

1st John

Practicing Righteousness

“Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God” (I John 3:1).

That is in our reading today, and we are going to use it. We sing it, we have it memorized, and it is in our hearts, but occasionally I think we experience it. Even this morning it was quoted, and the theme when we broke bread was on joy. It is that sense of amazement that we are the children of God. This is God’s love, and as we behold it, we are just amazed. I want to begin by reading a verse at the beginning of I John, and it has to do with joy again.

“That which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is indeed with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we to you that your joy may be full” (I John 1:3).

This whole book of I John is on fellowship, and it is a joy to fellowship. All this morning as we were breaking bread I felt it is such a joy to be gathered like this, sharing in God’s Word together, discovering Christ together, and experiencing Christ right now. It is the joy of the Lord, and it becomes our strength and everything that we are doing.

There is one more verse which is more on our topic that we will be focusing on right now which gives the statement. It is the beginning of this section.

“If ye know that he is righteous, know that everyone who practices righteousness is begotten of him” (I John 2:29).

Let’s pray together:

Lord, we come to You, and we just worship You in all that You have called us as children of God, that You have set us apart to join in this fellowship. Lord, we just give ourselves over to You right now, and we give this time over to You and pray that You would make our joy full. May You grant us fellowship with the Father and the Son right now and fellowship with each other. As we are in Your Word, Lord, we pray that eternal life inside of us would rise up and You would complete us and fill us with Your joy. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

We are actually at part 6 of I John, but I recognize that we have forgotten everything else that we have talked about in I John, and that is completely okay. For this time though we are going to remember just one thing, which is fellowship, and we are narrowing it down to practicing righteousness. We are in a brand-new section so it is okay if we have forgotten everything else. Now practicing righteousness is an aspect of fellowship, and it is not going to be like what we expect. John is going to talk about practicing righteousness in his letter, and he is focused on the experience of fellowship. We have to set aside a lot of our concepts of what it might look like because the way of the Lord is higher than the way of man. So we will see that as we look into these Scriptures. This section goes from the last verse of chapter 2 all the way to chapter 4:6. It seems like a long section but some parts of it go by very fast as he is just connecting the dots and

explaining things and making it easy to understand. But all of this is a fellowship experience of doing righteousness, practicing righteousness, and he is calling us into this.

Fellowship

Fellowship is based on eternal life, and I just want to narrow it down into this righteous section. That verse I just read earlier is right here. You know He is righteous; now that is the part of God that has to do with eternal life. God is righteous, and this is something that we have received and is the very life of God. Then our part of it in which we fellowship is that we practice righteousness. So you can tell that the ones who are practicing righteousness are born again, that they have been begotten of God because they are doing it by the eternal life that they have received. So in the righteousness of God there is both eternal life and there is fellowship. Basically, our fellowship, the doing of righteousness, our practicing righteousness is that we grab from that eternal life which we have received, and then out from that, practicing righteousness comes about. It has to work that way. It has to be from the depths of eternal life that our works of righteousness come about, and so this is what it is meant to be like.

Then it is fellowship. If it is doing right things, it may or may not be fellowship. What we are not talking about is just the mere actions that are not really bad, not just mere actions that are good actions, but we are talking about something where we join in the life which is righteous because God Himself is righteous. Then by living with that life we fellowship with Him, and in fellowship we practice righteousness.

Now here is something that may seem different with abiding and with fellowship. This one requires us to be brought into some action. Normally, if you think of abiding, you may think of relaxing which is really the main part of abiding it seems, at least relaxing from your own dead actions. But in that abiding comes some fellowship, and at some point the Lord inside of you, the life inside of you is saying, "Let's do something together," and that is this part of fellowship.

Oftentimes, our fellowship with the Lord, especially at the beginning, comes when we get right with the Lord, we get back to the Lord, we repent of our sins. We have covered that talking about walking in the light. It is getting back on the track, and then we are going to grow as we abide in Him. We start to obey and we are beginning to be with Him. But we are to stay with Him, stick together with Him which is a big part of our fellowship. We find ourselves in the light, and there He is.

This part of fellowship takes us on an adventure with the Lord; we are to do something together with Him. We are called into something together with Him. I think it is actually not a common fellowship experience unfortunately, and maybe because so many of us have had bad experiences with doing good things. We have done it the wrong way, so we get afraid of doing good things. We get afraid because we do not think of it as fellowship. Mainly, we think of fellowship as that of taking a step-back experience and just beholding the Lord and enjoying Him. And if somebody begins to talk about doing something, you know that just leads to dead works, and it is going to be terrible. Instead, if the Lord talks about doing something, it is not going to be dead works; it is going to be practicing righteousness. So we are called into something.

Some of us lean one way or the other, and I think in this section it is very helpful. He gives a well-balanced instruction on the practice or the experience of practicing righteousness. Basically, it is how-to-do-good works with the Lord. He covers all the different areas that we have problems with. Here is another Scripture with these phrases that is the topic.

In chapter 3:7 it says, “He that practices righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

So here is another very similar verse, but the one who is actually doing this in fellowship, you know that one is righteous, and God is righteous. We are matching up as the children of God, reflecting the life of God, and reflecting the face of God.

“Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God” (I John 3:10b).

This is all from the section that we are reading today. Now we are in trouble. Are you not of God? We are going to get into trouble in this whole section. This is maybe the most difficult section of I John. If you read a lot of commentaries they all are scared of this section, as all of us are. We search it, we read it and phrases like this come up. But let’s keep one thing in mind. We are talking about fellowship. Sometimes I am not in fellowship but sometimes I am. Does that mean I am not a child of God for eternity? It has nothing to do with it. If you want to learn about being a child of God, it is found in the gospel of John. It teaches you how to become a child of God. It teaches you how to live in the good of being a child of God in the first letter of John. So everything that he is saying is to believers, and he is just talking in a realistic way that you are not always walking with the Lord.

If you are stunted from practicing righteousness, if you will not go forward with the Lord, it is that you are not of God right then. You can be in Christ but not of Christ, just like we say that we are in the world but not of the world. You can be definitely born again, but you are not about it right now. So if you are not practicing righteousness, and the Lord is actually leading us into this and wanting to fellowship this way, our fellowship is stunted so we are not all about the Lord right then. We are not in that fellowship.

