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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

March 27, 2022

By This It Is Evident Who Is A Child Of God

1 John Part 15

Prayer: *Father, I just again I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for this body that you have given to us, we are a gift to each other, we are your gift to us and I thank you for that, Lord. And again, as we pray each morning as we open up your word, I pray for the gift of your Holy Spirit that you would accompany us. We're going to look at a lot of material this morning and again I just pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit who can sort through this and to make it make sense. I pray for the power of your spirit to make this of lasting value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, 1 John is an epistle that is marked by contrast. It is filled with good news and it's also followed by bad news, it's filled with light followed by darkness, encouragement about good doctrine and warnings about bad doctrine. We spent some time last week looking at some of the best news ever and it was John writing about the future that the children of God have and we saw three wonderful things that are waiting in store for us as believers:

number one, Jesus will be revealed; number two, we will see him as he is; and number three, we will be like him. This, folks, is stunningly good news. But as John so often does he contrasts this good news with a series of warnings. John is absolutely determined since his time and place is surrounded by false teachers and false belief, he's determined that his people get their understanding right of just what it means to be a child of God.

So right after the good news of what awaits the children of God we find a series of warnings again presented as contrasts that we're just going to kind of work through this morning. This is 1 John 3:4-10. John says: *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not*

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

Did you get all that? All squared away? Like I said, John sometimes gets very complicated, and he's all about contrasts. And you'll notice John's not very big on nuance. He's much more interested in making it clear what the relationship of a born again believer is to the idea of sin. And we come upon the word sin or sinning ten times in this one paragraph. Three times he refers to the practice of sinning. In verse 4 he says: *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.* In verse 8 he says: *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.* In verse 9 he says: *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.* And then for good measure John speaks to those who keep on sinning. In verse 6 he says: *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.* In verse 9 he says: *He cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.* So in each case John is trying to hone in much more on the attitude of sin much more so than the action. John speaks to the present ongoing continuous practice of sin as a mark, a genuine mark of an unbeliever because if we don't get this right, if we really don't understand the difference between being in the kingdom and simply kidding myself that I am, we will be lost.

Now President Biden recently caused quite a stir with his remarks about St. Patty's Day, and what he said illustrates the problem quite well. *IJR News* recently ran this headline: "Joe Biden Receives Backlash For Joke During St. Patrick's Day Gathering." "President Joe Biden faced criticism after appearing to suggest the Irish are 'stupid.' While delivering remarks on St. Patrick's Day, Biden joked, 'Father, before I begin: Bless me, father, for I'm about to sin.' He added, 'Well, I just want you to know, I may be Irish, but I'm not stupid. I married Dominic Giacoppa's daughter.'"

So what does our president's St. Patrick's Day remarks have to do with our text in 1 John? Well, the president got in trouble for equating his Irish heritage with stupidity and claiming he wasn't stupid because after all he married an Italian. So as an Irish person myself, I mean that remark doesn't bother me in the slightest. It's the other statement, actually the other joke that he mentioned there that is really worth looking at.

Now anyone who was raised Catholic will recognize the statement that President Biden made, it's a play on the standard statement that's made when one goes to confession. We were always taught that you opened up your time in a confessional by saying, "Bless me, father, for I have sinned, it has been blank days, months,

weeks, years since my last confession." Well President Biden altered those words slightly by saying not, "Bless me, father, for I have sinned," but "Bless me, father, for I am about to sin." His point being that he was going to seek forgiveness through the confessional first and then go about committing the sin that required it in the first place. President Biden was inadvertently making John's point for him. He's illustrating the difference between committing a sin and the practice of sinning. You see, one commits a sin by giving in momentarily to temptation; one practices sinning by planning for, excusing or diminishing God's laws, and praying, "Bless me, father, for I am about to sin" is clearly planning to practice sin. That's why John said, *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, and no one born of God makes a practice of sinning.* John opens our text this morning by saying: *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.*

Now lawlessness it's a product of the fall, it's something that's built into every single one of us from birth. We just don't realize it. I mean God has these rules and the rules are sent to govern our behavior towards him and towards our fellow man; we call those rules the Ten Commandments. Everybody knows or knows of the Ten Commandments. And God makes these rules and we resent them.

