**Genuine Righteousness**

**1 John 3:4-10**

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Today we’re going to be in 1 John. We’re returning to our series of genuine Christianity and what it really means to follow Jesus. The theme of our church has been *Following* *Jesus Together*. So it’s important for us to gather around the Word together and to listen to the Word of Christ. This is Christ’s Word to His Church. It’s true today. It was true yesterday. It will be true tomorrow. It’s something solid that we can root our hearts upon. And so I’m going to be reading 1 John 3:4-10. This is where we are in this study.

All of 1 John is really written so that we would know that we know that we know that we have eternal life. It’s written so that we would have confidence that we are part of God’s family. And so this section teaches us one of those tests we’ve been talking about; the obedience test. So let’s read together from 1 John 3:4-10.

***4*** *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.* ***5*** *You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.* ***6*** *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.* ***7*** *Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.* ***8*** *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.* ***9*** *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.* ***10*** *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 brother.*

We’ve been thinking a lot about disease lately. It’s unavoidable! This coronavirus is impacting us in ways that we could not really previously imagine. Likely, if you’re like me, you’ve watched a number of videos about pandemics and how they operate and what happens in the midst of them. Or even about viruses and more of the science behind a virus and maybe behind this particular virus. We’re learning a lot about these matters in this time. And the scientists are telling us to take this virus with particular seriousness. They’re telling us that it can impact communities in really dramatic and severe ways. And as we hear that and we hear the news stories, we’re likely impacted emotionally by all that is happening. Some anxious thoughts begin to grab hold of our hearts and begin to race through our minds, disrupting our peace; and especially as we begin to think about people who are in the most risk category for this.

Well, as we think about that and we are experiencing it together in our community, I would ask you to imagine: What if on this particular message I would tell you, “I have found the cure. There is good news. This cure that I have discovered works on 100% of the patients, and I can make it available to every person in the world today!” Well, if I made that announcement, first, you likely would not believe me and you’d be right not to believe me. It’s an unbelievable statement! But if it was true and you did believe me, wouldn’t you rejoice? Wouldn’t the whole world rejoice?

In Scripture, God tells us that the greatest problem that we face as human beings is not war. It’s not poverty. It’s not pestilence or disease. It’s not any of these things. The greatest problem that we face is our own sin. And in the Scripture, God even uses the analogy of disease to help us understand what sin is and how sin has this deadly effect upon our souls. In Jeremiah 17, God says

**Jeremiah 17:9–10** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Think of that! The heart is desperately sick. What is it sick with? It’s sick with sin. In Romans chapter 5, we read

**Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Think of that word “sin” as a deadly virus. This deadly virus of sin had a starting point and that starting point was Adam. All contracted this deadly virus and everyone died. That’s the sobering picture that God wants us to have regarding our relationship with sin and regarding what sin does to us. It has a deadly impact. It’s not just physically deadly. It’s eternally deadly; separating us from the God of Life forever and ever and ever.

There is no opportunity for us to practice social distancing from Adam. We’re all connected by way of birth into the human family. And so from the moment we’re born, we are born with this virus. This virus of sin passes to each one of us. And once we contract that virus, we know what happens. It brings death to our soul. It’s a death that separates us immediately from God. We’re disconnected from Him. And this death will separate us ultimately, eternally, if there’s not a new life that is injected into us.

Well, the good news is that God has an answer. He has a cure for this deadly pestilence, the pestilence of our own sin. And that answer, that cure is Jesus Christ Himself. We’re going to talk about that in this passage of 1 John 3. If we are in Christ, we have this new life. This new life conquers the deadly virus of sin. It eradicates the consequences of death and it overpowers the influence of the sin, of the virus, even now, so that we might live healthy and whole lives. The main idea behind this passage is that new life in Christ always makes war with sin. The new life will make war with this virus. When we have this new life inside of us, it immediately attacks the virus because this new life is bringing us to health. And this new life always makes peace with righteousness. Righteousness is what is healthy.

As you open your Bibles to 1 John 3, John speaks so simply. And yet, his logic, the way

he structures his message is so beautiful in that he kind of rolls wave after wave. He

repeats some of these waves. He often uses a parallel structure and that’s what we see

here in this passage. If you look closely at verses 4-7 and then look at verses 8-10, you’ll

see these sort of match together. He makes the statement in 4-7 and then he restates the

very same truth in order to provide an emphasis so that we don’t miss the message. So

we’re going to speak of this passage in that way. There are really three main ideas or

thoughts that John is bringing home. The first is a truth about

**1. Sin and Its Starting Place (4, 8a)**

We’re going to looking at verse 4 and then we’re also going to look at verse 8 because

they are parallel.

