

Whoever Practices Righteousness

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[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3, and we'll read verses 4 through 10.

And yes, as we heard this morning, this is our authority, and it is without error. God's Word. 1 John 3, 4 through 10.

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. No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

[1 : 10] The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in Him.

He cannot go on sinning because He has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Let's hear this word preached. Well, this doesn't happen often. This doesn't happen often. The opportunity that we have to gather back-to-back weeks for our evening service, and therefore an opportunity to gather back-to-back weeks to be in 1 John together.

It only happens when we have five Sundays in a month, and in God's providence, October is a five-Sunday month. Now, this is why we can be glad for that, because we need to especially remember last sermon in 1 John.

And we think, sometimes that's hard. Sometimes it is hard to recall a previous sermon. But be thankful. We've only had one week, not two weeks. And so, hopefully, the Lord helps us to recall it all the more.

[2 : 33] If you weren't with us, or if it is a struggle, here is a very brief recap. Last week, we looked at the first three verses in chapter 3 of 1 John.

And in those verses, we considered God's great love for us. See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are.

We are children of God. Those who by grace alone, through faith alone, have put their trust in Jesus Christ. They are indeed God's children. So we saw that in our sermon.

Last week, that's our identity. That's who we are. Now this week, we're going to consider, how then do God's children live? We are God's children.

So how then do we conduct ourselves in this life? So if last week's passage centered on our identity, this week's passage centers on our conduct.

[3 : 32] So right up front, we need to get the point of this passage settled. We need to state it right now. Here's the main point of this text.

God's children will live according to God's righteous ways. God's children will live according to God's righteous ways. Or if we want to use the vocabulary that John uses, those born of God will practice righteousness.

That's the mark of a true believer. That is the mark of a child of God. That person will practice righteousness. It will necessarily follow.

The one who is made a child of God will behave like a child of God. Our Lord, in his earthly ministry, spoke of this by way of illustration.

In Matthew 7, verses 17 to 18, he said, Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[4 : 35] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. So the fruit of a tree, that which is external and is seen, is directly related to the inner unseen condition of the tree.

A healthy tree won't produce diseased fruit. And a diseased tree will not produce healthy fruit.

There's a consistency here. And so we relate that to the Christian life.

How our conduct matters. How we live matters. Because how we live externally relates directly to the inner heart condition. The pattern of our life is a key indicator of our relationship to God.

John here is making the same point in our passage. Those who are born of God behave like it. Now interestingly, John is not telling us how we need to live.

He is not exhorting us, practice righteousness. He doesn't give the direct command in this passage. He doesn't say, now you need to do this.

[5 : 51] Now obviously there is a place for that. We need to be encouraged and exhorted. And we need to be pushed to live in obedience to God. But that's not the primary purpose of our passage this evening.

That's not what John has set out to do. John is not telling us how we should live. He is simply telling us this is how you will live if you're a child of God.

You will live this way. It will be true of you if you're a Christian. So why does he do this? Because there's this entirely unbiblical way of thinking.

This false teaching. It existed in John's day. And it persists. It exists today. And here's what that false teaching says. You can claim Christ.

And then live however you please. You can claim Christ. And then you can go your own way. How you live is of little concern to God.

[6 : 55] Sin, not a big deal to God. Your sin, not a big deal to God. In fact, perhaps we don't need to talk much about sin at all. That was a problem in John's day.

It is still a problem today. In a nutshell, to boil it down, it is the idea that we're probably familiar with of having fire insurance. I don't want to go to hell.

I don't want to suffer the consequences of hell. How do I avoid that? I will pray a prayer. I will say the right words. And then I will get back to living my life however I please.

John is arguing against that. How you live is evidence of who you are. How you live is of great concern to God. God justifies you.

He saves you. He declares you righteous. He adopts you into His family. He makes you a child of God. And then He sanctifies you. He who began a good work in you will see it to completion.

