

"Children of God"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. As we are in our summer months, if you find yourselves overwhelmed with heat, you can move up. There are a couple of seats in the front in the fan zone, kind of like the splash zone at SeaWorld.

And so you'll get a little bit extra wind. And also, downstairs, if you go out here and downstairs, there is air conditioning and live stream. If that will help you, stay with us for the next little while as we look into God's Word together.

You know, I used to have in my dresser two broken watches. Technically, they were called Folexes. Maybe you're familiar with this. A Folex is something you can buy on the street, probably in New York.

I purchased mine in China. They cost about \$8, not the thousands of dollars that real Rolexes cost. And they reveal themselves by their workmanship and by where they come from.

I have actually seen and been in a real Rolex shop once in Switzerland. And if you have seen the true thing, they are amazing. Their workmanship, their beauty, their style, their quality, truly amazing.

[1 : 24] But the Folexes are not that. And the first time I bought them, I thought, maybe I'm getting a deal. Maybe this is kind of like slightly shoddy workmanship, but maybe this is pretty close.

Not so. It broke before I got home. And the second time I bought it, I knew exactly what I was getting. But I thought, this is fun. Why not? But it raises a question, how do you know the difference?

How do you know the difference between a Folex and a Rolex? Well, where it was made and the character and quality of its work.

And this is a question that's been asked not only if watches, fake and real, but throughout the history of the church, it's a question that the church is asked about what is the true nature of a Christian?

What do you look for so you can distinguish between what is fake and what is real? It's asked by those outside the church who look at the church and the breadth of people who claim the name of Christ and wonder what is real here?

[2 : 30] Because there's a breadth of all sorts of things. And it's asked within the church, as people want to know for themselves, how can I know that I truly am a Christian?

How can I get some kind of assurance or confidence that my Christianity is really what the Bible says? Well, it's to this that our passage speaks to this morning.

We're in the letter of 1 John. John, that's at the end of your Bible, right before Revelation, page 960 is where we're going to be today. And as you know, John is writing to a church at the end of the first century or near the end of the first century.

And what he's writing about is how to give confidence in the face of some other believers, other teachers who were showing and demonstrating something different than what they had seen or heard from the beginning.

Last week we looked at it. We saw that true Christians are those whose doctrine about Jesus is true, that we know and understand who Jesus is rightly. And this was in response to those who seem to be trying to mislead the church about the nature of Jesus.

[3 : 46] Well, let's go ahead and look at the passage today to see what John adds to our understanding of what true Christianity is meant to look like. So, 1 John, we're going to start in chapter 2, verse 28, and we'll go through chapter 3, verse 10.

Let's read along together. And now, little children, abide in him so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back from him in shame at his coming.

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.

And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, and we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

[5 : 09] Sin is lawlessness. And you know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning.

No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as he is righteous.

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.

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. 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 brothers. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we ask for your help this morning.

[6 : 14] Lord, let us receive this word from you with understanding in our mind. Lord, with gladness in our hearts and with willingness in our spirit.

Lord, to follow you and to heed this word and to sit under it as it teaches us and instructs us and leads us. Lord, I pray for your help this morning.

You would help me that I might speak your word clearly. And Lord, together we might honor you by sitting under it together. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. So where does the confidence come from to know that we are true Christians?

Well, there are three things. The three things, and here's my attempt at an outline. We'll see how it flies, but I think it'll work. The first one is the confidence that true Christians have that they are children of God.

[7 : 12] That's the first thing we're going to look at. Second thing that John says is that there is a character that true Christians must demonstrate. And thirdly, that there is a champion that true Christians trust.

So there's a confidence, a character, and a champion. There's your outline if you're a note taker. Hopefully we'll be able to walk through the passage together today. First of all, then, in the first part of this passage, what is the confidence?

The confidence that Christians can have is that they are truly children of God. Why does this come up? Well, in verse 28, John starts by saying, Now, little children, abide in him so that when he appears you may have confidence and not shrink back.

