

1 John 3:1-12 - Beloved, We are God's Children

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1 John 3—and I just want to tell you as we get into Chapter 3 here, I feel the need to issue a—almost a warning of sorts. You know how some products come with a warning on the side, you know. There are some challenging verses in this Chapter—some very challenging verses—and frankly, some of them have been badly misunderstood by believers in the past. And those—well, any misunderstanding of God's Word can cause a great deal of difficulty and pain and heartache—and some of the verses in this passage can be misunderstood, if we don't remember that John was writing this letter because he was responding to teachers—false teachers who had arisen within the body of Christ, and they were leading people astray, and they were saying all kinds of stupid things.

And John felt the need to correct those things, to contradict them, and to bring the truth back into view. And so, John is one of those interesting writers. If you're—if you've read much of John, you know that he doesn't—he doesn't mess with gray areas. John the Apostle was a man who just said it like it was. You know. He kind of laid it out there.

They're really, they're really—it was either this way or it was that way. And you know, a little bit like James in the same way. And we're going to—you're going to see that kind of that attitude of his. So, let's get started here. Chapter 3—1 John 3—and in Verse 1, John's going to make two statements.

And the first statement is this: “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*” And I suppose this isn't so much of a statement as it is an expression of awe and wonder. He's—he talks about the incredible love of God that moved Him to not just save us from our sin.

Do you understand, Christians, He could have stopped there? I mean, He didn't even have to do that, but He saved us from our sin. And rather than just stopping there and saying, “All right, you're forgiven,” He went several steps further. And He said, “I want to make you my own child. I want to invite you into my family.”

And that is what John is marveling about in this first statement that he is making—and it again, he's attributing all to the love of God. He says, “*See what kind of love. See what kind of love the Father has given*” that He would make us His children. And so, the question kind of comes up, you know, “How does someone become a child of God?”

Because—I don't know about you—but I was kind of raised with the idea that we're all God's children. Well—and I understand why people say that. I understand what's behind that statement—it's the idea that we've all been created by God in the image of God, and therefore, people just assume that we are all God's children. We are not all God's children. We are children by right, but there's a condition upon being a child of God, and that condition is laid out for us in John's Gospel Chapter 1, Verse 12. Let's put it on the screen here. And it goes like this—you know this:

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John 1:12-13 (ESV)

But to all who did receive him, (that's the condition—to those) who believed in his name, he gave the right (to what?) to become children of God, (notice ‘become children of God.’ You’re not born a child of God; you are reborn as a child of God. So, we become His children. He goes on to say) born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh.

That means we're not—it's not a human birth. He says it has nothing to do with the will of man from that standpoint of the birth of an individual, a human being. It has to do with being born of God. And when we are born of God, we are born into the family of God, and we become a child of God. And John reminds us that it's because of His love.

But don't ever forget that the condition to being a child of God is that we place our saving—or our confidence rather—in the saving grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ on the cross. That's the condition. By faith, by faith, we become a child of God. The second statement here in Verse 1 is—goes like this, “*The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*”

And this is connected to the first statement, because now that you are a child of God, you are now a stranger and an alien in this world. And this world—we're told some interesting things in the Scripture about this world. And there's two things that I want to show you. First of all, there's a statement from Hebrews 13:14 that we need to look at, and it goes like this:

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Hebrews 13:14 (ESV)

For here (and that means in this world) we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

That's the first thing that about this world that you and I need to fully understand. It's not our home. This isn't home. We like to talk about home. We like to—and I enjoy my home. I really do. You know, the temporary one that I have—I like it, but it's not permanent. And this world is not our permanent home. Right? *“Here we have no lasting city.”* We have no lasting home. We have no lasting residence. The Bible tells us that our citizenship is in Heaven. Our citizenship is actually in Heaven. It. And so, you can see what's kind of going on here right away.

But the other thing that the Bible tells us about this world is that it's under the temporary rulership and influence of Satan. Let me show you this also. John 16:11 says, *“...concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”* This is Jesus talking, and I just simply wanted you to see that He refers to Satan as the ruler of this world.

And he has ultimately been dethroned through the death of Jesus Christ in resurrection, but he has not yet conceded defeat. He is a defeated foe. He has not conceded defeat, and so he still functions in a role of rulership of this world. Now what is that—what are the implications of that? What does that tell you when you think about this—the world as it relates to these two passages?

