

# Your Cheating Heart

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 3:19-24  
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I enjoyed the singing tonight. Thank you Brother Mark for helping us on that.

1 John 3. Let's go there tonight. 1 John 3. This section of John's epistle, something of a circular epistle, by the way, it was passed around to all the churches. John deals with and addresses a lot of the error and the challenges that are out there and in this section he points out a truth that is pertinent to all of us, some of you may be more particularly where John is talking but all of us wrestle here and that is that our hearts lie to us and that we have to be diligent to put the truth in because the truth doesn't come from within and he connects all of this to the assurance of salvation.

Let's look at it together. 1 John 3:19-24. 1 John 3, beginning in verse 19, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure," or persuade, "our heart before Him." Now notice that, we will persuade our hearts of things about us and our God. Verse 20, "in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." Aren't you glad God's bigger than your heart? My goodness, your heart tells you all kinds of crazy stuff. Verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

I entitled this section "Your Cheating Heart" because it is. It's a cheater. I remember a fellow saying something one day and I could really relate to this statement, he said, "You know, I have been through some terrible things in my life and some of them actually happened." What he means was he lived letting his heart and his mind tell him, "This is going to happen. This terrible thing is going to happen. That terrible thing is going to happen." And he said, "Most of them never happened." But when you let your mind think on things that are not true and if you don't know they're going to happen yet, then you live through them even though they don't happen. Isn't that terrible? Well, that's just what kind of heart you have. Listen, truth is objective, it has to be discovered. Truth is objective. It's outside of you. It doesn't come from within you, it comes from God who is, of course, objectively true, not subjectively true.

So it's out there. It's not in here. As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that our heart, that is, the natural fallen heart we were born with, is no good. It's a heart full of lying and a heart full of cheating and it wants to lie to you and cheat you out of the blessings of God and out of enjoying the blessings of God. That's why he had that phrase at the very first verse we read that we have to take the truth of God and persuade our hearts, bring our hearts around to the truth and quit listening to the lies that naturally come up from within us. Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick, who can understand it?"

You know, in counseling over these 33 or so years in the ministry, I can relate to those that I counsel with so often because I will be talking to them and think, "Now, why do you believe that?" They'll be thinking of something, some terrible conclusion or all these dominoes are going to fall and this awful thing is going to happen. I say, "Now why are you thinking like that?" And usually they'll say, "I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know." Now, often you can talk to someone and go back to some childhood experiences where they had maybe traumatic experiences of some kind and it kind of set them on a pattern of negative or fearful thinking and we can trace some things down. The Scripture doesn't put a lot of the emphasis on that; the Scripture puts emphasis on believing truth, not tracing down why you're so warped in your thinking. I mean, that's like a dog chasing its tail if you're going to try to figure out your heart. Your heart is all mangled up and that's what Jeremiah meant when he said the heart is desperately wicked, who can understand it? Who can understand all the things man can come up with in his heart? All the illogical contradictory nonsensical stuff that our hearts will tell us? Aren't you glad that we've got the truth to straighten us out?

A good cross-reference, turn with me, if you would, to Matthew 15. We'll just read it and leave it, alright? Matthew 15:18. Jesus is speaking to these legalists who put a very big deal on not eating unclean foods, believing that if they ate unclean foods it would make their hearts defiled before God and Jesus said this in Matthew 15:18, "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." Well, in this case, it was the ceremonial washing they were to have or the food would somehow contaminate them any he said, "Look, you don't have to worry too much about the contamination coming in from outside of you, the contamination is already inside of you. The warped perverseness, the evil already dwells in you, that is, in your heart."

Now, think about how your heart has tried to cheat you, I mean, from the very beginnings how your heart has tried to cheat you. First of all, your heart has tried to lie to you and cheat you out of salvation. That is true of everyone. Now, answer a question in your own heart: why is it that you did not immediately in genuine faith embrace Christ the first time you heard of your sin and the first time you heard of him as the Savior? Why didn't you just immediately say, "Yes, I'll take him"? But you didn't do that. I daresay there is a person, there has never been a person rather who has ever lived who can say, "The first

