

Lesson 9 – 1 John 3:4-10

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Review/Introduction

John is writing so we might know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13); so they may see the objective truth (1 John 5:11-13) and subjective evidences (obedience, love, dealing with sin, progressive sanctification, etc.) that give assurance of salvation. Both objective truth and subjective evidence go hand-in-hand.

John presents tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are the readers (and ultimately us) deceived. He makes it very clear that a profession of possessing salvation without the evidences that flow from salvation is self-deception.

The Scriptures are clear that true salvation is accompanied by a changed life. Those who are truly saved will be progressing in sanctification because of God's work in their life and because they are striving in the power of Spirit to glorify God and grow in their relationship with Christ. True believers will have a desire to know their Redeemer more and more.

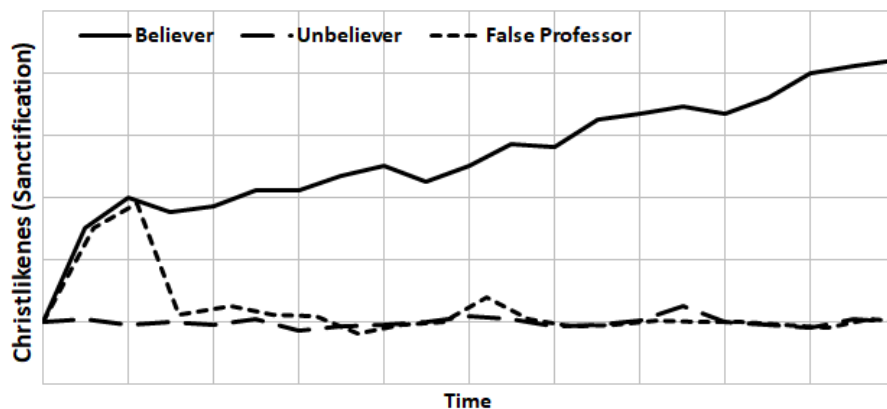
¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** ¹³**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**
(Philippians 2:12-13)

Which curve below best describes the changes in your life after professing faith in Christ?

Believer – Significant changes at or around salvation then continued upward trend of progressive sanctification through your life.

Unbeliever – No significant changes in life; may have moments of “self-improvement” but no sanctification.

False professor – Starts with a connection to the body and things of Christ, but ultimately falls away and either actively or passively denies Christ; may have moments of “self-improvement” but no sanctification.



Subjective evidences are present as a result of walking in the Spirit. We must be careful to ensure that subjective evidences are not legalism.

³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
(Galatians 3:3)

John presents his tests in four spirals laying out doctrinal and conduct tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration.

III. Evidence of true saving faith – Spiral 2 (2:18-3:24)

- A. Doctrine – Hold fast to truth – Don't Apostatize (2:18-27)
- B. Conduct – Christ's coming is a purifying fixed hope (2:28-3:3)
- C. Conduct – Sin/obedience (3:4-10)**
- D. Conduct – Love (3:11-18)
- E. Conduct – A conviction-free walk (3:19-24)

Today we will look at the second conduct test in the second spiral. This is the second time that John addressed the conduct test of sin and righteousness. In today's passage, John describes a spiritual paternity test.

Spiral 2 – Conduct – Sin/obedience (3:4-10)

1. Christ deals with sin (3:4-6)

⁴Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

⁴Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. (ESV)

John just told his readers that “everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” There is a purifying influence that fixing our hope on the fruition of our salvation plays in sanctification. But not everyone is progressing in sanctification; not everyone is connected to the source of sanctification. The contrast of the sanctifying ones and the not-sanctifying ones is striking with the former pursuing righteousness and the later pursuing lawlessness.

“Practices” means to do. It is in the present tense expresses an action that continues. This is a lifestyle of doing something. The something is sin.

“Sin” is literally missing the mark or falling short of a standard. Sin is anything contrary to the character of God (Romans 3:23), either by commission or omission transgressing God's word (Romans 5:15), lawlessness or rebellion (1 John 3:4), and missing the mark of perfect righteousness (Matthew 5:48). It is any departure from God's perfect standard, His light, in thought, word, or deed.

But sin is also ungodliness – living with little or no thought of God, His will, His glory, or dependence on Him since the purpose of our creation is to live and move and exist in Him.

²⁸for **in Him we live and move and exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ (Acts 17:28 and before and after)

“Lawlessness” describes the disregard or willful rejection or flagrant opposition of God's moral will. This is rebellion.

❖ **Are there ways in which you are living in rebellion against God?**

All Scripture are from the NASB '95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

Sin equals rebellion. John is clear that the “everyone” who practices sin is in active rebellion against God. There is no excuse for a lifestyle of sin. There is no excuse for rebellion against God. This is the life of the unbeliever. This is the life of one who is a slave to sin.

¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18)

As John has just been describing, Christ will come the second time in judgment, but He appeared the first time in order to take away sins. He came to set people free from slavery to sin. In Christ, God the Son, there is no sin. In order to “be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”, our sin problem must be solved.

³¹So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “**If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;** ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.** ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore **you also do the things which you heard from your father.**” (John 8:31-38)

No one who “abides in Christ” has a lifestyle of sinning. No one who has a relationship, fellowship, friendship, dependence, or communion with Christ makes a lifestyle of sinning. Indeed, no one who makes a lifestyle of sinning has encountered Christ or has known Him.