First of all, this is not my home, and second of all, it's under the rulership—temporary though it may be—of Satan. What kind of a world do you expect this to be? I find Christians struggle with embracing the truth about this world. That it is fallen, that it is full of tragic consequences many times, because—and that it is evil, because it is under the temporary rulership of Satan.

Now, that's not going to last. He will ultimately be overthrown. Jesus will return, will establish his kingdom on the earth—can't wait for that to happen—but for right now, we battle. The Apostle Paul said, we groan. We groan longing to see this creation set free from this bondage that it's under to decay. And that's the world that we live in.

But here's the point of what John is saying—because you don't belong to this world and because this world is under the rulership of Satan and you're not, the world is never going to accept you for who you are. So don't expect them to.

They're not going to accept you for who you are, because you are an alien and a stranger, and you don't belong. You don't belong here.

And that is why he says, the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. So he goes on to say in Verse 2, “*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared.*” And John is very graciously reminding us here in this part of this verse of the fact that there's so much more for us as believers than what we have today. Aren't you glad of that? I am so glad of that. You know, I love being a believer. I love being a child of God. I love walking with God. I love being able to pray and lay my burdens at the— at His feet. I love coming to the throne of grace. I love all those things. Don't you?

I had heard somebody say, “I don't know how people get through life without the Lord.” And the fact of the matter is, many times they don't. And I love the fact that we—we have that closeness, but guys, it's going to get so much better. John says, “(we are children of God now), *but what we will be has not yet*” (fully been revealed).

And he's kind of telling us there that, you know, a lot—there's a whole lot about life to come that we just don't—we really don't have a clue about. I get a lot of questions from people about what it's going to be like. Do you know that God has, I believe, purposely withhold—withheld, I should say—information about Heaven?

There's very little in the Bible. I mean, you can do your best to scour it and find what you can find. You're not going to find much. You're not going to find much about what it's going to be like in the presence of the Lord, search though you may. And I really believe that that is on purpose, because we are to look forward to that by faith, by faith.

So, people ask all the time, “What's—Pastor Paul, what's Heaven going to be like?” I don't know, but just think of it this way, a lot better than what it is—what you have it right now. A lot better. I mean, we—it's even tough to imagine what having a glorified body is going to be like, you know. The Apostle Paul says that the bodies we now have are corruptible. He says that we are going to receive later an incorruptible body when Jesus returns.

Think about that for a minute. To have a body that won't tire or get sick and never die. And all the other things that go along with that. It's very difficult to imagine. I mean, even those of us who have a pretty good imagination, we run

into roadblocks along those lines, because it's very difficult to relate to something we've never experienced before in our lives.

And so, he says, you know, “*what we will be has not yet appeared.*” But here's what we do know—he goes on in Verse 2—he says, “*but we know (we know this), that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*”³ And everyone (he says in Verse 3) *who thus hopes in him* (meaning puts their hope completely in Jesus) *purifies himself as he is pure.*”

John is writing to you and me in this passage about the ultimate goal of God's redemptive program. And I don't know if you were aware of that, but God's ultimate goal is to make you and me like Jesus. That's the goal, okay—to make us like—like Him. Now, even when we say those words, we're not entirely sure what they mean.

I mean, we know what they don't mean. We know we're not going to be God. When we say we're going to be like Jesus, or when the Bible says that, you know, we will be like him, it doesn't mean that we will be gods or anything like that. It just means that we have an amazing future in store as—you know, for all who trust in Jesus in His work on the cross.

And the apostle Paul also wrote about this when he wrote his letter to the Romans. Let me show you this on the screen as well, from Romans Chapter 8. Check this out. He says:

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Romans 8:29-30 (ESV)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be (what?) conformed to the image of his Son, (so that we) he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, (and check this out) and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Glorified. I think about, you know, glorification. Good grief, Lord, what are you doing here? I know that I know that I know, I don't deserve any kind of glory. But the Bible says we're going to share His glory one day by—by being remade into His image, and it is an incredible thing. But I also want to focus on something that John writes here at the end of Verse 2, when he says—if you look with me again in the end of Verse 2—he says, “*we shall be like him, because*” —did you catch that? “*Because* (because why?) “*we (will) see him as he is.*”

Now think about that. Think about the implications of that statement. We're going to be like Him. When Jesus returns, when He comes for His church—Paul talks about us being changed in the twinkling of an eye—and this is the same transformation that John is referring to here.