moment I learned of sin and the first word I heard of Christ I believed on him savingly." No, you didn't. Why don't we do that? Why wouldn't we do that? I mean, everything about it is rich and right and pure and good but we don't do that. Why? Because our hearts are bad. Our hearts lie to us. Our hearts say, "Well, you can be saved later." Isn't it interesting how even smallish children, you'll teach them the things of the Scripture and the things of sin and the things of Christ and, oh, they'll give it a passing consideration and then they'll want to talk about the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus and some other fantastic thing that has come across their minds lately. Why can't they just embrace and believe and hold to Christ the first time they heard him? It's because our hearts are full of cheating and lying and deceiving. "Well, we can just do that later," and our hearts are so deceptive. "Well, we're not saying we're rejecting Christ," but that's what you're doing. When you put it off until later, that's a rejection. If you die in that place or in that state, you will die as a rejecter of Christ but that's the way we are. "Well, you can be saved later."

And then how many go through the seasons of time before their conversion thinking they are basically pretty good folks. "Well, sin is not that bad. Well, we're only human. Well, I'm not like So-and-so." And we try to assure ourselves before this perfectly holy and just God that since we've finally found some others who are worse than us then we're okay. "Well, I'm pretty good." The lying of your heart.

Or others will believe that their religion will save them. "I'm going to put on some good deeds. I'm going to help some less fortunate people. I'm going to give some more money to the United Way. I'm just going to do the right thing. I'll join the church and I'll partake of the ordinance of baptism. I'll begin to work in my small group." Why do they do that? The Scriptures are so immensely clear. And they can even sit under thorough teaching on the doctrine of grace, salvation by grace through faith alone, yet so many will default back to, "Well, I've done those things. I've done this stuff." It's your heart lying to you.

I remember a relative of mine saying one time, "Well, I just don't think God will send anyone to hell. I just don't think God would do that. God is too great of a God. He's too wonderful of a God." No, God is just and he is holy and he's going to be glorified by those who would not receive his Son by punishing them in hell. "Well, I don't want to be a fanatic. I'll be true to God in my own way but I don't want to be like you fanatics. You guys just go too far." And on and on and on we could go, the pilgrimage we went through and all the lies and all the deceptions that come from within us about salvation.

Well, our heart does lie to us and try to cheat us out of salvation but it also after we're converted, we don't lose this old fallen unredeemed humanity, the old heart, it still lingers along with us until the day of glorification and it tries to cheat us out of the treasures of salvation and that's particularly what John is getting to here when he talks about, "by this we know that we are of the truth." In other words, you can be assured that you are God's and you are of the truth of salvation from God if these things are true in your life because he knew so many of them were wrestling and struggling and doubting and fearful of their standing before God so he's trying to assure them that they will not be robbed out of the great treasure of the security of their salvation.

How many of you sitting under my voice right now have struggled with, "Well, you've sinned and God can't use you now"? Some kind of sin in your life, maybe you chalk one particular sin up as the kind of sin, "If I do that, then I know God is just through with me now." Who told you that? Where did you get that? That's not in the word of God. So often our hearts lie to us. Do you not understand the perseverance of the saints, that rich doctrine of Scripture that once God saves you he keeps you and he will keep drawing you back to himself, bringing you to repentance, sanctifying you in grace until the day of glorification; you will persevere all the way through to the end? God didn't throw you away and I've challenged you and exhorted you through these years that when you sin you run to God. That's the only way to quit sinning is run to him. Run to him and say, "God, here I come, filthy and unclean but here I come." How many of you have been robbed of the treasures of salvation and say, "Well, God can't use me now." That's a lie. You ask God's forgiveness. You humble yourself and you go on for God.

