

I JOHN 3 : 8
ENTER -- THE SON OF GOD !

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.

Do you remember being in a play or skit, or watching a play or skit, in which an announcer explained as things went along? Maybe it wasn't an announcer, maybe it was two stage hands walking across the stage with a sign. For example: It's a cowboy scene; a ruckus has started. It looks like the troublemakers are going to win. But then the words: "ENTER MUSTANG BILL." BILL, the hero, straightens it all out and restores peace.

Epiphany Festival is like that. Our word "epiphany" means "to shine out, to make manifest, to reveal, to bring to light." Epiphany centers on Christ "entering the scene" on this earth, being "revealed" or "manifested" as the Son of God, the Savior of distraught and helpless sinners—sinners captive because of their own trespasses and transgressions—both "trespass" and "transgress" mean "to cross the forbidden-line." Epiphany is the grand closing of our Christmas Festival. Christmas and Epiphany are such a happy time. Because we are people who are in trouble, in trouble with struggles on this earth and in trouble with our dismal performance of God's expectations. Yet we rejoice that a HERO—not Mustang Bill—but Jesus God's Son—has come to earth to restore peace for us.

Speaking of our predicament, our text simply says, He who sins is of the devil. "He who sins." Are you a sinner? It's a Predicament for you if you are--God is angry. The word "sin" in the New Testament means "to miss the mark or target" or "to fail." Think of hunting, think of target practice, with a bow or a rifle. Missing the mark is not a good thing. Think of following a map to get from here to Struseton. If you do not get there, you fail. Think of a task or project on the ranch or in your house. The project is bigger and tougher than you thought, and now the mess sits there. You missed the mark. Think of your convictions as expressed in a family discussion or at a meeting, a church meeting. You don't get your point across. The opposite side wins. You have failed to carry the day.

Missing the mark happens because you were caught by surprise, you didn't have the training, you just didn't have the ability, you were careless, or you missed on purpose. How often does that happen with you and your performance under God's commands and God's will? Whether you violated because you were caught by surprise, or were careless, or didn't have the ability, or "missed" on purpose, it's a failure on your part, it's sin. And you are in Trouble and a Predicament. You are now categorized as a follower "*of the devil.*" What to do?

Let's interrupt a moment. What about the devil? The word "devil" in Greek is really the "diabolical" one. Surprisingly, the root meaning of "diabolical" is not wicked, harmful, unloving, crude and coarse, supernaturally powerful—although the devil is all of those. The word "devil," or diabolical, means to set two sides against each other, to misrepresent, to deceive by false accounts, to slander. The devil is THE SLANDERER. He slandered God to Adam and Eve, when he said, "You will not die if you eat that fruit. You will be wise like God." He slandered. He made God look bad to them and himself look good to them. He slandered, he lied about God, he acted as if he loved Adam and Eve more than God. His goal was to bring down Adam and Eve, and God, Whenever you miss the mark, when you heed the Slanderer, when you sin, you fall into the devil's camp, and become an opponent and enemy, of God. There is no neutral. One is either for God or against Him. "Against" creates a dire predicament before God!

But where did the Slanderer come from? Is he the eternal, wise, powerful, everywhere-present Evil Force, at odds with God and Good from eternity? Scripture says otherwise. He is a created angel and is less than God. *By Him [Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16-17).* "All things." When he rebelled, he was banished from God's presence *God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (II Peter 2:4).* Therefore, now he labors to strike back. In that regard the devil and his cohorts are far superior to man. *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:11-12).* Slandorous, fallen spirit-beings.