We resent them simply because they are an intrusion into our autonomy but we don't really realize that. And Paul discovered that and he came to discover his own inherent resentment of God and his rules when he examined his own attitudes toward something as strange as coveting. In Romans 7, Paul is examining the relationship of God's law to sin and he points out that God's law is where we find out how sinful we actually are by comparing our standards to his standards. And Paul responds to the idea that maybe the problem is actually with the law itself, maybe it is the source of our sin. This is what he says in *Romans 7:7*. He says: *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. And what Paul is saying, he says I never had a problem with coveting at all, I mean, it was no issue at all until I found out God's standards saying you better not do that, "You shall not covet." He said as soon as he found that out he said the desire to covet exploded within me. Romans 7:9 says: I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and*

the commandment holy and just and good.

And what is not holy and not just and not good is our predilection to lawlessness, our innate desire to be law breakers. The Greek word for "lawlessness" means an utter disregard for God and his laws. Paul said he was astounded to find that merely discovering that God had forbidden coveting is what caused this desire to covet to explode within him. So he recognized that sin was a problem that went far deeper than actually sinning. He recognized that he, too, had to battle his flesh and the utter disregard that it had for God and his laws. Paul recognized that one's attitude toward sin was much more a heart issue that marked whether or not one's heart was given over to God and kingdom or still to this world and its values.

And Jesus also made a statement about lawlessness. He spoke about what things would be like at the end of time, he gave a prophetic vision shortly -- he's talking about the time that's going to happen shortly before he returns, and it's the kind of statement that should make everyone who hears it nervous. This is what Jesus said in *Matthew 24*, he said: *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

You see lawlessness first and foremost is a heart issue. We've

seen literally the love of many grow cold as they resist and resent any law whatsoever. We've seen riots and car jackings and flash mobs and smash and grab and everything about the rule of law being turned upside down. Everyone knows it and everyone sees it but no one seems to care enough to do anything about it. And that same lawlessness is filtered down into the church. There's sins that folks know as sins, they're now met by eye rolls and excuses as folks choose to follow culture rather than scripture for the same reason: *The love of many has grown cold.* And this really is what John is trying to describe in our text this morning. I mean some folks may look at this paragraph of John, they see it as confusing, almost contradictory when in reality what John is trying to do, he's trying to describe the essence of a relationship that a truly born again believer has with God and his rules. And John doesn't believe in nuance at all. I mean lawlessness, as Jesus points out and John illustrates it, is a sign that the heart has grown cold. That might describe a temporary situation for a true child of God but Jesus is quite plain in describing the impossibility of one of his sheep ever becoming permanently indifferent to God and his laws. This is what Jesus said in *John 10*. He said: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out*

of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." Jesus says that because no one is able to snatch us out of Jesus or the father's hands because none of us have placed ourselves in their hands in the first place. That was something that God did. And because God has chosen us, we bask in his full protection as well as a determination to keep us from being snatched out of his hand. I mean the reason we follow his voice is because our hearts have been surgically removed and replaced with brand new hearts that beat for him and his kingdom. Those transplanted hearts can never be snatched away; they're absolutely permanent. But there's a huge question that lingers. And the question is am I a recipient of one of those hearts or have I now succeeded in kidding myself?

Jesus warned us about rocky soil hearts and thorny soil hearts, telling us that the soil of the gospel sown in rocky soil could yield a heart that really looks like the real thing but only for a while. And when persecution comes, rocky soil hearts bail out. And Jesus said the same thing about thorny soil hearts except it wasn't persecution that revealed that heart, it was instead worldliness. And when the weeds of the world weave their way into the fabric of your life, the gospel becomes secondary or tertiary and it reveals a heart that was never truly transplanted. I mean John himself was very concerned about his church being a mixture as all churches are of true believers, false believers and those who

were kidding themselves into believing they were real when they weren't. He said the mark of those who were never truly transplanted in heart was the fact that they didn't stick around, they didn't remain. As John put it in *1 John 2:19*, he says: *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

So like I said, God's own people have transplant the hearts, hearts that beat with a desire to serve him, honor him and bring him glory. And what John is trying to put into words is the difference between someone having that genuine God-given born again Spirit of Christ within them and someone who falsely believes he does when he doesn't. Because there's so little nuance in John's description, it's kind of easy to get it wrong on both sides. I mean, you may think John is saying that there's no way you can even commit a sin because on the one hand John did say after all in verse 6: *Whoever abides in him does not sin*; or on the other hand you might think that John is saying that a life of sin doesn't matter since your sin's already paid for because John also said in verse 9: *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.* So as you can probably guess, context here means everything.