“Seen” and “knows” grammatically speak of a past completed action with ongoing results or relationship. This is clear – a lifestyle of sinning means you are not a believer, you are not redeemed, you are not regenerated, you are outside of fellowship with God and God’s people. An ongoing lifestyle of sin is incompatible with regeneration.

MacArthur notes that “If no check against habitual sin exists in someone who professes to be a Christian, John’s pronouncement is absolutely clear—salvation never took place.”

❖ **What is your lifestyle?**

2. Christ deals with the works of the Devil (3:7-8)

⁷Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the 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.

⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever 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. (ESV)

There are false teachers or antichrists or self-deceived professors who think that practicing sin is compatible with a profession of faith in Christ (or more generally in Christianity). We should not be surprised to see this outside the church, but we also see it with those who are connected to the church. We see this today with lifestyles of sexual sin, drunkenness, theft/pilfering, anger, envy, dissensions, covetousness, idolatry (a catch all), etc. from those who claim to be a Christian. We not only see this being lived out in false professors, but they “give hearty approval to others who practice such things”.

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

¹⁹Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

⁵For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:5)

³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, **but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.** (Romans 1:32)

❖ **Do these things characterize what you once were or what you currently are?**

We have to be careful. This does not just describe “those” churches. This describes people in our church. This may describe people in the chair next to you. This may describe you.

Besides the flagrant practicing of immorality, how might this be manifested in one’s life? How about those that attend Christian gatherings but outside the gathering they are like the world or have no appetite for the things of Christ? How about those who week after week, month after month, year after year arrive at their custom of going to church on Sunday and nothing of Christ is real to them outside the service times?

Brothers and sisters, “little children”, dear ones, do not be deceived (made to wander, led astray) by such lies. John gives the opposite views of the situation so there can be no confusion. The one to whom you are connected is the lifestyle you will display.

1. “The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

“Practicing righteousness” means habitually conforming to God’s perfect moral standard as found in His word. This is the opposite of “sin”. It is habitually hitting the mark of holiness instead of missing the mark.

The reason a true believer has an increasing pattern of practicing righteousness is that they are “in Christ”, have “fellowship” with Christ, “abide in Christ”. It is Christ’s life that is being lived through you.

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, **but Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20)

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.**

¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Galatians 5:16-17)

❖ Are you walking as a pattern of life in the Spirit?

2. “The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.”

Connection to the world, practicing sin, is indicative of a connection to the devil. This is what you were before you were regenerated through faith in Christ. The reason that an unbeliever does not have an increasing pattern of practicing righteousness is that they are “of the devil”. They are connected to the devil and his world system.

¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

¹³For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

Not only is the unregenerate one who practices sin of the devil (has the devil as a father), but is also doing the desires of the devil.

⁴³Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴**You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.** He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. (John 8:43-45)

❖ To whom or what are you connected?

Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil. The “works of the devil” is sin which is lawlessness or rebellion. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins (1 John 3:5). There is no other place to look. Either you are of the devil and practice sin or you are of Christ and are progressing in sanctification, practicing righteousness. Do not look elsewhere for salvation or sanctification.

¹⁴Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that **through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,** ¹⁵**and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.** (Hebrews 2:14-16)

❖ Are you allowing the words of Christ to dwell richly in you to cause sanctification?

3. God's obvious offspring (3:9-10)

⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰By 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.

⁹No 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. ¹⁰By 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. (ESV)

People are known by their fruit, either on the outside by other people or on the inside by themselves, but ultimately God.

⁴³For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. ⁴⁴For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. ⁴⁵The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. (Luke 6:43-45)

An unbeliever can do “good” things or even feign a love for God. But they ultimately do not “practice righteousness” and do “practice sin” (“lawlessness” / “rebellion”). On the other hand, a believer can sin and can sometimes sin grievously, but cannot have a habitual lifestyle of sin because they are born of God.

Believers do not habitually practice sin because God's “seed abides in him”. “Seed” is new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit as He applies the word of God to a believer's life.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

⁵He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (Titus 3:5-6)

²²Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, ²³for **you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.** ²⁴For, “All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, ²⁵But the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22-25)

¹⁷So **faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.** (Romans 10:17)

One who has been born of God, having His seed abiding in him, does not habitually practice sin and after salvation “cannot (is not able to) keep on sinning” (better ESV).

❖ **Do you find yourself sinning easily?**

John has summarized the “spiritual paternity test” which he says is “obvious”. “Obvious” means made visible as an external manifestation to senses. It means conspicuous, apparent, (openly) manifest, obvious, visible, evident, plain, clear, easily seen, open to sight.

²¹And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not *brought* to be put on the lampstand? ²²For nothing is hidden, except **to be revealed**; nor has *anything* been secret, but that it would come to light. ²³If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:21-25)

Children of God practice righteousness. Children of the devil practice sin. Children of God also love (next time).

❖ **What is “obvious” in your life?**

Conclusion

John is writing to present tests of true saving faith. The purpose is to ensure that his readers know if they have eternal life (actual, true, real regeneration) or not. Today, we looked at the spiritual paternity test – practicing righteousness and not practicing sin.

Additional Study

1. Each time you come to the Scriptures, pray for the Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Read 1 John once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for five days).
3. Pray that God would show you personal applications from today’s passage.
4. Read today’s passage noting repeated words/ideas and ask yourself what John means.
5. Re-read the notes from today and contemplate the thought questions.