

So You Call Yourself a Christian

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Bible Verse: 1 John 2:3-11
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We return tonight to our study of 1 John which we've been in for a week and a half now or so, and we come to a more extended text tonight than what we've treated the past couple of messages but I'll do a little bit of review to bring us up to speed as we continue on in this very important study. This is a very fundamental piece of Scripture. It is very fundamental for the church of Jesus Christ. It reads like a circular letter, as though John intended it not for a particular individual or a particular church because he doesn't name individuals and he doesn't mention specific churches. It seems as though this was a letter designed to be taken from place to place and be read by many and therefore indicating its broad applicability to the whole of the Christian church, and that abiding truth, that abiding power, that abiding reality of it has continued on for 2,000 years into the present time and it's something of great significance to us.

John is writing as a pastor, even though he was an apostle, and I say that he's writing as a pastor because there was a very tender tone that is marked throughout his letter, and if you read the letter in a single setting with this in mind, you'll pick it up quite quickly. John addresses his readers as beloved, as little children, as brethren. He's writing to them with this very caring tone, this very pastoral care for them is the dominant tone of the letter, and he's writing to help give them discernment, discernment because false teachers had come and were affecting them with their false doctrine and with their evil wicked lives, and we'll see this as we go along through the letter. So the major key is one of pastoral care to give true believers discernment, but there is also this secondary key, this minor key that is woven throughout the letter as he addresses the reality of false teachers and for them he addresses them as liars and deceivers and antichrists and it gives you a sense of what is at stake in the teaching of truth, that teaching God's word and understanding what Scripture says is not a matter of light consequence, for those that are in Christ, that are in the Spirit, you could say, there's this tone of love and care which is reflective of the care of God for his own children. On the other side of the coin, you could say, there is this sharp tone of warning and judgment against those who pervert the Gospel. We go back and forth between those themes as you read the entire letter of 1 John and we'll see it even in what we're going to look at here this evening.

To bring it from the general to the particular, the reality of that division, the reality of that dividing line has consequences for you tonight as you hear and listen to the message and as the Spirit of God applies it to your heart, you need to understand that you are either in

Christ or you're not and John paints the reality of the dividing line, the reality of discernment in very stark black and white terms. He's not dealing with gray areas here, he's speaking matters that apply to each one of us and they are matters of sharp distinctions of truth. And over the past six weeks or so we've covered an awful lot of biblical and theological territory and I'm so grateful to God for that, and so grateful for the hundreds of you that join us each time that we come together. I'm just greatly greatly encouraged by that. It's a time, tonight is a night of encouragement, I trust, for many of you but also a night of warning for some of you in particular that things are not right with you spiritually and the reality of God's word exposes that if you would only incline your heart and ear to hear to listen, and these are matters of great consequence. I keep going back to that message I preached some three or four weeks ago, Jesus on hell, and there is judgment for sinners. God judges sinners in the end and if you are living now, if you are breathing now, it is an extension of the fact that God is being gracious to you, God is being patient to you. He is extending to you opportunity and time to repent. He is staying his hand of judgment for a time on you to give you the Gospel for you to hear, for you to respond to that invitation of Jesus Christ that says, "Come to Me all ye who labor and are heavy laden. Come to Me and drink of the waters of life freely. Come and drink of the waters of eternal life." And this is the promise of Christ to you but, my friend, you must understand this, you must understand this, I don't know how to speak anymore earnestly or plainly to you than what I'm doing right now: this is not a game; Jesus is not bluffing when he talks about eternal damnation and he's not bluffing when he says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This is not a game and so what you need to understand, my friend, is this, is that while you are drawing breath God is giving you opportunity to repent. He is giving you time. This is a season of grace to you no matter if it seems like one to you or not. You know, the reality for all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, is that apart from the grace of God we all deserve to drop immediately into eternal damnation. In the words of Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon from 250, nearly 300 years ago, apart from the grace of Christ we are sinners in the hands of an angry God and righteously so is he angry with us.

So we just need to understand that as we come to the text tonight, that the consequences of the answers that you give to the questions that I'm going to be asking you are of incalculable significance, they are of everlasting consequence to you, and so I just urge you and plead with you to give heed to the word of God tonight in the only way I know how, my heart is weeping even though my eyes are dry, that you would take heed to this. And while I make that horizontal plea, all I can do is make a vertical plea to God because I know that you who are unsaved, you have no power of yourself to turn your heart to Christ, you're a leopard that cannot change his spots, you're a zebra that cannot change his stripes, and so you need the intervention of God in your life, you need an act of particular grace from God in your life if you are ever to be saved from your miserable condition. So I'm asking God even as I'm speaking to you, to have that kind of mercy on you tonight. And for those of you that are fellow believers with me, brothers and sisters in Christ, my prayer as I'm speaking is a little bit different for you, it's that God would take the truths of these things and affirm them to your heart, that as we look at these marks of a true Christian, that it is something that the Spirit of God would affirm you in

and you could see with the help of the indwelling Spirit that, "Yes, that's true of me, not in perfection but that is the affection of my heart. I do see those kinds of changes in my life. I do long for holiness even though I fall so far miserably short," and that in that kind of affirmation from the Spirit of God, you would grow in the purposes for which John wrote this letter: you would grow in your joy, chapter 1, verse 4; you would grow in holiness, chapter 2, verse 1; and you would grow in your assurance of salvation, chapter 5, verse 13. So we come to the word of God earnestly tonight, not presuming on what the future holds. We're laying everything out as plainly as we possibly can and asking God to bless it according to his purposes and that he would send his Spirit upon it all to achieve everything that he would accomplish in this evening together. So we hope and pray for nothing less than that.

