

Gospel Character: 1 John 3:1-10

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Date: 18 September 2016

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word and turn to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3. Before we settle into it, I want to share with you this morning an emotion that I'm feeling. And I feel a mix of emotions on every Sunday morning.

There's always an excitement. We've been preparing for six days and it's here and God's people are together and I'm expecting that God will work. I feel the emotion of just sheer exhaustion because of the six days leading up to and it's here and suddenly the service is rushed along to this point.

I always feel a manner of timidity, a weightiness to coming and opening up God's Word and doing by grace my very best to teach it to you with accuracy.

This morning, I'm also angry. And I believe that my anger is a righteous anger, which is a rarity for me.

[1 : 18] Very few times I could say that that would be the case, but I believe that it is a righteous anger and it's not an anger aimed at you. It is an anger aimed at a local prominent pastor that I often speak of in a great deal of ambiguity.

I speak in generalizations, hoping for your sake that you'll hear the truth and you'll be discerning as you hear things coming from this particular pastor.

I believe that this pastor is a brother. I think he's in the faith. Therefore, I love him. He's part of our family. I am concerned for him. I am praying for him.

I hope you'll do the same. But this morning, I'm angry at him. I think he's crossed a line. And as such, I think it's appropriate to begin to call him by name.

You need to be aware of what's in our backyard. Some of you may have come out of the ministry of this particular pastor. And I don't mean any offense to you in the process of speaking about him.

[2 : 36] Most of us, I would presume, know people who are currently part of the ministry of this pastor. I know many people who are many phone calls I need to make in the coming weeks as a result of what's happening in the life of this ministry.

The pastor I'm speaking of is Andy Stanley. And the ministry I'm speaking of is North Point Ministries. Six churches, I think.

Massive mega church in our backyard. The reason I think it's important to call it by name and to talk about it is because I love you.

And I love the people under his leadership. And I think it would be irresponsible to not talk about it by name. Now, most of you who have been around for a while know that I'm not a big fan of their ministry model.

The idea of attractional church and building the church for the lost. I believe that the Bible teaches us that the church gathering is primarily for the believer.

[3 : 42] Certainly, we want to minister to the lost as they come in amongst us. But it's primarily for the believer to be equipped in order to go and to serve the lost. We are gathered to go.

This is not the way they've arranged themselves. Not a fan of the ministry model. But I wouldn't want to harp on them by name for that reason.

In practice, they have functionally denied the sufficiency of Scripture. But now, Andy Stanley is drawing into question the inerrancy and quite possibly the inspiration of Scripture.

In an interview with Russell Moore, who's the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Russell asked him a very strange question, but asked him, If he were the Pope of Evangelicalism, what would he do?

What would he change? The first thing that crossed my mind was that first I'd do away with having a Pope of Evangelicalism. Not what he said. But he said instead, I would ask that pastors get the

spotlight off the Bible and back on the resurrection of Jesus.

[5 : 01] A couple of weeks later, in a sermon entitled, The Bible Told Me So, he addresses what he calls deconversion.

And just the idea of deconversion, that someone could have been converted at one point, regenerated, and then dederenerated, is in and of itself a dangerous idea, an entirely unbiblical idea.

But I think he's referring to those who grow up in the church and then leave the church. There are dramatic statistics, particularly about college students, as high as 85% of college students who profess faith in Jesus Christ through high school, when they leave and go in their freshman year, 85% no longer claim to follow Christ.

I think that's what he means by deconversion, but it's certainly a scary way to talk about it. He says that it's not ample to say, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

And he apologizes to people who were sent to college with a frail, I quote, frail version of our faith.

[6 : 23] He says, if the Bible is the foundation of our faith, as the Bible goes, so goes our faith. And then he gives examples that he states as fact of scientific evidence that contradicts the Scripture.

Things like, there is no scientific evidence for a worldwide flood. Or, what if the ruins of Jericho are excavated and we never see evidence that the walls fell down?

This is called evidential apologetics, and I would suggest to you that it's not the way that we approach the Bible. If the Bible is the foundation of our faith, as the Bible goes, so goes our faith. He questions the infallibility, and therefore, the very inspiration of the Scriptures. If God is true, and if God wrote the Bible, then the Bible is true.

