

Who are you?

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[0:00] I used to be for fun playing this game this game on the screen called play game how the game was you were create a virus which would! David can we turn this mic off sorry I think it's causing issues is this one on okay shall we start again!

I as I was saying I used to regularly play this game for fun called plague inc in the game you would create a virus that you would use to infect the world and the mission of the game was to destroy the world with the virus that you create.

I had many hours of fun playing this game until about five years ago when we went into a COVID pandemic and a national lockdown.

Suddenly sitting in my bedroom and playing a game infecting the world with a virus didn't feel so fun because the reality of it wasn't fun.

Something which was once a little game had become a scary and deadly threat. And I wonder if that's how Christian people feel about sin.

[1:32] Once sin may have felt like a little bit of a light-hearted game. You can say a little white lie here and there and it feels empowering.

I could go and get drunk on some alcohol and that's just a bit of fun. I can go and use lots of swear words and curse words over there and that's harmless.

A little bit of envy won't hurt me. A little lust won't harm anyone.

But then as God works in us, we start to feel convicted about sin. We start to feel it's not just a light-hearted game.

It's not something to brush under the carpet. In fact, as the Lord works in us, we feel guilty. Sin no longer feels as fun and as pleasurable as it used to.

[2:46] As we grow to discover the seriousness of it. Sin no longer feels as good.

And as we continue our series looking at growing in Christ, I want us to see how our relationship to sin has changed. And it's changed because we now find ourselves in a wonderful new relationship with God.

Before we get there, before we get to the passage, let me just say one or two other things to help us in terms of context. The Bible shows that two things are true for all of us.

I'm sure you can say it shows us more than that. But two big things. Firstly, we are created in God's image. All of us are created with the maker's image.

Human beings. It gives human beings real value and dignity and worth to know that we're created in his image. But the other truth that the Bible shows to us is that we're all in a mess.

[4:20] We're all in a mess. And the Bible calls that mess sin. That sin that perhaps we once enjoyed, we see as rather scary and deadly.

In the passage that we read, John defines sin as this. Chapter 3, verse 4. Everyone who breaks the law.

In fact, sin. Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, sin is lawlessness. Sin is law-breaking. God has given his law, revealed his right ways for us to live.

But all of us, when we sin, are saying, No, I don't want to go your way. Actually, I know better than your way. My way's better.

My desires are better than yours. Sin is lawlessness. And put it that way, sin doesn't sound so fun. It's scary and it's deadly.

[5:29] Elsewhere, the Bible says to us, The wages of sin are death. Sin is scary and deadly. And the passage that we read this morning shows us

more of who we are.

Two categories of people it gives us. Verse 8. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. We're either a child of the devil, lost in our sin, or verse 9.

No one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in them. They cannot go on sinning because they've been born of God. We're either a child of the devil or a child of God. And if we're a child of God, we have a new relationship with sin and we'll explore what that is in a moment. So in thinking about children, just recently I've been thinking about how I have noticed more of my father's traits and ways coming through in me.

We both have a similar love for a tin sardine sandwich for lunch.

[6:46] Something which as a child I thought was absolutely gross. I now realize I have the same taste, wonderful taste, as my father. I've realized I have the same fussiness of how you pack things into a trolley and then pack things from the trolley onto the conveyor belt in Audi and then into your bag.

Just ask my wife. Though I don't share his same passion for bosses, I do share his enthusiasm for trains. I see more and more how I'm a child of my father.

And I've been thinking about this a lot because it seems rather amazing but also really scary to me to think that the little boy that Becky will give birth to soon will share some of the likeness of his dad. I only hope it's the good bits. John is telling us here in this passage that if we're children of the devil, and actually all of us are, we are prone to sinning.

We'll love sinning. But if we're children of God, we have a new relationship to sin and we'll be growing in our father's likeness, our father God who does not sin.

[8:09] So let's think about that a bit more, before we think about our new relationship to sin, we need to think about our new relationship with God. So first of all, we see that we are deeply loved children.

We're deeply loved children. Verse 28, chapter 228, John writes, and now dear children, it's like we're sitting and listening to the elder apostle and he's writing to those younger in the faith and he says, dear children, continue in him.

Continue walking in the Lord Jesus, growing in Christ as the theme of our series is. And in verse 29, he says, if you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

He talks about those who have come to see Jesus and his righteousness and his wonderful ways. We've come to know that we have new life in him.