So I just want to take some time to examine our text in the light of that thinking. I want to just read it once again, recognizing that there's an awful lot of stuff going on here. John says:

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Well what I want to do is break this down and kind of look at this verse by verse and just give a comment on each verse before we tend to get lost in the weeds. Verse 4 starts out: *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness* and John is telling us there that sin is lawlessness and we know that lawlessness is utter disregard for God and his law. So what John is telling us is that every time we sin we are making a conscious

choice for that sin over God. In verse 5 he says: *And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.* And he's saying Jesus appeared to take away our sins by being the only sinless sacrifice that could take that sin away by substituting his perfection for our imperfection.

In verse 6 he says: *Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.* What John means there is to the extent that you're tracking with Jesus, you will not sin. It doesn't mean that you're never going to sin, John's already addressed that in the previous chapter and he went so far as to say *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,* so he's not saying that. What he is saying is when you do fall into sin is because at the very moment that you're doing that, you're not tracking with Jesus. As John puts it at that moment *you haven't seen him or known him.*

In verse 7 he says: *Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.* Once again John has very little use for nuance, he has very little use for a faith that remains on a theoretical level. If it doesn't translate to an actual practical way you live your life, then as far as John's concerned it probably doesn't exist. We always say "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Well that means that

orthodoxy must always be accompanied by orthopraxy. And orthodoxy simply means thinking the right way, thinking with your right mind, and orthopraxy means doing the right way. John's saying the two always have to go together. Back in his day the Gnostics and the heretics had a field day trying to separate those two, and we see that same behavior today. In verse 8 he says: *He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* Again just as right thinking confirms right practice, so wrong thinking is confirmed by wrongdoing. I mean in the same way that tracking with Jesus prevents us from sinning, so tracking with the enemy puts you in league with him. Sinning is literally doing the devil's work for him.

John goes on to say that Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to destroy that work by paying the debt of our sin at the cross so that we by faith could claim his righteousness as our own, thus destroying any claim the devil might have on us. In verse 9 he says: *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.* And again we have to understand the Greek here, the Greek present continuous tense tells us that the phrase "does not sin" is more accurately translated "does not continually sin." And the phrase "he cannot sin" is more accurately translated "he cannot

continually sin." John's not saying that becoming a believer in Christ makes you instantly sinlessly perfect. And again, put into a context of this entire paragraph, he's talking about someone whose heart has been captured by the Father and the Son, who's a follower of Christ because his heart has been transplanted and a new heart that seeks after God now reigns because he's now born of God. In verse 10 he says: *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.* Once again he's just saying the proof of the pudding is in the eating; and that proof is our behavior, our behavior will manifest who we are. Those who do not practice righteousness, those who do not love their brethren demonstrate that they're not children of God. And if they're not children of God then by default they're children of the devil.

So if you look in total at what John is trying to say here, you can sum it all up by saying that John is giving a description of someone whose heart has been transplanted by the living God, who instead of a heart of stone now has a heart of flesh that really beats for his God. And you know we don't have to guess what that looks like because God gave us two very specific examples in the Old Testament. He gave us the examples of the first and second kings of Israel. Saul was the first and David was the second. And

if you look at their lives you can see the difference between the two as one of them had a transplanted heart and the other one didn't. Plugging them into John's description of what makes for a true believer and what doesn't is helpful because both Saul and David had feet of clay, I mean, they sinned greatly. In fact you might say that David had the greater offenses. And yet when we look at their lives we can quickly see it was David who actually had a heart for God and not Saul. It was David who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged for the murder of her husband Uriah. So we're not talking about whose sins were worse, as I said, they're both terrible sinners. But it was David who had a heart for God and not Saul. And we will see that they made choices that reflected not just their sin but also the hearts that they had for God. This is not just a mere opinion of men, this is something that was actually stated by God himself as described by Paul.

