

1st JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 3:4-10

Lesson #13

Introduction

When a church ceases to think and behave as Jesus Christ himself thought and behaved, it has moved away from its calling and purpose in the master plan of God. When secular philosophy, and trends, and thinking, replace the Bible, the holy word of God, as the dominant influence upon decisions and behaviors, then all is lost for that church. And what exactly is a church, but a group of individuals who assemble together and claim to be believers in, and followers of, Jesus Christ? But how is it that so many people can claim to be believers and followers, when they simultaneously reject Christ's teachings, and disobey His commandments? It would seem that the terms "believer and follower" no longer include any necessity of compliance to His expressed commands. The vast majority of evangelical Christianity goes about its merry way, living however it thinks is right in its own mind, and **fearlessly** ignores any and every commandment that it pleases. And all the while lauding its own praises for godliness, and confidently boasting of a future life in heaven.

But like someone once said "not everybody who talks about heaven actually goes there." In fact, according to Jesus, the group of religious people, even those who name the name of Jesus and perform many impressive works, that actually goes to heaven, is smaller than the group that does not. (Mat 7:13-14, 21-23) And the difference is **always, always** described as those who obeyed the commandments of God, as opposed to those who did not. This is the litmus test of a profession of faith; has your faith produced that work of sanctification that God has declared that it would? (1Pet 1:2; 1Jn 2:3-6) In most cases, according to scriptures, it has not, and this is certainly confirmed by our observable experience.

We have professing churches that have ordained women as their pastors, and women as their Sunday school teachers, when it's absolutely prohibited by holy scriptures. (1Tim 2:9-14) We have churches that accept the practices of sexual promiscuity, and homosexuality, and even call these as their teachers and pastors, in direct disobedience to the word of God. (Lev 20:13; 1Co 6:9-10; Rev 21:8) But we value our own ideas and thinking more than we value the word of God, so we fearlessly ignore any and every provision of scripture that doesn't fit our current day thinking. And we use all the old meaningless twisting of scriptures that the Pharisees did to justify, and even dignify, our disobedience. Remember what Jesus told them?

6 He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 7 They worship Me in vain, [uselessly] teaching as doctrines the commands of men. 8 Disregarding the command of God, you keep the tradition of men." 9 He also said to them, "You completely invalidate God's command in order to maintain your tradition!"

Mark 7:6-9 (HCSB)

As we see, this isn't something new, false followers of God, and now of Jesus Christ, are well schooled at disobedience, and have even found ways to make their lawless ideas and behaviors appear to be loving and godly. In fact, it's very easy to find professing churches that openly boast of their liberal tolerance of promiscuity and homosexuality, and proudly proclaim their full acceptance of any and all who wish to openly practice these behaviors, and they take credit for their love and godliness in so doing. But, rightly and succinctly the Apostle Paul describes such as these when he wrote that their glory is in their shame, and their end is destruction. (Phi 3:19) Meaning, the things they boast about, and take pride in, are the things that are admirable to sinful men, but are an abominable shame to God, and to all those who truly love Him and seek His holiness. Please make no mistake beloved, please do not allow yourself to be deceived, there is no reward, and there is no heaven, in the future for those who reject the word of God and practice lawless disobedience to His commandments, while claiming all along that they have no sin. So say the holy scriptures everywhere from Genesis to Revelation, despite the multitudes of false teachers claiming otherwise. This epistle of John is a resounding proclamation of righteousness, made clearly and repeatedly, so that none may ever claim ignorance of the truth.