"Well, I'm just not good enough. I keep failing. I keep struggling. I keep falling short. I keep wrestling with so many things." Look, you don't focus on your weakness, you focus on Christ's greatness. That's where your focus must be, the all-powerful Christ. You need to even just say to God, "God, I don't even know the depths of my defilement and weakness but it's overwhelming to me but, God, help me understand the great infinite worth and value of your power to save and keep me saved." Our hearts lie to us. "You've sinned and God can't use you. Well, you're just not good enough." Or maybe, "Well, you're not smart enough or you're not talented enough." You see someone sing, you hear someone teach a class, you want someone with charismatic leadership skills and, "Well, God can't use me." Do you know what that is? It's pride. It's not truth. God has no junk in his church. God has no unusable vessels in his body. The Scriptures even require us to affirm that the most, at least from a human perspective, the most least usable or least valuable are just as important as everyone else. Do you remember when Junior Hill was here years and years ago and he used the analogy the Apostle Paul uses in the epistle that we are all members of one body? You know, some are this part of the body, some are that part of the body, and he said, "What if you're the big toe?" You're the big toe. Have you ever had a pain in your big toe? It affects the totality of your body. And they tell us if you lose your big toe, walking becomes difficult. Everything else in the body is offkilter. We are all important to God. Don't get into the pride of focusing on your lacking, your insignificance, your lack of gifts or ability. That's focusing on you. Don't focus on you, focus on the God who saved you. Find something to do in God's church and get busy serving. You'd be amazed at what God might do. The Bible says, "It's not by might and it's not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." John says here to assure your heart, persuade your heart with the truth. Don't listen to the lies your heart will put out.

Oh, and there are so many others. "Well, you didn't get baptized at the right church. You didn't join the right place. You didn't partake of the right sacraments," and on and on we could go. In Colossians 2, as a matter of fact, turn over to Colossians real quick. I want to preach this section to you again sometimes. It's been years since I've was in Colossians but in Colossians 2:8, we have this powerful command. It's not an encouragement, it's a command, and he says here in verse 8, "See to it," Colossians 2:8, "that no one takes you

captive." What a vivid picture. It's a picture of somebody plundering a herd of sheep and he comes in and he captures the sheep and he wants to run away with it. He says, "Don't let somebody come in here," some teaching is what he's talking about, "come in here and capture you and carry you away in error." He says, "Don't let them take you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." Now, think about that for a moment. Here's what Paul says: they're going to come in and they're going to take the traditions of men, in other words, they're going to take teaching that is natural and logical to mankind, stuff that sounds so reasonable, so sound and so right. He says, it's going to be the traditions of men. He said, then it's according to the elementary principles of the world. He says they're going to come in and their teaching is going to sound so right, so sound, so logical and it's going to be based on the things that everybody agrees, "Oh, that's how that works." Now, what's the most elementary worldly principle that you run into anywhere in any culture as far as a religion or as far as knowing God? What's the most elementary thing that people just naturally say, "Oh yeah, that's right." What is it? It's works salvation. That's the most elementary thing that's out there in culture. "Now, what can I do? If I join the right thing, if I put on the right thing, if I avoid this defilement, if I avoid this violation of this law, if I put on this behavior, if I do these works." That's so basic to men's thinking. Paul says, "Look, don't let anyone take you captive with that kind of teaching." Now look, he's not suggesting you don't let anyone, it's a command. It's in the imperative mood. He commands them, "Work at it. See to it. Don't let it happen." So when your heart lies to you, "I'm not good enough. I wasn't baptized right. I didn't jump through the right hoops. I don't come from the right stock. I don't have the right talents. I don't perform well enough." See to it, don't let anyone take you captive. Say no to your lying cheating heart.

Have you learned that sometimes your heart and your mind speak to you so powerfully it takes every bit of God in you to speak against the lie you're believing and that's what John is saying here in 1 John 3, "Persuade your heart of the truth." Some of these believers know undoubtedly, were being deceived probably by the Gnostic heretics and others who were teaching a promiscuous Christianity, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and many other things, and telling these Christians, these genuine Christians that they are not the real deal. I mean, here we are in the very first century and the church is just getting going and already the true remnant is being attacked and persecuted by the professing church that is not true at all. So John writes to encourage the professing church, "Yes, you are God's. You do believe right. You are on track. Now persuade your hearts with the truth. Don't listen to your lying cheating heart."

Now, not only does he try to cheat us out of salvation and those treasures of salvation, let me mention a few of those treasures that you will rob yourself of if you don't assure your heart. Now, when I say assure your heart, there is one main principle here. What is the one main principle you must be assured of if you're going to enjoy the blessings of salvation? Here it is: unconditional acceptance through Jesus Christ. That's it. Look, did you, I said: unconditional. God looked down on you and saw the core of your offensiveness, saw the depth of your wickedness, saw every sin you have or would ever commit and in your wretched, depraved, offensive state, chose in grace to richly favor

you and through the merits of his Son to make you righteous before him. Unconditional favor before God. Unconditional acceptance.