And I would suggest to you that it is the foundation of our faith, that faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God. He says that in the first century, believers didn't copy down the Scripture because they believed that it was inspired, but because they believed that it was true, that they took it simply as historical record, and they knew that the apostles penned it, so they took it as simply a true historical account, and it had not yet been canonized, and so they didn't believe that it was a Word from God, but just simply an account of Jesus and His resurrection.

[8 : 04] He concludes to say, we should rather think, Jesus loves me, this I know because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tells me so.

which seems like circular logic to me. But I believe what he's saying is that let's not be too concerned about whether or not the Bible is inspired.

Let's not be too concerned if it's actually the Word of God, if it actually has authority, but rather, let's look at what men who knew Jesus had to say, which is part of what we do as we look at the Scripture.

But he neglects altogether that one of the apostles saw what we now see as our canon as Scripture. 2 Peter 3, verses 15 and 16, Peter writes, And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

So Paul, in all of his letters, speaks with wisdom about the patience of God toward us and the salvation that's found in Christ. That's me reversing the logic of Peter's writing.

[9 : 21] Then he says, verse 16, of all Paul's letters, there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do, if you're looking at it, the other Scriptures.

So apparently the early church, at very least, Peter was already viewing the writing of Paul as Scripture, understood it to be inspired, as Paul says, breathed out by God.

I apologize if you were sent to college without an unshakable confidence in the inspiration and therefore the infallibility and authority of our Bible, which is indeed the foundation of our faith.

it's my hope, if you're a college student here and you have any misgiving about the value of it, I'm going to assume that because you're here, you probably don't, but if you do, that we so show you Christ in the Scripture that it becomes extremely precious to you, that you would be a person of the Word, that you would put theology above all of your other studies and would have a confidence in who Christ is because God has spoken to us about Him by His Word.

Romans 10, 17 again, so faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.

Ephesians 2, verse 13, Paul says, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[11:10] And then he goes down into verse 19 and 20, so then you were no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation, hang on for it, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

He is talking about the revelation of God through the apostles and the prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. Many attractional churches teach a neutered gospel.

Many preachers these days teach a subversive prosperity gospel. Jesus died on a cross that you might glory in Him and He in you forever.

Not so that you can pick up weekly life lessons to live a more fulfilled life now. That is not what the Christian faith is about. Not about aneisms.

It's about God revealed in the scripture. There is no crown without the cross. There is no glory without suffering. You cannot follow Christ without giving Him your all.

[12:25] He expects nothing less. He expects nothing less. With all that in mind, we ask that you pray for Andy Stanley.

Join me in that. Pray for those under his leadership. Pray for those across this nation that look to Him for their cues on how they ought to lead successful ministry.

I don't doubt his motivation in what he's trying to do. I believe he's a Christian. I believe he desperately wants people to come to faith in Christ, but he's doing it wrongly. Preach the truth to your friends and your family.

Pray that he would come to an understanding of the truth, what an influence he could have if he would open the scripture to his people. And with all that, I'll remind you that, beloved, this is God's word to us.

It was written for His glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. 1 John 3, verses 1-10 is our text for today.

[13:36] See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God. And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

Beloved, we are God's children now. And what will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

Sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning.

No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as He is righteous.

[14:36] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in Him, and He cannot keep on sinning because He has been born of God. By this it is evident, who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil?

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. Now, over the past three weeks, we've been considering the Christian life, and we've been framing it up beginning with our gospel identity, and you're seeing that as the new logo for our church, the single tree in a circle.

And the summary statement that we've been using for gospel identity is simply this, by grace alone through faith alone, and the personal work of Jesus Christ alone, we are justified before God, forgiven and adopted by Him.

So that's who we are in Christ. And then we said this gospel identity is our great motivation for worship. So we're accepted by God in Christ, so we live how He wants us to in all things.

[15:54] This is worship. Have experienced the mercies of God to us in Christ. We live for Him, and we're using the biblical metaphor. Being good trees, we bear good fruit.