So, we're going to be changed in the twinkling of an eye. Right? We're going to be like Him. Why? Because we're going to see Him as He is. Well, what exactly does that mean? Well, again, it doesn't mean we're going to be gods, and it doesn't mean we're all going to look alike. It's not talking about necessarily a physical image.

What God is telling us here through the Apostle John, is that we will finally and completely be transformed from the sinful beings that we are now, and we will become like Jesus in purity and holiness. Right? But guys, do you know that transformation has already begun? Do you know that transformation has already begun?

I mean, it began the day you got saved. The day you bowed the knee to Jesus and said, "I'm a sinner. I need You. I embrace You. I receive what You did for me on the cross." The Holy Spirit came in to live inside of you, and He began that work—that we call sanctification—that will be completed when Jesus returns.

But it has already started, and it's been going on ever since you got saved. And sometimes the process is quite painful, isn't it—that process of sanctification, that process of being transformed. Now, on this side of glory, before Jesus comes, that transformation is never going to be complete. Okay? It won't be completed until He comes back.

That's when it is completed. But for right now, it's going on. You were wondering why all that stuff was happening in your life that is hard and challenging and drives you to your knees, and call—causes you to call out and cry out to the Lord and say, "God, help me. Please, Lord, help me. Change me. Transform me. Open my heart. Change my heart."

You know why all that stuff is happening? He's doing the work. He's doing the work of transformation. It's happening. It's going on. You're—you're probably your worst judge. You don't see it happening. We do. So just chill. I find that Christians really get messed up about—"I don't think I'm changing, Pastor."

I know you don't. It's like watching a flower grow, you know. You can sit and stare at, and it doesn't seem to move. Trust me, God's doing a work in your life,

in your heart. And Paul wrote about the now part of transformation in 1 Corinthians. Let me show you this—or excuse me—2 Corinthians. On the screen. He says, look at this:

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2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Guys, that's why you don't see it. It's one degree to another, and one degree isn't a—maybe a huge change all in the course of a month or a year or whatever—but it's happening, and you just have to trust that God is doing that work in your life. And Paul reminds us that all this “*comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*”

It doesn't come from you. You know. I mean you can—you need to surrender to that work, but the work is His to do. That's why Paul says it— it is something, it is a work that “*comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*” The spirit is working through you to change you and transform you. And that—and so you need to really just let the Lord do His work. Trust that the Lord is doing His work and don't get upset.

Don't get upset when you don't think you're growing as fast as you think you should. I mean, just be in the Word, pray, ask the Lord to do that work in your heart, and then let Him do it. Trust Him to do it. But I want you to, again, remember what Paul said, we “*are being transformed.*” It is going on right now.

But one day, when we see Him face to face, we will see the completion of that work of transformation. Why? Because we will see Him as He is. Do you know that we get to see Him? We see snippets, don't we now? We read through the Bible, we learn about Jesus, and what happens? We see Him. We get a glimpse of Jesus, and I go, “Oh, Jesus, I can see you.”

Boom. There's a transformation going on, but it's just like this momentary glimpse, you know. But one day we're going to behold His glory, and it will absolutely transform you. What a cool thing to—to look forward to. John outlines that here for us. Now, we've gone through these first three verses of the Chapter, and they serve for us as kind of an introduction into what John really wants to get on and talk about, because he's going to go on in the rest of this Chapter.

And by the way, we're not going to get through it all tonight, but he's going to go on in this Chapter, and he's going to address issues related to errant teachings—or false teachings—that are contrary to Biblical Christianity. And he—and it's very important that you understand that he's addressing these things as he makes these various statements.

And the first statement that he's going to make here in Verse 4 and in several verses following, has to do with our understanding—our understanding as believers—of sin. How do you see sin today? How do you view sin? All right? Well, John is going to help us to have a Biblical view of sin, and he begins in saying, in Verse 4. He says, “*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness*; (and then he says) *sin is lawlessness*.”

Now I—it's important if you have an ESV, that you circle the words or make note of the words, “*makes a practice of sinning*” if those words appear in your Bible. And I need to tell you here something—they are given to us in the ESV translation to help you understand what this verse is saying, because not all Bible translations give as much clarity.

For example, the new King James Version simply says, “*whoever commits sin*,” and it kind of makes it sound when you read the New King James, like if you commit sin of any kind at all, you're practicing lawlessness. Right? Well, you need to understand something—first, even believers sin. We commit sin from time to time.