How did the devil go bad? Did God make him bad? *God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Genesis 1:31).* At the end of the 6th day of creation, everything was “very good.” The devil was not created evil. Sometime after creation and before he led Adam and Eve into sin, he rebelled against God, refusing to submit to God’s will. It is in connection with pastors Paul writes: *A bishop [pastor] must be blameless . . . not a novice [new-comer], lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil, (I Timothy 3:2-6).* “Puffed up with pride.” The devil’s self-pride led him against God. This happened shortly after creation, as our text says, *The devil has sinned from the beginning.*

Could God have stopped the devil from pride and from failure to hit the mark? Could God have stopped Adam and Eve from sinning as well? God can do anything. Why didn’t He? The Bible doesn’t say. But we do know God did not create angels or man as “robots,” who could only do what they were programmed to do—as if mechanical devices. God made them such that they could willingly CONTINUE to serve Him. He had made them His own, they were good. They were not simply neutral and should pick for themselves whether to be good or bad. He made them good. However, of their own will, they could foolishly walk away. The devil and his cohorts “walked,” and then proceeded to slander God before Adam and Eve. He succeeded in leading them away as well.

The resulting Predicament for Adam and Eve, and for their children, comes right down to us. How to return to God’s good graces? Our goodness is broken. We are not neutral by birth, as if we can decide for ourselves to go up or down. We are stuck—“up to the axle” in mud. We are high-centered on hard driven snow, going no where. With his slander, the devil has deceived us right into his clutches, cast out and confined in hell.

But remember the skit? Now—at Christmas and Epiphany and we in our predicament—ENTER: JESUS OUR SAVIOR WHO RESCUES US FROM THE SLANDERER’S CLUTCHES AND REMOVES ALL THE MISSES FROM OUR RECORD. ALL! *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil!*

Jesus the Savior was manifested and revealed in the manger. The angels told the shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord!” Jesus was manifested to the Wise Men, “We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him!” Jesus was manifested at His baptism at age 30 when God the Father spoke from heaven, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!” Jesus was manifested by John the Baptist “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus was manifested by His miracles, the first being changing water into wine, “This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” Jesus has come on the scene. It’s His Epiphany. He has come to destroy the work and labors of Satan and his kingdom. The New Testament word for “destroy” is “to loosen.” Just as one can “loosen” a horse from it’s tether, one can also “loosen” all the parts from a structure—one can destroy it! Jesus came to “take Satan apart.”

Think of Satan’s reaction to Christ’s epiphany, and the presence of the God-man on this earth. “Oh, He thinks He’s going to save them. I’ll hit Him with everything I’ve got.” But the Slanderer was stymied against Jesus. Jesus did not fall for one, not even one, of his lies and temptations. Nor did Jesus feel pressured into reversing even one of His statements regarding the Word of God, or sin, or God’s anger over sin, or God’s promised mercy in the Messiah-Savior. Jesus was not intimidated by Satan through the leaders of the Jews or the Roman government. Jesus did not back down because of weakness or fear. “I told you I am He.” Satan must have been frustrated at the unmovable will of Jesus, a flesh and blood son of man—yet all the while divine Son of God. Surely in the back of Satan’s mind, he saved his last card: “I’ll KILL Him. Then let’s see who wins.” He did kill Him. But Imagine Satan’s shock and terror at the special epiphany of Jesus when Jesus descended to the gloomy dungeons of hell—not to suffer, but as living Lord to proclaim His victory! All the Father’s commands kept perfectly for the sinners, all of the Father’s punishment fully suffered for the offenders, death itself overcome in His resurrection, heaven’s doors opened to all clinging to Him for forgiveness, not to the worthless Slanderer with his lies! What an epiphany that must have been! Christ could have done it with force and power, but He did it with His will.

It is your JOY! In Christ you are God’s dear rescued child. All your misses of the mark are no longer considered. In Jesus’ blood, in His death and resurrection, you are washed clean. The celebration of His appearing, His epiphany on earth, brings happy relief to our hearts. Think about that, each of you. It’s not just that sins from long ago are eventually forgotten by God. It’s not that the little sins don’t count. It’s not that your big sins aren’t as big as someone else’s. They are each real and damning. They stand against you. But with JESUS ON THE SCENE you are loved and spared! Epiphany Festival is great. There’s one more! His final Epiphany at the End, when He ushers even you into the halls of heaven!

In the meantime, live for Him. Satan is still going to slander Him before you, in hopes you will walk away from your salvation. But Cling to Jesus, who is ON THE SCENE FOR YOU!

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---