

Identity → Activity

1 John 3:4–10

I. INTRO

- A. Two heresies have plagued the church since its inception. They are both lies.
 - 1. **Legalism:** “Stop sinning so God will accept you.”
 - 2. **Antinomianism:** “God accepts you, so sin doesn’t matter.”
- B. John is writing to a church that has been shaken by false teachers.
 - 1. There were people who had been part of the community, who knew the language, who knew the teachings, who appeared to belong
 - 2. But John says: “They went out from us, but they were not of us.”
- C. The issue was not that some people left John’s church, but that they claimed they could know God while rejecting the life that knowing God produces
 - 1. They claimed you could know Christ without obedience
 - 2. They claimed you could be spiritually healthy without being surrendered
 - 3. They claimed you could have a relationship with Christ, but never actually grow to resemble him
- D. For us this is an important thing to wrestle through
 - 1. On the one hand, we have a nation of people who claim to be Christian but their lives look nothing like the risen Christ (antinomianism)
 - 2. On the other hand, we know that you don’t follow Christ by modifying your behavior (legalism)
- E. John wants to make sure his readers aren’t falsely clinging to these false gospels
- F. Scholars have noted that throughout the letter John gives three signs of faith:
 - 1. A right view of Jesus (**Doctrinal**)
 - 2. A growing obedience to God (**Moral**)
 - 3. A genuine love for others (**Relational**)
- G. Again, these aren’t ways to earn salvation, they are signs of life → evidence that salvation has taken root
 - 1. John wants to expose the false assurance of people who claim Christ while remaining unchanged by Christ
 - 2. Because for John, the life of God cannot enter a person and leave that person exactly the same.
- H. Last week we looked at how as followers of Christ we are God’s children
- I. But that raises the question: If God is now our Father, shouldn’t there be a family resemblance? And the clear answer is, “Yes!”
 - 1. After all, children resemble their parents.
- J. John says there is a spiritual resemblance among the children of God
- K. Those who have been born of God begin to bear the character of God
- L. Here is John’s point → **The CHILDREN of God begin to look like the SON of God because the LIFE of God is within them.**

II. *1 John 2:28–29, [28] And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. [29] If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

- A. Notice where John starts – relationship.
- B. Before John says, “Practice righteousness” he says “abide in him”
- C. As an author imagine that John has been musing and meditating on John 15 (vine and branches) for decades
- D. Abide means to remain, continue, stay connected
- E. Relationally, this means that following Jesus is not about trying harder, but about remaining close to Jesus b/c he’s all we got!
 - 1. We abide as we cling to his Word, depend on him in prayer, walk in repentance, and remain with his people
- F. The order is important
 - 1. John doesn’t say: Practice righteousness so you can be born of God
 - 2. He says: Those who have been born of God practice righteousness.

G. Identity comes before activity

- 1. The new birth produces a new life // BIRTH → ABIDING → FRUIT
- H. Simply stated: True faith is evidenced by growth (doctrinally in truth, morally in obedience, relationally in love)

III. *1 John 3:4–8, [4] Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. // Everyone who sins is breaking God’s law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.*

- A. This passage has confused a lot of people over the years
- B. Because if we isolate this passage, we might think John is teaching that Christians never sin
 - 1. But John already told us: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”
 - 2. So John is not talking about the presence of sin. He is talking about the practice of sin.
 - a) Stated another way: He’s not referring to a believer who struggles, but someone who is settled into their sin like a pig in mud
- C. Essentially, John is presenting the opposite of what he just said about righteousness
 - 1. If those born of God reveal God’s life over time, then those separated from God eventually reveal what governs them as well
 - a) They won’t cling to truth
 - b) They will morally compromise
 - c) They will lose their love
- D. It’s helpful to see how John defines sin: “Sin is lawlessness.”
 - 1. Sin here is not just breaking a rule; it is rejecting the Rule-Giver
 - 2. It is a declaration that I belong to myself → nobody governs me
 - a) It is living in open rebellion against God
 - b) It is shaking your fist at his truth