The Apostle John wrote this letter to help Christians discern false teachers and to turn away from them. As you read the letter, it's become apparent that the influence of these false teachers were making some believers question their salvation. They were losing joy and it was causing them to stumble in their walk. That's always the effect of false teaching, superficially on the surface to uncritically thinking people it might not seem to be too harmless, but the reality is that false religion and false teaching is a great and damnable sin. Paul pronounced anathemas on those who contradict the Gospel in Galatians 1, and those who would take away from the word of God or add to it with their own rules and man-made doctrines as so many religions do, they're faced with a similar curse at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation 22:18 and 19, "Don't add to this word, don't take away from this word." You see, my friends, God has placed a sacred, you could call it in the way of a very cheap illustration, God has placed a very sacred high-voltage electric fence around his word, around the 66 books of the Bible, and we are not to climb over that fence to take away from it, or to add to it I should say, and we're not to take away from the Bible and climb over that fence, God has built in destruction for those who do that. And that's why, my friends, that's why the Bible says that not many of you should become teachers because as such we will face a stricter judgment. There are consequences to the teaching of God's word. There are consequences to how you respond to the Gospel. There are consequences for the man who opens the word of God and if we had any sense, any clarity about the nature of the holiness of God, we would fear and tremble before the task every time that we come to it, there would be a sense of reverence, a sense of awe, a sense of fear in response to the great holiness of God and the significance that he has attached to his word and the significance of the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins, that he suffered and died on our behalf though he was the perfect, innocent, eternal Son of God. This just isn't a game. This isn't a game and when we say it's not a game, part of what we mean is that there is no room for you to trifle with error and there is no room for you to trifle with sin. When sin is pointed out in your life, you need to take it seriously. You need to respond earnestly and quickly and obediently to God and to his word lest the consequences of sin overtake you, lest Satan keep you in his evil clutch and drag you down to hell with him. It is no less than those things that are at stake in what we are discussing here tonight from God's word and I'm just not of a mind, not that I ever am but tonight in particular I'm just not in a mood to try to be humorous or funny with you. We come to you earnestly with the word of God tonight and pray that the Spirit of God would earnestly apply it your heart so that you

would respond in an earnest, sincere, candid manner recognizing that you are hearing these things in the presence of a holy God.

So it's with that spirit that we turn to these things. John has written this letter to help his readers as Christians live in the midst of a hostile world and what he says in this letter, what helped them in the past helps us today, and he gives several tests of discernment to help understand what the truth is and by the grace of God and by the help of the Holy Spirit, to apply it rightly to your own heart that you would know where you stand with God yourself and then be able to listen with a keen discernment to teaching that comes to you so that you would be able to separate the true from the false, the wheat from the chaff, the meat from the bones, so to speak, what John is writing to do for us.

So let me just start with the title of tonight's message. It's a question, sort of, and then I'm going to give you five questions to help you answer this question for yourself. So the title of tonight's message is this, "So You Call Yourself a Christian." You call yourself a Christian. Very well, I do too. I am a Christian, praise God through no good in me, through the mercy of God alone I am a Christian and I want to help you be able to answer these questions honestly so that you could know if you're a Christian or not because Christians go to heaven, everybody else goes to hell and that's the ultimate destiny, that's ultimately the only thing that matters in this life is the answer to this question. So we're going to talk to each other tonight, I'm going to talk to you more accurately, going to speak with you tonight on the presupposition that you call yourself a Christian. I'm not challenging that as I speak to so many of you here this evening but if you call yourself a Christian the Bible has an exhortation for you. It's found in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and it says, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless you fail the test?" Well, John gives us themes for us to consider that help us examine ourselves in a very clear, straightforward way. So as we contemplate that theme, you call yourself a Christian, here are five questions to help you test that claim in light of the word of God, five questions to help you test that claim for yourself, and the first three questions are going to be a lot of review and so we'll go through those pretty quickly and then we'll come to new material toward the end of the message tonight.

But question 1. This one may surprise you that we start here, but here's the question, question 1: do you fear God? Do you fear God? It is impossible for someone to be a Christian that does not have some manner of fear of God in him and we start with that question because it is where John starts the body of his letter. He says in 1 John 1:5 and 6, look at it with me, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." Here's why we start with the fear of God and why we start with that particular question in light of the structure of the letter of 1 John. John starts with this cornerstone assertion about the holiness of God. God is separate from sinners, holy, undefiled, innocent as Hebrews speaks about our Lord Jesus Christ, he is separate from them and he is a God of absolute moral purity. That has consequences for you and me. If we saw ourselves truly in the glaring and the blinding brilliance of the holiness of God which exceeds the

brilliance of the sun, if we saw ourselves in light of that and we saw our sin in contrast, it would be crushing to us and somewhere in the life of a true Christian is a recognition of the holiness of God and that he falls short of that holiness. God is holy and he will not allow sinners into his presence. Do you, therefore, here's the question, do you recognize something about the exalted nature of the character of God? Is he separate, high and lofty in your thinking or is he a commonplace deity that is no threat to you and really has very little to do with your life except to try to make you feel better and to make life go better when you run into some rough patches? You see, there is the way that you think about God is a reflection of whether you are truly in him or not.