John is looking ahead to a day of judgment and to a day of return where Jesus is going to come back to the earth, and he's going to call all people to account.

And what he's saying is, I want you to have confidence on that day that you will be able to stand before him and not be ashamed. Now, why does he talk about shame here?

[8 : 20] Well, there could be a number of different things, but I think the shame he envisions here is actually different than guilt. Guilt would be being brought before a judge in a courtroom, right, where our transgressions, here's the law, you have broken the law, and you receive a judgment and a penalty for it.

But I think the shame here is actually something different. It's the shame that we feel rightly when we recognize that we have let down those that we love.

So if you're a student and you have to go home and confess that your teacher caught you cheating on a test or copying your friend's answers on their homework, and you have to face those parents, you feel shame.

When you've made a promise to someone, whether it be marriage or in a work context or others, and then you've broken that promise, and you have to go and face the one who you've broken that promise with.

This is the shame that John envisions that sinners will have when we stand before a holy God. He who is perfect in goodness and beautiful in his majesty, when we stand before him, when we know ourselves, there is this fear.

[9 : 39] But John says, I tell you, there is a way that we can stand before him where we will not feel that shame. How is it? It is that we are children of God.

This is the whole part of this section from 28 through 3.3. This is the thrust of it. You see it in chapter 3, verse 1 so clearly. Behold what manner of love the Father has shown to us, that we should be called children of God.

And let's be clear about what he's talking about here. He's not talking about a creator-creation relationship. Sometimes we talk about humanity, all of humanity as children of God.

Aren't we all children of God? And at one level, that's recognizing that we're created in God's image. And so rightly, all of creation in some way is a reflection of God.

But here there's something more specific. This is about God's elected, adopted children. The one that he has chosen to rescue out of sin and fallenness and make them his own.

[10 : 46] And the doctrine of adoption that we, because of our sin, have been alienated from God and have been rejected from him and are not a part of his family. And yet God has come to us and called us into his family through Jesus Christ.

And at the core of that calling back in and that adoption is this amazing doctrine that we are born anew into his family.

Because that spiritual alienation is also a spiritual death. And when God comes to us through the gospel and invites us into a living relationship with Jesus, he makes us born again.

This is what Mina read earlier from John 3, a famous passage about Nicodemus. How must I enter the kingdom of God? You must be born again. What does that mean?

It means that God's spirit working in us brings alive what was dead in us spiritually so that we can actually know and relate to God.

[11 : 48] And as God does this, he brings us into his family and he says, you are now my special children. And in my love, I have imparted to you in this spiritual reawakening, this spiritual rebirth, a new nature so that you are now no longer an alien from me, but you are now like me.

We are born then into his family so that we might be like him. And this is the thing that John is threading all these massive theological themes together to say that when we become children of God, we are then meant to bear a family resemblance.

I've been told that I resemble my father in a number of ways, not only in physical appearance, but in my mannerisms, in my disposition.

My brothers and sister-in-laws, my sister-in-laws especially, because you know sister-in-laws are always really, they've got a good radar for stuff like this. They're like, you're like your dad. I'm like, really? Okay. But it's true.

But so in my family, there's this family resemblance that has been passed down from my dad to me. And this is what God is doing.

[13 : 06] As he makes us born again, he then calls us into remaking us so that we are going to be reflective of him and his character, and particularly in this context, in his moral character.

This is what we see in verse 29. If we know that he is righteous, then we will be, everyone who practices righteousness like God, will demonstrate that God has made him born again into this kind of righteousness.

And in verse 3 of chapter 3, you see it again. And as we know that he is pure, then his children purify himself. That is, we move away from the defiling things and towards the goodness of God and his character.

And this is the hope and the confidence that John wants to give true Christians. That we could be called children of God because this work that God is doing in us is producing something that is visible.

And he's doing this, I think, and we'll explore this a little more in a bit, but he's doing this because it seems that some of those who had left the community but were still claiming the name of Christ were saying, I can claim to be a child of God, and it doesn't matter how I live.