[7 : 57] He ultimately glorifies you. He brings you all the way along the way. So John is cautioning us.

Don't be deceived. Don't think that you can live however you like. Those who are truly saved will live like it. Those who are in fact God's children will live like God's children.

Jesus said you can recognize them by their fruit. So that's what our passage is unpacking. Look at verse 10.

Verse 10 is like a summary statement of the passage. 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. We're going to save that last bit about loving our brother. That's going to be for our next sermon in 1 John.

[8 : 58] But what is John saying here? He's saying it is known. It is clear. It is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. And this is how.

Those who are children of God, they practice righteousness. He states it in the negative. He says those who are not of God do not practice righteousness.

That implies those who are children of God do practice righteousness. So our passage is taking that idea and it's stating it over and over again.

Verse 6. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. Verse 9. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. So John makes it plain to us.

God's children will live according to God's ways. You can be sure of it. You can take that to the bank. And so in a way, this is a sobering passage for us.

[9 : 58] John's words challenge us to examine ourselves. If you are a child of God, if God has set his love upon you, then this is indeed how you will live.

You've been transformed. You've been brought from death to life, so your life will look different. So does it? Are you making a practice of righteousness?

Or are you making a practice of sinning? John is driving that home. God's word is piercing us with that question throughout.

Everyone born of God makes a practice of righteousness. So here's the question that we are going to probe this evening. Why? Why is this the case?

Why is it the case that those who are born of God make a practice of righteousness? We are given four causes in our passage this evening.

[11 : 04] Four causes that explain why this is the case. And they're interspersed throughout the passage. So we'll see that John keeps making the point.

God's children make a practice of righteousness. And then he pauses and he says, here's why. God's children make a practice of righteousness. Here's why again. And he gives us four of those tonight.

So let's unpack those one at a time. Let's look at the first why together. The first of these four causes. Number one, because the Son of God has freed us from slavery to sin.

Let's read verses four and five again. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins. And in him there is no sin. Those who make a practice of sinning disregard God's laws.

[12 : 07] Disregard his laws. That's what lawlessness is. It is saying, I know the laws that are put in place. I don't want to abide by those laws. I know how I should live.

I know how God calls me to live. But I'm choosing to not live according to God's way. I'm setting aside God's laws. I'm rejecting God's laws.

That was all of us in our unregenerate state. We said, I want nothing to do with what you have said. I want nothing to do with obeying your commandments.

I don't want to be shackled to God's laws. I want to live however I please. I want the freedom to live how I would like. But we weren't nearly as free as we thought we were.

Kids, do any of you enjoy brushing your teeth? I would be shocked if any of you said, do you actually want to brush your teeth? In fact, you probably know it's a rule in your household.

[13 : 12] Your parents, they say, you have to brush your teeth. And we're going to make it a daily habit. Now, how would you feel, kids, if your parents one day said, you know what?

You are free to never brush your teeth again as long as you live in our household. Would you rejoice in that? Would you say, that sounds great. We can put this into place immediately and I'm going to stop brushing my teeth.

And you think, I'm free from the master of having to brush my teeth. I don't have to obey that anymore. And you think, I'm free. But guess what?

You're actually now having to obey another master. The master of cavities. Kids, have you ever had a cavity? Everybody, I have had lots of cavities, probably at many of your ages.

I learned quickly as a child, if I don't brush my teeth well and live under that law, I'm enslaved to cavities. Cavities are where your teeth start to rot and they hurt so bad.

[14 : 18] And you have to tell your parents because at some point the pain is too much. And they take you to a dentist and the dentist has to do some work on your teeth. You think you're free if your parents tell you, you don't have to brush your teeth.

But you're not. You are not free. So too, when we think of living under God's laws, we think, I want to be free of God's laws.

Well, then you are enslaved to sin. Before you were a child of God, you served another master. And Christ came to take away sins.

In him, there is no sin. He has the ability to take away our sins. And in doing that, he sets us free from the tyranny of sin. We're no longer mastered by sin.