We've been born of him. And not that we enter our mother's womb again to be born again in Christ, but that spiritually we've come to have new life in the Son of God.

[9:33] Verse 9 puts it this way, verse 9 again, no one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in them. We have God's seed, God's life at work in us.

And there's some debate about whether that's the word of God or the Spirit of God. I'm not going to get into that this morning. But whatever it is, we have new life from God within us if we've come to know Jesus as our Savior.

So as people born of God, the question is, how does God feel about us? How does God feel about you? That's a good question for us to ask because some of us right now may feel he's unhappy with us for some reason.

Some of us may feel like he's forgotten us somehow. So it's good to remind ourselves, how does God feel about us? Well, it's there, chapter 3, verse 1.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.

[10:45] This verse shows us we are deeply loved. We are deeply loved children, deeply loved by our Heavenly Father.

The early part of this verse could be translated, see what kind of foreign or alien love or otherworldly love this is.

because this is being loved with a love that this world doesn't give to us.

A greater sort of love than you can find from anything or anybody else. Otherworldly love, love from God Himself. And God the Father loves you with such a deep and profound love that it has totally transformed and renewed us.

It's changed our identity. Because all of us begin life as naturally, as children of the devil, lost, dead in our sin. But this wondrous, alien-like love of God is so amazing because we go from being called an enemy of God to being called His children.

[12:11] This is absolutely astounding. Now, I'm aware that perhaps in a congregation of our size, the word Father can provoke some hard feelings within us and memories.

Perhaps we have never known our fathers. Or perhaps we have felt like what we do know of our fathers is far from ideal. And so we need to acknowledge that speaking about this can be painful for some of us.

But, I pray and I hope this morning that this verse is a comfort to you, in particular, if that's true for you.

If your experience of a human father has not been good, please know that in God, we can know a father who won't let us down.

He has not abandoned you or forgotten you. His words you can always turn to and He is always ready to listen to you.

[13:30] Even the best earthly father is nowhere near as wonderful as our heavenly father. And so we can rejoice in this verse this morning.

That our Father in heaven loves us with a love that this world could never give. A love that's so deep that He would even give His own Son for us in order to adopt many others, sons and daughters as His own.

We sang at the very beginning of that love, didn't we? Here is love vast as the ocean. This is a rescue, a love, a rescue like no other.

Now, if you were struggling at sea for some reason and you needed rescuing by the RNLI lifeboats, for instance, you would be thankful if they come and they pull you up out of the water and rescue you.

You'd be thankful for them. But you wouldn't expect them to invite you round to their house for dinner and say, now you're here, you can live in my house and you can live as my adopted child.

[14:58] That would be weird. But with God, He has seen our need of rescue. And He's not only provided a way for us to be rescued from hell and from our sins, but He has invited us into His family and He says, you can come and sit at my table.

You are my precious child. And so now we can experience all the wonderful blessings of being a child of God and look forward to all the wonderful blessings that are to come.

So see this morning what great love the Father has lavished on you, child of God. We're in the family.

We're deeply loved and cherished by God Himself. And perhaps that's what some of us just needed to come and hear this morning.

Perhaps we felt alone this week. Perhaps we've even felt abandoned by God. Perhaps we felt like, God can't love me anymore. God deeply loves you as His own precious child.

[16:25] God's. It's a glorious thought. But there's more. As we've already said, we have a new relationship with sin.

We've got this wonderful relationship as a child of God and we have a new relationship now with sin. As you read the Bible, you will see that God is very unlike us.

And most particularly, we see that He is holy. He is set apart. He is pure. He is without sin. He is holy.

And we are not. So when it comes to us and our sin, our mess, it is an offense to our holy God. So much so that human beings cannot dwell with a holy God.

That is why, as you read, when Adam and Eve sinned, they were barred from access to the garden. Because they were barred from walking closely with God.

[17:38] They were barred from His presence. And it's why, as you read on through the Old Testament, we see that God's people cannot fully dwell with their holy gods.

And we ask this question as we read through the Scriptures. How can a holy God dwell with His people again? How can His people dwell with Him? He does sort of come close to them in the tabernacle.

His presence dwells with them in a special way in the Holy of Holies. But there's so many limitations barring people's access to God and so many sacrifices that need to be made for our sins that it feels like God is still far away.

And the only one that can come and enter into God's presence is only once a year by the high priest. So how is this problem going to be solved, we think?