You can look in your heart and say that you do not know of any sin. It is like in the Song of Songs; He is drawing us away, and He is leaping on the mountains calling us to resurrection works. It is like He is saying to get out of the bed and let’s do something. It has been enjoyable to spend face to face time with Him, but now let’s do something together. So that is the Lord with us sometimes, and you begin to sense something is wrong. Sometimes, if it is not some specific sin, He is calling us to something more, calling us to do something. Unfortunately, the ones who actually talk about it are usually the younger believers or the believers that lean towards carnality, and it gives a bad rep towards works. There are the movers and shakers among us, and they need to do something. Then the wise fellowship ones hold back and dare not do anything. So we end up with these two sides of things, and I think the Lord would bring it together and show us the right way together. It does not have to be carnal, but it does have to be Christ, and it does need to go forward or else we are not of God.

Doing Righteous Things

We can say that practicing is the same thing as doing. So in other parts of the Scripture it is translated a little differently. For instance, in Matthew 3 in the call to repentance from John the Baptist it says, “Produce therefore fruit worthy of repentance.” This word produce is the same one as practicing. For practicing righteousness here is to produce, do the works of repentance in order to show that you have repented. That is an action item right there.

Another one is in Revelation 2:5 which is the call to remember your first love, repent and get back to it. “Remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works.” This word “do” is our word practice, practicing righteousness. It is the same thing.

We have to realize that practicing righteousness is not the same thing as being righteous. So if you just look at the general topic of righteousness, we know that God is righteous, so nobody gets confused about that. But we also have probably learned that our righteousness is Christ Himself, and that is how God has made us righteous. These are all the truths that are solid that can keep us steady and assured that all our righteousness is bound up in the Person of Christ. But there is something about actually doing righteous things, and when we talk about practicing righteousness it is that—doing the righteous things.

In Revelation 19 I think this was mentioned this morning when we were breaking bread, that the bride has made herself ready, and it was given to her to be clothed in fine linen bright and pure. The fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. This is a great translation in Darby. It might say in some versions “the righteous acts of the saints.” The clothing of that bride who makes herself ready is not just the clothing of Christ. She has a garment of Christ; that is how she has been made a virgin and ready for marriage. But then she makes herself ready by doing things together with the Lord, practicing righteousness. It is the righteousnesses of the saints.

Just a side note here; when the Lord actually comes on His white horse for the battle, it says, “He judges and makes war in righteousness,” and then there is a group of believers behind Him. It is His army behind Him from heaven that follow, and they are clad in white, pure, fine linen. This is making war in righteousness, and this fine linen upon those saints is not just the garment of their salvation. It is the garment of the righteousnesses of the saints. When you read in that battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19, you see the army behind the Lord coming on their white horses with garments which are similar to His. Those garments on top of their undergarments are Christ as their righteousness, but then there is the righteousnesses of the saints. It is that they have fellowshiped with Him in righteousness. They have made war in righteousness today. They have overcome today in doing these righteous things. Therefore, they get these special outfits; the bride has made herself ready. I am just making the point that practicing righteousness is the action. It is the doing of righteousness.

In Psalm 23 there is another verse which we have probably memorized. “He leads me in the path of righteousness for His name’s sake.” Again this is different than He has made me righteous. Just in being sure of salvation has taken a long time for all of us to be relaxed and realizing I am righteous because Christ is righteous; He is my righteousness. We have to hold on to that especially now if we talk about doing righteous things. We have to hang onto that milk of the

Word realizing it is so good. Taste and see that the Lord is good; He is our righteousness. But He is going to lead us on a path, and that path is the path of righteousness. We are taking steps and we are doing righteous things.

This is just a sampling from the section we are in today. We will read this because this is the action item; this is the example. This is actually what we are talking about, not just using the words, but this is it.

I John 3:17-18: "But whoso may have the world's substance, (like you have clothing or money or food) and sees his brother having need and shuts up his bowels from him, how abides the love of God in him? Children let us not love with word nor with tongue but in deed and in truth."

This is almost like James when he says, "You say that you have faith, but show me your faith by what you actually do. You say that you have love for the brethren, but show it by deed and in truth." This is practicing righteousness. It does not negate the sense of the life of love or the being righteous which you have. And you say that you love your brethren but they have need. Are you willing to lay down your life for them and actually help them? This is common understanding. I just wanted to make that very clear that when we are talking about practicing righteousness, we are in the mode of doing something together with the Lord.

Now we are going to spend time in the Scriptures section by section looking at this. So we are all the way here in chapter 2:29-31a:

"If you know that He is righteous, know that every one who practices righteousness is begotten of him. See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God."

This is kind of the beginning statement. This is almost like a charge as in chapter 1:5 where he says, "This is the message, God is light. In him there is no darkness."

All the way up to the end of chapter 2 he is talking about walking in the light. So this is our statement right here. "If you are practicing righteousness, you are begotten because he is righteous. God is righteous and we are called to practice righteousness."

Right after that it says you are begotten. We know if we are practicing righteousness, we know that we are righteous because everyone who practices righteousness is begotten of Him because God is righteous.

You are born of Him, and you find yourself in fellowship with the Lord. You are practicing righteousness because you just did something together with Him. The joy of the Lord filled you because you are fellowshiping, and you are doing these things. But it is from the eternal life within, and you know if you are doing that then you are born of Him. One way to be sure that you have eternal life is that when you do these things you do it together with Him by His life, by His strength. That is an assurance of salvation and eternal life.

