

Who's Your Father? 1 John 3:4-10

Introduction:

We live in a confused, lost, post-modern world. Many want us to believe that issues of truth are relative and not absolute. They work hard to leave us with the impression that there are many ways to God, that everyone has to find and take their own path to Him, and that as long as we are people of faith who are involved in some kind of religion, we will make it.

Consider, for example, the response of Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*, when asked whether or not he is a Christian:

“Yes. Interestingly, if you ask three people what it means to be Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as absolute historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum, and we each fall on that line where we may. By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious--that is, that we are all trying to decipher life's big mysteries, and we're each following our own paths of enlightenment. I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a life-long work in progress.”

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Dan Brown wants us to believe that “We’re each following our own paths of enlightenment.” For this author and other proponents of postmodern thinking, issues of faith are relative and should be personally defined without imposing our views on others. Those who have bought into post modern thinking don’t believe that where a person stands with God is an absolute issue—i.e. They don’t believe we’re either children of God or not children of God based on whether or not we have trusted in Christ. Postmodern philosophers give the impression that issues of faith are nebulous and as long as we have faith, we’ll be O.K.

The truth of God’s Word that John penned for us in 1 John 3:4-10 is in absolute opposition to what post modern philosophers want us to think. Where a person stands before God is an absolute issue. Each and every person living in this world belongs to one of two families. A person is either a child of God through faith in Christ or a person is a child of the devil because he or she has not trusted in Christ.

During the last several weeks, we have been meditating on the truth that for us to enjoy fellowship with a holy God, we must be holy! It is completely impossible to continue the practice of sin and at the same time continue in fellowship with God.

EXHORTATION FOR US TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S HOLINESS (2:28-3:10)

The key to a holy life is our abiding in Christ (2:28a)

There was a sign in a textile mill that read, "When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman." A young woman was new on the job. Her thread became tangled and she thought, "I'll just straighten this out myself." She tried, but the situation only worsened. Finally, she called the foreman. "I did the best I could," she said. "No you didn't," the foreman replied. "To do the best thing, you should have called me."

How often are we like that woman! We take matters into our own hands and try to live a holy life without calling on and depending on Christ. We try to manage on our own instead of abiding in Him. Just as a branch of a plant draws from the vine all it needs for life and fruit production, so we need to draw from Christ all that we need to live a holy life. Without an abiding relationship with Him, it is impossible for us to live in a holy and righteous manner that is pleasing to God.

When we abide, we'll be ready for Jesus to come (2:28-3:3)

We'll be confident and unashamed when Jesus appears

"And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed" (2:29).

If it is our practice to abide in Christ, we won't be like the embarrassed child whose parents got home earlier than expected and found the room he was supposed to clean up a complete mess. Instead we'll be confident, able to speak freely and openly. We'll be unashamed with no concern about what Jesus will find in our life when He comes.

We look forward to being made to be fully like Christ

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (3:2).

We aren't yet fully like Jesus as God has not yet finished His work in us. Just the same, we are confident based on the promise of God's Word that what He has started, He will complete. When Jesus appears, we'll see Him as He is and be completely transformed to be like Him in righteousness and holiness.

Our hope for the future motivates us to commit ourselves to purity now

"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (3:3).

The fact that God's plan is for us to be perfected and made to be like Christ in the future should motivate us to abide in Him and live more and more like Him now.

In 1 John 3:4-10, John concludes his exhortation for his readers to be holy by underscoring how significant the issue of sin is and explaining what its characteristic presence or absence in our life indicates about us.

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.”

Sin is serious business (1 John 3:4-5)

Sin is lawlessness (3:4)

John addresses the seriousness of sin by referring to those who habitually sin as doing lawlessness. I believe John uses the term lawlessness to capture the rebellion and disregard for the authority of God and His standard of right and wrong that is displayed in the person who practices sin.

Sin is incompatible with the purpose for which Jesus appeared and with His nature (3:5)

Jesus appeared to take away our sins

The effective removal of sins is the purpose of Christ’s appearing. He appeared to be crucified for our sins and rise again in order to take them away. He came to remove not only the guilt and punishment of our sins, but the actual sins themselves. The presence of sin won’t be completely removed from our life as believers until Jesus appears again, but just the same, Christ’s purpose is that the process of removing sin’s presence within us should be happening now.