***4*** *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is*

*lawlessness.*

So we ask the question: What is sin? Our world doesn’t use the vocabulary of sin very

much anymore, yet this is the vocabulary of the Bible speaking to us about our

disobedience to God and our rebellion against His Person. So what is sin? Sin is both an

action and an attitude that defies God’s authority and that denies God’s goodness.

First, sin is an action. Sin is any action, word, or thought that disobeys God’s clear

commands that He has provided for us in His Law. God was really good to give us

His Law because the Law teaches us a path that leads to life. It teaches a path upon

which to walk, where we can enjoy God, we can remain in fellowship with God, and

where we can experience the life of God. The Law is so good and helpful in that it

describes in great detail the daily practices of a life that places us inside of God’s

pleasure, inside of God’s blessing, inside of God’s goodness.

Now, this deadly virus, sin that we’re born with, produces a state of blindness. It is

spiritual blindness. We would always get morality wrong if we relied upon our own

instincts and our own desires because we can’t see the difference between good and evil.

We would never live inside of God’s pleasure by doing what God says is right if we

rely upon our own measure, our own thoughts. Whenever we do what we think is right,

we are going to be walking on a path away from God. Our very ideas about what is good

and moral are ideas that are infected by sin. Let me use an illustration.

God has given us the Ten Commandments where He gives ten words about what is right

and true and good. Let’s use the first commandment. “Thou shall have no other God

before me.” Today, if you ask people, “Do you think it’s okay to worship other gods?”

“Sure. What’s the harm in that?” And yet, God in His Word tells us practically that you

cannot worship other gods and remain on the path of life. We think of the command,

“Honor your father and your mother.” And again, in our own minds, if you’ve had a

father or mother who maybe has not been kind to you when you were young, maybe right

now your relationship is strained and you could think of a thousand reasons why it would

not be right to honor your father and your mother. But the Law takes us back practically

and says, “No, honor your father and your mother.” We think of other commandments

like, “Thou shall not murder.” We might think, “Well, I think I can agree with that. Even

my natural man says that.” But Jesus says, “Well, do you know what that means? It

means that you are never to be angry with another person and call them a name.” And

right away, our defenses rise up inside our own way of thinking and say, “Well, what if

they deserved it? If I didn’t say something angry to them, they would just get by with

sin.” And again, we see how God’s Law keeps taking us back over and over again to

what is right and good. So oftentimes that runs contrary to what we think would be

right, what we think would be good. In fact, Paul himself would say, “I wouldn’t even

have known coveting was wrong at all except that the Law tells me ‘Thou shall not

covet.’” So what is sin? It’s any action; any word, thought, or deed that disobeys God’s

clear commands in His Law. But also, John is teaching us here that sin is not just an

action. It’s also an attitude. He says

*sin is lawlessness.*

In other words, it’s an attitude about God’s Law, about God’s authority that sets God’s

authority aside. It’s an attitude that determines to say, “I am choosing to go my own way

and follow my own desires. I know what God says, but I don’t like that. I don’t agree

with that. I believe that I have a better path to follow in my life in order to really live, in

order to have happiness, in order to have joy.” This determination to defy God’s authority

is the ultimate offense against God. It’s the ultimate disease. God made us. He is God.

This is His world. He alone deserves glory. Our determination to do what is right in our

own eyes is a power play against God. It is an act of war against His holiness and His

authority. This determination seeks power and glory that is to be God’s alone. And God,

as God, is right to demand His creatures submit to His rule. He is right to call His

creatures to praise Him. The only reason why we have any life is because of His

goodness. We live in His kingdom. This is not our kingdom. This is His world. This

determination to deny God’s authority is the ultimate offense.

It’s also an attitude that denies God’s goodness. This is the ultimate rejection of God and

His praise. God made this world so good and He offers to give life to all. And yet, in our

own willfulness, in our own spiritual blindness, we determine that we know better than

God does about what will bring us life. This is what sin is. It’s that attitude. It’s an

attitude of defiance. It’s an attitude that says that really there is no authority that is greater

than me.

This defiance takes us all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Eve, I believe,

was first deceived as to what is good. Is God good? Satan convinced Eve to believe that if

she ate the fruit then she will experience goodness. And ultimately, I believe Adam just

simply defied God’s authority. Adam ate the fruit just as an act of, “My wife did this. I

want to do this. And so, I’m going to eat this forbidden fruit.”