[14 : 27] I can live no matter how I want. And John is saying, that is deception. That is not true. And in order to bring this to bear more clearly, he then, as we move on to our second point, he then brings a contrast into focus.

This is what we see in verses 4 through 10. Most clearly, he makes a contrast, and he's very black and white in his language. It's shocking, striking, and fearful sometimes how John speaks.

But he says, you are either a child of God or you are a child of the devil. And if you've been at Trinity a lot, you know this is not language that we usually use around here because it's shocking and it's sort of, it feels extreme.

And if you're visiting today, know that this isn't. But this is what John is actually saying here. He says there are two kinds of people. How does he say this? Well, it's at the core of it, right, is in verses 8 and 9.

And he says you can tell the nature of a person by their character and their actions. Verse 8 and 9 says this, whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

[15 : 41] And the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him.

He cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. So the contrast here is very stark, right? If sin is characteristic of your living, then you are like the devil.

And look, John defines sinning particularly in this context, right? Verses 5, he says sin is lawlessness. What does that mean? A spirit of independence, of freedom from any authority, right?

And he might be thinking violating the law of Moses in the Old Testament, but I think his picture is actually larger than that. It's a fundamental spirit of rebellion against God as our ruler and judge and creator to whom we are accountable.

It is a rejection that he is the one that defines good and evil, right and wrong in the world. And the sin here is the practice of regularly rejecting God, taking this role in our lives.

[16 : 55] And when we reject God in that way, the DNA that emerges through our actions, what we see is the same thing we see in the devil because that's what he did from the beginning.

He rebelled against God. He enticed humans to rebel against God. And this is his fundamental character, is to reject and rebel against God. And so this is what John is saying.

And he makes a contrast then. In verses 7 and 8, he then said, or in, I'm sorry, in verse 9, he makes the contrast negatively. If you keep on sinning, you can't be born of God because this spirit of rebellion is contrary to the DNA of the person who has the seed of God in him.

Now, some of you are like biologists and know far better than me. But a particular plant, seed, can only produce a particular kind of plant.

If I plant a marigold seed, I'm not going to get a chrysanthemum. I'm going to get a marigold, right? And so when God plants a seed in his children by making them born again, that seed of God is going to produce godly action and character.

[18 : 16] So to be born of God is to submit to rather than reject God's rule. It's to gladly embrace his determinations and his ways. To be his children is not a duty of rules we have to keep so we don't get spanked, but a delight so that we might please him.

And it's not an independent spirit of I want to do my own thing, but a joyous dependence. God, show me how I might live so that I might flourish and glorify you.

And to keep on sinning, John reminds us, is to inhabit a practice of rebellion is the opposite of this spirit. Just like a maple tree cannot create acorns and a corn stalk cannot make radishes, so someone born of God cannot produce this spirit of rebellion.

Remember Jesus said, a tree is known by its fruit. So John brings this contrast to bear, and it's really stark. And if we're listening carefully, we should start to be afraid, right?

How do we respond to this? How do we think about this? Because if we're honest with ourselves, we're all finding ourselves not in the children of God category, but somewhere else.

[19 : 34] And what are we gonna do with this? Three applications for this major point before we move on to our third point. First, we need to be careful not to be deceived. This is what he says in verse seven.

Don't be deceived. Character and the actions are the ultimate test of who we are in our nature, okay? And anyone who teaches that I can reject God and still be God's children, that I can live in rebellion against him and still be rightly related to him, this is falsehood.

And it is the hypocrisy that we hate or should hate, and that the world hates when they see it in the church. So we need to not be deceived by this teaching that is prevalent, not only today, but in the first century.

John Stott, the great British commentator and pastor, wrote this about it. The heretics seem to have taught that the enlightened Christian, that to the enlightened Christian, questions of morality were a matter of indifference.

Now, today, our sins are excused either by euphemisms like, oh, I have personality problems, or by a plea of cultural relativity.

[20 : 51] Well, is it really that bad? In contrast to such underestimates of sin, John declares it is not just a negative failure of missing the mark or unrighteousness, but it is essentially an active rebellion against God's known will.