John is talking here about making a practice of sin, and that is why the ESV translators actually gave it to you that way in the Verse—“*Everyone who makes a practice of sin*,” right? So, he's talking about someone who is living in sin or who continues on in sin, and just—that's the direction their life is going. All right?

And then he reminds us that sin is lawlessness. And I really believe that the reason John is giving this statement and reminding you and me that sin is lawlessness, is because Satan is referred to in the Bible as “the lawless one.” And that is essentially what his—you know, his persona is all about.

He is lawless. Right? So, what is John saying? He's saying that someone who is making a practice of sin is functioning after the role or the persona of Satan in that sense—not functioning after the person and character of God but is rather walking after the character of the enemy. And he's going to say that in clearer terms as we go on through these verses.

Look at what he goes on to say in Verse 5. He says, “⁵*You know that he (and he's talking about Jesus) You know that (Jesus) appeared in order to take away sin. And in him there is no sin.*” So, he's made a very important sort of a point here by comparison. Satan is the lawless one. Jesus is the opposite. There is no sin in Him, and in fact, He appeared on this earth to take away sin.

He's reminding us that to sin—okay, and this is important you hear this—he's reminding us that to sin is to live a life that is entirely contradictory to the person and character of Jesus. Okay? Let me say that again. To live a life of sin — and he's talking about to make a practice of sin. He's not talking about Christians who occasionally fall into sin. We all do that. Some of you might have done it on your way to church tonight. I'm not prophetic. I'm just spit-balling here because, you know, I know human nature. We do that—we mess up, because, you know, you guys, the word sin means to miss the mark. How often do we miss the mark? Regularly. Yeah.

That doesn't mean that you're making a practice of sin. That means you mess up. John is talking about the person who makes a practice of sin, and he says that individual and the character that they display is contradictory to the character of Jesus. “*In him there is no sin.*” And that is why he goes on to make the point that he does in Verse 6: “⁶*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.*”

Now again, be careful. If you did mess up on your way to church, you might read this verse and come here and without any explanation, you would walk away going, “Well, you know what, I think I messed up on the way here. And it says here in this verse that anybody who does that has never seen Him and doesn't know Him. So, I guess I may not even be saved.”

Remember, I told you at the very beginning if you're not careful, there's some real areas of misunderstanding here that have caused great heartache. And I've told you guys many times in the past, one of the worst things you can do is doubt your salvation. When you know that you know that you know that you're trusting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, because that is the devil's playground.

And so, what is he saying? Well, it sounds like those who know Jesus no longer sin. But again, he's not talking here about sinless perfection. He's talking about the idea of living in sin—making a practice of sin, literally even enjoying sin.

And that is why he starts off Verse 7 the way he does. He says, “⁷*Little children, let no one deceive you*” (about these things). Don't let anybody tell you

things that are untrue. I believe that there were false teachers that were going around that were addressing or talking about sin in such a way that they were minimizing it.

“Don't worry about it.” And John is horrified at that whole idea. And so, he says, don't let anybody deceive you. Don't be unaware of the kind of deceptions that the enemy throws at us. A lifestyle of sin is inconsistent and opposed to the life of Christ. But I want to remind you again, as believers, we will make mistakes. We will mess up.

You know, don't you, that God has made provision for you by faith, for the mess ups that you and I make. He's made provision for it. Do you remember what John said in the last chapter when we were in John Chapter 2? I know it might seem like a long time ago. Let me show you this on the screen just so we can see it together. He says:

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1 John 2:1 (ESV)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. (but—look at these words—) But if anyone does sin, (and he knows God made provision; we have an advocate) we have an advocate with the Father.

Who is it? It's Jesus Christ. You have an advocate with the Father. In other words, the sacrifice that He made on the cross is your advocacy. That is—that is what makes up that advocacy. We have that perpetual cleansing by faith through Jesus Christ. He says, listen, I'm writing these things so you wouldn't sin. In my heart, my desire is that sin would not captivate your life and rule your actions and words and thoughts and so forth. But listen. But if you do sin, just remember this—God's made provision through Jesus Christ for you to be cleansed perpetually.