When Jesus began His church on the day of Pentecost, Satan immediately responded to what he could see would be his eventual demise. His counter attack was on two fronts. First from outside, with brutal persecutions, and second from inside, with false teachers spreading deceptions. And these are formidable tactics, but Jesus said publically that He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Nevertheless, there will be many casualties in this

battle, and more of humanity will be lost than are saved, according to the word of God. Not because Satan is stronger, but because God has so decreed from the beginning. Salvation is not a common commodity laying around everywhere, it's a magnificent gift of God, bestowed by His grace, on a select few whom He has chosen. This makes it immeasurably valuable, not common and ordinary. And it is always effectual in its operation upon its true recipients, because, God has set His Holy Spirit to the task of regeneration, and sanctification, and transformation of each and every one on whom He has bestowed His gracious gift of saving faith. John is telling us that this is how we can determine with certainty who is, and who isn't, really a child of God, because Satan has sown many tares among the wheat, meaning there are many false converts and false teachers who are members of our churches. But we have a sure way to tell them from the true if we simply pay attention. In these next verses John is going to explain this to us.

No One Who Abides in Him Sins

4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:4-10 (NASB)

These are some rather amazing verses. In fact, if we don't grasp them correctly we'll conclude that no one is saved, because the scriptures themselves tell us that all have sinned, and John has already told us in this very epistle that if we say we have no sin we are liars, so how do we interpret these verses we've just read? To be able to understand John's meaning here, we must have a very clear understanding of the difference between two similar, but nonetheless different words, because they have different meanings. And that difference is the difference that defines these verses. The two words are "**commit**" versus "**practice**."

In the loosest possible interpretation, any commission could be said to constitute a practice, but these words were made to acknowledge that there's a difference that's worth noting. So two different words were devised. One might, for whatever reason, occasionally commit and act that they don't ordinarily do, and by this we say they committed an offense. But this does not, by any reasonable interpretation, constitute a common practice as that word is normally interpreted and applied.

To *commit* an act is freely acknowledged in human language as being different than *practicing* that act. To use the word practice, there must be a prolonged pattern of repetition. Every man and woman has told a lie, but do we then claim that every person practices lying? Only a perversion of the true intended meaning of the words would make such a leap from one to the other. Everyone has lied, so everyone is a liar, but not everyone commonly practices lying. Likewise, everyone has committed sin, so everyone is a sinner, but not everyone commonly practices sin. This is what John is saying, and when we understand that, everything falls logically into place. Only those who want to banter over words try to obscure this truth. John is speaking of "practice," of common and prolonged repetition, in these verses, so let's examine them in that specific context, and not misapply his intention. If we do, then these verses are crystal clear and amazingly revealing. These verses can, and should, either fill us with confidence, or frighten us into reality.

Verse 4:

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

I often hear discussions among all kinds of people, but particularly those professing to be Christians, and whole Christian churches, as to just what is and isn't really a sin. Inevitable you'll hear someone say "well I don't think that's a sin." As if sin was subjective, and it depended on how we feel. The bank robber says that he doesn't think it's a crime to rob banks if he doesn't kill anybody. Is this how we know what sin is, by how we feel about it? Is this how we think our secular laws work, by how we feel about them? Obviously not. We recognize that governing authorities have been established, and they are legally endowed with the rightful power, and authority, to both establish, and enforce, a set of written and publically endorsed set of laws and regulations. If we disobey these laws, we are subject to prosecution and incarceration. It has absolutely nothing to do with our agreement with them, or our feelings about them.

It's our obedience or disobedience to them that puts us in jeopardy of suffering the consequences. We all seem to understand this pretty well in our secular society. But for some reason that understanding doesn't seem to rightly carry over into the realm of God, and His rightful and lawful set of laws and commandments. We think our own personal opinions can sway, or even nullify His legal proclamations. If we know this doesn't work in a human court of law, why do we think it will work in the supreme and divine court of God's law?

John says that everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, because that's what sin is, it's practicing the disobedience of those divine laws of God. Breaking God's laws is disobedience, and disobedience to God is sin. Let me say that again, disobedience to God is sin, that's what sin is. We tend to think of sin as being something abominable entirely of itself, and certainly there are things that are so, but what makes them a sin is that God has decreed, and published, a set of laws and regulations that govern the proper and lawful activities of mankind. And any, and all deviations from those are against the law, and subject to prosecution and incarceration in God's penitentiary, the lake of fire.