3. In other words, sin is deeper than behavior; sin is rebellion because at the heart of every sin is a question: Who is in charge? God? Or me?
- IV. *[5] You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [7] Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.*
- A. Now, John told us that Jesus' mission was to take away sins
 1. So, to track John's logic, if Jesus' mission was to take away sins, then how can someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus willfully, repeatedly, without remorse or repentance, walk forward in sin?
 - a) B/C that's what the false antinomian teachers were doing
 - b) They were claiming that since Jesus forgives sin, you can do whatever you want → live a LAWLESS life
 - B. In answer to their ridiculous claim, John gives two reasons why this cannot be
 1. Jesus came to remove sin
 2. Jesus himself has no sin
 - C. So, in other words, how can we (abide) remain close to a sinless Savior while actively, without remorse, embracing the very thing he came to remove?
 1. **A true believer cannot be comfortable with actively embracing that which crucified Christ. He WILL feel convicted over time.**
 - a) Stated another way: Sin should bother you
 2. Feeling the conviction of the Holy Spirit when you say, think, or act in a certain way is actually a GOOD SIGN of the work of God in your life
 3. If you have no conviction of sin, no remorse, no repentance, and claim to be a follower of Christ, someone is deceiving you
 - D. "The fight" itself is evidence. Dead hearts don't grieve sin; new hearts do
- V. *[8] 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.*
- A. Remember: family resemblance...
 1. You're reborn of God, you start to look like Jesus
 2. You're of the devil, you start to look and act like the devil (John's claim)
 - B. The devil has been marked by rebellion from the beginning, and his children (Jesus' words), will look and act like him → rebels
 1. And when Jesus said that, he wasn't talking about the prostitutes and drunkards; He was talking to the Pharisees – those who looked like religious goody two-shoes!
 - C. John says, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." → That word destroy means to undo, dismantle, break apart
 - D. Jesus did not come to help us manage darkness → He came to defeat it
 1. The gospel is not only forgiveness from sin's penalty, but from its power over us as well today
 2. It's not about getting a better cage for your sin (gritting your teeth, cussing someone out in your head instead of with your mouth)

3. It's about God removing the hatred in your heart entirely over time!

VI. *[9] No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. [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 is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

A. This is the heart of John's argument: New birth creates new desires

B. God places his life within his people → John calls it God's seed

1. The idea is that something new has been planted (the gospel, the word of truth, the Holy Spirit)
2. What is placed within us is alive. It grows. It transforms us from the inside out → not like hanging fruit on a dead tree, but like God bringing the tree itself back to life

C. HEAR ME: Christianity is not behavior modification; it's about new creation, resurrection, metamorphosis

1. God does not simply make bad people behave better. He makes dead people alive

D. John finishes: "By this it is evident who are the children of God..."

1. Or to quote Jesus, "You shall know a tree by its fruit."

E. How is it evident who is a child of God and who is a child of the devil?

1. How does the family resemblance show? John cites two ways:
 - a) Righteousness → obedient pursuit of holiness
 - b) Love → loving your brothers and sisters in Christ

F. True holiness always moves toward love.

G. In John's mind, we cannot separate morality from relationships

H. You cannot claim to resemble the Father while refusing to love his kids

1. But that's next week's passage → the call to LOVE

VII. CONCLUSION

A. Religion says, "Change your activity and maybe you'll get a new identity."

B. The world says, "Do whatever you want. You be you."

C. But the gospel says something completely different: God gives you a new identity, and that identity creates a new activity.

D. An apple tree doesn't produce apples because it's trying to become an apple tree.

1. It produces apples because it already is an apple tree. Fruit doesn't create identity; identity creates fruit.

E. You don't obey so God will become your Father. You obey because God has become your Father.

F. John isn't asking, "Have you ever sinned?" He already knows the answer.

1. He's asking, "Who do you belong to?"

G. If you're unsure how to answer that, John has given us signs of life.

1. Look at the direction of your life.
 - a) Are you growing in your love for God's truth?
 - b) Do you desire to be closer to Jesus?
 - c) Do you hate your sin, even though you still struggle?

- d) Are righteousness and love becoming more evident over time?
- 2. True children of God begin to look like the Son of God. The family resemblance starts to show.
- H. Now, every believer struggles. You may battle anger, lust, gossip, grumbling, or other sins for a season.
 - 1. The question isn't, "Do I struggle?"
 - 2. The question is, "Is the Lord convicting me?"
- I. Conviction isn't permission to continue in sin.
 - 1. It's evidence that the Spirit lives within you, lovingly exposing sin so you can walk in both forgiveness and freedom.
- J. Because if we keep entertaining habitual sin, it will destroy us.
 - 1. The nightcap can grow to addiction
 - 2. The financial compromise can become theft
 - 3. The lingering glance desires pornography
 - 4. Unchecked despair spirals to isolation
- K. That's why John doesn't minimize sin. God loves us too much to let us believe we can play with it without consequence.
 - 1. But John never leaves us staring at our sin. He points us to our Savior.
- L. If you're discouraged because you're still fighting sin, don't confuse the battle with defeat.
 - 1. The grief you feel over your sin may be evidence that God's Spirit is at work in you. Dead hearts don't fight sin; they make peace with it. Children of God wage war against sin because they belong to a different Father.
- M. So don't leave here trying harder in your own strength. Abide in Christ. Bring your sin into the light. Repent quickly. Trust his forgiveness. Walk in the power of his Spirit. Find accountability in a trusted friend who will say the hard things.
- N. And if you've been claiming the name of Christ while comfortably holding on to sin, hear John's warning.
 - 1. Don't settle for a profession of faith without truly knowing Christ
 - 2. Don't settle for religion
 - 3. Jesus invites you to come to the One who not only forgives sin but breaks its power
- O. The Father isn't raising children who merely look religious.
 - 1. He's conforming them to the image of his Son
 - 2. The family resemblance may be imperfect today, but by God's grace it will become increasingly evident until the day we see Christ face to face