

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community / 1 John, wk 2

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Message Title: Whose Child Are You? Pt. 2

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[1 John 3] Verses 4 through 10 are critical to understand, but this text also has high potential for misunderstanding. Most of the Bible - from cover to cover - you can, with basic Bible study principles, interpret the text out of the English text, and fully understand the intent of the writer. Some of the original language stuff fills in a little bit, but you can study your English Bible; it's a wonderful translation and you can understand the intent of the writer - no problem, with the exception of a handful of texts, and this happens to be one of those texts. If we don't understand the nuances of the Greek language, it can be very misleading.

Verse 4 says:

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

(NASB, 1 John 3:4)

Now when he's talking about sin and lawlessness, he's using a verb tense that's called the *durative present*. The best way to think of durative is like *duration*, and it basically is reflecting something that happens over a period of time — in other words, a lifestyle of sin — a way of life that is habitual sin. The verb tense is indicating that. So he's talking about **sin** and he's talking about **lawlessness**. Now those two terms are very similar in the original language, to the degree that they're often used interchangeably. But the false teachers, this early form of Gnosticism, had actually kind of redefined the terms and made them very distinct, and that's what John is referencing here. These false teachers had created a theology to fit their morality. And basically, their theology was that we are divided between the immaterial and the material — that which is spirit and that which is flesh, or body. The spirit part of me connects with God. The material part of me is completely disconnected from God. So whatever I do in the material part of me - in other words, whatever I do with my body - it is irrelevant to my relationship with God. Therefore, with this theology, they had created a way, where they could live grossly immoral lives, and still believe they were fine with God. That's kind of the essence of their theology, and that's what John is challenging.

They took the word **lawlessness** and they defined this as *rebellion against God*. Sometimes this word is used to describe Satan's rebellion — so to fight against God, to be at war against God, to rebel against God. And they're saying, "That's a bad thing; we would never do that. We're for God. That's why our spirits connect to God. We would never be guilty of that." But they deny the concept of **sin**. There is no sin concept. "Whatever I do with my body is irrelevant; it doesn't matter. It has nothing to do with my relationship to God."

Now you remember we dealt with this in Chapter 1 when John said, "If you say that you have no sin, you're a liar." That's the same teaching he was dealing with. These false teachers were saying, "We have no sin. We don't buy into that concept." And so now they're saying, "You

know, we would never rebel against God, but we don't buy into the sin thing." So John is responding to that when he says, "**Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness.**" When I sin, it is a rebellion. When I sin, it is fighting against God. When I sin, I am aligning myself with the enemy. That's what sin is; that's its very essence. So he's saying, "There's no such distinction; that's bogus theology. When I sin, I am at war with God."

Verse 5:

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

He reminds the believers that the whole reason Jesus had to come — that God became flesh — is to take away sin. John the Baptist introduced Jesus by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." In other words, if sin was no big deal, if it didn't matter to God, if He could just shrug it off, why did Jesus come? When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and He saw the wrath of God to come, He asked the Father, "Is there any other way that we can do this?" And the fact that He hung on the cross was the answer. If sin is no big deal to God, then why did Jesus have to suffer God's wrath on the cross? That's what he is saying. Sin is a really big deal to God. Sin is completely incompatible with God. Sin is at war with God.

And then he reminds us that *Jesus Himself had no sin*. Jesus didn't die because of His own sin. He had no sin quality. But rather because He was sinless, He could die on behalf of us. He could be the substitutionary atonement, or the substitutionary payment for our sin. But I think John is also reminding his readers that Jesus was sinless, because that's the quality of God. **Sin and God are incompatible**; they can't go together; they never could go together. There is no sin quality to God at all, because that's an important part of his argument here.