It does not have dominion over us, Romans 6 says. Listen to Titus 2, 11-12. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave

himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works.

[15 : 52] So right there, that's a gospel text. Christ came to redeem us from all lawlessness. If you are a child of God, it is impossible. If you are truly a child of God, born of God, it is impossible for you to make a practice of righteousness.

You've been redeemed from all lawlessness. It's impossible for you to make a practice of lawlessness. You've been redeemed from all lawlessness. It's no longer your master.

You have a new master, who has now purified you to make you zealous for good works. You've been made now to be obedient to God's laws.

You have a new master, who is a wonderfully gracious, good, kind master. You are now enslaved to righteousness, to serve God.

So it's not so much that we went from living without law to now living under law. We went from being captive to sin to now captive to God and his righteousness.

[16 : 59] And that took place because Christ came to take away our sins. He came and he set us free from slavery to sin. He unshackled us from our slavery and then he made us his own.

We belong to him. So that's the first why. That's the first cause of our passage. God's children, they live according to God's righteous ways because Christ came and freed us from our slavery to sin. Let's look at the second cause together. Why do God's children practice righteousness? Because as God's children, we are made like God's son.

Verses six to seven. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, do not, let no one deceive you.

Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as he is righteous. So God's word says, no one who abides in him, that's Jesus Christ, keeps on sinning.

[18 : 07] That almost sounds like God's children, those born of him, stop sinning altogether. As though once you're a Christian, you no longer commit sins.

As though we stop sinning. I mean, isn't that what the opposite of keeping on sinning is, to stop sinning? So is John teaching us some kind of doctrine of sinless perfection here?

That we become entirely sanctified without sin in this life? Well, to answer that question, we need to revisit John's own words. Two different places.

First, look back at chapter one. Look at verse eight. Chapter one, verse eight. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

In other words, those born of God will have remaining sin. Then in verse nine, John tells us what to do if we sin.

[19 : 15] What does verse nine say? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. So what do we do if we sin? We confess it. We would have no need to confess if the Bible teaches that we no longer sin once we are born of God.

So that's one place where John's letter clearly teaches Christians have sinned. Let's look at the second place. Chapter two, verse one. John, how does this chapter begin? My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, let's stop there. John writes with the expectation that his letter will be used by God to help us avoid sin, to help us to abstain from sin.

Then he says, but if anyone does sin, those words show us that John is fully aware of remaining sin in the life of a believer.

Those born of God don't immediately stop sinning. The problem of sin remains. So then John tells us what to do if we sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

[20 : 31] So what do we do if we sin? Remember, we have an advocate and his name is Jesus. We would have no need for an advocate if the Bible teaches that we no longer sin once we become children of God.

So two places that clearly teach us Christians have remaining sin. Now we should obviously strive to not sin. That's one of the very reasons that John wrote his letter for us.

I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. The goal, the aim is that we would not sin. We should work hard to abstain from sinning.

We should work hard to not stumble in sin. But we should not expect sinlessness to be a reality this side of eternity.

So that teaching from earlier in John's letter should inform us as we now come to this text in chapter 3. Children of God do still sin but children of God don't live in that sin.

[21 : 37] Their desire for sin diminishes more and more. It weakens more and more. And when children of God do sin, they are grieved by that sin.

They aren't flippant about it. They aren't okay with it. They may sin but they don't revel in it. The child of God is quick to confess that sin to God.

The child of God is quick to see that sin and to turn from that sin. To make a practice of sinning is the exact opposite. To make a practice of sinning is to see your sin, to not think much of that sin, to not bring it to God and to not seek to change.

At the heart of practice is repetition. We're talking about practicing righteousness and practicing sin. At the heart of practice is repetition.

You want to get good at something. You want to be skilled at something. You have to do that over and over again. There's a reason why I don't play the guitar. I bought a guitar. I practiced it for one day.