And we've talked about that in, in the past. As long as we live in these bodies that have this sinful nature, we're going to—we're going to battle the flesh. What does the Bible tell us about the work of the Spirit and the work of the flesh in our lives? It says that they are opposed to one another. And there's this constant friction. Do you guys feel it? Do you—I mean, every day, do you feel it? There—there is a battle going on in each one of us every single day between the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. And the flesh says, “No, we're going to do it my way.”

And the Spirit says, “Oh, but there's a better way.” And the Spirit brings conviction when we do fall to the flesh, and the Spirit empowers us to live according to the righteousness of God. But there's a battle that's going on inside of all of us. I talk to so many Christians who are distressed by the battle.

And I try to comfort them and say, “Listen, the fact that there's a battle going on inside of you means you're a believer. If the spirit of God did not live within you, there would be no battle. It would just be the flesh's playground, and that—that's what would dominate you. But the fact that you are crying out to God and saying, “God, change me. I hate this. I hate this flesh. I hate this sin. I hate the way this makes me respond to people. I despise myself sometimes by the way I respond and I act.” That is the battle. That's the battle. Praise God for the battle. Because it shows that the spirit of God is striving within you. That's that work of sanctification—to hate sin. To hate sin.

Don't you just hate it? That's the spirit. Do you think your flesh hates sin? No. It's the Spirit in you who hates sin. So, we give ourselves way too much credit for wanting to be righteous people. You know. “I just really want to—I want to walk with God, but I'm not sure I'm even saved.” Do you understand what you just said? That's a contradiction. If you weren't saved, you wouldn't care about walking with God. You know.

So, listen, I've been talking a lot about the fact that sin—sin is going to happen in our lives, but in no way do I want you to think that I am saying that that's permission or freedom, or that it's okay. Sin is never okay. Sin always hurts. Sin always destroys. Sin destroys, and we need to remember that. And we need to know and remember too, that God has given us everything we need for Godliness, everything we need.

There has been a fundamental shift in the life of every believer where—whereby Jesus Christ has set us free from the tyranny of our sinful flesh. Before we knew Jesus, before we made Him our Savior and Lord, we had no ability to restrain the flesh.

Now that the Spirit has come into dwell, we now possess that ability. Not only that ability, we possess everything we need for victory. So why aren't we constantly walking in victory? I mean, we see victory. We see it, you know. We get glimpses of it, and we see it. And there's certainly areas of our lives that, you know, if you've been walking with the Lord long enough, there's areas of your life you can look back and you can say, “Oh, I don't—I'm not dealing with that little element anymore. So, you know, God's given me victory—and that's

wonderful—but why am I not walking in perfect victory? Why isn't there such a thing as sinless perfection this side of heaven? Why isn't there?”

Well, because at the end of the day, we still choose to sin sometimes. We still choose to go the way of the flesh. And I'm sorry if that disappoints you to hear that or, and I'm even maybe more sorry if it offends you, but the truth is often very offending. We sin because we choose to. In our flesh, we choose to say no to the power of the Holy Spirit, yes to the power of the flesh, and we regret it. We regret it—always. So, none of this, “the devil made me do it” sort of stuff.

The end of Verse 7 goes like this, “*Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he (the Lord) is righteous.*” And so, he's making a statement now about righteousness, and I need to remind you something, that when we talk about righteousness from the Bible, there are two kinds of righteousness that we always make reference to.

One is positional righteousness, and that is the righteous standing that you have before God through Jesus Christ. Here's the way that works: God sees you as righteous, okay? He looks at you and He goes, “That's one of mine.” Why? Because you've been robed or clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. So, it's a positional righteousness, but the Bible also makes reference to a practical righteousness, and that is how I live my life.

That is the day-to-day, rubber meets the road. This is how I speak to you, how I treat my wife, how I talk to my children and grandchildren, that sort of thing. Okay. It's the aspect of my life of walking out righteousness. Well, here's what's interesting—and I share that distinction to simply make the point that—what John is doing here at the end of Verse 7 is he's saying that practical righteousness is the proof that you have been made positionally righteous.

In other words, because you are now positionally righteous—meaning, saved, born again, child of God—it is going to issue forth in practical righteousness. That's what John is saying. All right? Now, once again, we're really hard on ourselves about this, and we sit and think to ourselves, “And what practical righteousness have I shown today?”

Well, you know, again, this is a work of the Lord. This is the work that God is doing in us. But you know, I have to believe that John is responding here to, again, to false teachers who are claiming to be righteous before God, but are living lives that are completely contrary to the character of God through their acts of unrighteousness and so forth.

