

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Walking in the Light with Jesus

(Studies in the Apostle John's first letter)

Great Reasons to Lead a Righteous Life Study #4

(1 John 2:28--3:10a)¹

Introduction: *That you may have confidence...*

Many, many people struggle with self-confidence. Some should have more confidence; others, less.

You may know someone who exudes confidence, and you wonder, "*Why?*", because his confidence far outstrips his competence.

I was "that guy" one year when I planned a backpacking trip with some friends to what is called - unfortunately - the "Gore Range" in central Colorado.

I had mapped out what I knew would be a challenging route while sitting in the comfort of my San Antonio home, and I bit off more than we could chew.

We had to adjust fire on the second day and didn't come close to finishing the route. We were all over-confident.

Others have less confidence than they should. They can do more than they think they can.

And, while I've never seen a book written to help the over-confident scale back, there are lots of books, articles, and podcasts aimed at encouraging the under-confident.

I read some of these this past week. One idea for boosting confidence stood out to me as remarkable - not necessarily remarkably good. Just remarkable.

The author of this article suggested that we readers take "*The 100 Days of Rejection Challenge*".

The idea came from a young man from Beijing, China, who had lost his confidence to move forward in business after he was rejected by a potential investor.

His solution was to desensitize himself to rejection by making outrageous requests of random people over a one-hundred-day period, knowing that he would get rejected.

In this way, he hoped to become more confident and would no longer be paralyzed by fear of rejection.

While I'm not so sure about the method, the young man was right to try to slay the dragon of un-confidence.

We won't even attempt to kick a bad habit if we lack confidence that we can. Without confidence in your competence, you won't do well in that job interview, you won't take the last shot at the buzzer, you won't risk a tough conversation with someone you love.

We need to find appropriate confidence when we're facing a big challenge.

¹ The literary term describing how John puts together the major section of the letter is *inclusio*. *Inclusio* defines a section of literature by bracketing it, front and back, by a reference to the singular theme, with everything inside the brackets relating to that theme. In 1 John, everything from 2:28--4:19 relates to the theme of a believer in Jesus having boldness / confidence at the future Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Bible teaches that we who know Jesus as Savior will one day face a really big challenge. We will stand before our Savior as Judge.² The Apostle John wants us to have confidence on that day.

So, he tells us how to be *competent* in the things that matter so that we'll have bold *confidence* at this judgment.

[28] Now, little children, abide³ in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

If you want to know what 1 John is all about, this is a huge part of the overall message. He's telling us how to live, NOW, so that we'll have confidence when we stand before Him, THEN.

Getting ready for that day will involve making preparations on several different fronts. Among them is the pursuit of holiness.

This morning, John tells us, *"Leading a righteous life will stand you in good stead when you stand before Jesus for judgment."*

Review...

To this point, John has told us to:

- be confess our sin to God and receive cleansing forgiveness;
- "abide" in Jesus - "keep His word" and "obey His commandments";
- beware of *the world*, a system that will drive you away from Jesus;
- beware of *antichrists* who complicate the simple message of faith alone in Christ alone.

John's first words today take the form of an *"If...then"* statement. And we understand *"If...then"* conditional statements.

If you don't brush your teeth, then your breath will smell bad.
If you drink Coke, then you'll burp.

² For passages dealing with the Judgment Seat of Christ (often called "the bema") see 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

³ "Meno" (Greek for "abide") occurs 7x in 12-27. Abiding in Jesus (keeping His word, loving God) is a key theme in this letter.

Conditional statements like these are important in computer programming, in math and logic, and, it turns out, in our life with Jesus.

What You Can Know About the Righteous (2:29)

"If..."

[29] If you know that He is righteous...

This is the condition - and John doesn't take it for granted that we know that God is righteous. In fact, in the first century, there were people running around saying that God was both good and evil, yin and yang, light and dark.

But he's told us that there is no darkness in God. God is 100% light. So, we know this. We've got this. Therefore...

"Then..."

[29b]...you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.⁴

I find something striking about the ORDER of this second part.

If the order of the words here had been reversed, John would be saying that anyone who is born of God does righteousness. That would mean that if we saw someone who did not do righteousness, we could conclude that they are not born of God.

We would become fruit inspectors, people who could tell that someone is not born of God if he doesn't do righteousness.

But John doesn't say that. There is something very powerful about what he says here, but what he says he says positively.

Of course, he requires that we agree that God is all light and no darkness. God is all righteousness.

⁴ This is John's first reference in the letter to being "born of God." We'll see it again and again.

And, given this, if we see someone who is living a “righteous” life as John defines it - she is loving God and those around her, he is obeying God’s word, abiding in Jesus - then we can deduce something about that person. That person is born of God.

That’s really helpful. And John has more helpful things to say as we keep reading. He goes on to write about a very hopeful future for those who believe in Jesus and are God’s children.