I John 5:13 says, "I have written these things to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God." It is this type of experience. I know I have eternal life because I just practiced righteousness with Him. Now when you realize that you have eternal

life, that you were begotten of Him, you just burst into a joyful praise. “Behold, what manner of love.” That is what this is starting off with in chapter 3. It is directly connected to the realization that I am begotten of Him because I just practiced righteousness because He is righteous. There is no way I would have practiced righteousness except by the life of God. Sometimes when you walk away from doing something with the Lord, you are just in amazement. It is not always pride; sometimes you are just amazed; Did that come out of my mouth? Did that action actually happen to me? Did I really turn the other cheek? Was I really gentle when normally I am not? We are so familiar with not practicing righteousness or trying to do right and failing or barely making it, but when it is the Lord, it is just like it flows and you are amazed and you know you are born of God. In this joyful expression we are called the children of God, for this reason the world knows us not. This is in verses 1-2: “For this reason the world knows us not because it knew him not, Beloved, we are children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been manifested.”

The world does not know us; it does not understand us. Now at the very end of this section it says that the reason the world knows us not is because it knew him not. “They are of the world, for this reason they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God, he that knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us” (1 John 4:5-6). The world is not going to understand when we get into practicing righteousness because it has to do with being born of God and it has to do with eternal life. The world does not understand it, and worldly Christians do not understand it. The world’s mindset does not understand it. If someone is of the world and not of God, who are Christians, and they look at how you do things and how you hesitate doing things and how you go forward doing things, they are not going to understand, and we just have to be okay with that. This has to be part of our renewed mind because we are doing things based on being children of God. There are no more of these messages being received into our hearts from worldly concepts such as thinking you need to do good things and stop doing bad things. All of that worldly mindset has to be set aside, and those that preach that, and those that have received that word are not going to understand.

We have expressed our joy, we are children of God, we are walking in the family of God, and you must realize unbelievers and worldly believers are going to despise what you are doing. You are not going to have enough works or you are going to have too many works. You are going to take up too many things so you don’t have time set aside for yourself. There are too many worldly mindsets that are going to come at you, and you just have to let them flow off your back like water off a duck’s back. You just have to let it go because if someone is of the world, they are not going to understand. They are not going to hear what you are saying. But if someone is of God then you can fellowship together and your joy is made full. You know that you are doing these things together with the Lord, both not doing things and doing things, because it is all based on the Lord.

People do not understand you because they did not understand the Lord Jesus. “Why don’t You go up to the feast? Now is the time to go up to the feast.” It does not make sense. “Why don’t you show yourself as the Messiah?” It does not make sense. If you are of the world with a worldly mindset you are not going to get it, but He would not dare do anything except His Father

told Him to do it. He did not say anything except the Father had Him say it. He practiced righteousness in that way.

We shall See Him as He is

Then it says, “Beloved, we are children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been manifested. When it is manifested, we will be like Him. We will see Him as He is.” Here is another part of our expression of being children of God that renews our mind. I realize I am begotten of God, and I have eternal life inside of me. Let’s think of our current mindset that often stumps our practice of righteousness. One of them is that you see how you are right now and you get depressed, so you actually give up pretty often. We have tried and we have failed. We are not there, and we tend to stop all things because of that. However, as you see Him and you know that you are born of Him and you behold this love that the Father has given that you are a child of God, just relax for a moment and realize where you are going is found in Christ. What we shall be is not here right now. I am a work in progress, but it is going to be. I am a child of God; all of this sin and failure is going to be gone. At some point even my body is going to be changed, and that principle of sin will be removed and I will only practice righteousness. So do not be discouraged but instead take courage because when we see Him, we are going to see Him as He really is, and we will actually be like Him. We are being changed and brought into this glory. We shall see Him as He is.

I John 3:3 says, “Everyone who has this hope in him” What is this hope? I fix my eyes on Jesus and I have a hope of who He has called me to be in Christ. I have a hope that all of my redemption will be completed eventually. I have a hope that it is going to be amazing even though I am stunting it all right now sometimes.

If you have this hope in you, what do you do about it? You do not get discouraged and stop everything, you do not get discouraged and go the way of the world and just practice whatever you want to practice. You do not give up because it is too hard. Instead, you purify yourself even as He is pure. Now this purifying of yourself only works if it is as He is pure. You have this hope in you, then you purify yourself because He is pure. That shows it is sandwiched in here, the purifying of yourself, hope, and then I am pure for myself, but it is as He is pure. It is like I have two eyes now fixed on Jesus. One is that He is the hope and I am found in Christ. And the other one is that He is pure and His life is inside of me. Now I will purify myself. This is not the same thing as being cleansed by the precious blood after you have sinned. That is what we talked about in walking in the light; we have been cleansed, and we confess our sin.

So let’s say you are cleansed right now. But as you fix your eyes on Jesus and you know He has called you to walk with Him and do some things, there is something impure in my life that keeps stopping me. That is the problem. There is something that is not pure as He is pure. There is something that does not match Christ. So as I fix my eyes on the Lord Jesus I ask Him to search me and show me if there is something that is not Christ, it is not pure. The issue is not whether there is a sin unconfessed. The issue is whether there is something on my heart that I am holding on to? Is there something in my life that I am regularly getting into that keeps pulling me away from this way?. And as we look at Him we may immediately know there are some things.

Sometimes we just ask Him. Sometimes we do not know of anything, but at least we can set ourselves apart to the Lord.

Occasionally you find that you are in a struggle because of a sin. You find that you love both the world and the Lord so it seems. But this should not be a long-term struggle because now there is hope; He is pure and now I am going to purify myself. Again, this is not a dead work; this is not drumming up strength in yourself. It is fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Let's say that your heart is laid bare before Him, and you know there was a sin on your heart and you had it cleansed. But you sense there is something like a stone in your heart. There is a hard spot that whenever this temptation comes up, I seem to really love it; I am drawn to it. So it is this stone that you want together with the Lord set aside.

Now setting aside a stone has to do with your will, your desire and your choice. And there is a choice of the moment, but then there is a choice that I have decided to follow Jesus. When I find this stone within me then sometimes it is fasting and prayer before the Lord, and it may be days. But you have this spot in your heart that you have struggled with for a long time, and you make that ultimate decision before the Lord and say, "I do not actually want this; I choose not to want this." I put the stake in the ground that Jesus is Lord over this spot, and that stony heart, that rock in the way is set aside.

