been destabilized by false teaching. The teachers probably told them that they could be real Christians and still live lives marked by sin. But John is saying, no, that's wrong. He encourages these believers that they really have changed, they really can change. Jesus came to remove sin, destroy sin, and transform us to no longer live in sin.

So, if you are a true believer—you have changed. You have been born again. You are not perfect, but don't let that lead you to think you're unchanged. You are part of God's family, and he is changing you into his character.

Let this Advent lead you to give thanks for God’s transformation of your life. Maybe he set you free from a life of anger. Or an addiction to sexual sin. Or pride. Or a life of selfishness, self-importance, and using people to advance yourself. And he has slowly, but truly made you more patient, kind, loving, self-controlled, and gentle. Thank him for this at Advent.

Fourth, let this lead us to share this aspect of Advent with others.

As Christians, we have the privilege of sharing the meaning of Advent with the world. Many of our neighbors don’t know why Jesus came. Many coworkers have never been to a church. Many family members have a superficial, hallmark card understanding of Advent.

Who is going to tell them the great news of why Jesus came? Who is going to tell them that Advent is God’s answer to our addictions, to our anger, to our greed, to the worlds injustices? Who is going to tell them that Jesus came to eradicate the world of all that makes us grieve? We have the privilege of sharing that Jesus came to save us from sin—to both forgive us and set us free.

ⁱ The word for lawlessness (anomia) was used throughout the LXX for particularly heinous sins. It is where chronic sin leads—It is no longer “inadvertent but rather heinous rebellion that reflects one’s confirmed inner character, not just incidental (though serious) misdeeds” (Robert Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, BECNT, 182). It is probably closely related to the sin that leads to death, the fatal sin, of 5:16.

ⁱⁱ For this second aspect of the remove of sin, see Peter Leithart, *the Epistles of 1 John*, and Robert Yarbrough, who thinks John emphasizes both forgiveness of past sin and the elimination of sin in the sense of daily life (Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 186).

ⁱⁱⁱ “Keeps on sinning,” probably carries with it the sense of 1) present, ongoing habit of sinning, and 2) the kind of sin that progresses to lawlessness, which he just referred to. John Stott emphasizes the present, ongoing nature of “keeps on sinning,” while Yarbrough notes that the context indicates a certain kind of lawless, heinous sin (see Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 183). I think both are true.

^{iv} Yarbrough translates this, “No one begotten of God sins, because his offspring abide in him” (Robert Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 193).