Verse 6:

No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Verse 6 is one of those that could be very misleading, if we don't understand the verb tenses. Is the verse saying: *if you know God, you don't sin?* You know, at about that point we're all saying, "*Man, we are in trouble if that's the deal.*" But wait a minute; that's not the deal. He already told us in Chapter 1, that *if you say you have no sin, you are a liar*. Of course we sin. When we come into the light, our sin is exposed; our rats are exposed, and we confess our sin — *and He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin*. He said that when you sin, you have an Advocate; you have a lawyer that pleads your case to the Father. He has already said, "Of course as Christians we are going to fail. We're going to stumble; we're going to sin." So it's obvious that's *not* what he's saying.

It's also been very clear in this text that he believes the recipients of this letter are believers. He's concerned about the false teachers but, in Chapter 2 he just affirmed, "*I know that you know. I know that you believe. I know that you have the Holy Spirit.*" So he's clearly affirmed them as believers. So what is he saying? The key is in understanding again the verb tense — the durative present — which is saying *sin as a way of life, sin as a habitual pattern, sin as a lifestyle*. What he is saying then in Verse 6 is, "**No one who abides in Him sins as a way of life, as a habitual pattern. No one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.**" Again, he's pushing

back on the false teachers who say that they can live this grossly immoral life and still maintain a relationship with God. What John is saying is, it doesn't work that way. That's not possible.

Verse 7:

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

So he's not saying we're righteous because we're self-righteous. We're righteous because our Father is righteous, and it's because it's His seed in us; it's because it's His nature in us; it's because it's His Spirit in us; it's because we've been completely reborn, and now it's the very Spirit of God Himself in us. Therefore it's His righteousness.

Verse 8:

the one who practices sin (again, same verb tense, as a way of life) is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy (or to set us free from) the works of the devil.

The best sinner on the face of the planet is the devil himself. He's been practicing it for thousands of years. From the beginning, there has been this cosmic war between the devil and God. And so what John is saying is: if you sin as a way of life, if you sin as a habitual pattern, then you resemble your father the devil. That's how he lives his life. He is at war with God. It's the very thing that Jesus came to set us free from.

Verse 9:

No one who is born of God practices sin (sin as a lifestyle, sin as a pattern), because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Now this is going back to his previous argument. If there is no sin in God, and if we've been born of God — if God is our parent, if we have God's nature, if we have God's Spirit, if we have God's seed, if we're children of God, if we're in the process of being made like Him — God can't be at war with Himself; God can't rebel against Himself; God cannot maintain a lifestyle that's opposed to who He is. Therefore he says, "*No one who practices sin as a way of life really has the seed of God in him or her.*" It's very important to understand the text doesn't say, "If you are born of God, you *shouldn't* live this way." It says, "You *can't* live this way." You can't! It's incompatible! You can't say that Verses 1-3 are true and then live this way. It's just not possible. If you are God's child, you can't live that way. It's a very sobering verse.

One of the dangers of too much information is, in our heads we think we know the answers, but that doesn't necessarily mean we have ever truly experienced God's salvation. Perhaps you've heard this question: "If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He was to say, 'Why should I let you into My Heaven?' what would you say?" It's been this diagnostic question that's been out there for years. Just because you know the right answer doesn't mean you're *in*. **Having the facts in your head doesn't mean you've experienced God's salvation.** If you can practice sin as a way of life — as a habitual pattern — and it doesn't bother you, you have every

reason to be concerned. There is good reason to believe you do not have God as your Father. That's what he's saying.

Verse 10:

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Now when he says it's **obvious**, that's just kind of a general statement. It doesn't mean it's going to be *obvious* in every single person. As a matter of fact, even Jesus said that sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between the wheat and the tares. Ultimately, that's God's business to sort it out. But generally speaking, those who live like the devil, belong to the devil, and those who pursue righteousness, belong to God, who is righteous. So what exactly is the text saying and what is it not saying?

First of all let's remind ourselves that John is addressing a very specific problem — a problem where false teachers are making the case that it's possible to live a grossly immoral life, and that has no effect on your relationship with God. That's what he's responding to, and he's saying that's impossible. That's bogus theology — it's absolutely not true and he's concerned that they might be deceived by that teaching.