And so, John bluntly says in Verse 8—if you look with me now, there in your Bible—he says, “*8Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*”

And here again, John is making the distinction between someone who makes sin a continuous characteristic behavior of their lives, and the believer who occasionally falls into the weaknesses of the flesh.

He says this—he's now talking about the person who makes a practice, right, of sinning. And what does he say about that person? He says that they are of their father, because you're going to act like your father, right? He says that kind of a lifestyle, that kind of a perpetual, ongoing lifestyle, is of the devil.

Is literally of the ruler of this world. This is the way the ruler of this world wants people to act. And when somebody follows in that pattern, they're following in the pattern of the ruler of this world. It's really as simple as that. That's what John is saying.

So, he goes on then in Verse 9 to bring it back to the believer—remember, he's kind of contrasting things—and he says, “*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.*” And again, we're talking about this practice of sinning because in the Greek where the grammatically, this idea of sin is ongoing—it speaks of an ongoing action. So, he says, “*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.*” Why? “*For God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.*” And he's telling you and me that a true believer cannot be settled and intent on sin because the spirit of the Lord lives in, in inside of them, and the conviction of the Lord isn't going to leave him alone.

Have you ever been under that kind of conviction? David writes about it in the Psalms. He talks about how the conviction of the Holy Spirit was heavy upon his life until he finally confessed. And thank God the Holy Spirit doesn't leave us alone, you know. And He brings that conviction, and it can be a very heavy thing. But you know, all of this that he's saying here in this Chapter so far, is really just John's way of simply saying that when you come to Christ, changes will take place in your life. They will. They will take place. As you grow in Christ, as the Word of God becomes real and genuine in your life, the changes in your life become real and genuine, and it changes the way you think and act and the way you live. Jesus changes people. Jesus changes people. That's what John is saying.

But that change is going to align with His character, not the character of the ruler of this world. And this is—so you can kind of see what John is doing—he's writing to his audience, and he's simply reminding them, if you're seeing stuff that is more consistent with the ruler of this world, don't be deceived by that. I don't care what they say. I don't care how many times they drop the name of Jesus. I don't care how much they talk about the Holy Spirit. I don't care how much they call him Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord. If you see a lifestyle that is consistent with this world and the ruler of this world, then it's, it's pish-posh. It's not real. It's fake.

When somebody gets saved, there are real changes that take place in their lives, and that's such an important thing to remember. The last verses that we're actually going to cover here tonight are Verses 10 through 12, and I'll just go ahead and read them, and then we'll talk about it. It says, ¹⁰ *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness* (and that means live in that heart and desire to walk with God, please God, and so forth), *is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*¹¹

These are signs of someone being saved—they want to obey God and they want to love their fellow believers. He says, Verse 11, ¹¹ *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*¹² *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one.*

In other words, his actions, his heart, his desires were consistent with the ruler of this world. And that's what he means when he says he was of the evil one. And what did he do? He ended up murdering his brother. It all came out in how he acted toward his brother and even said, asked the question, *“And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's (were) righteous.”*

And this has been a—an example to you and me throughout the course of history, why we are hated by the world, because there is an innate understanding in their lives that what they're doing is not right. They try to cover it up, but they know that you're different and there's a light that shines in your life, and they hate it, and they want it extinguished. Now, in these last verses that we're looking at, some of you, you know, again, might be made uncomfortable by John's usage of the term *“children of the devil,”* but once again, John was not the kind of guy to entertain a middle ground sort of a position.

You know, you're either a child of the devil or you're a child of God. What makes you a child of God? We already went over that. To those who received Him, to those who believed on His name, He gave them the right to become children of God. Right? That's how we become children of God. In John's heart and mind, this was sort of an absolute line of delineation. A person either is going to walk after the character of the Lord or they're going to walk after the character of the world and the ruler of this world.

And John's conclusion in the verses that we've looked at here thus far, is that you and I can—can know whether we're dealing with a child of God or a child of the devil. And why is this important information?

Well, because there are people coming along professing to tell us or to lead us, you know, in some sort of a religious sort of a posture, and how are you going to know? Well, the way you recognize whether or not somebody is in Christ or really walking with the Lord or really genuine, is do they have a heart to obey God's Word, and do they have a love for one another in the body of Christ? These are very important sorts of things that we're to keep in mind.