Now, as we’ve been talking about sin related to disease, as an analogy, there is one

important caveat here that we have to make. While the analogy of sin as a disease is

valid, there is a big limitation to this analogy that we have to observe. In diseases, we’re

victims of the disease. Regarding sin, we’re not merely victims. Sin is not something that

just happened to us. Sin is a disease we actually actively, willfully pursue. We are

responsible for having this disease and holding it close and even loving this disease that

will kill us. So where does sin come from? Well, let’s jump down to verse 8.

***8*** *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from*

*the beginning.*

So the devil is introduced here, and John speaks of the devil often. He wants us to know

the devil is a real person, a real creature. He is finite. He is wicked and he is very

influential in this present world. Evil began not with Adam and Eve, but sin actually

began with the devil. He is the one who has been sinning from the beginning. In Isaiah

14, there is a section that I believe is a reference to Satan’s statements at the very

beginning of creation. Here’s what Isaiah says.

**Isaiah 14:13–14** “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

That’s that defiance. That’s sin as lawlessness. It says, “I don’t care what God says. I don’t care about God’s authority. I want God’s authority for myself. I want the right to self rule.” What’s interesting is at the beginning of creation, Satan convinced 1/3 of the other created angelic beings, 1/3 of them, that he was right and God was wrong. That’s astounding! How could a created being convince so many other created beings to believe this huge lie that the God who created everything is not glorious and that we could have a path to glory outside of Him? And yet, that’s exactly what happened. Think of that! Satan’s first work is to rebel and then his second work is to convince other angelic beings to believe the lie that Satan is more powerful than God and that sin brings life as opposed to bringing death. It’s a powerful lie and it’s a lie that the world is deceived by today. We continue to believe this lie; all humanity. Satan never tires of this work of deceiving. He wants to have more and more people join him in defying God.

Let me ask you, do you think that you are a pretty discerning person? Do you believe that it’s easy to convince you to believe a lie? Most of us will say, “No, I’m very discerning. I think it’s really hard to convince me to believe a lie.” It is this pride that makes us so susceptible to this particular lie of the evil one. The believer’s answer to that question would be, “Yes, I think I am very easily deceived. There’s only one way that I won’t be deceived, and it’s not because of my smarts or because of my wisdom or because of my discerning nature. There’s only one reason, and that is that I have the Word of God. The Word of God teaches me the truth. It’s my anchor. It’s a light to my path. It is the sure thing. It is the most sure thing. It is the only sure thing. And when I hold onto this Word and I read it and understand it, I believe in it because it came from God Himself and God is the God of truth. God’s Word will never ever lead me astray. It’s only with that conviction that we’re safe from the lies of the evil one. So he says in verse 8.

***8*** *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil,*

To be of the devil is simply to believe the lie that God is not the source of all goodness

and that there is another path to a happy life outside of God and outside of submission to

Him. It’s to believe that we can find that way to goodness on our own. Isaiah describes it

in this way.

**Isaiah 53:6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own

way;

The real wickedness of sin is not in the specifics of the sin. It’s in the heart of sin that

says, “I want to go my own way. I want to do what I want to do and that’s what I will

do.” To be of the devil is simply to have that heart attitude. That’s what the devil did.

That’s what he convinced the 1/3 of the angels to do. That’s what he convinced Adam

and Eve to do.

John is saying that there are really only two sides in this world. There’s a side of God and

there’s a side of the devil. We’re part of either one or the other. And he causes us to ask

the question, whose side am I on? God’s or the devil’s? And again, our pride sort of

wells up and we say, “Well, of course, I’m not on the side of the devil.” But again, God

says we’re all born wearing those team colors. We’re all born with allegiance to that heart

attitude of going our own way. And that’s why He sent Jesus to help us, to save us, to

rescue us from that very disease. This brings us to verse 5 and verse 8b.

**Jesus and His Work. (5, 8b)**

***5*** *You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*

***8****…The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

When the Son of Man appeared, He appeared sinless, born of a virgin. He lived a

perfectly sinless life, completely obedient to the Law, fulfilling all righteousness on

our behalf. And then He died as a sacrifice upon the cross. 1 John has already talked

about this in chapter 2, verse 2. He died as a propitiation for our sins. We’ll talk about

that in a moment. But now John says, “Do you know why He did that?” He gives these

two reasons. And really, they’re the same reason, just looked at from different angles.

***5*** *You know that he appeared in order to take away sins,* ***8****…The reason the Son of God*

*appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

Let’s think of those things. What did Jesus’ death on the cross accomplish for us? Well

first, His death on the cross took away sins. And what hope there is in this! If you go

back to 1 John 2:1-2 we read

**1 John 2:1-2** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins,

You might want to circle that word “propitiation.” It’s a really important word. Again,

Scripture describes our sin as this disease. It’s a disease that is fatal. It’s a disease that is

infectious. There is a 100% transmission rate. All we like sheep have gone astray.

**Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Every one of us has this disease. If we test for this particular sin virus, every one of us is

afflicted. And it has a 100% death rate.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death,

That’s true 100% of the time! And that’s not just physical death. Physical death is scary,

but the greatest physical problem is spiritual death. And what a sobering death that is to

even think about. We’re separated from God forever and ever, away from His goodness.

And none of us has a natural immunity. This is different from every other disease. For

this disease we’re dealing with, some just seem not to get it. Others when they get it, they

don’t suffer death from it. In fact, most don’t suffer death from it. But here, again, there is

no natural immunity. It’s 100% fatal! There is only one cure and that is Jesus. We have

an advocate from the Father, Jesus Christ. And when He died upon the cross, He died as a

propitiation for our sins.

You know, this shows just how sinful we are. The internal rebellion of man hears the

gospel, hears the call of God, and he says, “Why is there only one cure? I want my own

cure to work. I want the medicine that I choose to take to be the medicine that would

sufficiently cure me of this disease.” Don’t we see how willful and how ignorant and how

foolish that line of thinking is when we consider sin as a disease? Imagine again, a cure

being discovered. Do you think that the people of the world will say, “Well, that’s not

right. There should be more than one cure. I want my own cure to work.” That’s exactly

what we’re doing in reference to the gospel of God. God, in His grace, supplies us with

the cure and He does so at great cost to Himself. This is the cure. It is Jesus, who takes

away our sin. He takes away the disease. The reason why we reject the cure is because

we love the disease so much. The disease blinds us and deceives us into thinking that it

actually is a good thing.

So how did Jesus take away sins? He was the only one born into the human race that was

born without the disease of sin. He never committed any sin. And when He died upon the

cross, He took our disease upon His own body so that we could be fully rid of this

disease, every particle of it within us. And then He placed His righteousness, His

complete health into us. This is the great exchange. He took the penalty or the

punishment of our sin, the judicial punishment of our sin upon Himself as He was

punished for our transgressions. And then He took His righteousness and applied it to us

so that when we stand before God, we’re free of the sin and we’re filled with this health,

the righteousness of Christ. What an amazing thing! He died to take away sins. But He

also died to destroy the works of the devil. And here again, the devil is described as real,

personal and evil. John says

***8****…The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

And again, the works of the devil are works that encourage us to live our own lives in our

own way. When you hear words our culture says like, “Follow your own heart, or do

what’s best for you, or you have to love yourself before you can love anyone else, or

follow your dreams, or your happiness is all that matters.” Do we hear them with gospel

ears? Do these phrases seem dangerously diseased, these ideas that will kill us? They

ought to for the Christian because they are. They are expressions of our defiance against

God, our decision to go our own way, to remove ourselves from our need for God and to

believe that our own path will be able to supply us with the life that only God can.

Nothing is more demonic than the ideas that we are complete in ourselves and all we

have to do is discover ourselves or feed our self will and self desires. Nothing is more

demonic than that lie. That’s the works of the devil. And Jesus died in order to destroy

the works of the devil, in order to render them powerless in our life so we wouldn’t

believe that lie or follow that lie anymore.

When Jesus died on the cross, He did destroy the works of the devil. What that means is

first, right now, when we have Jesus, we’re guaranteed victory over every sin that afflicts

us. There’s no sin that has so much power in us that it stays rooted when Jesus is in our

life. Jesus provides us with power to overcome every sin habit. That is true for every

Christian. It also means that one day, Jesus Himself will completely remove all sin and

the temptation to sin, from our lives.

The last part of this passage is the most practical and it’s really the place where John

parks.

**The Christian and His/Her New Life. (6-7, 9-10)**

***6*** *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either*

*seen him or known him.* ***7*** *Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices*

*righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.*

***9*** *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.* ***10*** *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 brother.*

What John is saying is that if we have this new life in Christ, then our practical life will change. New life changes our attitude toward God and toward His Law. New life changes our actions toward God and His Law.

Now the big question is: is it possible for a Christian to sin? And the answer to that question is yes and no. First, is it possible for a Christian to sin? Yes. John has already dealt with that in the first chapter.

**1 John 1:8-9** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So yes, sins can enter into the life of the believer. But is it possible for a Christian to sin? John here is also saying, no. What John is dealing with here is ongoing, willful, deliberate sin. It is willful and ongoing. Let me illustrate.