In the book of Acts we find Paul arriving in Antioch and as he gets there he goes as he always does to the synagogue and there he's presenting a history of the Jews to his fellow Jews. And in that story God tells us in no uncertain terms that David was a man after his own heart. It's recorded in Acts 13. This is what Paul says, again describing the history of the Jews. He says: *And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man*

of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID THE SON OF JESSE, A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART, WHO WILL DO ALL MY WILL.'

So how do we know that David was a man after God's own heart?

Well, I said it's our behavior that manifests who we are, and this particular behavior consists of obedience. David, according to God himself, was a man who will -- quote -- *"Do all my will."* Saul was a man who could only give lip service to obedience because his heart never belonged to God.

Now Jesus in the New Testament, he echoes the very same sentiment that God the Father did when he said that obedience is the mark of genuineness when it comes to a claim to love God. This is what Jesus said in *John 14*. He said: *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."* So here we have God the Father and God the Son telling us that the mark of genuine love, the mark of a heart transplant that actually has taken place is found through a spirit of obedience driven by this new heart.

Well the apostle Peter gives us even more evidence of this as he

introduces his letter explaining that it was written to the elect saints who had been scattered due to the persecution and then he gives a very specific indication of what marks out these people as having been chosen of God, as having been given this brand new transplanted heart. This is what Peter says in his introduction to his letter. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.* Peter insists that the elected exiles of the dispersion are sanctified by the spirit for what? For obedience to Jesus Christ. You see, if you want to mark out the difference between a heart for the kingdom and a heart that is kidding itself, just look at both Saul and David's attitude towards obedience.

God once told Saul through the prophet Samuel to completely wipe out the Amalekites. This is *1 Samuel 15*. God says: *Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."* We read that, we go, oh, no, we shouldn't even talk about this kind of stuff. Trust me, God had his reasons for having to take these extreme measures, but that's another 20-minute time and place, it's not for right now, but I'd

be happy to talk to you at any other time about it. But Saul decided, well, God, you're asking for too much. This is *1 Samuel 15:9*. It says: *But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.*

So upon his return, Samuel calls Saul out for his disobedience. He says -- this is Samuel saying to Saul, this is *1 Samuel 15:18*, he said: *Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'* Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" Well not only does Saul disobey God's direct order but he further revealed the state of his heart by then arguing and blame shifting. This is what he said, he said: *And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.* Well, it was a flat out in-your-face lie. And then Saul follows that up by shifting the blame from himself to his people denying that he was responsible. In verse 21, he says: *"But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your*

God in Gilgal." The prophet Samuel tells Saul that he directly disobeyed God and Saul's response is, no, I didn't. God told him to utterly destroy the Amalekites, and Saul says, well, I brought back the king and the other people brought back all this other stuff. I mean, what part of "utterly destroy" did Saul not understand?

I mean the big point that John is trying to make in our text this morning is not so much focused on the sin itself but on the attitude behind the sin. John says: *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.* And if you remember we said lawlessness is an utter disregard for God and his rules. Well that definition fits Saul to a tee. Now David, on the other hand, is someone who sinned greatly. I mean we know he committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband murdered to cover his tracks but note David's response to God's conviction. David says in *Psalm 51*: *Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.*

Do you see any difference between Saul's response and David's response? There's no argument, there's no blame shifting, there's just a complete acknowledgment of David's sin and a plea for mercy. And when David further sinned by ordering a census on the nation of Israel, we see the same pattern of conviction and repentance. This is *2 Samuel 24:10*. It says: *And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."* When Saul sins we see this pattern repeat itself of blame shifting and arguing, we see Saul's heart grow harder and harder and more resistant as he becomes more and more jealous of David to where much of Saul's latter days were spent pursuing David in order to kill him. And we see David pursuing -- I mean literally years on the run actively being pursued for no crime other than being a threat to Saul's reign.