In the secular world you can be arrested for mass homicide, or you can be arrested for shoplifting, although the nature of the two are different, the same police will arrest you, and the same judge will sentence you, and maybe even the same prison will house you both. The point is, that we aren't allowed to practice acts that are against the law, no matter how small or seemingly unimportant they appear to us. If we break the law, then we're subject to arrest and prosecution. Why don't we understand that this applies equally as well to God's laws? James, the Lord's brother, understood quite clearly when he wrote that if we break any one of the laws it's as if we broke all of them, because there's only one Lawgiver, God, and breaking any one of His laws is an act of disobedience, so in one sense, breaking any is the same as breaking all, because breaking any one of them makes us a criminal against the One and same God. James wasn't insinuating that the nature of every crime is the same, but that the offense was always against the same holy and righteous God.

To disobey the word of God is to sin. To participate in, or propagate, or support, or even passively condone, practices and beliefs that are contrary to the teachings of holy scriptures is a sin. It's a sin because it's a violation of God's declared laws for mankind. Every direct disobedience, every intentional ignoring and condoning of disobedience in the church and among the brethren, to the word of God is sin. And to make a practice of it is to expose the condition of your heart as being deceived and void of the Spirit of God. Because:

Verse 5:

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

Here John makes it clear that Jesus didn't just come to forgive us for our sins, He came to take them away. This means exactly what it says, that Jesus' appearing wasn't **just** intended to forgive us for our occasional "commissions" of sin, but much more, to henceforth **take away** our common "practice" of sin. We will be unable to prevent our occasional "commission" of sin, (1Jn 1:9) but we are fully expected, yea commanded, to cease and desist from our repeated and prolonged "practice" of sin. And we've already made that difference perfectly clear. John says that in Him there is no sin; and, because it is the Father's intention to conform us to Christ's image, (Rom 8:29) that we are being transformed through the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2) in both thinking and behaviors. It is therefore totally inconsistent with the stated plan and purpose of God, that His children continue in the prolonged and repeated "practice" of sin. Which is the practice of intentionally disobeying His commandments as presented in scriptures. Regardless of the clever spin tactics that are applied by the multitudes of liberal false teachers and false converts. John's next verse just amplifies this same thought.

Verse 6:

No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Now let's continue to hold fast to our agreed context. John says that no one who abides in Jesus "practices" repeated and prolonged disobedience to His commandments, which is sin. No one will, without coercion or maybe even with it, decide to maintain a lifestyle that is in direct disobedience to the word of God. The work of the Spirit within that person will either bring them eventually to confession and repentance, or God will terminate their life here on this earth so they don't exceed His righteous limitations. (1Cor 11:30)

John then says, quite matter of factly, that no one who continues to “practice” sin has truly seen Him nor do they know Him. To repeat a saying from earlier, “not everybody that’s talking about heaven actually goes there.” Satan’s tares are often among the most vocal, but actions speak louder, and truer than words says John, and it’s those who obey God who demonstrate that they really know Him. Disobedience to His word, as a practicing lifestyle, is compelling evidence that there’s no true relationship on the inside. John says straight out, that those who continue to practice sin, by intentionally disobeying God’s commandments, have never seen, or known Jesus Christ, and have no family affiliation with God.

Those who endorse, and even boast of their openness and tolerance of lifestyles that are forbidden by God in His holy scriptures are not true Christians, period. It’s really that simple, and that’s what John is telling us. Listen now to John’s next couple of verses:

Verses 7-8:

7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Are you ever unsure of who is right and who is wrong about all the issues of the day, and what’s the right thing to do? In today’s world, there’s nothing imaginable that you can’t find a defender for. Someone, somewhere is ready to defend and justify the disobedience of every prohibition ever made by God. So how do we know who to believe?