A true Christian understands something about the truth of God and in Job 28, I want you to turn there with me for just a moment, keep your finger in 1 John because we'll go right back there in just a moment, but in Job 28:28, you'll find this statement, Job 28:28, it says this, it says, "And to man He said," God speaking, "'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'" Look at it again, a definition of the fear of God, "Behold, the fear of God is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding." Someone who understands the fear of God, someone – watch this – someone who understands the Gospel of Jesus Christ and has the Spirit of God dwelling in him responds to the holiness of God with adoration and with worship, and also with a spirit of obedience. You see, if you are living a life of sin, I can say something for certain to be true about you, if you are living a life of sin, if you're a person of deceit, a person of adultery, a person of covetousness, a person of false religion there's something to be said for you that is unalterably true: you do not fear God. You do not fear God, you could not possibly fear God because if you did, it would be reflected in the fact that you turn away from evil, it would be reflected in the fact that you would be repentant in the sight of the high and lofty one with whom you have to do. I had an opportunity in another place, not here in the Midwest, had opportunity to counsel a man who had fallen into adultery and I made this very point to him, I said, "Your fundamental problem, you got into this mess because you do not fear God. If you feared God, you would have turned away from that rather than living in it for months and months until you got caught."

So my friends, so it is with you and this should cause you to tremble, this should shake you up, this should shake you up, my friend. It should shake you up to realize that the fear of God is reflected in turning away from evil and when you persist in it, when you dabble in it, when you excuse it, when you hide it and cover it up and lie about it lest your sin be exposed, you are showing that you do not fear God and that is the mark of someone who is not a Christian. John said it plainly there in verse 6, didn't he, 1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." My friend, if you call yourself a Christian and yet you're living a life of sin, not only are you sinning in the outward actions of which you are now convicted but your sin is compounded by the fact that your claim to be a Christian in that kind of lifestyle is an accusation against God, it makes God out to be a liar. You are saying that God is not true. "I can have fellowship with Him and yet walk in this sin, walk in this lifestyle of darkness and not have it contradict the claim." No, no, it doesn't work that way and a true Christian who fears God would never try to handle life that way. He would never excuse himself at the expense of the holiness of God.

So you and I come to a central question right from the start that goes to the very fundamental nature of how you view life and the essential way in which you consider your place in the universe. Do you fear God or not? That's a yes or no question. Do you fear God or not? And if you say, "You know what? These things concern me. I'm compelled toward obedience even though I fall short and I do want to be holy and I do want to follow Christ but I do fall short. I acknowledge that," well, you are expressing the words of one who fears God. You're repentant, you're turning away from evil but as I've said so many times over the past several weeks, if you can just brush these things off like so much dandruff on your dress, then, my friend, your careless indifference should shock your conscience and frighten you into a recognition that things are not well with your soul and that you're in a grave danger that because your life exposes your lack of the fear of God.

So that's the first question: do you fear God? True Christianity, true Christians understand that God is holy, they give him reverence and it influences the way that they live. Christianity 101 there. I didn't give you any profound esoteric theology there. This is basic to what it means to be a Christian. So that was the first question: do you fear God? Question 2: do you confess that you are a sinner? Do you confess that you are a sinner, and this builds on the first question. If you fear God, if you see something about the reality of his holiness, it will expose your sin by comparison. The fact that by nature you are a sinner and that in your choices in life you are a sinner by what you do as well, and so the question is do you confess that you are a sinner because the fear of God exposes your sin to your conscience.

Look at verses 8 through 10 of chapter 1. Again this is really just review of things that we've studied in the past several days but in 1 John 1:8 it says this, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." Denial of sin, an indication that you're not a Christian. Open confession and acknowledgment of your sin is consistent with that claim to know Christ and to be in him. And let me just drill down a little bit more here with a personal illustration from a year or two before my own conversion many years ago that it was like this. If you had asked me, and there were a very few number of people in my life in those days who asked me this question, you know, they asked me, "Are you a Christian and what does that mean to you?" Well, I was able to stammer out something like Christ died for my sins and, you know, and in their kindness and their generous hearts they accepted that at face value. Had they probed more, if I had been honest with them and now just looking back at what the reality of my life was, you know what was really in my heart as I said that? What was really in my heart was a sense of self-righteousness that I was better than other people because I knew the sins that some people had committed and I had not committed those sins myself, and so I looked upon myself with a comparative sense of self-righteousness, that's what I really thought about myself in my heart even though I was confessing superficially with my mouth a brief acknowledgment of sin. What I want you to see here tonight, I don't want you to make that same kind of, to practice that kind

of self-deception on yourself first and foremost, and I would not have you practice that kind of self-deception on those that love you and care about you as well.