At one point Saul is asleep in a cave and David and his men find it as a perfect opportunity to take his life, and they gather around him and said, this is your shot. David refuses to. This is *1 Samuel 24:4*. It says: *And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'"* Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of

Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

Do you see the picture that this is painting of David's heart? I mean David's heart was so given over to obeying his Lord, he was convicted for simply cutting a piece of Saul's robe. And not because Saul deserved any mercy, after all he had been pursuing David to death for years but simply because David knew that Saul had been anointed by God. And that was enough for David to feel convicted for simply cutting his robe. See, David's heart was given overwhelmingly over to God; Saul's heart was given over to Saul.

John says in 1 John 3:9, he says: *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.* We see that seed that John is referring to, that seed is

the Holy Spirit of God. And all those who have had a heart transplant have also had an infusion of God's Holy Spirit; he now lives inside you. The only reason why John can say whoever has been born of God cannot continually sin because to do so sets up war internally. Once you become a child of God you have the spirit of the living God inside you and whenever you succumb to temptation, whenever you engage in sin, you set up a conflict between your spirit that's your flesh, and the Spirit of God who is now living inside you. There's an internal war going on.

I just had an amazing conversation a while back just with somebody whose daughter had been far, far away and had just left a solid marriage for a sexual relationship with another woman and this had gone on for years and she had come back and she just said -- she said something that was so key to understanding where she was at. She said, "I was so miserable." And I know why. That more than anything speaks to the fact that she was a child of God because when you start doing this stuff, the spirit inside you and God's Holy Spirit are at war. That's why David was at war, that's why David had this contrite heart because he understood what was going on inside him. David was so tuned into the Spirit of God within him that even cutting Saul's robe convicted him. I mean: *He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing*

he is the LORD's anointed."

John goes on to say once again: *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest*, in other words they're made obvious, you get to see who is who -- *whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother*. What John is pointing out that eventually whoever you are, whose child you are, it's going to become manifest. If you're a child of God, that will become self-evident; if you're a child of the devil, that will become self-evident as well. Saul started out looking for all purposes like he was a man after God's own heart and life and trials and circumstances revealed that that was not so. And David, in spite of his many sins and failings, gave ample evidence that the Spirit of Christ was still within, and the evidence wasn't his exemplary behavior, he still messed up, he still sinned, his evidence was his reaction to being convicted of sin, his desire for full and complete repentance and his understanding that his love for God was expressed through obedience. Those are the identifying characteristics of a new creature in Christ. And you see that amply in David; you don't see it at all in Saul.

So you might say, okay, what does that have to do with me? Well, it's critically important to figure out whether you have the heart

of Saul or the heart of David when it comes to your heart for God. Saul's passion was always pointed back to Saul; David's was always pointed back to God. Saul always counted the cost because pleasing God was never his goal, so God always came up short. David never counted the cost because his greatest passion and pleasure was pleasing his God. And that, folks, is the difference between someone who has a heart for God and someone who is actually kidding themselves. It's a difference between someone coming before God and saying, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned" or saying instead "Bless me, Father, for I'm about to sin." John isn't laying out a list of to-dos for Christians as hoops that you've got to jump through in order to get to heaven. Instead he's laying out what the heart attitude of born again believers consists of and he's asking where does your heart fit in this?

He opens up the paragraph by saying: *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.* And he ends it by saying: *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.* The Spirit of God is the seed that abides in believers. It's the seed that drives him through conviction to repentance and love as expressed by obedience. These are not hoops that we jump through in order to get into heaven; that's what Saul thought. These are identifying characteristics of

all who have God's seed abiding in them, as John says: *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. Let's pray.*

Father, I just, I just thank you. I sense your spirit is speaking to people. I just think of Pete's prayer this morning just where he's addressing that very same thing, Lord. Do not kid yourself that you are one of his. If you don't have within you this overwhelming desire to please your God, this desire to make right the wrongs that you've done in your life, this desire to demonstrate the truth of that by your obedience, if those things are missing, then ask yourself that question: Am I truly someone who is called of God, am I truly one of his sheep or am I kidding myself? And if you feel that pressure, come speak to us, come speak to any of the elders and let's get it squared away because that pressure that you're feeling, that's God's Holy Spirit knocking on the door right now. I pray that you would hear, I pray that you would respond, I pray that you would enter into the kingdom today. And I pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.