Unless we have the holy scriptures, and a proper and unbiased interpretation of them, then we’ll never know the real from the imposters. First and foremost is the acceptance of the authenticity, and authority, and inerrancy of holy scriptures. Then, a proper interpretation of those scriptures. Then from there, we can ascertain what is true from what is speculation. Practicing righteousness is practicing what is taught in the holy scriptures, unchanged from antiquity, and unedited by liberal scholars, and unembellished by modern church growth experts. Righteousness is what the scriptures say is righteous, and sin is what the scriptures say is sin, and they (the scriptures) are 100% reliable, so we never need to be deceived by clever imposters, no matter how pretty they smile or how eloquently they present their deceptions.

We avoid being deceived by being familiar with holy scriptures ourselves, and we recognize false teachers by their subtle twisting of the meanings of them to usurp God’s true intentions, and thereby justify their disobedience to His commandments. John says that it’s only those who “practice” righteousness, as its defined in holy scriptures, who actually are the righteous ones. And conversely, he says outright, that those who “practice” sin (disobedience to God’s law) are the family of the devil. He doesn’t just say they’re poor souls who are misinformed, he says they are of the devil, and they sin because the devil sins, and that’s the family tradition of the devil and all his own.

Saints I’m probably going to shock some of you now but I’m going to restate what John is saying in another way so we clearly understand the implications. What John says could be equivalently stated today as all those seemingly nice people in your churches who disagree with the teachings of scriptures, and want tolerate everything under the guise of love, are not children of God, but children of the devil. They aren’t “seekers” they’re tares, planted by Satan into our churches, and their purpose isn’t to find the truth of Christ, but to confound and confuse it with their own secular worldview. Look, you don’t ask your doctor to leave cancerous tissue in your body because you hope your body will convert the cancer to good tissue, you tell him to take it out before it kills you. John is telling us both how to recognize the children of the devil that have infiltrated our churches, and what we must do in response. Joining, or even just accepting the practice of sin (which is any disobedience to scripture whatsoever) isn’t condoned anywhere in the scriptures.

What John said in verse 5, he again says with different words in the last half of verse 8. That The Son of God appeared for this purpose, what purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Not just to atone for the works of the devil but to destroy them. To make them cease and desist in the lives of His redeemed. So that sin would no longer be the master of us but that we would be freed from its (his) tyranny, and made slaves of righteousness by a regenerated and renewed heart. Remember these words by Paul?

17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-18)

This verse we quoted from Paul leads us nicely into the next verse of John:

Verse 9:

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

The first thing we tend to do is to challenge the validity of this verse. Probably not openly, but in our minds. We immediately think back to times in our own lives perhaps, or someone that we know, when we might have slipped back into the world for a time and lived less than obedient lives. We think of David, and worse, his son Solomon, and how they had periods of time when they were less than godly in their behaviors. We think, John, are you really sure you want to make this statement so plainly and without reservations? To answer this, I again refer back to our opening discussion about the difference between commit and practice. So you may ask, where is that line between the two? Exactly when does a repeated commission of sin become an official practice of sin? You already know that neither I nor you have that answer, but God does, and He marks it well, as we already discussed concerning the Corinthians who God literally killed to stop their sinning.

As for me, I have this tendency to always ask a lot of questions, and it has both benefits and drawbacks. Like right now, I'm teaching a verse that says that the one who is born of God cannot perpetually practice sin because God's seed abides in him and therefore, due to regeneration and transformation, he cannot continue to sin as a practice. But I just referred to verses by Paul that say that God had to terminate the lives of some of the Corinthians because they wouldn't cease from their sin. I would love to comment on this right now, but it must await those pending verses from this same epistle that John wrote in chapter 5, regarding a sin that is to death. (vv. 16-17)

For now, we must stay in context, and accept that John is speaking in a general term regarding how we distinguish between believers and imposters. And that is by their behavior, a behavior that is consistently kept in obedience to the commandments of God. Before we were redeemed, and transferred from the kingdom of darkness into His marvelous light, we were only capable of appreciating those things that dominated our hearts and our affections. There was no capacity within us for loving God or loving righteousness. We were damaged by the consequences of sin that came about under the fall of Adam, and that capacity for godly affections that might have been resident in Adam and Eve before their fall was now dead in sins and trespasses. We were born of spiritually dead parents who lacked the capacity to pass on godly affections to their offspring, because they had lost it themselves. For this reason spiritual imposters cannot walk in newness of life, nor can they understand the things of God, because they're still spiritually dead.