Second of all, is he saying that if we are children of God, we do not sin? He is absolutely *not* saying that. He already told us in Chapter 1 that we *do* sin; that's why we confess. That's why we have an Advocate. But when we sin, there is something deep within us that responds to that, that reacts to that; there's a sorrow, there's a conviction, there's a grieving, and there's a sense in our spirit that says, "I don't want to be that way. I don't want to live this way. That isn't how I want to be. I want to be like God. I want to be like my Father." There's something in us that's miserable when we sin, that calls us to something more, to something higher. **When you sin and that bothers you, that convicts you, that grieves your heart — that's a really good sign.** That's an evidence of the Spirit of God in you. That's an evidence of His nature. That's an evidence of His seed and His Spirit. That's an evidence of God in you saying, "Wow, that's totally incompatible with who you now are. You cannot do that." And there's a sense of grief and sorrow that says, "I don't want to keep doing this." **But if you can sin as a way of life, as a lifestyle, as a pattern, and it doesn't bother you — there's no conviction; there's no sorrow; there's no grief — you have a problem.** That is totally incompatible with everything we believe to be true of a child of God, and you have reason to be concerned. You have reason to believe you've never really experienced God's salvation. You've never truly been born of God.

So what does all this have to do with community? It has everything to do with community! **Sin always isolates.** Sin always pushes us into the shadows. The first thing that Adam and Eve did when they sinned was, they hid from God, because that's what sin does to us. So we pull back into the shadows. I asked you at the start of this series, "Do you experience an intimate, passionate love relationship with Jesus? If not, why not? And do you experience authentic, deep, rich community with other believers? If not, why not?" I guarantee you, **if sin is a way of life for you, you have no chance of authentic community, until you deal with your sin.**

There is a pseudo-community that defines people who rebel against God. They gather around the rebellion. They gather around their sin. They gather around their grief. They gather around their sorrow and their despair and their dissatisfaction. And they gather together to medicate, in order to get through one more day. But it's not the community that breathes life into their souls.

It just leaves them empty and dissatisfied, day after day after day. But just imagine the possibility, if we, as the children of God, are destined to become so magnificent, that no eye has seen and no ear has heard how magnificent we will become — by the grace of God. **Just imagine if God’s children gathered together in the light to dance with Jesus, what the possibilities are for deep, rich, authentic, life-giving community.** *Behold how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that He would call us His children.*

Father, we’re thankful for Your truth. Lord, you love us. You’ve called us to be Your children. Lord, of all the things in the universe that are so amazing, the thing that You love the most, the thing that You’re most passionate about is Your children. Lord, it’s hard to even process that. Lord, it hasn’t been revealed yet what we shall be, but when we see Him as He is, Lord, we will be like Him. Lord, if that’s true, then obviously we have to live that way. Lord, I pray for those who perhaps have never really understood Your salvation - maybe they’ve misunderstood because they know the facts, that that’s enough - Lord, that You would convict his or her heart to experience the reality of Your salvation, of what it really means to be Your child. Lord, until that day when we gather together with You, celebrate the wonder of what we have become by Your grace, Lord, I pray that you find us faithful. In Jesus’ name.

Several years ago, I had a guy actually say to me that he feels like it's okay to sin on Saturday, because he can ask forgiveness on Sunday. It's no big deal. I would say John completely disagrees with that. He would say sin is a big deal. It's such a big deal that God had to give up His own Son to die, to pay the price for our sin. John reminds us, if sin is a way of life, if it doesn't bother you, then you have every reason to be concerned. Even if you know the right answers to the questions, that behavior is troubling. If when we sin, we have deep conviction, we have sadness, and it makes us feel miserable, that's actually a really good sign. It means that Jesus is alive in us. That's where the conviction of sin is coming from. **Real Christian community is not coming together to commiserate around our sin and failures. Rather, it's coming into the light. It's facing our sin. It's dealing with our “rats”, so that we might come together with Jesus and one another in the light.**