And so we rejoice when we get into the New Testament and read that God has come down to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to us in a way that is safe for human beings to dwell with the holy gods.

[19:03] As the Lord Jesus dwells in a human body, perfectly human, perfectly gods. And we rejoice even more that He would choose to willingly give His life up for us on the cross, bearing our sins upon Himself so that the holy God's rightful wrath can be placed on Him for our sin.

And so when we come to find Jesus as our Savior, we come to find our sin, it's been crucified with Christ. The debt that we owe to God has been paid for our sin in full.

But we still struggle with sin in our lives. But as children of God, we now have a new relationship with sin.

Let's see how this works out in this passage that we've read. Verse 4 and 5, 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. In Jesus, we have a Savior who has come to deal with this problem of our sin.

[20:27] He's come to take away our sin. And so by looking to Jesus, that problem that we have of sin is dealt with. Our sins are washed clean by His work on the cross.

And so we need to keep looking to Him. He is our example and it's in His likeness we want to be growing.

So much so that John says this in verse 6, no one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him.

like God's love being sort of alien-like to the world around us, so sin should feel alien-like to the Christian.

For we now abide in Jesus, the righteous, holy one. Our home is in Him. So sin should have no place if we find our home is with our holy God.

[21:42] But this morning, I think I've even sinned this morning. So does that make verse 6 untrue? Does that make me not a Christian?

Does that mean I'm not a child of God? That question was going around in my head this week and maybe it's going around in your head? Well, I think the answer is no, but let me show you how that works because it's not clear if you just read verse 6 on its own.

It's important to read Scripture in context in order to understand it rightly. And it seems that John in writing this letter is writing to two groups of people who were known as Gnostics, but they believed two different things.

So some believed that we could live in a sinless state of perfection whilst others believed that sin doesn't matter and cannot harm the Christian.

So two very different views on sin. And so if you go back to 1 John verse 8, 1 John chapter 1 verse 8, John writes this, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[23:15] So there is sin in us, John says. If we say that we're not sinful, if we go around and tell people I don't sin, now I'm a Christian, then we're deceiving ourselves and others.

But as we're trying to see, we have a new relationship to sin. So let's read on chapter 1 verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And we joined in this morning with a prayer of confession. It is right to confess our sins because there is sin within us and we trust that Jesus, because of Jesus, we are cleansed from all

unrighteousness.

And how's this possible? Just in case we're not clear. Chapter 2 verse 1. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin, but if anybody does sin, it's okay, we have an advocate with the Father.

Jesus Christ, the righteous one, he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

[24:41] So sin is still something we have working within us. Something we fall into.

We do sin, we do struggle with sin. But John encourages us in our new relationship to sin.

So, verse 6 and 9 again, let's read them again carefully. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

And then verse 9, no one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in them. They cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God's.

John is helping those who say it's okay to sin. It's no harm. He is helping them to see, no, it's not okay to sin. If God has changed your life, if you're a child of God, you shouldn't be making a practice of sin.

[25:51] It's not okay to be messing around with it. I say making a practice of sin purposely. I like the way the ESV translates it.

It says, no one born of God makes a practice of sinning. So if you were a doctor, you would work in a GP practice perhaps to practice your skills of doctoring, of being a GP.

If you're a swimmer, you would intentionally go and practice your swimming to keep that going and to improve. If you're a musician, you would spend time practicing being a musician, practicing your instrument in order to get better and learn new things to play.

And so if you're a child of God, we should practice growing in the family likeness. We've been born of God and so sin doesn't belong there.

And so the child of God shouldn't be waking up and saying, today I am going to make a conscious effort to sin. In fact, the very opposite is true.

[27:13] It should horrify us to think that we would go home today, this afternoon, and pick up the phone to speak to our mum because it's Mother's Day and lie on the phone to her.

It should horrify us to think that we would go home today and make a conscious effort to search images online that we know are going to be unhelpful and will cause us to stumble into sin.

It should horrify us to think that tomorrow morning we're going to go to work and we will envy our colleagues because they got a lion because they're not a Christian when the clocks go forward.

Sin should horrify us because sin has no place within the believer. And the very fact that sin should horrify us shows our new relationship to sin.

We have come to see it as it truly is. It's not a game, it's scary and it's deadly. And so we have new desires built within us that want to resist sin.

[28:31] And because of that horror that we have to sin, we are more willing to fight against temptation. And I know that at times temptations can feel very strong and powerful.