The theologians speak of unconditional election that God chose to save you and had no conditions to it that you had to perform or achieve or merit for him to do it. Now look, now listen, if you don't persuade your heart that that's true, "I am fully accepted unconditionally by God through the merits of his Son," then you're going to rob yourself of some of these wonderful, wonderful treasures that we have before God. Here's the first one I want to mention: prayer. Prayer. Do you know how warped, how small, how insignificant your prayer life is if you think you're not worthy to approach God? You're not going to do it. You're going to avoid prayer. You're going to avoid fellowship with God in prayer. You're going to avoid communion with God because you believe a lie. "Oh, I'm unqualified now. I've blown it now. I'm not good enough now." And on and on and on you can go. Why do you do that? Because you're listening to the lie, not the truth of Scripture. John said, "Persuade your heart with the truth of your unconditional acceptance."

Look back at our primary text, 1 John 3 and look at verse 19, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him," verse 20, "in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." Then verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us," here it is, then "we have confidence before God." That's prayer. That's prayer. But look, before the confidence to go to God in prayer and enjoy the rich blessings, I just, you know what I'm talking about, there are joys and sweetnesses and blessings in communion with God that are beyond human utterance but you're not going to know those unless you first persuade your heart, "I'm unconditionally elected. I can charge boldly into the throne of God which is a throne of grace." It's very clear, verse 22, verse 21 rather, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." Then he qualifies that. What's the commandment, verse 23, "that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ." The commandment we are to keep is that we have faith that his Son makes us righteous in his eyes. We have faith that his Son makes us unconditionally accepted before this true and holy God. You're not going to seek God's face in prayer unto you know he fully accepts you unconditionally. Hebrews 4:16, "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace."

Well, prayer to God and close akin to that, another specific treasure you don't want to let your hearts rob you of is the peace of God. The peace of God. Now, if you're a child of God, there is only one thing and one thing only that keeps you from having peace: wrong thinking because if you think the truth, you can't help but have peace. Wrong thinking. If you think the truth about who you are in Christ, you have peace. John 14:27, "Peace I leave you, My peace I leave to you. Let not your heart be troubled." Now there, again, that's a command. That's an instruction. Don't let untruth, don't let error, don't let lies cause you to be robbed of your peace. What peace is that? The peace that I'm unconditionally accepted, unconditionally forgiven by my God through the merits of Jesus Christ. Jesus left us his peace. What a wonderful, wonderful treasure that is but it's

our lying and cheating hearts that try to rob us of this very treasure. Now, certainly the enemy from without works on us but he can do nothing that we don't let him do and it's our old hearts that need to be persuaded as John says before God.

And another one closely akin to the first two: the pleasures of God, that is that God and fellowship with God and intimacy with God contains rich, rich joy and rich, rich pleasure. The Bible says, "In thy presence is fullness of joy. In thy right hand there are pleasures forever." I have, I think it's a two headed monster in one way and that's my job to strive to find something to preach to you every week, and after 33 years, I'm telling you, there are some difficult weeks. Difficult weeks. And on the one hand, Charles Haddon Spurgeon who is called the Prince of Preachers and I do not know of a man in the last 300-400 years that could preach like Spurgeon could preach. He was a genius in the English-language but he was a humble man and with all the brilliant wisdom he had, he was just a natural genius in everything, but his humility, his love for Christ, his sound doctrine was just so great, but Spurgeon said studying was the most irksome task on earth. Now, that's one of the greatest preachers of the last 400 years but to him studying to preach was the most irksome. It's a wrestling, it's a fighting, it's a grind but at the same time there's another side to it, I have moments alone with God preparing to preach studying God's word that are absolutely rapturous beyond description. Rich, rich pleasures where I say to myself, "Can it get any better than this?" And sometimes I would wish you had the same job. Now, you've got to be called to this. No doubt about it. You don't want to enter this because there are rich pleasures in it, trust me. But there are pleasures beyond compare.