Now it does not mean that the temptation never comes back even in that area, but it never has that power over you anymore. You have purified yourself before the Lord and set it aside. Even when something comes back, you can say, "In me he has nothing." It is like Jesus said, "The ruler of this world comes, but in Me he has nothing." In that spot where the temptation used to be so strong, as you have let go of it with the Lord, He crushes the stone and removes it. You put the stake in the ground and say, "Jesus is Lord over this area of my life." It may mean some loss of things in your life that you love, and it may mean loss of something that you have held dear, but we have to take the time to make the choice to purify ourselves because He is pure. This is not a call just to fix yourself for whatever; it is in light of that we have this hope. Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us. I am a child of God. This is who I am in Christ, so let's forget about this stone. Let's forget about this area of my life that I keep holding onto, this love of something else that keeps draining my time and energy.

All of that is the beginning of being called to righteousness; we are children of God and this is possible. Let's set aside everything that would stop us from doing this, and let's do it. Now we will actually get into how to do this. So the next section is actually to do with lawlessness.

Lawlessness is Sin

So it says in I John 3:4, "Everyone that practices sin, practices also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." It is super important to understand that if you are going to practice righteousness that lawlessness is indeed a sin. This Scripture is reversible. Actually, even Darby's note mentions it in a phrase such as if you practice sin, you practice lawlessness, if you practice lawlessness, you practice sin. Lawlessness is not the bad things that you do; they are the things you do without the Lord. It is the things that you do without God being God.

So this was a problem in Matthew 7 with those who came to the Lord and said, “Lord, Lord.” They are claiming Christ. “Did we not do this?” This is practicing righteousness—it sounds. These things they were doing even casting out demons, and all of these good works, but Jesus tells them to depart from Him. But He says, “You workers of lawlessness.” It is lawlessness that He calls them out for. It was not, “You sinners get away;” it was not that they were unbelievers. “Why didn’t you believe in Me?” They did not have any issue of believing or being born again believers, but their issue was that everything they did was without Him. It was lawless. They were not doing it under the Lordship of Jesus; it was not that I am going to do this together with the Lord. It is practicing lawlessness. That is why they were probably shocked. “What do You mean? We did all this in Your name.” But it is practicing lawlessness.

That first principle of doing righteous deeds is that we are not going to do stuff without the Lord. I would say a good number in this room have this thing down, not the movers and shakers always. It is the other guys, the slow to move people who really understand practicing lawlessness is a bad thing. We cannot negate this. Those believers have learned something that was costly; lawlessness is not worth it. If I just go out and do stuff because I know I should do stuff, it is not worth it. But there is a way to do stuff. Catching that this is a sin will give us that fear and trembling of the flesh, give us that fear and trembling of just doing things randomly.

It goes on to say, “We know that he that is Christ has been manifested that he may take away our sins.” We are talking about the sin of lawlessness. This is not 1 John 1 that spoke of being cleansed from the sin actions that we have done. He has come to take away our lawless sins. He is come to take away that experience that Adam and Eve had in the garden of Eden. It does not seem they did anything wrong when they ate that fruit, but they did have a command not to. But they just went off on their own, and the principle of that tree is that you do not need God. You know right and wrong, you can decide to do right. The principle is lawlessness. The principle of the tree of life is that I may not know what I am doing, but I am going with life; I am going together with God. I will learn right and wrong eventually, but even if I do not know it I am at least with Him. So that is the principle of life. But lawlessness is this way. He has come to take away that sin; in Christ there is no sin. Also in Him there is no lawlessness. Just like I mentioned before whatever Jesus did and whatever He said, it was what the Father was doing and what the Father said. He is the most unlawful Person. Even when He feels like I really do not want to do this for good reasons and He says, “Is there another way than going to the cross? But not my will, Your will be done.” That is the heart of not practicing lawlessness. That is how He takes away that sin and gives us the heart to only want to do the Father’s will. It is having the desire to do the Father’s will and having the mindset that I do not want to just do things; I want to do God’s things.

Now as a brand-new Christian what I understood was that I am going to try to do good and try not to do bad. And if I was doing good for a day I felt really good about that. I would never say anybody was doing bad if they were doing good. But we discover that lawlessness is a problem. It is not an upgrade on your mindset of practicing righteousness. So we have to have our minds this way. Practicing lawlessness is a sin, but the Lord has come to take it away. How has he done that?

Depart from Me, I Never Knew You

Verse 6: "Whoever abides in him does not sin, (does not practice lawlessness)." Whoever sins, (whoever practices lawlessness) has not seen him or known him." Here we go again with this concept, "Have you ever seen Him or known Him?" Yes, as a believer you have, but in the moment, do you know Him? Are you fellowshiping with Him? Do you see Him right now as you are practicing lawlessness? Not so much. That is why He said to the lawless ones in Matthew 7: "I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of lawlessness, I do not know you." He did not know them in all of those works. Of course, He knew them, but He did not know them in all of those works. So that is the case here. When we know the provision of the Lord, that He has died for us to take away our sins, when we abide in Him, we do not need to practice lawlessness.

Let's go into this next section, and in this case we are learning another aspect which again it is the principle. We are not at the doing just yet, and I think this is the way it works with the Lord. We might say just as in Ephesians 2:10: "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus, then to do good works." It seems like He is always working on us and making us ready to do something, and we are going to do something. There is a lot of work going into helping us get ready. Actually, out of all these verses you would say, "I do not think this section is talking about doing righteousness. It is all about not doing bad things it seems like," but it is all preparing you to do righteousness. So this part right here is getting into the two natures inside of us.

"Children, let no man lead you astray; he that practices righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that practices sin is of the devil; for from the beginning the devil sins. To this end the Son of God has been manifested, that he might undo the works of the devil" (1 John 3:7).

Notice as we read through this there are the sons of God and there are the sons of the devil, and let us set aside our mindset that we are talking about unbelievers just for a moment. Have you ever had this experience in fellowship?

Verse 9: "Whoever has been begotten of God does not practice sin because his seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God. In this are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, and he who does not love his brother."