And I've been suggesting to you all along the way that the bearing of good fruit requires activity on our part. It requires effort on our part. And so we're talking about four areas of Christian living, and they are as follows.

First, our gospel conviction. Right? Knowing God through His word and prayer. Two weeks ago, we talked about that. Last week, we talked about gospel community.

Loving the church in varying means of fellowship and service. This week, we'll talk about gospel character. And then finally, next week, gospel commission.

And Lord willing, we'll be back in our verse-by-verse exposition of Acts following that. The summary statement for this morning is being justified before God, forgiven and adopted by Him.

[16:55] We worship Him through gospel character, conforming to Christ both in private and in public. Now, John starts out chapter 3 making the point we've been making all along that who we are is a work of God.

God has established it. So being justified before God, we're forgiven and adopted by Him. And you can see that running through the first three verses of 1 John chapter 3.

But draw your attention specifically to verse 3. Everyone who thus hopes in Him. And he's referring back to what he has said that as God's children, we do not yet look like Christ being perfect, but we will one day look like Christ because we shall see Him as He is.

When He returns, we'll be glorified and perfected at that time. But, he says in verse 3, and everyone who thus hopes in Him, so in the future perfection, which we call glorification, purifies himself as He, Christ, is pure.

So by faith that we're justified before God and the debt of our sin is canceled before Him. And we are granted the righteousness of Christ. We are both forgiven and adopted.

[18:23] Paul writes in Romans 8.1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So, because we're beloved, because we're children of God, we're going to live a certain way.

So don't mistake me saying that we live a certain way and therefore we're children of God. We're children of God, therefore, we live a certain way.

We give evidence to who we are by the way we live. And John goes on to say this in no uncertain terms. I hope that it was a little scathing for you, right, to read from the authoritative Word of God. How it is that the person who claims to be a follower of Christ looks. Verse 4 and down through verse 10.

If we are justified before God, forgiven and adopted by Him, we worship Him through our character. We are being conformed to Christ.

[19:30] We have not arrived there yet perfectly, which I will show you in a moment, but we are pressing on in holiness toward Christ's likeness.

If you are of God, it's the point that John is making, you will not make a practice of sinning. If you are a child of God, you will practice righteousness.

You will be on God's highway. The Greek word for practice simply means to do or make. You hope it would be kind of complex and we could unravel it and go, oh, now we understand what practicing means.

John's not pulling any punches here. He's simply saying that you will not be characterized by sin. You will rather be characterized by righteousness.

And beloved, the beautiful precious doctrine of regeneration is so being lost in the life of our churches. If you are in Christ, you have been made new.

[20:43] You are no longer your old self. You carry that baggage of yourself around, but you have been made new. And so many of us act as if we've not been set free from the bondage of sin.

We are free from it. We've been given power to live to God. And not to ourselves. You can think of gospel character as obedience in all things.

And we talk about these areas of Christian living. I get that this one kind of becomes a catch all. We intend for it to be a catch all, but I think so often, I'm seeing particularly with young people who have a high view of God and of God's sovereignty.

Praise the Lord for that. Recognizing that God works in us to accomplish His goodwill. Also being lazy. Just expecting that at some point that there will be enough compulsion in you that you're going to begin to do the things that God wants you to do.

And it's so often framed up as feeling. You don't feel like doing certain things. I teach my kids to be obedient.

[21:57] I train them. I show them how it is they're to be obedient. I discipline them when they're not obedient. If all you caught Judah down here talking about the rod, it's like a spanking.

A lot like a spanking. Showing them the way that they should go. And it is never an excuse for one of my sons to say to me, I don't really feel like being obedient.

There's not a compulsion in me to be obedient. How do I help my children to walk in the ways they should go? I tell them what they should do or shouldn't do, and I bring correction when they need it. The Lord deals with us in the exact same way. You've been given command, right and good for you, command. You have a heavenly Father that's perfect in all of His command, who loves you immensely and wants the very best for you.

You should listen, and you should do the things that He's asked you to do or not asked you to do. Many people misunderstand that sin has two sides to it, both sins of omission and sins of commission.