But not so for the children of God. They have been born again, meaning specifically that their spirit with which they can understand and relate to godliness and righteousness, has been made alive again, as it was before it was lost in the fall of Adam. There is now a capacity to rightly understand God and His holiness, and righteousness, and to appreciate it and long to have it ourselves. To see it working in our own lives, and earnestly strive to bring it to maturity and eventually even to perfection, as it is in Christ Jesus. These will not let themselves repeatedly and perpetually practice sin, because it's totally against our new nature, and it's abhorrent to us when we do it. To sin makes us feel dirty and polluted, and makes us feel separated from God's presence, and we just can't live with that. Disobedience isn't enjoyable, and it isn't worth the consequences that attain to it, so John says that we cannot practice sin. Not because we're physically restrained, but because we're spiritually and emotionally constrained, by our own affections.

In a virtual sea of churches, ones that strictly and consistently adhere to all the teachings of scriptures, without skipping over some, and twisting the meaning of others, are hard to find. But those who are populated by a majority of genuine believers, and pastored by a true man of God, will be clearly identifiable. They'll obey the word of God enthusiastically, and contrary to allegations to the contrary, will be the most loving of all, because their love won't be worldly love that encourages and accepts sin, but Godly love, that calls everyone to repent of their sins and come to Jesus Christ in humble submission to His authority, for the salvation of their eternal souls.

Depending on where you live, and especially what country, you'll have varying degrees of difficulty in finding one of these. But don't settle for anything less. For the vast majority, it's about which church is the shortest drive, or which has the best program to entertain their children, or which one accepts them just as they are without imposing demands upon them.

Or which one plays the music they like the most. Or which one has the best looking pastor who can keep them entertained and not bore them to tears with a long sermon all about scriptures they don't understand or even agree with. There's no end to these churches in the area where I live, and probably in yours as well. Obedience to God is usually a moot point, since the word of God isn't even taught. I can't help but chuckle every time I see this popular preacher on television who always starts by having his congregation hold up their bibles and repeat some pretty slogan, because every time that I've watched him do this he then proceeds to preach a sermon that has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with those scriptures that they've just held up in the air. But admittedly, I haven't seen him very many times, so it's possible that he may actually teach from the scriptures when I'm not watching.

My point is nevertheless the same, that churches that both want, and have, pastors that actually teach the word are not easy to find. And, I would say that there's probably more pastors who would be willing to do this than there are churches that really want it. I've seen good men dismissed for faithful adherence to the word, and others have their sermons censured by deacon committees who want to see numerical growth more than they want to see spiritual maturity of the members. Since the abandonment of the historic Calvinistic doctrines of grace in favor of the Arminian view of human free will and innate capability, the church has become a social club of unregenerate folks trying to gain respectability by coming to church. Most of them are nearly devoid of any real believers. I'm speaking the honest truth, this isn't hyperbole.

But genuine believers will not be happy and content if they're knowingly living in disobedience to God. That's why Satan sends eloquent and persuasive false teachers into the churches. Because one must know they're being disobedient to understand the consequences of it. Multitudes of genuine Christians are this very day living in disobedience to God without knowing for sure that they're doing so. There are so few churches that really teach the whole word of God, and dare to call sin, sin, that many dear immature Christians are lying stagnant in their growth and maturity process. Under these conditions it's very difficult to spiritually mature to any meaningful degree. So what's the answer?