What You Can Know About the Child of God (3:1-3)⁵

The Glorious Love of God! (v. 1)

We are called and we are children of God (v. 1a)

[3:1a] See how great⁶ a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are...

If it’s been a while since you’ve reflected on the beauty and the wonder of calling Almighty God “Father”, well, let’s go there now.

- If you had or have a great earthly father, you’ve now got an infinitely greater heavenly Father.
- If your earthly father was mostly absent and wasn’t a strong presence in your life, know that your Father in heaven took the initiative to adopt you into His forever family, and is with you wherever you go.
- If your earthly father was actually unkind toward you, wounded you, even abused you, know that your Father in heaven is for you. He loved you so much He gave His Son for you.

This love God has showered on us that brings us into His family is glorious - and not everybody “gets it”.

We are unknown to the world, just as Jesus was (v. 1b)

[3:1b]...For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Remember that “***the world***” as John is using the term is the system that opposes God. It seeks our loyalty and affection. It consists of ***[1 John 2:16] the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.***

The world didn’t recognize Jesus when He appeared as the only begotten Son of God and it won’t recognize you, either, as a daughter or son of God. You may not get a standing ovation for your love for God and His word. Jesus didn’t, either.

That’s OK, though, because we not only have a real-time relationship with God to enjoy now, we have a future to look forward to that is out of this world.

The Transforming Presence of God (vv. 2-3)

Seeing Him transforms us (v. 2)

[2] Beloved,⁷ now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

It is true RIGHT NOW that we are children of God. And, while there are lots of things that remain a mystery about heaven, we do know that when we see Him, we’ll be transformed.

The Apostle Paul taught that in this life inner transformation occurs, step by step, as we behold “***the glory of the Lord***” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Here, John takes that a step further and says that transformation will be complete on the other side when we see Him face to face.

⁵ This chapter break (as are many others in the Bible) is unfortunate, as this verse flows directly out of 2:29.

⁶ “How great” in Greek is “*ροταρος*” (*ποταποσ*), literally, “how glorious!”

⁷ Addresses his readers as “***beloved***” - another clear indication that he is writing to sons and daughters of God.

That is your future. Becoming just like Jesus.

So, knowing that this is your future, let's get after it now, abide in Him, and become as much like Jesus as possible in this life so that there's less transforming to do when we get there.

Hoping for this transformation moves us to action (v. 3)

[3] And everyone who has this hope⁸ fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

This - purifying ourselves - is on us. Yes, it is God who sanctifies us. He alone can transform us. But we have a role to play in the process of moving from glory to glory, of embracing the beauty of holiness.

When you shower in the morning, the water does its cleansing work. But you turn the handle. The Spirit purifies you as you turn the handle: keep His word, obey His commands, love Him, love others.

So, here's another great reason to lead a righteous life. John has already told us that we are identifiable as belonging to God if we lead a righteous life.

Now he reminds us that righteousness is the life you will lead in eternity. Righteous is what you will be when you are transformed in a moment into the image of Jesus. It's your destiny, so fix your hope on that vision. Lean into that vision today and ***"purify yourself."***

And there is more. In what follows, John speaks even more powerfully to call us to a righteous life.

What You Can Know About the One Who Abides in Jesus (3:4-6)

The Utter Sinfulness of Sin (v. 4)

[4] Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.⁹

⁸ Hope is something about which we are sure; it just hasn't happened yet.

A direct translation of the word "*lawlessness*" is "*lawlessness*."

However, in the Greek version of the Old Testament - called the Septuagint / LXX - this word (anomia; *ἀνομία*) is used to translate about two dozen different Hebrew words.

Most of them have nothing to do with God's law or even law, generally. We usually translate the word "*iniquity*" or "*wickedness*."

John's point here in using this particular word is not to emphasize that sin is, essentially, law-breaking, but that sin is awful.

To that, you and I say, "*Duh*." But it is worth hearing John say it because it's not uncommon that we Christians take sin lightly. John writes here to highlight the utter sinfulness of sin.¹⁰

He wants us, his readers, to be so impressed by the evil of sin that we're repulsed by it, both because of its ugliness and because it is so un-Jesus-like.

Jesus - the Sinless Sin-Breaker (v. 5)

[5] You know that He appeared in order to take away sins;¹¹ and in Him there is no sin.

Jesus is entirely without sin. Everything about sin stands in opposition to who He is and what He has done.

Like our verse says here, when John the Baptist saw Jesus at the Jordan River, he cried out, ***[John 1:29] "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."***

⁹ Hodges prefers the translation, "*Everyone who commits sin, commits iniquity also; and sin is iniquity.*" John's intent is to emphasize sin's evil and wickedness, not that it is anti-law.

¹⁰ See Romans 7:13 for the same point from Paul.

¹¹ The thought here is primarily Christ came to earth to eradicate sin forever from our lives and from the world.