Those who say that God's will has shifted, that his standards have changed, that sin isn't sin, and that God will accept us no matter what, no matter how we live, no matter what we do, this is not truth.

This is deception. So we need to hear this. Now, again, if you're not afraid yet, you should be, right?

Let us examine ourselves because John wants us to hear this and to know this standard, and one of the ways we might respond is to find ourselves in judgment of other people.

That our response is to sit back and look at this passage and say, oh, well, now I know who the real Christians are because it's me and, well, he looks really good and I think she looks really good and the rest of you, yeah, probably not.

[22 : 05] And we have this spirit and this desire to judge. And look, there's something right about this. I want to be careful with this because when our church, for instance, when we baptize people, we do so upon their profession of faith, but we affirm that we see the seed of God planted in them bearing fruit.

And when we bring someone into membership, we affirm their profession of faith in Jesus Christ partly on the basis of what we see in their lives. If someone is actively rebelling against God and says, I want to be a member of the church, we would say, we love you, but we're going to call you to repent before we can bring you into membership.

And if there's no repentance, then we can't affirm that God's seed is producing this righteousness in you. Now, having said all that, let us hear C.S. Lewis because he has a great word for us.

He says, human beings judge one another by their external actions. God judges them by their moral choices. When a neurotic person who has a pathological horror of cats forces himself to pick up a cat for some good reason, it is quite possible that in God's eyes, he has shown more courage than a healthy man may have shown in winning the Victoria Cross.

And when a man who has been perverted from his youth and taught that cruelty is the right thing does a little tiny kindness or refrains from some cruelty that he might have committed and thereby perhaps risks being sneered at by his companions, he may in God's eyes be doing more than you and I would do if we give up life itself for a friend.

[23 : 49] So this is the humility. You hear what C.S. Lewis is saying? Recognize that we don't all start at the same place and what we see on the outside is not always the true growth of that spiritual seed in someone.

And depending on where we started, we might look really good on the outside and yet our hearts are not good. Or we might look a little rough around the edges but our hearts are good.

So we want to be careful with how we hear this and yet we do want to hear the exhortation and the standard that John is saying.

We've got to see fruit of God's seed in us to know that we can be true Christians. And this brings us to the very crux of the crisis that this passage ought to bring to us.

Because in 1 John 1, he told us, if you claim to have no sin, you lie and the truth is not in you. If you claim that you have not sinned, you deceive yourself.

[24 : 51] And now John says, if you have sin, you can't be a child of God. Well, what is it, John? How do we do these things? Well, two things to bring us together so that we can see that John is not actually speaking out of both sides of his mouth but he is speaking in each context towards a common truth, right?

First, in this passage, there is a repeated emphasis not on sin but on sinning, right? So the verbs often indicate ongoing action, continuous presence, right?

And so what he is talking about primarily here is not a single act or a single thought but a pattern, an attitude, a character trait.

Right? Again, the big picture is a question of rebellion versus submission to God and his law and moving towards and it's a question and here's what John would want to say to us.

If we are complacent in the face of our sin when we excuse it rather than hating it, when we are comfortable in our sin, when we are unwilling to, as Jesus says, pluck out our eye in order to stop sinning, if we find ourselves defensively denying sin when others graciously pointed out to us, these are some of the warning signs that we have these patterns so embedded in us that we have taken hold of a spirit of not submission but rebellion.

[26 : 29] John is not calling for sinless perfection here. I don't believe. Chapter 1 would tell us very clearly that's not true but he is saying what is your trajectory? What direction are you headed?

Are you headed towards God and continually being refined and as things become clear, you repent of them and you change? There is a sense in which it is true that we are always going to be sinners this side of heaven so that we will not be perfect and yet, we should never say, but that makes it okay for me to sin in this way because John would say, no, don't you see?