[22 : 49] I set it aside. I never picked it up again. I can't play guitar. Many of us have similar experiences. Perhaps not with instruments. But you could think of things in your life. Tried it once. Set it aside.

Haven't done it since. I'm no good at that. So if you fall out of practice once you've begun practicing, your skills diminish. So what are you putting your time into?

What are you making a habit of? That says a lot about where your heart is. Are you putting in the time with sin? Or are you putting in the time with righteousness?

Christians still sin, but they are not improving in their ability to sin. The child of God is not making a habit of sinning. So we shouldn't think in terms of whether we have stopped sinning or whether we keep sinning.

We should think in terms of our mentality towards sin. Are we making every effort to stop? Or are we okay with it?

[23 : 55] Do we have a seared conscience that doesn't really recognize even when we are sinning? Are we doing everything that we can to practice righteousness or are we complacent and apathetic?

Have we given ourselves over to living in sin? See, verses 6 and 7 here are not teaching us that we should be sinless like Christ, but we should sin less and less and look more and more like Christ because we are making a practice of righteousness just as Christ himself is righteous.

So if we confess Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we should look like Christ more and more because we are in the habit of seeking to live like him. It's easy to say something.

It's easy to confess something. It's another thing to demonstrate it, to prove it, to back it up. So it is with the Christian life.

It is one thing to claim Christ, especially even in the midst of professing Christians, to say that you are a Christian. But what does your life look like?

[25 : 09] Do you live like it? Do your actions back up your claims? That's the challenge here in verses 6 and 7. You claim to abide in Christ.

You claim to have seen Christ as he's revealed in his word. You claim to know Christ. How do you live? Do you live like you have seen him?

Do you live like you know him? Do you live like you are walking with him? Jesus Christ is righteous. Those who are in him have been declared righteous and those who have been declared righteous are becoming more and more righteous.

God's children are made to be like God's son. That's the second cause. Why is it the case that God's children live according to God's righteous ways? Because we have been made like God's son.

Let's look at the third cause together. The third why. Because the son of God has defeated the devil's works. Because the son of God has defeated the devil's works.

[26 : 19] Now as we unpack this point together and see it in the text here, I've come to realize that Pastor John and I need to compare notes perhaps before a Sunday service because there are going to be many ways in which the Lord is reminding us even with some exact same verses from this morning and that's good for us to have.

So let's read together verse 8 again and let's consider this cause. Whoever 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. So Christ has come and he has conquered his foes.

He has dealt the death blow to his foes. And the works of the devil are included. We see this all over his earthly ministry as he cast out demons.

He was pushing back the kingdom of darkness as he was bringing the kingdom of light. We see this in his death and his resurrection. Listen to what Colossians says.

[27 : 23] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. Or as Hebrews says that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. And deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. So Christ has dealt the death blow to Satan.

Christ has dealt the death blow to the devil and to the devil's works. And what are the devil's works? Making a practice of sinning. Making a practice of sinning.

The devil is good at that. He's been doing it for a very long time. John says from the beginning. He's good at it and he's good at getting others to join him in it.

Just as we saw in the text this morning. He is good at leading into temptation. He is good at tempting us to sin. So his name it's fitting.

[28 : 23] The deceiver. That's what it means. Now we've been warned a few times in 1 John to be careful that we're not deceived. In fact, John warns us in verse 7 of our passage.

Don't be deceived. Don't think otherwise. Don't think that sin is to be taken lightly. That cheapens the grace of God.

Don't diminish and downplay the great cost of your salvation. Christ's blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Don't think that you can just claim Christ and then just keep living however you would like.

But this is where we can be deceived. Because we can think, yeah, I know that. It's obvious. I recognize this false teaching.

I stay away from this way of thinking. I know these lies that are promoted, but I'm safe. I'm secure. I know the truth. I know it well. So I'm not susceptible.

[29 : 26] I am not gullible. When we do that, when we just brush off the possibility of being deceived, we show that we think too highly of ourselves.