Sin is serious as its presence in us, to whatever degree, runs contrary to Christ’s purpose in coming. Sin is serious as its removal required such a high price to be paid by our Lord.

Jesus is without sin.

In Jesus, there is absolutely no sin. He is completely pure, spotless, and perfect. In Him there is no darkness at all. No act or attitude of sin can be attributed to Him.

Sin is serious in that it is completely contrary to the nature and practice of our Lord.

The characteristic practice of sin or lack thereof separates all of humanity into two separate groups (3:6)

Group #1-God’s children don’t sin characteristically (3:6a)

How is it that the child of God is able not to sin as a characteristic activity of life? God’s children are able not to practice sin as a habit of life by means of their abiding in Christ (3:6)

“No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning.”

Many Christians struggle with this passage. They say, “If no one who abides in Christ keeps on sinning, where does that leave me? I know I sin and at times struggle with sinful habits. Does this mean I am not really one of God’s children?” When John writes that “no one who lives in him keeps on sinning,” he doesn’t mean that Christians never sin again, but rather his point is that sin does not characterize the life of the one abiding in Christ.

In verse 6, John implements the substantive use of the Greek participle. I am not going to get technical on you. I will simply tell you that this use of the participle in Greek is implemented to communicate a fundamental characteristic of the person described. If the fundamental characteristic of a person is that they abide in Christ, then that person will not at the same time live a life characterized by continual sin. It can’t happen!

It is impossible that the child of God who is abiding in Christ could live in a pattern of habitual rebellion against God and disregard for His Word. How could those who are abiding in the Sinless One who came to take away sin have sin be the dominant characteristic of their lives? They can’t. It’s impossible! John says emphatically, “**no one** who lives (abides) in Him keeps on sinning.”

Again, saying that believers won’t sin as a characteristic of their lives is not the same as saying believers don’t sin. As we consider 1 John 3:6, don’t forget the rest of what John has taught us in this book. We are deceiving ourselves if we claim to be without sin (1:8). John acknowledged that as believers, we will sin (1 John 2:1). When we sin, God has provided a means for restored fellowship (1:9).

Group #2-Those who don’t know God do sin characteristically (3:6b)

If the dominant characteristic or ruling principle of a person’s life is habitual sin, that person has not seen Jesus. That is, he hasn’t seen Jesus and put his trust in Him. That person doesn’t know Jesus Christ—he is not a child of God—he hasn’t yet entered into a personal relationship with God.

Though I trust we have cleared up one issue in explaining what John means when he says, “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning” we still haven’t answered all the questions Christians struggle with from this passage. Many of us face the following dilemma at one time or another, “How frequently does sin need to be in our life before it is considered characteristic sin?”

There have been occasions in our life when we have wrestled with patterns of seemingly habitual sin. At these times, though we are slow to come out and say it, we wonder if we are really saved because of the sin in our life.

Here are some things to consider when we find ourselves in such a dilemma:

First, think about what it really means to say that sin characterizes a person’s life. Yes, we might have told a lie or lied several times that we know of, but are we characterized as being a liar? Yes, we might have gossiped this week, but are we characterized as being a gossip?

Next, think with me about what it's like when we have an ongoing struggle with sin as a believer. Are we concerned about the sin in our life and desirous of it being removed? Are we miserable? Do we sense that God is disciplining us for what we are doing? Have we discovered that the only way for joy to return to our life is for us to confess our sin with a view towards having our fellowship with God restored? These are the experiences of the child of God when they are in sin. Yes, there will be times when a believer will slip into the flesh mode, trying to live a holy life in their own strength and without God. The result will be a struggle with sin. Even so, this struggle with sin will not characterize a person's life as a whole if that person is a believer. God will work to make sure that doesn't happen.

Allow me to invite you to be a third party observer to a counseling situation that pastors encounter several times over in our ministry. People come into our offices struggling with a pattern of sin. They have read verses like 1 John 3:6 and question if they are really saved.

Allow me to share with you how I as a pastor handle this kind of a problem.

First I ask, "What do you believe to be the basis of a person's salvation. You have said that you are not 100 % confident that you are going to heaven. Would you say that making it to heaven is something you are working on?" If the person says that going to heaven is something he is working on, I know immediately that this person's problem is that he is not a child of God. Those who are trusting in their works to make it to heaven are clearly not believers. The lack of a relationship with God as one of His children is the reason this person is characterized by doing sin. The obvious course of action is to share the gospel and encourage this person to trust Christ.