It all sounds terrible to say. One thing that sounds hard is whoever is sinning is not begotten of God. Or whoever abides in him, whoever is begotten of God cannot sin. Did we just read that? We actually just read that. But this is the Bible; it is correct.

Now let's think about your experience as a Christian. Have you noticed inside of you that there is still the sinful nature somewhere in there? We have noticed that; there is a power inside of us. Our old man has been crucified with Christ, and we can deny ourselves and we can crucify the flesh experience in a moment. We can choose and say, "No, I deny my flesh; I am going to walk by Christ." But we have noticed that it is possible for us to sin, and we have noticed that our old nature, our life or death of sin is inside of us. It is not us; it is not who we are in Christ, but it is there. In a sense, there is a child of the devil inside of us still. You are not a child of the devil. But what is a child of the devil? It is sin; that principle of sin comes from Satan as we just read that from the beginning he sins. He is the original sinner who went a different way and as soon

as he sinned, as it says in Ezekiel, “Unrighteousness was found in you on that day.” So that unrighteous life when Adam and Eve fell and he sinned, sin came inside of them, and we have inherited that nature ever since. This is pretty common knowledge, but no one says it so bluntly except Jesus: “You are sons of your father, Satan.” Or John the Baptist: “You brood of vipers.” Jesus said that is not saying that there is a real offspring of Satan himself like some kind of demonic terrible thing, not able to get to heaven. But when they were acting by the nature of sin they were of Satan. They were of sin. They were of evil. And is it possible for a believer who is just walking in sin, who is just living by the sin nature, for the Lord to even speak to them and say, “You are not acting as a child of God.” So this is like a child of Satan, a child of the devil, and it sounds very harsh.

“He that practices sin is of the devil.” I think we can understand that. But we would never want to say it, but let’s imagine that you did start to think this way. How differently would you feel when you are practicing sin? Instead of our common mindset which means I am struggling a little bit with this thing. Or a common feeling like this: “Yeah, I know we are all humans, and I have my issues and you have yours.” Somebody who is walking with the Lord will look at that desire to sin and say, “That is of the devil.” Even in the repentance after they have sinned, they say, “I repent because I was of the devil in that moment. I was of sin and I was of evil and I hate to be on the side of the devil. I hate to be on the side of sin.” This type of thorough renewing of the mind helps us in our repentance to realize such natures are inside of God. Something is born of God inside of you. Right now your whole being is not born of God, even though you are born of God. What is born of God? In your spirit you are born again. At one point in the future your new bodies will come and we could say that there is a complete child of God. I am not saying your body is bad, but I am just saying in this time we have a struggle inside of us.

So let’s read this in the mindset of fellowship. Now just think in a squinty-eyed fellowship way. It is not a question of, “Am I born again? Am I a child of God? And who is a child of the devil?” You really cannot look at how people are acting and say there is an unbeliever and there is a believer. That is not what this is talking about. You cannot say here is a believer, and a believer does not sin. You must not be a believer because you just sinned. Not only did you sin, but maybe you regularly sinned. It cannot be that. Instead, if you realize what is inside of you never sins. What is born again never sins. Christ in you does not sin. That is a Hallelujah! That is a joy made full. That is, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to me that I am a child of God, and if I live by that life I am not going to sin.” That is of God and God does not sin, and He has given me this provision. He has been manifested to take away this work of the devil, and He takes it away. “I am crucified with Christ. No longer live I but Christ lives in me.” When Christ lives in me, I am not sinning. So this is that type of Hallelujah experience.

In John’s letter he starts off in chapter 1 saying, “That which is from the beginning.” He says that is almost like it is an if. But then as you read a couple of verses he says, “He has been manifested.” It is Christ. To John it does not matter. It is almost like in some languages there is the he and she which do not matter or it and he does not matter; it is all the same thing, and in John’s letter it is like that. He may say, “Who?” and be talking about a thing. Or he may be saying

it and talking about a who, a person. Like in the beginning it is talking about Christ, but it says that which was from the beginning. But he is actually talking about a Man.

The Two Natures Inside of Us

Here, if you can think of it like very technically because it is our mindedness, but I do not think it is quite this technical, but the one who is born of God inside of you is in your spirit. You are born again; therefore you have received eternal life. The one who is born of the devil, inside of that one is the sinful nature. And in that way I think we can understand. That which is born of the devil practices sin. That which is born of God does not practice sin. I can get that. There are these two things inside of me. John himself though does not like to say it in such an easy way. Here he says, “No, you are all of the devil right now. You are of the devil because you are practicing sin.” I think the reason it is said that way, even the Holy Spirit would say it that way, is to give us that realization, “Oh wow, what am I doing?” to help us to repent. We find ourselves walking this way. Do you want to be on the Devil’s side? There is no middle ground and there is no watered-down stuff here. But it is also for you to realize that you are born of God and you do not need to sin.

So the main emphasis in this section is to have the light bulb click that I have a nature inside of me that does not sin, that practices righteousness. And as I am going to practice righteousness, I am concerned that I have the right holy fear of God. I am concerned about living by my sinful nature. I am concerned about that. I do not want to do that. When I am close to the Lord, then I can practice righteousness.

Cain and Abel

Really, the best way to explain this is that he uses a picture of Cain and Abel. In I John 3:11-12a he says, “This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the wicked one.” Is Cain of the Devil? Is Cain really a child of Satan in some grotesque way? He was just like Abel; there was no difference with these two. They had the same parents, the same inherited sinful nature, but one of them got to be of that sinful nature and the other one did not. There was a difference in that way with these two. Abel was not of the sinful nature, and he actually got right with God by his sacrifice of blood, but Cain did his works of lawlessness. He brought his good vegetables, but there was no leading of God, no connection with God, no principles of God. He was working as if good things were okay. All good things are fine. I am not sinning; I am just gardening. This is good. This is useful food, but it is not realizing that we have to come into the presence of God and then do our labor. We have to come by the precious blood. So Cain was of the devil because of that.