Is there a desire? And again, when we're looking at somebody—this is not—John is not giving us this information so that I would look into your life, you know. And put you under the microscope, you know. And I'm going to look at every little dirty sin, you know, going on. It's not what's going on here.

He's wanting to keep you safe. He's wanting to keep you safe from people who would pretend, who are literally pretenders and who would fake it. Because don't you know, that we're told in the Scriptures, Satan comes as an angel of light. I'm not so concerned about Satan coming as a big boogeyman with fangs dripping with blood and, you know what I mean? And, and growling and I'm not so concerned about that. That's fairly easy to recognize. What I'm concerned about is when he shows up as an angel of light. And when he—when everything kind of on the outside looks good, and it all looks like it's kind of in place and—and, you know, they start talking about God, and they start dropping God's name, and they start talking about the Holy Spirit, and they start speaking to you, and some of those things even begin to resonate with you.

That's what I'm concerned about—when there isn't a genuine work of the Holy Spirit going on in their lives. And this has become even more dangerous today, I believe, because we have all these people who are speaking, and we never get to meet them face to face, and we never get to see their lives. You know, we were told concerning false prophets, Jesus said, you'll know them by their fruit. Well, what if you never get around to watching their fruit, because they live

somewhere, on another continent, and you're watching them online or on TV or something like that. And they're saying all the right things and it looks really, really good.

But how do you know? How do you know if they're—if there's a heart and desire to be obedient to God and if they truly love others in the body of Christ? These are the markers, and these are not the only markers. These are just the ones John's giving us right now. This is some of the fruit, you know, that he would want us to investigate in order to stay safe.

And when I, when I read this letter from first—from John—this first letter, honestly, part of me is sad that we have to spend so much time equipping saints to be careful and to be safe. I am. I wish we could just sit and talk about, you know, Jesus and Jesus this, and I wish we could always just talk about nothing but, you know, the good stuff.

But unfortunately, the Bible issues a lot of warnings. The Book of Hebrews is all about warnings. The Book of Galatians is all about warnings. First John is largely about warnings. Warning you because there is a very real danger that exists. And we remember, you know, the words of the Apostle Paul. Remember when he met with the elders of Ephesus, it was the last time he would ever meet with them face to face.

Let me put this on the screen from Acts: 20. Here's what he said to them. He said to them:

(slide)

Acts 20:28-31

(Guys, you need to really) *Pay careful attention (both) to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, (he says you need) to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Because listen to this) I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (and listen) and from among your own selves (men will arise twisting) speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore (he said) be alert, remembering that for three years. (and that's how much time Paul spent in Ephesus.)*

He says, night and day I was admonishing you even sometimes to the point of tears. He says I would break out crying, just with the whole idea that these men were going to rise up even from within your own numbers to draw people away. Well, this is the same thing John said in the first part of his letter. You know

when he said there were some who were among us, but they went out for us—from us, and that showed that they were really never of us, because they went out. They broke away. They broke off from us. Do you remember that? From the first part of this letter? So, he says that proves that they were never of us because they didn't stay.

They broke off. And so, you know, it's kind of unfortunate that we have to, you know, talk about this stuff. And you know, John's—John is—Christianity was less than a hundred years old, you know, when John was writing these things. Now we're over 2,000 years, we've thought up all kinds of ways to get into trouble.

And there have been all kinds of dangers that have reared their ugly head in that amount of time. There's all kinds of things that we have to warn Christians about in order that they might stay safe and not be deceived. And that's one of the reasons we go through these passages and remember the warnings.

So, that's where we're going to stop for tonight, and we will pick up the rest of the Chapter, Lord willing, next time. So, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for the reminders that You've given us tonight through First John. And Lord, even though it's, you know, kind of challenging stuff, and it's difficult, you know, to just read warning after warning.

Lord, there's so many good reminders here and we see that this is like a parent that's just wanting to say, “Stay safe. It's a fallen world that you don't belong in. And, and the people of the world, they don't like you very much. And there is an enemy who wants to trip you up, take you down a wrong path. So be alert, stay safe.”

And Lord, for that, we're thankful. We're thankful that You care, and that You've given us everything we need to stay safe if we will just keep our eyes on You, abide in Christ, keep our hearts focused on the Word of God. Thank You for these reminders tonight. We commit them, Lord God, to our hearts in the power of the Spirit, that You would speak to us about them throughout the course of this week. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.