[23 : 11] Omission are the things that we're not doing what God has commanded us to do. We're sinning because we're not doing what God has commanded us to do, and sins of commission are doing what God has commanded us not to do.

Many of you probably grew up in churches where the pastor liked to rattle off the top three drinking, smoking, cursing, which in their proper context may or may not be sinful.

All three of those, let's lift off some of the other ones that are almost definitely sinful in every case.

We feel like if we just had the list and we're avoiding certain activity, then we're living to God.

Not so, beloved, sins of omission and sins of commission. God's children recognize we have a loving Father, and we obey because He loves us.

Now, is John suggesting that we must be perfectly righteous? No. He is not.

[24 : 14] Back up a couple of chapters to 1 John chapter 1. Once again, strong language, verses 5 through 10. Beginning of verse 5, this is the message that we have heard from Him and proclaimed to you that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

God is perfect, God is holy. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, practice sin, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus' Son cleanses us from all sin. Verse 8. Here we go.

If we say we have no sin, if we say we're perfect, if we say we've arrived, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. So very clearly John is saying that there should be a practice, there should be a trend, a trajectory of our lives.

[25 : 35] Not perfect, but pressing toward perfection. Verse 3, once again, of chapter 3, and everyone who thus hopes in Him, in the future glory, in the future perfection, purifies Himself as He is pure.

John's not saying we must be perfect, he's saying pay careful attention to the pattern of your life. A biblical view of sanctification is called progressive sanctification.

It means that as we're working, God is working in us and He's moving us bit by bit, degree by degree, one degree of glory to another degree of glory, further up.

And that doesn't mean that if you zoom in on any moment of your life that you're moving upward at that moment. You could zoom in on a single day of my life and it would look like my heartbeat.

But as we back away, I can say to you that I sin. I sin grievously still before God. But if I step back and I look at the way in which God is working in me, I can see that I hate sin more than I did yesterday.

[26 : 48] And I love righteousness more than I did yesterday. I desire to please my Father. I am moved by His great love for me. I recognize who I am in Him and I press on.

Grieved by my sin, I repent and I turn back to the Lord. I press to know Him in obedience. So our sanctification is progressive.

I do not expect perfect obedience from my sons. I hope for it. I really hope for it. But I don't expect it. In fact, I expect the opposite to be true and I bring correction when that happens.

But never is it okay. I say, son, why did you not do the thing I asked you to do? And they go, you're going to feel like it. The retribution is swift.

So John is saying pay careful attention to the pattern of your life. Jesus tells us how to recognize the regenerate in Matthew 7, 17 and 18. So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[27 : 59] Apples don't grow on pear trees. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. He's talking about pattern of our life.

Peter exhorts us to the activity of self-examination in 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 10. He says, therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fail. And these qualities he's referred to previously in chapter 1, faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

So he's given us a list of qualities, and he's saying, pick these qualities up and roll them around, meditate on them. Are these characteristic of your life?

Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love. Peter says to us, don't flip to the front of your Bible and write down the date you walked down an aisle.

[29 : 03] He says be diligent to confirm your calling and election by these qualities. Verse 10, 1 John 3, by this it is evident.

By what? A date? A particular activity? The characteristic of your life? By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. And I love as John is about to launch into a wonderful chapter on love, he mentions it, Peter mentions it, in chapter 1, love is the most defining characteristic of the Christian person. Jesus says in John 13, 35, by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. God, I never want to stand up here and cause you to doubt your salvation unless that's the very thing you need.

I care about your souls deeply. I know many of you this room very well, some of you I don't know at all, I'm seeing faces I've never seen before, but I see you as eternal and I care about you immensely.

[30 : 32] Be diligent to examine yourself, make sure that you are in the faith, and if you will not repent and believe, place your hope in the righteousness of Christ that he would grant it to you.

So we are to measure out our lives. Jesus is our great example. We are to conform to him.

And certainly as we see love as the most defining characteristic of the Christian persons, he is the high example of love. As Jesus' hands and his feet were pounded onto a cross, and as he hung for our sins, experiencing so much more than we could possibly imagine the physical anguish of hanging on that cross, he bore God's wrath on our behalf.