When we say do you confess that you're a sinner, we're not simply talking about a verbal, a superficial verbal acknowledgment because if you've been around our church for any length of time, Romans 3:23 is embedded in your mind, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Well, you know what? You can say that and kind of roll your eyes as you say, "Yeah, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. How soon can we move on to something else?" And say it with that kind of dismissive attitude that is a reflection of having no fear of God in your life whatsoever. When we talk about confessing sin here, we're talking about confessing it in light of the fear of God that says, "God is holy and I'm a ruined sinner before him apart from Christ and there is no good in me. I am spiritually bankrupt. I have no righteousness of my own. I cannot save myself. If I am not to go to hell and to be found in heaven, I must be saved by someone outside of myself because there is nothing in me to commend myself to God. He has no reason to accept me whatsoever. I am not comparatively better than any other sinner. I am equally ruined before a holy God and if I have not committed some sins that other people have committed, I'm honest enough to acknowledge that I have committed sins that they haven't." And so we're all bankrupt and the fact that I may not be an egregious sinner, a scandalous sinner doesn't change the fact that God sees me as someone deserving judgment apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, my friend, when we ask the question do you confess that you are a sinner, I'm not looking for a quick and easy answer to that. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm a sinner." No, no, no, that's not the way we answer that question. That's a question that calls for a sober, brokenhearted, tenderhearted acknowledgment, "Yes, I have sinned against a holy God. I have sinned against the One who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I have sinned against my Creator. I have sinned against the One who died for sinners like me. I don't love Him with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind and I don't love my neighbor as myself and that's not okay and I don't like the fact that I'm like that and therefore I'm calling upon the God whom I fear to show mercy to me in the Lord Jesus Christ." Friend, I'm asking you whether you confess your sin like that? We're being very direct and candid with each other here tonight, aren't we? We are getting down to the brass tacks. We're dealing with things in the most earnest way that we know how. I am speaking to you tonight as a dying man speaking to dying men and we realize that the real issues of life are eternal in their consequence, they are far-reaching in their scope and so we're not playing games here tonight and we're getting down to the essence of the nature of the true answers to these questions. Do you fear God? Do you confess that you are a sinner? And mean it, do you mean it when you say that? That's the question that we are asking.

You see, no one who says the good in his life offsets the bad is a Christian. You're not a Christian if you think that about yourself. "Well, the good outweighs the bad and therefore God will accept me." No. No, there's no one good, there's not even one. There is no one righteous. No one who thinks that they're good enough to go to heaven goes to heaven. It doesn't work that way, there is this serious profound recognition falling short of the glory of God and taking that seriously and recognizing that it is a serious matter,

that Scripture is not joking, God is not bluffing when he says that his wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, for even though they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks but they became futile in their speculations, Romans 1.

So only those who confess their sin could possibly be a Christian. You could confess your sin and not be a Christian. We'll go into that more in the next point, but unless you're confessing your sin earnestly in a spirit of brokenness, you are not a Christian. I can't be any more direct or plain than that, can I? If you do not earnestly seriously confess the fact that you are a sinner, you are not a Christian. I don't care how many times you've been inside a church. I don't care if you're a member of a church. I don't care how long you've claimed to be a Christian. If your confession of sin is not earnest and serious and profound, you're not a Christian. You couldn't be because Jesus himself said in Luke 5:32, "I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." He's come to call sinners and if you harbor delusions of self-righteousness, the call of Christ has not come to you. If you think you're righteous, go your way in your righteousness, just don't besmirch the name of Christ by claiming that you're a Christian as you do because Christ came to save sinners, he came to call sinners, he came to show mercy to broken-hearted guilty people rather than to affirm self-righteous, self-congratulatory men in their self-delusion.

So I ask you: do you confess that you're a sinner? Well, that brings us to our third point, there's a sequence to the way that these develop. Do you fear God? Do you confess that you're a sinner? Point 3: do you trust Christ alone for salvation? Do you trust Christ alone for salvation? In light of what we have already said here this evening, it should be obvious to you what I'm about to say. A true Christian relies on Jesus Christ alone to reconcile him to a holy God. Because God is holy and because we are not, we need someone else to reconcile us, we need a mediator, we need a great high priest, we need a Savior that is beyond our power to control. We cannot save ourselves. You cannot save yourself from sin, my friend, and so a true Christian is trusting in Christ alone for his salvation.

Let's look at a few passages here in 1 John that we've already seen. In chapter 1, verse 7 it says, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He does the cleansing. His blood is the cleansing agent on our guilt and sin. Then in chapter 2 it talks about Jesus Christ being our Advocate, our Helper before the throne of a holy God. It speaks of him in verse 2, that, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins"; that Christ is the one who turns away the wrath of God from our sins. So you see repeatedly in these opening verses, these opening 12 verses of this letter John referring to Christ who is the one whose blood cleanses us from sin, that we rest in him as our Helper, as our Advocate, as our propitiation, not in our own righteousness but trusting in him alone for reconciliation with God.