This is contrary to the very DNA of who you are. A Christian must be moving towards righteousness and it is the direction that we are headed that is most important and as we hear this word, for those of us who are in a battle against sin, a particular thing right now that you're fighting that right now the Holy Spirit is bringing to your mind going, oh my gosh, my deceit, my anger, my pride, my selfishness, my pornography, whatever it is, it's coming to mind and you're thinking, okay, he gave me a little room to be okay with being in battle.

Here's what we need to do. Never use this passage and this idea of trajectory to let you be complacent. You need to fight against sin.

It needs to include lamenting of your fallenness. It needs to include confessing as we saw in chapter one. It needs to include repentance, turning away, changing your life, changing your mind and drawing on the resources that God has given us to move towards the things of God.

[28 : 22] We should always hate sin as a foreign invader for those of us who are truly in Christ. But it's more than that and this brings us to our third point.

As we fight this battle against sin, as we see this trajectory, how do we know that we are children of God? Because we have a champion in which true Christians trust in.

Verse five, look with me at it again. You know that he, that is Jesus, appeared to take away sin and in him there is no sin.

When Jesus Christ came, he came as the only sinless human. Though he was fully human, he had no sin and he perfectly obeyed his father in every way and his perfect obedience showed his true nature.

He was unstained by the sin of Adam and Eve so that he might be our savior and that through his life on our behalf, through his death in replacement for us and in through his resurrection displaying his perfection, he then comes to take away our sin.

[29 : 36] His life, death, and resurrection for true Christians erases the record so that when we go into the police station to say what's on his rap sheet, there's nothing there because Christ has taken all of those things for us and given us his sheet which is all righteousness.

Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection has also washed us clean though the stain of sin from Adam and Eve would continue to pull our hearts towards rebellion and away from God.

He has washed us clean from that. White as snow and removed from us our sins as far as the east is from the west and this is what happens when he plants his seed and then he calls us to be who he has made us now in Christ.

This was the purpose of his work that sin would not continue but it would end. That the devil who comes to encourage sin and rebellion would ultimately be seen to be the defeated one not the victorious one and that God himself would be lifted up in the midst of his whole creation as the glorious savior as the truly righteous one and his people would be a reflection of this in his world.

This is our champion and this is our hope because when we see him we know that sin does not have the ultimate power that the devil does not have control over us but instead when the gospel seed takes root in our hearts we now have a new nature to be born again and we will see this in the midst of our battle we will see this by growth in righteousness.

[31 : 25] Now you guys have heard me say this before one of the amazing things that happens in saints is that as we go along in life the older we get the more righteous we should become and the more aware of our sin we become at the same time.

So when you ask the older saints in the midst of us they're not going to tell you how perfect they are they're going to tell you how much more they see their sin and yet when you look at their life the fruit of it you will see they have become increasingly righteous they are less selfish they are less they're more giving and sacrificial they are more patient they are less angry etc. etc.

And this is what we should see is growth in both of these things so a true saint will be more aware of their sinfulness and yet produce more of the fruit of the seed that God has planted in them this is what John is looking for and he's saying this is what we should be looking for and if you want the confidence the confidence of true Christianity look for that look for that gospel dynamic look for the seed of God in one born again producing fruit someone who's battling against sin someone who's humbled by their weakness and yet someone who is being conformed more and more so that they're like Jesus because Jesus came to make us his brothers and sisters under our heavenly father born again into the family of God behold what manner of love the father has shown us that we should be called children of God let's pray

Lord Jesus we thank you for this word Lord we confess as we come to you before it God we are not perfect and Lord we pray for you oh Lord will you by your spirit strengthen gird us up to fight against sin help us to lay hold of the seed of the gospel and the new life that you have given us Lord so that we might not become complacent or weary in fighting against sin but rather Lord that our trajectory would be always towards you pleasing you honoring you doing what is right Lord we pray as a church that Lord we might pursue this fight with humility with grace and with stubborn steadfastness

Lord that we would not be like the world that does not know us because they did not know him but that this church would be reflective of you and the seed that you have planted in us in the gospel Lord I thank you for this word may we be encouraged by it today we pray in Jesus name Amen That means to be we pray enough to be