Then it says, “He slew his brother.” Why did he slay his brother? Why did he do an action of unrighteousness? “Because his works were wicked and those of his brother were righteous.” Now this is like a play on words here, but Cain’s first work was his worship; his second work was his murder. His works were wicked. He worshipped by his own works, lawless works. Now why did he slay his brother? It is because when he went to worship, he never got connected to God. Why did he slay his brother? It was not that he was a child of the devil and a really bad guy. He never got connected to God; he did not come by the blood and get into the presence of God. Because

of that the sin nature continued to grow. God had warned Cain to watch out; it is going to grab you. Then the devil grabbed him and he killed his brother. It is the fruit of the nature of sin. There was no difference between Cain and Abel, just like with us, except that one got connected to God and worshipped and the other one was disconnected. I think that sums up this whole concept. When I am connected to God, I practice righteousness. I do not practice sin. When I am disconnected from God, even my good things are lawless actions and lawlessness is sin. If I am disconnected to God, basically I am a child of the devil for that moment. I am of the devil; I am of sin, even as Cain was of the wicked one. So do not think of yourself so harshly, but just realize the sinful nature is of the wicked one, and we dare not touch that way. So that is his explanation.

This is a continual explanation of Cain and Abel. Again about the world and its hating us and not understanding us. Verse 13: “Do not wonder, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life.” How do you know that you have gone out of this worldly way into the presence of the Lord? You actually know it because you love the brethren, the opposite of Cain. Cain could not love his brother; he got jealous of his brother. You love the brethren because it is in that nature. “He who does not love his brother abides in death.” Cain was living in death because he did not get connected to God. He was still living in that death of his sins. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, like Cain. If you hate your brother you are Cain. It is because you have not tapped into the nature of the life of God. You are not in your born-againness nature. You are in your old sinful nature, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in Him.

Here is another one of those verses in the way of talking that gets confusing to us on a surface reading. Remember the previous verse that said, “If you do not love your brother, you hate him, and you are a murderer but no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Now this is different than saying, “You do not have eternal life existing in you.” You have eternal life if you are born again, it is there. The Holy Spirit has brought you eternal life, but does that life live inside of you? Or does it not? If you have the murderer spot, in that moment, you are not allowing the eternal life to abide in you. You are not allowing the love of God to just exist there, to dwell there. So you are not tapped into that nature. All of this talk is to just get this big concept down. I have the ability to be in my born-againness or to be in my old sinful nature even like I was before I was saved. As a believer I have the ability to act like an unbeliever, as a child of the devil. Or I have the ability to tap into this new life and to be a begotten-of-God person. I have both of these abilities. So now with that understood and with the fear of doing lawless things, we want to actually get to work.

Laying Down Our Lives for the Brethren

So in this next spot he just wants you to—“let’s do something,” and he used the example. “Hereby we have known love” and this is how we know about doing good deeds because our Lord Jesus did something really good, and we have received it. We know love because he laid down his life for us. He did not just come and teach us so we could understand a lot. He did not just tell us to sit back and watch everything, but He did something. He actually died for us on the cross, and we are to do the same thing and lay down our lives for the brethren. That is dying for the brethren; that is doing something. It is when I do not want to do something, but the Lord calls

me to do it. I do not have the energy for it or I do not have the desire for it, nevertheless not my will but Your will be done, and I go to the cross. I deny myself and I love the brethren with actions. Here comes this verse which we read earlier. It is an action item.

So I say I love my brethren but what if I have the world's substance (v.17). I have something and I could help them but I see the need there and I shut up my very inward being, my bowels, my heart, my care and concern for them, my compassion. I have no compassion for them because I have seen them sin. They have sinned against me and they never apologized, so I shut up by bowels from them. How does the love of God abide in me? It is missing because Jesus died on the cross for those who were crucifying Him. So when we do our action items, it is not just for the people who will return the favor and it is not just for the people that are lovable; it is for the unlovely and the enemies and the sinners and the people who have not apologized yet. So how does the love of God abide in you if you act that way? "Children, let us not love with word, nor with tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18).

Here we come to this point, and this is the highlight of his point, practicing righteousness, let's do something. With all of the good fear of God that has gone before this, I dare not do it by the old nature. I dare not do lawless things. Keep that in mind, but also keep in mind the joy of what manner of love is this that I am a begotten person. What I will be has not yet been manifested. The life is inside of me, and I am called to something amazing. I am called to be who I am in Christ. Keep that in mind more than keeping in mind all of the concerns and all of those principles. Those are solid principles that we have gained. Now when we get into the stepping out, we need some type of boldness. So this next little bit of a section is a humble type of boldness, not a prideful boldness, but if you are going to do good works, let's go forward. Stop the hesitating and stop the concern. Yes, we do understand these things and let's do it.

Led by the Spirit

And so he says, "Hereby, we shall know that we are of the truth, and will persuade our hearts before him" (3:19). Here is how we are going to do it. Catch the picture which I think a lot of us have experienced. I am so afraid to step out and do something because I have done it wrong so much. I am so afraid I will do it in my flesh, so I dare not do anything. All of that is incorrect; it is time to be bold in a humble way, and here is how you know that you are of the truth. How are we going to actually know? He has not said like go and give this person this or go and call this person. It is not always a command so direct, so then how do I know? I am trying not to sin, but how do I go forward and practice righteousness? Here is how you know.

"If your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart and knows all things. But if your heart condemns you not, we have boldness towards God, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and practice the things which are pleasing in his sight"(3:20-22).

Our heart will show us when to stop, and that is actually enough. There is some boldness even in just knowing that the Lord can convict me even of things not to do, that the Lord can work with me. For example, the apostle Paul in the book of Acts chapter 16 was going out to preach the good news and establish new churches. It was his first journey to Ephesus, to Asia

Minor, and he was burdened, but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. His heart had not condemned him because he had not sinned. I do not mean that kind of condemnation, but his heart stopped him, and he did not go there and do those works. He could have pressed through that feeling that he should stop and just gone ahead and preached the gospel. He could have said, "Did I not preach the gospel, and did I not preach the gospel in Ephesus? But it would have been, "I do not know you."