So as we've said many times here, the person and work of Jesus Christ is the only place where a sinner can find salvation. Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect righteousness during

his time on earth. He went to the cross and he offered up that perfect life as a sacrifice to God, a sin-bearing sacrifice to God on behalf of his people so that whoever believes in him and receive him and his work as their only hope for salvation, those are the ones who are true Christians, those are the ones who truly belong to him. You see, it's by grace that you've been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, not as a result of works lest anyone should boast. It's a gift of God. The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So when you see these things, you understand, a true Christian understands that his hope and that his trust for reconciliation with God, he places it outside of himself, he places it in someone else, he places it in the Lord Jesus Christ and that is his only hope for reconciliation with a holy God.

You know, the question is often asked, you know, you die, you stand before God outside the gates of heaven so to speak and he says, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" Well, the answer to that is not, "I've been a pretty good person." The answer is not, "The good outweighs the bad." The answer is not, "I'm not as bad as some of these other scoundrels that come up before You, God." No, the answer is, "I'm trusting alone in Jesus Christ for my righteousness and for the forgiveness of my sin. And God, You Yourself promised that the one who believes in Your Son would have eternal life and that's what I've done. I come to you clinging to Christ. God, I don't bring anything in my own hands. Nothing in my hands do I bring to entice You to let me into Your heaven. I'm believing Your Son, I'm trusting in what You provided for salvation and I do it with the free acknowledgment that apart from Him I would be utterly lost. God, so I am dependent alone on the mercy of Jesus Christ as I stand before You." Friend, will that be your confession before a holy God? If your confession is anything else, you're not a Christian no matter what you might call yourself because a true Christian trusts in Christ alone for his salvation.

So those three questions have kind of taken us through our past studies so far in John. Do you fear God? God is light. Do you confess that you're a sinner? The one who says he has no sin is a liar and the truth is not in him. Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation? Christ is our Advocate, Christ is our propitiation. And you see how those themes all interlock with one another to present a consistent picture of what the reality of a true Christian is and the way that he, and what he confesses from the depths of his heart. Well, as we turn now and make our pivot to chapter 2, verse 3, what we see is that there are life consequences to that confession. There are life consequences to the reality of having been born again. It inevitably and always shows itself in one way or another in the manner that we are about to see.

Now as we think about that and as you continue in chapter 2, what we see is this, is that salvation, and more specifically justification, the gift of justification in salvation changes your legal standing before God. Before God the Judge, you are accepted and declared righteous in his sight based on the merit of Jesus Christ. God pardons all of your sin for the sake of the blood of his Son. He accepts you as positively righteous for the sake of the obedience of his Son, and so to be justified is to have a legal standing that passes the judgment bar of God. Your sins are forgiven, you are accepted as righteous. That is a legal standing. It is perfect the moment that you believe. It can never get better. It can

never be worse. Your sin does not diminish that legal standing. Your obedience doesn't improve it because it is based entirely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Okay? That's justification and that is central to true salvation but here's the thing, at the moment of salvation when God saves you, he does more than justify you, he also regenerates you, he causes you to be born again. God gives you a new nature when he saves you. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell you and there is this radical transformation of your inner man that takes place in true salvation and the Bible calls that regeneration. Regeneration. You are given new life in salvation in the same way that you are given a new legal standing. New legal standing, new life in Christ. Different aspects of the same comprehensive gift of God's salvation. And regeneration means that your life will change, your life will be somehow begin to transform and Christ will begin to conform you to his own image. You were saved so that you would become like Jesus Christ, you weren't simply saved so that you wouldn't go to hell, and you certainly weren't saved so that you could continue on in the same life of sin only now with a little bit of Jesus added onto it. No, Jesus saved you in order to deliver you from the penalty of sin in hell and in this life he also saved you to deliver you from the power of sin which is something that occurs increasingly over the course of time, and regeneration is the reality that guarantees that that will happen. At the moment of salvation, God imparts to the believing sinner divine life so that he will repent of sin, believe in Christ and serve Christ in newness of life. The truth of the matter is that you must be born again in order to believe. You don't believe and then God grants you new life. God doesn't give you his Holy Spirit in response to an act that you did, the Holy Spirit brings new life to you and in response to that work of the Holy Spirit, you repent of sin and believe in Christ for your salvation. You see, you're dead in sin apart from Christ and you must be made alive in order to believe. It could be no other way. A dead, lifeless, disobedient, Satan-bound sinner has no capacity whatsoever to generate his own faith in order to save his own soul. You must be saved by an act of God upon you from outside of yourself, but when God saves you, my friend, here's the point for tonight, you're no longer dead in sin, you're alive to righteousness and that changes you, it changes the way that you think, it changes the way that you love, it changes the way that you talk, it changes the way that you live.