The answer is to become familiar with the scriptures yourself, so you can determine with clarity if the church you're attending is actually teaching you the truth, and also practicing it themselves. Do they know what the scriptures teach on any specific subject, and do they use that teaching as their foundation in determining faith and practice? Does your church tell you plainly and accurately and decisively what is and isn't sin? Or do they tell you that everything is subjective, and we all have to make up our own minds? And we mustn't be judgmental of others who believe differently, even on matters of clear and direct scriptural decree. Churches that aren't willing, or able, to ascertain with clarity what is and what is not sin are useless, and devoid of any purpose in the plan of God. He's long since removed the lampstand if there ever was one to begin with. Meaning He's long since removed His endorsement of, and blessing upon, that assembly that calls itself a church. Our next verse fills out this teaching:

Verse 10:

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Notice that there's only two families acknowledged here. There's the family of God, who are recognized by their practice of righteousness, and there's the family of the devil, which is recognized by their absence of the practice of righteousness. This verse means exactly what it says, and it doesn't simply use unstated implications, or reverse logic, it states directly and straight forward, that the absence of a life that is characterized by the practice of righteousness is evidence of family affiliation with the devil, not with God.

This completely destroys that popular argument that one might behave like the devil, but in their hearts really be children of God. As one does, so one is, according to John's declaration. One does not practice, as a matter of routine, that which is contrary to their true nature. If sin characterizes the practice of any, then that confirms the true character and nature of that person. Those who are reborn of the Spirit of God, will demonstrate that by their routine practices, and those who are not will be readily identified by their incapability to conform to that standard as a matter of practice. And by this observation John says that the children of God and the children of the devil are both clearly obvious. If it swims like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, then it is a duck. We don't need to give it a DNA test to figure it out.

Almost as a footnote to this verse, and from a whole different aspect, John adds: *nor the one who does not love his brother.*

After so much talk about external practice, and the obedience to the word of God, and a life that's characterized by a perpetual practice of righteousness, John feels the need to cap it all off with a reminder that our association with, and our relationship to God, and by extension all His other children, is one that is dominated by love. A love that is first and foremost for God and His Son Jesus, but is by logical extension necessary between every true believer, because we are indeed all of one Spirit and one mind and one eternal family. There will not be personality conflicts in His eternal kingdom, and there will be no posturing for position as the sons of Zebedee in Matthew 20:21. As Jesus said, all will be willing to be servants of Christ and servants of each other, for the mutual benefit of all.

There are many good reasons to desire adoption into the family of God, and entrance into His eternal kingdom. In fact we can't even imagine all that awaits those who are so blessed, (1Co 2:9) but it's the love of God, and our love for Jesus that's at the root of everything that God has planned for His beloved children. It's love that will bond the eternal heavenly relationship of God's kingdom. He could easily enforce His authority by strength of might, but God chose love as the mysterious force of adhesion for His eternal kingdom. We'll be a family because we love God with all our heart's and all our soul's, with all our mind's and with all our strength. There's nothing in the created universe, or beyond, that's quite like true love, and God values it above all else as the defining characteristic of eternal relationship. If we have not love, we have nothing said Paul in his well known passages from 1st Corinthians 13.

Conclusion:

We've covered more verses than usual in this lesson, but they were all on a singular topic of thought, so it seemed that they were best kept together.

The point that John is making here, again for the second or third time, is that true believers will be recognizable by their behaviors. And false proclaimers will be readily identifiable by their unwillingness, as well as inability, to consistently live a life that's in conformity with the commandments of God.

The false proclaimers will do everything they can to distort the meaning of the word of God so as to accommodate their disobedience. They'll claim to be loving and tolerant. They'll claim their nonjudgmental attitude is noble and virtuous, and reflects Jesus' own loving acceptance of sinners, ignoring that in that acceptance He always demanded repentance.

The conclusion is that consistent obedience to the word of God is the litmus test of genuine faith, and where there's disobedience to the word, either flagrant or passive in its nature, it's a sure sign of deception. Those who are true are daily practicing righteousness, as He is righteous, and eagerly looking forward to His glorious return. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
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