Now, God works out these pleasures in our life through things like Christian fellowship. "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity," fellowshiping with one another, fellowshiping with the Lord in Bible study and Scripture memory. But let me say something to you: if you want to find this peace, if you want to walk in this pleasure, now listen, often you have to start in obedience and with a cold heart but you start. That's about 90 percent of the key: you start. Have you ever noticed as a child of God you'll start praying and it just doesn't mean much? You start praying and it's cold but by the time you end, it's warm and it's sweet and the fellowship with God is rich and it's real. Don't make your relationship with God too much unlike your relationship with your spouse or your relationship with anyone. You may get out of it what you put into it. So sometimes we start in just obedience but we end in joy and the pleasures of God.

Then the fourth treasure that our cheating hearts try to rob us from that's very closely akin to the first three and that is: praise to God. Praise. There is just something about praising the Lord. It is a treasure. Do you realize only the truly regenerate can praise God? Now, I know a lot of people do it. I remember being in Africa and knowing that the people that were gathering in the tent, a good number of them, probably a great number of them, didn't truly know God. They knew something of a God, they had a mixture of witchcraft and superstition and a little bit of the Gospel and all kind of stuff. Some of them were truly converted, no doubt, we met many that were but they would come to that tent, it might have been 700 of them, I don't know a bunch of them, and they would start singing and praising God like three hours, literally three hours before the worship service started.

And they really got into it and they really were moved and they really were loud and they really were spontaneous but I don't know that they were praising God. Only the truly regenerate can praise the Lord.

I don't know about you but when I come to Grace Life and Brother Tom leads us, something happens in me. There is a joy, there is a blessing. Do you do this? Almost every week without exception I'm a little surprised. Maybe you're not, but I am. And I think maybe it's because I'm so focused on preaching, I've been studying to preach and I'm thinking about preaching the word and I forget I just need to praise God some and so I'm just made, not really I want to, but I am brought into praise and there's just something about that. And you ought to work on that some in your quiet time, you ought to work on that some in your car and you ought to work on that some in your Bible study, just praising the Lord. As a matter of fact, do you want some help with that? Just turn to the book of Psalms and pray and pray Psalms to God. The old-timers used to say when you can't pray your way through it, you praise your way through it. The burden is just too heavy, the load is just too difficult that you just can't seem to bring yourself to praise, you just throw yourself at prayer rather, you just throw yourself into praise. I'm telling you, I've been there as a pastor a number of times where I just had to raise my hands as an act of the will and just praise God. It's amazing what a blessing that is, how it refreshes your soul and fuels your spirit and strengthens your faith. But, once again, you're not going to feel much like praising God unless you know he welcomes you with unconditional acceptance so John says persuade your heart of these things. Don't be robbed of those treasures.

Well, let me go to my last thought. So we've talked about the truth of salvation our lying hearts try to cheat us out of, the treasures of salvation, let's talk about the truth though that silences our lying and cheating heart. The truth that silences. First of all, the upward faith. 1 John 3:23, the upward faith, look at verse 23, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of the Son of God." How am I going to persuade my heart? I'm going to talk to my heart and say, "Heart, shut up your lying. Quit telling me I'm too much of a failure. Quit telling me I was baptized at the wrong place. Quit telling me this." Look, my confidence is in Christ and him alone to cleanse me. The upward look of faith. Look, years ago we talked a whole lot about getting somebody to say a prayer to get saved, pray a prayer to get saved. Well, we did that for about 10-15 years and baptized 700-800 people and it didn't seem to save hardly any of them but what I do think is true is if you're a child of God, you are regularly praying that prayer to be saved. You are regularly calling out to God, "Lord Jesus, you are my only hope. Lord Jesus, you are my only Savior. Lord Jesus, if you have not and do not keep me saved, there's no hope. I cast my faith constantly upwardly toward the work of Christ on my behalf to cleanse me and forgive me because I can't save myself."

Secondly, another thing that can silence the lying of your heart against you is the inward witness. There is the upward look of faith but there's the inward witness of the Spirit. Look at verse 24, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." There is a mysterious presence within the child of God that assures us, that lets us know that we're a



child of God. Two thoughts about this inward witness. "When, pastor, might I be aware the Spirit is witnessing in me?" Now certainly in daily life he convicts of sin but sometimes it's a little difficult because the old conscience can also convict of sin. Lost men can be convicted of sin because God's put a conscience in them. That's different than the Spirit's witness. When the Spirit convicts of sin, it's a God-wardness. When the conscience convicts you, it's, "I don't want to get caught. I don't want to be embarrassed. I don't want to be ashamed." When the Spirit convicts you, it's God-ward, "I don't want to dishonor my Lord. I don't want to shame his name. I don't want to embarrass his reputation with this sin in my life." There is a God-wardness to the conviction of the Spirit.