Wes and Liz sang for us this morning how deep the Father's love for us. And I love that they worked so hard at being so precise, even at the expense of changing lyrics.

There's a line, I think it's in the second verse, it says, it was my sin that held him there, Jesus on the cross. And I don't think that's entirely inaccurate to say that, but I like that they changed the lyric to it.

[31 : 53] It was his love that held him there. Jesus restrained all the power of heaven to come and pluck him off that cross.

He set them at bay that he might die for us. Two quotes from Charles Spurgeon for you, I think they're both on your bulletin. The Christian should take nothing short of Christ for his model.

Beloved, do not compare yourself to one of your Christian friends that you look up to. Do not compare yourself to a Christian celebrity. Please don't compare yourself to me.

Hold up Christ as your example and let's press together towards him. Aim at the highest conceivable degree of holiness.

And though you will not be perfect, never excuse yourselves because you are not. So as those who have been redeemed by Christ, we worship him through gospel character, conforming to him, both in private and in public.

[33 : 05] If you are in Christ, you will desire to worship him in all matters of your life. Your concern is not the approval of man, but the approval of God.

God. He wants all of you because he loves you and because he knows what is good for you. That includes the thoughts in your mind and the feelings that you feel and the motivations behind your activity. Don't merely dress yourself up and look righteous on the outside.

The Pharisees were condemned for that, for being whitewashed tombs, but inside dead. Be introspective. Know yourself.

Know why you do what you do. Why you think what you think. Why you feel what you feel and bring all of that into conformity with Christ.

Are they characterized by sinfulness? Or are they characterized by righteousness? Maybe a bit more telling. Statement 18, I do not commit any particular sin habitually. Let's cycle back through the same thing. Which I would suggest to you is a sign that there's no real repentance for that sin at least. A little more telling. Five people strongly disagreed with that statement. 18, disagreed. 12, weren't sure. 35 total people that responded to the survey that are members of our church, 54.7% seem to be a particular sin. [39 : 55] The same thing over and over and over and over. If you find yourself in that number as members of our church or if you're a non-member and you find yourself relating to that, you need to consider carefully weigh the position of your soul.

If you do not have a confidence that you are in Christ, repent and believe. In closing, I want to read to you from Colossians chapter 3, verse 5 and 14. And I want you, you can turn there if you would like, you can just close your eyes and listen to me as I read it. I want you to consider what characterizes your life. This list by Paul of things to put to death or to put off and things to put on. Where do you find yourself moving toward? Some of you might be brand new believers. No one's expecting perfection of you. We're just expecting motion toward God, away from sin. Beginning in verse 5, Paul writes, put to death therefore what is earthly in you. [41 : 04] sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

In these, you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. So how do we put off and put on? [42 : 26] Start with the Scripture. Start with knowing God's good commands for us. We're not antinomians, which means without the law.

We recognize that God's given us instruction and that we should obey God's good instruction. And we pray. We turn that to prayer in desperation that God would move and work in us as we work. This is our gospel conviction. We're in fellowship with other Christians and accountable to one another. Gathering in settings like this, but not just this. Sunday morning sermons are important, but they're not enough. Gathering with community groups that you might know people and be known and even more centered to that, what we're going to start calling core groups. If you're meeting with a couple of individuals and you're getting it in, you're confessing sin to one another. You're really, really known by a couple of guys or a couple of girls. [43 : 25] Fellowship, gospel, community. Obedience. You just begin to do the things that God has commanded you to do. If you are His, I can promise you, you will be empowered for that activity. Get up and start doing it. This is your gospel character. Next week we'll talk about gospel proclamation which I would suggest to you is also a defining characteristic of who we are in Christ and that is our gospel commission. I hope this morning my prayer and as I'm about to pray is that you will recognize that God has given to you as His child a path to walk. And if you are not on that path, the answer is to repent and believe. Whether you're in the faith or not, if you are righteous in Christ, you still need to repent of that sin and get back on that path. You may find that you're going in the opposite direction altogether. Repent and believe in Christ. Let's pray. Thank you.