Let's look at a few verses here in the rest of 1 John to see this. We're still under the heading of point 3, do you trust in Christ alone for your salvation, and if you do then you have a new nature and that's expressed in verses like 1 John 2:20. It says, "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know." You have an anointing. The Spirit of God dwells within you. He is upon you. Chapter 3, verse 1, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and we are." We're no longer children of the devil as a believer, we are a child of God, we are on the receiving end of his love, the receiving end of his Spirit. Verse 9, chapter 3, 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." The idea being there is that he cannot continue in his prior life of sin that he had before his conversion. That's an impossibility because the Spirit of God has been born within him and the Spirit of God if he does nothing else in you, he does this, he makes his presence known, he makes his presence felt, he manifests the reality of a holy God in the lives of those that he saves and it shows in the transformation of life that follows. Even if that transformation is imperfect and incomplete along the

way, and it is, there still is a change. There's still a reality of something different, something that conforms to the life of God. Something, my friend, something. If you're trusting Christ alone for your salvation, if you've really been born again, then it shows in the way that you live. Look at chapter 3, verse 24, the last half of the verse, "We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." In chapter 4, verse 13, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."

So if you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, the Spirit of God has come to indwell you, and if that is true, then you are a new creation, the old things have passed away, behold new things have come. And because that is true of every Christian, regeneration is true of every true Christian, it's true of everyone who has truly trusted Christ alone for salvation, because that's true, there are always consequences, there are always effects of faith. Faith without works is dead, being by itself, James 2 says. So while we are justified by faith alone, true faith brings with it a transformation of life that follows upon the act of believing.

Now all of that undergirds our answer to the fourth question for this evening. All of that discussion of regeneration undergirds our answer to a fourth question and it's this, my friend: do you keep God's commands? Do you keep God's commands? Because a true Christian is born again, salvation brings an ethical impact on the true Christian. Look at verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2 now. Chapter 2, verse 3 and 4,

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

You see, a life pattern of obedience, a principle of submission, of willing, glad, loving submission to the word of God is the mark of every true Christian. The Spirit of God who inspired the word of God plants a love for that word in the heart of everyone that he comes to indwell. That's the way that it works, and so it's emphasizing the fact that a believer is oriented in his life toward obedience. It's what he's inclined to. It's what he responds to. It's what he really wants even when he falls short. It's what he wants, he wants to obey. This is more than just outward compliance with some external rules that, you know, a group of pastors made up somewhere 30 or 40 or 80 years ago. It's more than compliance with an externally imposed sense of righteousness by religious leaders. That's not what we're talking about. That has nothing to do with what we're talking about whatsoever. What we're talking about, more importantly what John is talking about here is a heart disposition of love and submission toward the word of God, toward the law of God. You want to obey because that's what pleases your Father. You want to obey because that's what's right, that's what's good and pure and holy is that you would live life in accordance to the moral law of God, not to earn your salvation, we've already said you can't do that. You're a sinner, you can't save yourself with your obedience. That's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is the one that God has saved, the one that God has planted his Spirit in is going to show a heart affections that is oriented toward obedience to his word. So my friend, when I ask you the question do you keep

God's commandments, that's the question. It plunges deep into who you are, not simply what do you do on the outside that men can observe.

So God gives us a new heart that wants to obey and as a result of that, my friend, this corollary, this consequence is necessarily true: a person who simply does not want to obey God's word is not a Christian. It doesn't matter if you say that you are. John couldn't be more specific on that than he is in chapter 2, verse 4. Look at it again, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." By contrast, verse 5,

5 ... whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

So John is not talking about spiritual perfection here, he's simply making a fundamental statement that faith produces a spirit of obedience in the true Christian. So my friend, I have the responsibility to ask you: do you keep God's commands like that? In the core of who you are, is there a desire for obedience? I understand that you fall short. That's not what we're talking about here, the question is, is that desire in your heart, are there aspects of your life where you can see yourself somehow in one way or another growing in righteousness, growing in the fruit of the Spirit, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Is there something like that in you? The utter absence of it is the mark of someone who is still dead in sin. It could be no other way.

Well, John goes on and speaks about these things. Let me just deal with one possible problem, it's actually a common problem. Let me just deal with it very briefly here. Someone might well ask, someone of tender conscience and a true Christian might well ask, "Well, does my struggle with sin mean that I'm not a Christian? Does the fact that I fall into disobedience, is that an indication that I'm not a Christian, then?" No, that's not what we're talking about here. John has already said in chapter 1, I repeat myself here, John has already said in chapter 1 that the one who claims to be without sin is the one who is not a Christian. Part of the questions that we've been asking here is that we are confessing that we are sinners. And so of course there's somehow going to be, there's going to be aspects of growth for a true Christian to enter into, there will be times when we sin. John said if anyone sins, chapter 2, verse 1, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. So the whole tenor of this is presupposing that there are pockets of disobedience that we struggle with, and so the struggle with sin or – watch this – a particularly besetting sin in your life is not a necessary contradiction to your claim to be a Christian. People have areas of weakness in their lives and it's common, and I want to just speak to encourage you true Christians with this. I know how the mechanics of your heart tend to think in this way. When you struggle with a particular sin in your life, you tend to view everything about your claim to be a Christian through the prism of that one sin and because you struggle there, then you have at best a weak assurance if not a complete lack of assurance because you're struggling with one particular sin. Well, here's what you need to see by way of truth and by way of encouragement, this sense of obedience, this sense of love for God is a comprehensive approach to life. There may be

an aspect of disobedience in your life but, my Christian friend, let me ask you this: isn't it true that you love Christ despite your sin? Don't you see him as worthy? Don't you long to be like him despite the presence of that sin? Well, do you know what? That's the mark of a true Christian. A child of Satan doesn't harbor that kind of love for Christ. He's dead to it. He doesn't care about those things.