That was the purpose of His first advent. The same purpose will be in play when He returns a second time to rule and reign in righteousness in what we refer to as the Millennium.

And then, after the final rebellion is put down at the end of the Millennium, He will finally and completely do away with sin. In the eternal kingdom no one will ever sin again.

Given all of this, sin is entirely inappropriate for a child of God.

Our Protection Against Sin (v. 6)

Now, before I read what John writes next, let me just say that this is a tough saying. It's tempting to look for ways to "soften" these words. Instead, though, we'll seek to deal honestly with the plain sense of a hard verse.

Here we go.

Abiding in Him (v. 6a)

[6a] No one who abides in Him sins...

You can instantly see why some go to great lengths to soften that statement.

Here's one way to do it. There are times when the present tense in Greek has the meaning of "to continue" in some action. This has prompted some to suggest that what John means to say is, "No one who abides in Him continues in sin..."

But that's not what's going on. The flow of thought demands that we see here an absoluteness to the words. No one who is abiding in Jesus sins. Period.

And the point is that at the point of abiding - obeying, loving, worshiping - we don't sin. Not even a little bit. And, believe it or not, THAT is very encouraging!

The truth is that there is always sin at work in my life at some point. Before I arrive in heaven, I'll never be completely free from sin. And John has been clear about that. (See 1 John 1:8, 10)

But when I am abiding in Jesus - when I am consciously obeying - I am not at that moment sinning.

For instance, while you are sacrificially loving someone who is in need in Jesus' Name, God's dialed in to what you're doing there and He's not counting you guilty of something else, like, say, prayerlessness.

You're walking in the light - you're loving - and there is cleansing going on as you abide. When you're abiding, you're not sinning. No one who is abiding in Jesus is sinning.

But when we aren't abiding, we are liable to and likely to sin. And sinning says something about us.

Knowing Him (v. 6b)

[6b]...no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

John's not saying that if we sin, we have never seen Him or that we have never come to know Him *at all*.

He's saying that at the moment of sinning we are showing that we haven't come to know Him very well, because if we knew Him well we wouldn't sin. At the moment of sin, we are living in a not-seeing and a not-knowing condition.

If we knew God well and if we were living in His light, we would see sin for the ugly thing it is, would see sin the way God sees it, and would flee pornography and lust, lying and greed, drunkenness and gluttony.¹²

When we allow ourselves to be deceived and fall for sin's temptation, we're just advertising that we haven't come to know Him.

¹² See Hebrews 13:3 which warns us against the deceitful nature of sin.

In terms of making an argument for the pursuit of holiness, John definitely ramps up the argument here.

First, it was, *“Purify yourself because purity is your destiny AND He is holy.”* (3:1-3) Now, it’s *“If you’re sinning, it’s clear that you’re not abiding, and you don’t really know God very well at all.”* (3:4-6)

Just wait. You’ll be shocked at what John says next. But he starts off tender and pretty mild.

What You Can Know About the One Who is Born of God (vv. 7-10)

The One who is Born of God Does Righteousness (vv. 7, 8)

The behavior of the righteous (v. 7)

[7] Little children...

No matter where you are on your faith journey, if you believe in Jesus, you are God’s *“little [child].”* And what he goes on to say is very similar to what he’s already said.

[7] Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices¹³ righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

That sounds like:

- ...the person who fixes his hope on being like Christ is pure. (3:3)
- ...the person who abides in Jesus does not sin. (3:6)
- ...the person who does righteousness IS righteous (3:7)

It’s in the next comments that he gets feisty.

The behavior of the one who is “of the devil” (v. 8)

[8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Light and darkness are mutually exclusive. So is sin and righteousness. And that means that John’s jump to *“the one who [sins] (the word “practices” is not in the original) is of the devil”* is a perfectly reasonable jump. Since God has nothing to do with sin, the devil must.

Righteousness is sourced in the One who is righteous: GOD. Sin is sourced in the one who has sinned from the beginning: SATAN.¹⁴

But this is not to say that the one who sins is not God’s *“little [child].”* Everyone sins. If *“the one who sins”* is unsaved, everyone is unsaved.¹⁵

No, this phrase, *“of the devil”*, means something other than that the one who sins doesn’t believe in Jesus.

When Simon Peter - a believer in Jesus and the chief apostle - rebuked Jesus when He said that He would be crucified, Jesus said to Peter, **[Matthew 16:23] “Get behind me, Satan!”**

Jesus wasn’t accusing Peter of being a demon. He was accusing Peter of being about the devil’s business by trying to get Jesus to avoid the cross.

To sin is to be about the devil’s business. And to participate in sin is to participate in the thing Jesus came to earth to destroy.

¹³ I would prefer to replace every instance of *“practice”* to simply *“does”*, as *“practice”* brings to mind a continuing involvement in something (either sin or righteousness), while the tense of the verb simply states present action.