Right afterwards he tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus stopped him. The heart will let you know by saying, "Okay, not that." But he is just going on, and he is doing. How is he so bold that he can go and do? It is because he is keeping the Lord's commandments to love the brethren. He is praying and going forward. "Whatsoever we ask, we receive from Him." He is praying with burden, "Lord, save souls. Raise up testimonies." He prays boldly knowing the Lord is hearing his prayers. He does have in his experience that in whatever measure he is shown he is keeping those commands to love the brethren and to do whatever the Lord is commanding. If the Lord gives him a small commandment he obeys and keeps it.

Now it is up to the Lord to actually lead him on the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. It is an unknown path, and at some point it is so dark because he leads you through the valley of the shadow of death which is all dark right there. But He still leads you step by step, and while He is leading you, you are in motion. But how do you have some type of humble boldness? It is because when He does speak to you, you obey and keep His commandments. When He does lead you, you respond. When He does convict you and says, "Not this," you respond. However, when He does not convict you, you have boldness to go forward. If our heart does not condemn us, we have boldness. We are praying. Now praying is connecting me to the Lord, saying, "I am not doing this without You. I am praying, Lord, let's do this." And then the Lord seems to amen it, and in your humble boldness, you go forward with whatever you have in your heart to do. When you are praying, it shows that you have the desire to not be lawless. This is part of our boldness.

Humble Boldness

Humble boldness says, "I need You, Tree of Life. I need You to do this." So you commit it to the Lord, "Lord, I have this sense that I should love my brethren this way, that I should call this person. And Lord, I just trust You to help me with this phone call." Then you go and make the call. Now has the Lord given you a script of what to say? No. Has the Lord even said, "Today is the day that you call this person at 2:00 pm. No, probably not. Occasionally that might happen, but it is unusual. But as you go to call, suddenly in your heart you think, Oh, let's not. Instead I will write a letter. Or instead let's talk another day. That's okay, follow that. But if you just go forward, the Lord is with you, and you just go ahead and do these things. There is a humble boldness. Part of humility is that if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

So here is part of the humility, my heart only knows this much. I do not know all of God's plan, I do not know all of what is actually a sin or not. I do not know all of what is maturity or not. I am just growing. I am just walking in this way, knowing that God is greater and allowing Him to be in charge of all of these paths of righteousness. It gives you a type of humility of being in His

hands, and He is working on me, creating me to do good works. It is okay for me to step up and do stuff. I am doing it together with Him. In all prayer I go forward with boldness. I respond to His tasks whatever small things they are. Usually they are things in your own life because you are His workmanship. He is working on you in the morning. As He works on you in the morning and you respond or in the evening and you respond, then you can do those good works because there is some humble boldness to step forward because you are actually walking together with the Lord. You have apologized for your mistakes, you are in His presence and going forward. So this is the concept that I can do things. We have to not be so concerned of failure. We have to not be so concerned of doing the wrong things. The only concern we should have is that am I open to the Lord or not? He is greater than all of us. if we are open to Him. Even the Apostle Paul could get all the way to Ephesus or to Bithynia, even getting into this city, and then the Spirit of Jesus says, "No, let's not do this."

We may get right to the point of doing something, and we are stopped. It does not mean you are immature. It means you are on the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. This is how it works. We are humbled because we do not actually know what we are doing, but we know that He knows what He is doing. God knows all things, and if He is not telling us not to go forward, and we are actually praying and holding onto Him, then we go forward and love the brethren. We do know His command to love the brethren. We know what is pleasing in His sight which is in verse 22: "Love the brethren."

"This is His commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and that we love one another, even as he has given us a command" (verse 23).

If the thing is falling in line with that, I trust in Him, I fix my eyes on Jesus, I believe, and I am going to love my brethren. Then it has that flavor of the path of righteousness. It has the direction that He is going, and He can redirect our steps as He needs to. So this is just to free us from that unnecessary hesitancy to do these things that God has called us to.

"He that keeps his commandments abides in him and he in him" (3:24). I just want to say here that sometimes because of the saints and what other people may think, we hesitate more. We actually feel that it is a humble thing to do nothing, but it is not the right type of humility. It actually gets us out of belief and into ourselves. It gets us looking in such a concerned way and thinking: What are other people going to say if I do these things? They are going to think that I am just being proud. They are going to think that I am stepping out and doing too much. They are going to think that I think I am awesome. You have all these thoughts going around, but we have to live before the Lord. You really have to be sort of besides yourself and go by faith. When you read the Apostle Paul writing his letters, he actually says, "He is beside himself." When he describes his ministry, he is beside himself. But he is honest.

In I Corinthians 15:10 he says, "It is by God's grace that I am what I am, and his grace which was given to me which is towards me is not in vain."

It did not just set there, but he labored. That is practicing righteousness. "I have labored more abundantly than all of them." That sounds pretty bad to say, but in all humility he said it. I have done these things but by God's grace. He can explain it that way or like in the beginning of

Galatians chapter 1, "If I seek to please men I am not serving God." Everyone is concerned there about whether he has talked to James and Peter about this. Have you talked to the pillars in Jerusalem? Are they all okay with this? And he actually admits in the book of Galatians, "It is true, I was a little concerned as I went to talk to them. Although I know in all boldness that I am a servant of God and not a servant of man. I do not seek to please them, I seek to please God. But they gave me the right hand of fellowship." There is that feeling though of what the others are going to say. But we have to fix our eyes on Jesus in faith. We have fellowship with each other, and if someone is concerned that what you are doing seems off, we can listen to it and maybe they are right because God knows all things. We are going according to our conscience, and we are trying. But those people who are walking with the Lord, they can tell when you are just fumbling around because this is what happens with new believers for sure. There is a little bit of carnality mixed in with their serving, and we should expect it. But we can help them sometimes and not just squash them. If you do that, you will do it in the flesh. They are going to do it in the flesh, but God knows and He has given them a conscious level at this spot. So let them serve, and He will raise it and He will raise it again. So wherever people are at, that is another matter. So in all boldness we go forward.

There is some help along the way for those who are boldly going out just to know that they do not get off course. I am going to use the last verse in chapter 3, chapter 4:1-6. This seems almost like a side topic but it is absolutely not. This is a discerning between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. He finishes with the boldness but then the question: How do you have boldness?