Imagine that when you were single, you had a friend who would live with you and he was a wicked individual. At that time, you enjoyed his wicked jokes, his wicked behaviors, his rudeness. This person represents sin. Sin is a rude, wicked guest who wants to drop into our house. And now you’re married and you have children. You have a whole new life. You’re enjoying this life much more than you did the wicked life that you had before. There’s a goodness to this life. And this friend knocks on your door and you open the door. Again, there has been a rapport with you in the past and so he convinces you to invite him in. While he is in, he’s speaking obnoxiously to your wife. He’s speaking roughly to your children. He’s influencing your children to watch movies that are corrupting them. Everything about this whole visit is very unhealthy. Finally you come to your senses and you say, “I should have known. I should have never invited this person into my house. I have a whole new life.” And you say, “Friend, you have to leave and you have to leave now. You are no longer welcome in my house!” On the other hand, another scenario is that you don’t come to your senses. You have this same rude, wicked friend who comes and he stays and stays and stays and he continues to do more and more damage and you continue to allow him to live permanently.

Do you see how these two scenarios are two very different things? The first is of a person who foolishly took an action for a moment. And this new life that he experienced ultimately convinced him that this is all wrong. “I’ve got to get this person out!” That’s confession. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just. The other is the question, do you really understand that you have new life at all? Do you really have new life? Because if you really had new life, you would protect it. That new life would drive that person out of the house. If you are born of God, what John is saying is you will not let sin live with you. You care too much about this new life. This new life is too powerful. It’s going to push this intruder, this wicked influence out. The new life will not let you allow sin to dwell, be willful and ongoing. The main idea behind this whole section is that new life in Jesus makes war with sin and makes peace with righteousness. John is very concerned here, isn’t he, about the danger of false profession. Again, I want to read these last two verses and I want to read them because they are so powerful.

***9*** *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.*

That seed, that life, abides in Him and it won’t allow sin to just dwell and stay as a permanent tenant in our soul. So do you want to know whether you have the life of God in your soul?

***10*** *By this it is evident who are the children of God,*

If you’re a child of God, this new life is going to wrestle and fight with that sin all the while. This new life again, may allow that guest in, but as soon as he is in, there is a realization, there is an awakening and there is a pushing out, as opposed to saying, “This is my life now. This is the way it is.” He goes on to say at the end,

 *whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

So you may be listening to this message and you’re thinking, “What happens if I fail the obedience test? There’s this test that God gives to discern whether I have the life of God. What happens if as I look at my life, I see willful, ongoing disobedience against God? I see this attitude that says, ‘I want to go my own way. I know God’s way is right, but I’m going left and I’m going to continue to go left.’ What if I realize that, and yet if someone were to ask me, I would say that I think I’m a Christian?” I would say brother or sister, soberly listen to John’s message. It’s right for you to be concerned about whether you have the life of God if there is ongoing, willful practice of sinning; if there is a continual practice of sinning taking place in a life. And if you discover that, the answer is not saying, “I’m going to try harder to obey. I’m going to try harder to be a righteous person. No, the answer is you must be born again. The way to have spiritual life is not by obeying more or by loving others more. The way to have eternal life is by coming to Jesus Christ who is the giver of life and saying, “Jesus, I need you.” Once we have this life, we can know that this life is real as we see these internal transformations taking place.

So what is God doing in these days? These are difficult days. There are anxious moments. We still don’t know what is going to happen with the virus in our community and in our nation. How would God have us respond to this trial? I just want to close with five brief thoughts of practical application.

1. Examine your own life with the Law of God in front of you to see if known sin is present.

If you have the life of God, the Law of God is not burdensome anymore. It’s not something dangerous. It’s not something to avert our eyes from. It’s a blessed gift. Examine your life with the Law of God in front of you, looking for known, present sin, saying, “God, wherever You shine a light into my soul, I want to hear what you have to say. I want to submit my life to you.”

2. Humble yourselves before the Lord and repent of known sin.

You know, at times like this, at times of all trial, it’s right to have a heart of repentance, a heart that says, “I want to turn away from my own way and I want to turn toward God. Humble yourselves before the Lord and repent of known sin. Return to God.

3. Confess Christ as Savior and Lord.

Again, it’s right for us to confess Jesus as our Savior and as our Lord every day. Daily take up our cross and follow Him. Daily say, “Christ Jesus, you are the Lord of my life. You are my Savior and I’m following you today. I want to do that every day for the rest of my life.”

4. I would really encourage you to tell this good news of great hope to others.

There is a cure! It’s the best cure! It’s the best life.

5. Love your brothers and your sisters.

We are in this fight against sin together. Let’s bond together. Let’s bind together. Let’s pray for one another. Let’s encourage one another all for the glory of Christ.

May God bless you! It’s so precious to be with you around the Word once again.