¹⁴ The devil is the source of all sin. His sinful career dates from the beginning, that is, the beginning of sin. See Isaiah 4:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-15 for probable references to Satan’s origins.

¹⁵ It is a fundamentally descriptive phrase, designating a person as a vocal opponent of God’s truth, just like the devil is.

The One who is Born of God Cannot Sin (v. 9)

[9] No one who is born of God practices¹⁶ sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

This is another absolute statement, as absolute as can be. And again, it is not surprising that, again, some try to soften John's words.

Because it is so obvious that Christians *do* sin, some people believe that John is explaining that a *true* Christian will not *continue* in sin. They say that John is teaching that prolonged continuation in sin can never happen if someone is really born-again.¹⁷

And, again, again, the Greek present tense *can* have the sense of "continuing" in something. But it certainly need not have that sense and it does not have that sense unless the context demands it, and the context here doesn't at all demand it.

All Christians sin and we all sin daily. No Christian would claim to not be continuing in sin. (see 1 John 1:6,8,10)

So, here is what I believe John is saying.

As a total person, we sin and can never claim to be free of sin. Our outward, fleshy self, sins. However, our inward, regenerated self does not and cannot sin.

The one who is born-again (or "*that which is born again*") does not sin AT ALL because he has in him the sinless seed of God's nature. In the same way that Jesus could not sin - being the God-man, so the God-seed in the Christian can't sin, either.

¹⁶ In arguing against including the word "*practices*", Greek scholar, Sakae Kubo, writes, "*the habitual view* (i.e. - the view that adds the word "practices") *actually wreaks havoc with the author's intention and argument.*"

¹⁷ The three major commentaries (one by I. Howard Marshall) written since C.H. Dodd and Sakae Kubo's ground-breaking exegetical work are agreed that the argument of an habitual or continual use of the present tense in 1 John 2:9 is an idea who time has come - and gone.

So, yes, sin does exist in you, the child of God. But it is foreign and extraneous to your deepest self, where Christ dwells in perfect holiness.

Which begs the question, "*Why would you or I ever betray our truest self and walk on the dark side of sin?*"

To sin is to negate the deepest essence of who we are. So, God forbid that we should ever sin. It's the exact opposite of what someone like you or me - born-again children of God - should ever do.

And our choice to not sin, to lead righteous lives and to abide in Jesus, will make it "***obvious***" to all that we are God's children.

Summary: How to Recognize God's Children

[10a] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious.¹⁸

One of my favorite stories of Jesus is of the time He healed a paralytic after friends had carried this guy up to the roof, dug through the roof and lowered him down on ropes in front of Jesus and the crowd that had gathered in the house.

They clearly wanted Jesus to heal their friend, but Jesus saw a greater need than physical healing. So, what did Jesus say? **[Mark 2:5] "Son, your sins are forgiven."** Jesus did something spectacular, but invisible.

Jesus' enemies were upset at this, thinking Jesus had no right to go around talking like that. Only God could forgive sins.

So, Jesus did something visible to prove that He had the authority to do the invisible. He healed the man of his paralysis. The man picked up his cot and walked out, with everybody watching.

¹⁸ Hodges (and others) takes the ending of the unit's thought to be only the first half of verse 10. This certainly makes sense to me as the second half of verse 10 is a necessary preliminary to the "***For...***" that begins verse 11.

It was then “**obvious**” to all that Jesus was who He said He was: Messiah, Christ, Son of God.

This is also the story of Abraham. We read of Abraham that he **[Genesis 15:6] believed in the Lord and it was reckoned to him as righteousness**. God justified Abraham because He believed God’s promise.

That was a private encounter with the living God. Something real, but invisible, happened in Abraham’s heart.

Years later, when Abraham faithfully obeyed God by taking Isaac up Mount Moriah, believing that God would provide for Isaac’s safety (Genesis 22:8), his faith became “**obvious**” to a watching world.

Everyone all around him knew about that. That wasn’t invisible. And that’s when Abraham gained the reputation of being **[James 2:23] the friend of God**.

You and I can go around all day long telling people that we are God’s children. And we may be. If we believe in Jesus, we have eternal life. Our sins are forgiven. We are forever in God’s family.

But, until we lead righteous lives, until we “abide in Jesus”, until we love the way Jesus loves, our status before God isn’t “**obvious**.”

When it gets “obvious” though is when we bear fruit and become a blessing to our world.¹⁹

¹⁹ First John has been mistakenly taken as a book that helps us identify who is and who is not saved. This section is advancing the theme stated in 2:28 related to boldness in the presence of the Lord at the time of judgment by abiding in Him. By abiding in Him (obedience), believers manifest themselves as children of God. Those who do not abide do not so manifest themselves. The reality of their regenerate inward man remains hidden.