That temptation is there in full force and we know what we should do and we know we must say no to temptation and yes to God's ways.

temptation and that willingness to fight temptations is a mark of someone who is united to Christ, who is born of God, who is a child of Christ.

Christ. But that doesn't make that fight easy. If you've known me for a while, you'll know that I enjoy a trip to this place, to Greg's, down London Road.

But I know that if I walk down London Road, I know that when I walk past Greg's, I'm going to smell the smell, I'm going to see the items advertised at the front and I know I'm going to be tempted.

[29:44] But I also know that it's not good for my health or bank balance to go into Greg's every day. And so I have to make a conscious decision to walk past it and not go in.

But some days that temptation can be harder than others. And some days I do go in and I buy that sausage roll or that caramel donut or that jammy heart biscuit and I think I'm in heaven.

And then a few minutes later I just want another one. And that strikes me that that's what temptation to sin is like. That's what a relationship to sin is like.

Some days it's easier than others to make that conscious effort not to sin and some days we we do fall. Thinking it's going to satisfy us.

Think it's going to bring us heaven and yet leaves us wanting more or feeling empty. And so we need to remember here our identity.

[31:02] We need to remember that we are now in Christ when it comes to sin. That we are children of God and as children of God we are growing in that family likeness and our desires and our willingness to fight temptation is growing stronger.

John Newton perhaps you know his story, a slave trader become Christian wrote the amazing hymn Amazing Grace. He said this, I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world but still I am not what I once used to be and by the grace of God I am what I am.

Christian this morning we're born of God we have a new relationship to sin and though we aren't where we want to be, we're not where we will be but we're not who we once were and by the grace of God we are today what we are and we can thank God for that.

Perhaps this morning we you look at where you are you hear this sermon on sin and you feel like you're a rubbish Christian but by the grace of God you are not who you once were before you came to Christ and by the grace of God you know Jesus as your saviour and you know that he cleanses you from all unrighteousness and although you may feel like you take one step forward in growing in Christ and three steps back still see that you are a child of God's and your relationship to sin is different and now we're children of God we want to grow in that family likeness and in all this we need to fix our eyes on

[33:31] Jesus our sinless saviour and John helps us to do that so verse five he puts our minds to the Lord Jesus and his work he says you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins and in him is no sin verse 16 he sets our minds on the Lord Jesus again this is how we know what love is Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters 1 John 4 verse 19 we love because he first loved don't think that's the verses I intended to read I think verse 16 and so I can't remember what verses I was intended to read but whatever the point is we focus our eyes on the Lord Jesus we fix our eyes on him and so when that temptation to sin feels strong we need to fix our eyes on him and see that he is better than the sin that we're desiring when we fail and sin we need to fix our eyes on him for he has given his life for us as an atoning sacrifice for our sin and we can say my identity is not in that sin it is in

Christ I'm his child loved with a wonderful love finally thirdly and finally for encouragement let's see we will be like Jesus verse 2 verse 2 John says dear friends now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known but what we know but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is all of us who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure we are children of God now we are held securely in our father's arms we are deeply loved by him now but there's a not yet aspect to who we are too and John helps us to see that not yet aspect in verse 2 now we are children of

God but what we will be has not yet been made known for when Christ appears we will be like him that's not happened yet Christ hasn't returned yet but when it does we will be like him we will be made pure and spotless free from the scary and deadly presence of sin for our old sinful nature will be completely gone away with and we will be changed we will be fit to live an eternity in heaven with our holy gods and when something you know is going to happen in the future it can often shape the way that you live today so in our case at home at the moment we're planning the arrival of our new baby we've ordered furniture for his bedroom we've started some classes which will help us for the birth and looking after a new baby once it's arrived and one of the things they suggested to us this week was we need to pack a hospital bag we know that day is coming when the baby will arrive we don't know when it's going to come and we know we're going to have to go somewhere else to have it so we be prepared and John reminds his readers here of the wonderful truth that there is a day

coming we don't know when but there is when we will be like Jesus and we will be changed and we will be pure and spotless like him so because that day is coming we should live like him we prepare ourselves by growing in Christ and seeking to fight that sin confess that sin and learn and grow with his help to live more and more in the likeness of Christ until one day the struggle will be over one day the fight will be won and one day that that constant feeling like we make progress and then slip up will be gone for we will see him as he is we will be like him and we'll be home at last we'll live in our father's house pure and spotless on that day when we see Jesus face to face and we're going to sing of that