"And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given to us" (3:24a).

How are you actually going to have boldness when you are doing something? It is because you have the strength of the Holy Spirit. The joy of the Lord is your strength, and you are walking with Him, you are abiding in him, you are keeping His commandments. You even have a sensing of He is with me. I have the power of the Holy Spirit to do these good things. I am with him, and His Spirit is inside of me. That realization gives you some boldness and some going forward, but then the question will come, "Is this the Spirit of God or is it something else?" What has happened to some of these others who are out preaching and doing many good works, but they are doing them the wrong way. And he mentions these false prophets here.

Test the Spirits

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, (test them) to see if they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4:1).

This is almost like the false prophet in the book of Revelation that goes right before the antichrist doing works but leading you to the antichrist or to Satan instead of to Christ Himself. Or like the false prophets that Jesus talked about when He said, "You will know them by their fruit." You will know the false prophets by their fruit. Now what fruit is it? Is it that they do bad things and do not do good things? No, it is that their fruit is lawlessness. You know them, and so in a way it is almost like a help to not become a false prophet. There are enough false prophets who have gone out into the world; let's not do this.

Sometimes you wonder, especially some of them that get really dangerous and say some really bad things and start quoting angels and other things. What happened to them? Some of them are real born-again people who turn into these wolves, some of them accidentally. But some of them really sold themselves to it, and they got other spirits. Just to be realistic, it may not be something you are dealing with in your life at all, like a voice coming to you. But some of these guys start to serve with a sense of the power of resurrection and the anointing of the gifting. You know what they end up wanting? The selfishness in them ends up wanting more and more power, and they end up accidentally or purposefully giving in to other spirits. So there is a need for discernment of spirits here. As you are going out doing things, do them only by the Holy Spirit. So there is a provision here given.

Jesus Christ Come in the Flesh

This is similar to the provision in I Corinthians 12:3 where he says, “No one speaking by the Holy Spirit says, Curse thee, Jesus; and no one can say, Lord Jesus, except by the Spirit of God.” So it is kind of similar here.

“Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit which does not confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is not of God: and this is that power of the antichrist, of which ye have heard that it comes, and now it is already in the world” (4:2-3).

This style, this way of the antichrist is not to be about Jesus coming in the flesh, even if there is an actual, real, literal demonic spirit, they are not going to want to see Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Now this is a real thing with a real test if you are dealing with a demon possessed thing or an actual other voice that comes to you. This is a real way because things will get loud and chaotic if you start to ask, “Did Jesus Christ come in the flesh?” We may not deal with it a lot in this country unless you go to really poor areas or people who are on a lot of drugs and other things, but then you deal with it. Then you run into it, and it is good to know this provision. But even for our own selves or for our own works of righteousness, to know that other spirits are not going to be Jesus Christ come in the flesh. They are not going to say that.

Now I want to take that principle and realize even on a milder level that when the Holy Spirit is with us and leading us, do you know what He is doing? He is bringing to our experience Jesus Christ come in the flesh. The results of what you do, your works of righteousness, your practicing righteousness, is that the Word becomes flesh and tabernacles among us. Christ comes down through us, through the church, and He lives and does things.

The opposite or the works of lawlessness as you do good things is that you are there physically, you are the one who is manifested or it is more antichristess, more like I can do this without Christ, more like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I can take this, and I do not need the tree of life. So even if you take the principle of this very useful warning about spirits and discerning the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error, even if you take the principle, it is helpful just to know as you go forward you can look at the works that you are doing, the practicing of righteousness and say, “Is Christ proclaimed? Is He displayed? Is He the fragrance of what I am doing?” Then you know it is not the antichrist style. This is the right style. The Holy Spirit desires

to show Christ. So whatever we are doing it is almost like a test afterwards or a test as we are doing it. "Is Christ going to be glorified in this? Is He going to be manifested in the flesh through His church? Are people going to come in and say, 'Surely God is here, surely this is Christ, this is Him'?" So that is the test.

"Ye are of God, children and have overcome them, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (4:4).

I read part of this just to show that the world does not understand what we are talking about. "From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6b). It is a totally different concept. People of the world will brag on you when you do good, and even Christians will do that sometimes when we are not in our right mind. When it is proclaiming the Man, that is one thing. Encouraging somebody is not a bad thing such as, "Christ was heard through you today. That was the Lord, thank you for sharing that or thank you for encouraging me today. I needed that verse that you sent to me." That is not going to ruin somebody. That is going to show them, "Amen, that was Christ. That was Christ. Christ came in the flesh like that."

So with all of this of practicing righteousness and this fellowship, I believe the Lord is encouraging us to know that His joy is our strength, and a new way to enter into the joy of the Lord is to actually do the things He is calling us to do. When we stand before Him on that day of the judgment seat of Christ, and He looks at us and what we have done, you know what He actually looks at? It is not, "Are you born again? Are you saved?" That has already been solved. He asks, "What did you do with what I gave you? I gave you the born againness, I gave you eternal life, I gave you all of these things, all of this grace. What did you do?" And He will say, "You did well. Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord." It is the Lord's desire that we actually do something with what we have been given, and I would say that we can enter into the joy of the Lord as we are doing what He has called us to. That is the, "Behold, what manner of love." There is a joy with this fellowship and our joy is made full as we walk in righteousness and practice righteousness.

Let's pray together:

Lord, we cast ourselves on You and can say easily that these things are too great for us. Lord, we do not know what we are doing, and we do not know how to do what You are calling us to do, but our eyes are fixed on You, Lord. Our eyes are with You, and we see that You are pure and so we come to You, and we want to purify ourselves even as You are pure. Lord, we pray that You would search our hearts and remove these things. And bring us this grace right now to choose to follow You in these areas of our life. Lord, we pray that You would also show us the things that You have prepared ahead of time for us to do, these works of righteousness and the things for us to practice. I pray that we would be in the experience of loving the brethren and the church, that you would raise up many priests in the house of God, that we would see the labor among all of us, and we would see the joy of the Lord as we all serve and fellowship in this way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