But two other things I'd like to point out and that is: the Spirit accompanies us in prayer. The Bible says the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that we can't even understand. There is just a sense of the flowing of the Spirit when we work in prevailing prayer that is rich and powerful, that affirms to us, assures us that we are God's child. Then, of course, the Spirit always affirms the word of God. You know, the Spirit of God is the one who wrote the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit of God superintended through human men to write exactly the words God wanted written in the holy Bible and when we are studying the Bible and particularly when the Bible is being preached, the Spirit of God gives you that amen of the Spirit. Something in you rises up and says amen. Even when it corrects you and rebukes you, something in you says, yes, amen. I call it the amen of the Spirit. It's the inward witness that you're a child of God.

Then the one that John puts so much great emphasis on here and that's the outward evidence. The outward evidence of love for other believers. Notice that there in verse 23, if you will, the outward evidence of love for the believer. Verse 23, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." It's amazing where John puts this thing. Believing upwardly on Christ to save you is always accompanied by a new heart affection and love for other true believers. I'm not talking about other true churchgoers, I'm not talking about other religious people, I'm talking about true believers. We're just drawn to them. We just love them. Look at verses 18 and 19 in our text. "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him." In other words, when you sense and are aware, "I just love other Christians. I desire to be around them." And I believe it's absolutely true that if you will love Grace Life Church and you're drawn to this church, it's the Spirit of God doing that. I'm confident the spirit of Satan is not going to draw you to this ministry but the Spirit of God definitely will and when he is doing that, John said, "Assure your hearts with that fact you are God's child or you would never have that love for his truth and for his true church and his true children." That assures your heart is before him.

Go up to verse 10, we'll just read this and we'll be done. 1 John 3:10, "By 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." Here we go again, how do those folks come through and just kind of use us and aren't really devoted

to what we're about and they don't seem to want to sacrifice and serve and then they're gone. Well, I don't know every case but the Scripture requires me, listen, the Scripture requires me to conclude that a lot of them don't have God in them and that's how they can take our fellowship so lightly and be so flippant about whether they come or they go. There was no devotion. But he says that's how you know which ones are of the devil and which ones are of God.

Verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Verse 10, "By 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." Now, down in verse 11, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should," here it is, "love one another." He goes back to the original two sets of mankind, Cain and Abel, "not as Cain," verse 12, "who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous." In other words, if Cain belonged to God the way Abel belonged to God, Cain would have loved Abel but he hated him; he didn't want to be around him. So he says verse 13, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." You find this affinity and this affection and this oneness and this love for this group of other believers but those outside really don't like what you are, really don't want to be a part of that, at least not very long. Verse 13, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." Verse 14, "We know," we know, we know, "that we have passed out of death into life," why? "Because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Verse 16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." That is the outward evidence, this love we have. Now, don't get into legalism and somehow chalk up in your minds, "Well, did I do enough acts of love this week to be a child?" No, no, no, it's the heart. Something in you is drawn. There is an affection there that you didn't put there and it keeps you.

I don't know how many times I've been on trips and I've been to other churches and other ministries and trying to help these dear pastors who are trying to reform their churches to sound doctrine and sound practice, and inevitably they have a lot of people in their churches who are not Christians, they are not born again. They may be good Baptist and they may be good churchgoers but they are not true Christians and I don't sense the Spirit I sense here and I come back to Grace Life and just something in me wells up with joy because I love being with the brethren. It's just different and it's special and John is saying, "Assure your hearts that you are one of those unconditionally accepted by God or God would have never put that kind of love in your hearts for other true brothers and sisters in Christ."

So it's not a one time thing. You don't just write it on a piece of paper and stick it in your Bible and say, "Okay, I'm saved." No, it is a continual work of denying the thoughts, the messages of your lying cheating heart and putting into your heart the truth of God about who you are before God in Christ Jesus.

Let's stand together.