I will never succumb to believing lies. We pride ourselves on being bastions of the truth. And in our pride, we brush off the notion that we can be deceived.

We have failed to appreciate and to heed the words of Proverbs 16, 18. pride goes before destruction and haughty spirit before a fall.

You are positioned just as the devil, the great deceiver, wants you to be positioned. So don't think yourself above being deceived.

Your best defense is a humble recognition that you need God's protection and preservation. just as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, 12, therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

[30 : 32] So don't look to yourself. Don't trust in yourself. Look to Christ. Trust in him. The one who came to conquer for your sake. The one who destroyed the works of the devil.

The one who has destroyed the power of sin over you. We are no longer in its grips because of his work, not because of ours. So don't live in your strength.

Don't be deceived. Don't look to yourself. Look to Christ. So that's the third cause. Why is it the case that God's children live according to God's righteous ways?

Because the Son of God has defeated the devil's works. Let's look at the fourth and the final cause. The fourth why? Because the word of God abides in us.

Because the word of God abides in us. Verse 9. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. For God's seed abides in him.

[31 : 31] And he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. John is very much echoing the words of 1 Peter for us. 1 Peter 1.

23 says, you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. So God's seed resides in.

God's seed remains in those born of him. There is a divine power at work in the children of God. It is transformative. We've seen that in Psalm 119 in the morning.

The psalmist adores God's word. He recognizes that it's life-giving, it's life-transforming. He says, how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

That is the effect of God's word, God's seed taking root deeply in the heart of his child. The child of God cannot make a practice of sinning because sin has become bitter.

[32 : 38] God's word, God's ways, God himself has become sweet. To him. So these are sobering words set before us tonight.

How you live is evidence of who you are. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. This passage calls us to examination.

What is the pattern of our lives? Have we been deceived into thinking we can live however we'd like? God's love? So for some of us, that may be true.

Perhaps we have believed that lie. And so we need to hear that word from John. We need to be examining ourselves. I have lived however I like. Am I a child of God?

But for some of us, we may swing the pendulum in the opposite direction. So we see the sin that remains in us. We see how often we still sin and we don't ignore it.

[33 : 39] We don't make light of it. We do the opposite. We are overwhelmed with despair and we doubt our salvation. We think there is no way that I'm a child of God.

If others could see just how sinful I still am, we despair. But is it not true that the more closely that we walk with Christ, the more fully that we do see our sin.

You see your sin more fully because you see his glory more fully. You see how little you love him in comparison to how much he loves you. You see how unworthy you are in comparison to how worthy he is.

You see how far short you fall in comparison to how high and exalted he is. Indeed, you see your sin. what do you do with it?

You see your sin. What do you do with it? Do you think it's fine? It's no big deal? Or does it drive you to your knees before God?

[34 : 51] Those who practice righteousness confess their sin knowing that God is faithful and just to forgive. And so those who are children of God will live like God's children because the Son of God has freed us from our sin, from our slavery to it.

Because as God's children we are made like God's son. Because the Son of God has defeated the devil's work. Because the word of God abides in us. And in this all glory be to God.

Let's pray together. Father God, we do thank you for your word. Lord, we thank you that it indeed teaches us and reminds us not just of who we are in Christ but of what we will look like if we are in Christ.

And so Father, we pray tonight that you would help us to examine ourselves, to look closely at ourselves, to see how we live, and then also to not forget and to rejoice in the reality that you do this work in us, that you have saved us, that you have justified us, and you sanctify us, and you glorify us.

So Father, we pray that we would be sobered, we pray we would examine ourselves, we also pray Lord that we would be reassured, that we would be comforted, and that we would rejoice in the work that you do.

[36 : 12] So help us as we go from here, help us as we enter into a new week afresh, that your word would indeed take deep root into our hearts, that we would then be abiding in Christ, and that we would live like your children because we have been born of you.

We pray all of this in Christ's name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.