If the person answers my question with something like, "I don't know if I am going to heaven for sure. I know I can't do anything to get there on my own as the only way to heaven is through trusting in Christ. I have trusted in Him. Just the same, I don't know for sure if I am really a believer because of this sin I am struggling with,"

I will ask, "What are you doing to try to get victory in this area of your life?" Many respond with a list of all of the things they have been doing to try to clean up their lives. I then ask, "How has that been working for you?" They obviously respond in frustration. After all, why would they have felt the need to come to me if they were having victory in a particular area of their life?

I then explain to this person that the reason they lack assurance of salvation is not because they are not saved. Salvation is eternally secure for the believer. If a person has trusted Christ, they are saved forever. Just the same, when sin is present in our lives and we are out of fellowship, we will not necessarily feel secure. We will struggle with assurance that we are saved. We enjoy the assurance that we know the Lord when we are obeying Him, but when we are out of fellowship with Him and in sin, we will not enjoy the same confidence. The need in this person's life is to confess their sin to experience His cleansing and forgiveness and then to abide in Christ who makes victory over sin and holy living possible.

Read 1 John 3:7-10

God's and the Devil's children demonstrate starkly different patterns of conduct (3:7-10)

In 1 John 3:7, John gives a pastoral warning, "Don't let anyone lead you astray." Apparently, there are some false teachers out there who are teaching the heresy that a person can be right with God and live like the devil. John warns us, "Don't be deceived." If a person is characterized by living like the devil, it's an indication as to who that person's spiritual father is—the devil himself. On the flip side, if a person is characterized by living in righteousness, it's an indication as to who the person's spiritual father is—God.

People who are characterized by righteousness have been born of God. People who are characterized by sinful deeds have not been born of God. There are those who are God's children and there are those who are the devil's children and that is the only two kinds of children that exist. We are either one or the other. Since there are two kinds of children, we are wise to examine the character of our life and make sure it demonstrates clearly that we are God's children who have genuinely trusted in Christ as our personal Savior.

God's children:

Characteristically do what is righteous just as their Father is righteous (3:7)

"He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

God's children act in a way that is the exact opposite of lawlessness. Their lives are characterized instead by righteousness. They make a habit of doing that which reflects the character of their Heavenly Father. Let's be clear here, their practice of righteousness does not make them righteous, but it does reveal the righteousness God has produced in them as His children.

Don't habitually practice sin because God's seed abides in them and passes on His characteristics to them (3:9a)

"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him."

Without exception, no one who is born of God will be characterized by sin. Why? Those born of God aren't characterized by sin because God's seed remains in this person. God's seed is the new life God has given us by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. No matter how much my children might want to, there is no way they will be able to change some of the characteristics I have passed down to them as their father. Ben Brown's traits will be evident in Ben Brown's children. In a similar way, God's character will be evident in God's children as He has passed down His characteristics to us—His seed remains in us. The child partakes of the nature of His parent. As God's children, we partake of the nature of God and as the result will not be characterized by sin.

Cannot habitually practice sin because they have been born of God (3:9b)

“He cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

It is impossible that a person who has genuinely trusted in Christ as Savior and been born of God will sin as the continual, unbroken pattern of his life. When we are born of God through faith in Christ, God transforms our lives, making us new creatures. The work of God in making us new will be evident in us.

Those born of God will not and cannot live in habitual sin—God will make sure of it. When a Christian is living somewhat in rebellion against God, it will be a passing thing. God loves us so much that when we live in rebellion against Him, He lovingly stops us by giving us discipline. Hebrews 12:6—“...the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” God uses discipline to keep His children from disobedience and to produce His righteous character in our lives. If the child of God is unresponsive to God’s discipline and stubbornly tries to persist in sin, I believe God still effectively makes sin in His child stop. God sometimes goes so far as to stop sin by taking a person’s life away. In 1 John 5:16, John alludes to sin that leads to death.

The combination of the new nature God creates in His children and His loving discipline make it impossible for His children to make sin a habitual, characteristic part of their lives.