Let's ask another question, those of you with a particularly besetting sin: wouldn't you if you could just snap your fingers, if you could just get rid of it instantly by an act of your will, if you could do that, wouldn't you do that? You would just get rid of it so that it never bothered you again? You would do that if you could. That's the mark of a Christian. A non-Christian loves his sin and holds it close to his chest and he luxuriates in it and it's what he wants and it's what he loves and what he lives for. Your besetting sin isn't like that, is it, my Christian brother, my Christian sister? You don't feel that way about your sin at all, you'd be rid of it if only you could. Here is the reality, sometimes when a person is born again, God takes away certain aspects of sin in their life and he does it dramatically and almost instantly. You know, I had a very foul mouth, I hate to even, it makes me shudder to remember it, I had a very foul mouth before my conversion. It just sickens me now as I'm standing here to remember what used to come out of my mouth. When I was saved, I mean, the next day it was gone. My entire pattern of speech changed instantly. I didn't try to do that, it was just something that God did for me. Now there were other struggles in my life, struggles with arrogance, maybe struggles with anger from time to time, other difficulties that didn't, he didn't take away right away, and those things have humbled me over the course of my life as I've seen that I'm not, you know, I'm not a super-sanctified saint, I'm just an ordinary Christian like you are, I just happen to be here teaching. God takes some of our sins away, for some of us he takes them away instantly, dramatically and it's a true mark of our salvation. Other sins he lets us wrestle with, he helps us with them little by little and it humbles us and it teaches us not to trust in ourselves, it teaches us to come in humble confession, to rely on Christ and what you find as you go on in the Christian life is you might not look much different one month to the next but do you know what? You look back at your life five years from where you were and you say, "I've changed. God's done a work in me over the past five years. I didn't see it, it was so incremental, it was so silent, it seemed so small day to day, but I look back at it now and I'm really different than what I was five years ago, even though that sin hasn't been completely conquered in my life."

My friend, that's what you need to see, that's what I want you to see. There may be a besetting sin in your life, that doesn't mean that you're not a Christian. The fact that you hate it, that you want to be rid of it, that you get up when you sin, you confess it, you confess it again and you continue in the battle against it even though it seems like you're losing more than your winning. My friend, may Christ help you and comfort you and encourage you right in this moment with the recognition that that struggle against sin is a mark of the reality of your salvation, not a contradiction of it because the one who hates sin is showing evidence of new life even if sometimes the sin seems to have the upper hand. So we don't want to just focus on one sin alone and evaluate all of our salvation by that one metric, rather we look at the totality of life, we see what we're trusting, we see that there's a fear of God in us, we see a desire for obedience, a love for Christ, and those

things help us interpret that besetting sin in a greater context that would affirm you as a believer in Jesus Christ. These are wonderful truths. These are things worth talking about for two hours, you know, at the rate I'm going that's probably what I'm going to do here, but they are just such matters of such great profound importance.

Having said those things to my brothers and sisters in Christ, let me just go back to those of you that call yourself a Christian but you're cold, you're callous, you're sarcastic toward the things of God, you can joke about sin and it doesn't bother you, you can watch other people sin in the entertainment that you use and you just drink it in and you have no compunction of conscience against that, you're the one that needs to be concerned. You have no desire for God's word. You have no love for Christ. I feel like I'm standing this moment on the brink of hell looking at you dangling over the gaping jaws of destruction and wondering if God will ever awaken your heart and if you'll ever show any desire for these things or not, or if you'll just toy with it all the way to the time when the rope snaps and you fall into destruction never to be received again, never to be retrieved again. Is that what will become of you after hearing the truth of God's word like this, or will you cry out for mercy to God and ask him to save your wretched miserable soul? I can't do that for you but I can tell you this, I can tell you this, my hands are innocent of your blood if you reject Christ in light of these things. Your blood is on your own head at this point.

We come to a fifth question, fifth and final question for tonight. We've asked four questions. Do you fear God? Do you confess that you're a sinner? Do you trust in Christ alone for your salvation? Do you keep God's commands? Do you keep God's commands? Fifth and final question: do you love Christians? Do you love Christians? Salvation has a social impact on us. It changes the nature of our relationships and specifically how we interact with the people of God.

Look at verse 7 with me, chapter 2, verse 7. He says,

7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

What is this commandment of which he is speaking? He goes on and says, verse 9, "The one who says he is in the Light," there's that holiness of God, the nature of God from chapter 1, verse 5, this light thing comes up again. Verse 9,

9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

What is this old commandment, new commandment thing that John is talking about here? He's dealing with the same principle, it is the principle of love as shown by the context as

he explains as he goes on. The Old Testament commanded the people of God to love one another. Leviticus 19:18 says exactly that, he says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So in that sense it was an old commandment because it had been with the people of God from the time of Moses but it's a new commandment as John writes, it's a new commandment because Jesus Christ has now come, Christ has manifested love and revealed it to a fuller extent, and he has made the supreme sacrifice of love and now he calls his people to enter into that same spirit of love with one another. So new situations, the coming of Christ called for a new application of the old commandment is the sense of the passage. What you and I want to see here tonight is this, is that a lack of love for other Christians is a contradiction of someone's claim to be a Christian. You know, we titled this message "So You Call Yourself a Christian," well, the question then is, is do you love other Christians? It's an inevitable mark of true life is that if the Spirit of God dwells in me and he dwells in you, then the sharing of that common life is going to give us a common affinity for one another that expresses itself in mutual love and mutual concern. Because we have the same Spirit, we have the same kind of love for one another and that's why participation in a local church is so important to the extent that you can find one, I'm speaking beyond the walls of Truth Community Church right now, but somewhere there's a desire in the heart of a true Christian for fellowship and to express love for each other, and a lack of love contradicts a claim to be in the light.