The Devil’s children:

Characteristically do what is sinful just like their father (3:8, 10a)

“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

Just as God’s children reflect God’s character by how they live, the devil’s children, those who are of him, will reflect the devil’s character. The one who is characterized by doing what is sinful is of the devil. Ever since his fall, Satan has shown utter disregard and contempt for God, His righteousness, and His Word. Just as their father, the devil’s children will live in a pattern of unrepentant, habitual sin, showing disregard for God, His character, and His Word as the dominant characteristic of their life. Evil will dominate their life and practice.

The fact that those who are characteristically sinful are of the devil is also supported by the fact that their lifestyle runs completely contrary to the purpose for which Christ appeared. Christ appeared not only to take away sin, as we learned earlier, but also to destroy the devil’s work— He came to break the controlling power of the Devil who is in the business of inciting men to rebel against God. Jesus appeared to render powerless and inoperative in our lives both the power of sin and Satan. The complete absence of any evidence of sin being taken away or the Devil’s work being destroyed in a person’s life demonstrates that person is of the Devil. When a person lives for what Christ came to destroy, that person is one of the Devil’s children.

Characteristically don't love their brothers (3:10b)

1 John 3:10 is a transition verse in which John begins to address the second quality or characteristic that will be evident in the child of God who is in fellowship with God. God is love and those who are in fellowship with God will live a life characterized by love. We will share more on this point in the upcoming weeks.

John here describes the characteristic failure to love as one of the specific areas in which those who are not children of God demonstrate that fact. God is love and God's children will be characterized by demonstrating the same characteristic of their Heavenly Father. The devil's children however, will be characterized by the exact opposite—they do not love as a characteristic of their lives.

There are two kinds of children. There are those who are characterized by righteousness who have been born of God. They are God's children. There are those who are characterized by sinful deeds who have not been born of God. They are the devil's children.

What are the practical implications of this passage for our life this morning?:

I have up on stage, three chairs that are labeled representing the three positions people find themselves spiritually. I would like each of us to ask, "Where am I?" and "What would God have for me to do in response to His Word?"

Chair #1-The devil's children who are out of fellowship with God:

As we have said, this person is characterized by a life of sin. This person's need is to become a child of God. So many in this position think that they need to somehow act like a child of God for God to accept them. They think they need to clean up their act and do good things. You cannot act like a child of God if you are still a child of the devil. Nothing you do will ever get you into God's family. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In order to get into God's family, you need to trust in Christ as your Savior.

John writes in John 1:12- "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Trust in Christ in order to become God's child

Once you become a child of God through faith in Christ, then God will do a work in you that enables you to live a holy life. Just as we become a child of God through trusting in Christ, it is a relationship of trust and dependence that enables us to live like a child of God. As a new believer in Christ, you need to begin abiding in Christ right away. You need to depend on Him and draw from Him all you need to live the life that pleases God.

Abide in Christ in order to be able to live as God's children should.

Chair #2-God's children who are in fellowship with God:

Continue abiding in Christ, living righteously, and enjoying fellowship with God

This seems obvious, but it is an important reminder. It is easy for us when we find ourselves doing well in the Christian life to begin thinking, "Hey, look how good I am doing" and to begin living in the flesh. When we are living righteously and enjoying fellowship with God, we need to remember who gets us to this point—Christ does as we abide in Him.

Chair #3-God's children who are out of fellowship with God:

Those who are here are miserable. They lack joy because of their sin and the absence of fellowship with God in their lives. They are also confused as to where they stand with God, lacking assurance as to whether or not they are believers. Again, we enjoy the assurance that we know God when we are abiding in Christ and living righteously. We will not have the same confidence when we are out of fellowship with God because of our sin. The fact of our being a child of God has not changed and will never change. If we have trusted Christ, we are eternally saved, but just the same, we won't enjoy the assurance of our position in Christ if there is known sin in our life that we are entertaining. For those who are here, God's solution is very clear.

Confess your sin to experience restored fellowship with God

If we confess our sin, God cleanses and forgives us. What does it mean to "confess" our sin? We agree with God about our sinful condition, so He can cleanse us. We acknowledge our sin. We acknowledge that it's wrong. We realize that it has to go—we decide to get rid of it with a view towards once again being able to enjoy close fellowship with God.

Abide in Christ to remain in and enjoy fellowship with God