Look at verse 11 with me,

11 ... the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

My friend, look at that verse one more time. In the context of love, you see the lack of love, you see hatred defined in this triplet of darkness, darkness, darkness. If you just can't get along with other Christians, if you just can't participate in love with your family or with your circle of professing believing friends, my friend, you're not a Christian. You are not a Christian and you've got to stop making excuses for it and say, "Well, that's just the way I am." Well, do you know what? The way you are is a child of the devil. You're not a child of God. You're not a child of Christ if your life is just utterly lacking this kind of love for one another. And yeah, I'm animated, yeah, I'm upset right now because these things matter and if you don't care enough about your soul to be exercised about it, I do. I do and apparently John did also. Three times darkness, darkness, darkness.

They have not seen the light even though they claim that they have. Look at chapter 2, verse 9, "one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." It is perfectly possible, it is common to claim to be a Christian and actually have no love for other believers at all, and when that happens, you may call yourself a Christian but you are not. You are a liar. You are guilty before God. You are on your way to damnation unless you repent and confess your sins to Christ in the way that we're talking about here tonight.

This love expresses itself in practical ways. Look at chapter 3, verse 16, the latter context of this letter helps us understand the earlier context of it. In verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." The brethren meaning the circle of Christians, true Christians. "He who does not love abides in death."

Darkness, darkness, darkness, 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," meaning Christ, "laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." There's a point where what you say with your mouth matters only incidentally, and I like to tell people this, if you see someone who makes a profession of Christ with his lips that is contradicted by the testimony of his life, always 100% of the time believe the life not the lips. The life tells the truth. The lips can lie, the life does not. Jesus said, "You'll know them by their fruits," Matthew 7. A good tree bears good fruit, a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Up and down, left and right, top to bottom this matter is covered.

So you may call yourself a Christian and God bless you and, you know, to the extent that I can, I'll accept you on that basis of profession, not that, you know, how I receive you is the point here, but what you must understand and what you must examine yourself for is that the reality of being a Christian produces certain attitudes and actions in the lives of a true believer and if those things are absent, what you say about yourself, the fact that you call yourself a Christian means nothing. It means nothing. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord did we not,' and I'll say, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'" Should I say it again? Should I say this again? Jesus is not bluffing. God's word is true. God means what he says and he has said these things plainly. He said them plainly. If you harden your heart and walk away, there's no excuse for you, there's no escaping. There's no excuse, there's no escape just the certain expectation of a terrifying judgment that will come on the ungodly, Hebrews 10. I grieve for some of you. I grieve over you. I told you last time I worry over you and tonight I'm in a grieving mood, I guess, because these things are so essential.

So my friend, are you cold and indifferent to Christ? You need to come back to these questions. Are you a Christian that struggles with assurance? Well, let me encourage you to start with this: go back to the reality that you know to be true, that Jesus Christ died for sinners, and ask yourself whether you believe that fundamental truth. Do you believe that Christ died for sinners just as an objective matter? Do you believe that Christ was the eternal Son of God, was and is the eternal Son of God? And that he died for sinners to deliver them from sin into eternal life, do you believe that? That's the starting point. It's not about anything subjective inside, it's not about introspection. Look outside yourself and ask whether you believe that. And I've talked to people, I've talked to some of you and had this conversation, it's sweet to remember it, "Yeah, I believe that. I don't know what to think about myself inside but I do believe that." Well, grab hold of that because the one who believes in the Son has eternal life the Bible says, and as you start from that position of strength, than you start to say, "You know, I understand it's all imperfect but

there is a fear of God in me. I do confess my sin. O God, I am trusting in Christ alone. God, help me to believe more. I believe, help my unbelief. God, I see a desire for obedience even though I fall short. God, I do find the fellowship of the saints sweet and precious even though I don't know what they want with me." Those are the marks that come forth in the life of a true Christian.

So for all of us unsaved and saved alike, we start with the holiness of God that leads to a profound confession of sin. That confession of sin and the recognition of our bankruptcy causes us to put our faith in Christ alone because we know we can't save ourselves. Having been born again, we see things flowing from our life, we see fruit that flows keeping with repentance, obedience and love, and more things that we will see next time. My friend, I've spoken to you earnestly, I've raised my voice sometimes, I've lowered it sometimes, my task is done tonight. I commend you to the word of God, to the word of his grace which is able to sanctify you and to give you an inheritance among the saints.

Let's pray together.

Father, have mercy on us one and all. In the name of Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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