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1 John 3:1-10: *Children of God*

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Two weeks ago we officially celebrated Easter,

With trumpets, song, and acclamation of Christ's resurrection.

Well, we are still officially celebrating Easter.

The Easter season per the church calendar is 50 days...

From Easter Sunday all the way to Pentecost.

We're still talking about Jesus, who was laid in a tomb, dead for 3 days...

And by the power of the Spirit was raised back to life...

This week we're looking at a piece of the letter from 1st John.

We'll start out reading chapter 3, verses 4-10:

⁴Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

This is the Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

This is not an easy passage for us to read...

It's one of those parts of Scripture that kind of turns my stomach when I read it...

Over the years it has made me question my Christian walk....

And it has at times made me doubt who I am:

“Do I *really* know the Lord?”

“Am I *really* born of God?”

After all it does say, “Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child.”

It’s pretty straightforward in calling out sin for what it is...

It takes sin rather seriously.

“Based on the way I’m living *my* life, is there evidence that I’m a child of God?”

“Or do I fall into the other category...”

“A child of the devil?”

What is John saying in this passage?

And why does he speak out so strongly against sin?

First John was written to a group of Christians late in the 1st century...

It was a group of Christians who were coming up against false teaching...

They were under threat of being led astray (v. 7).

Some people from within their own ranks broke off from the church...

They split because they started aligning themselves with gnostic teaching.

Gnosticism is a teaching based on the idea that there is a difference between the created world and the spiritual world...

They see the created world...everything physical and material...bodies included...

They see it as inherently evil.

On the other hand...

They see everything spiritual (non-material) as essentially good.

So the goal of life for the gnostic becomes escaping the material world for the spiritual world.

You’re trying to free yourself from this evil body and this evil world...

So that your spirit can reach a non-material existence.

The way that your spirit is released from your body is through knowledge...

Hence, Gnosticism...

Gnosis in Greek means knowledge.

It's where we get the word agnostic...or without knowledge...

We don't/can't know things about God.

For some Gnostics, Jesus was the teacher who gave them this knowledge.

He came into the world to reveal to them secret knowledge...

So now they had what they needed.

Everything they needed to escape their bodies and the material world was revealed to them by Jesus...

So now they were just waiting to be free from the physical constraints.

On top of this distorted view of Jesus and creation...

They also had a warped sense of morals...

Because they had what they needed spiritually—

Because they obtained the secret knowledge to free them from the physical world—

It didn't really matter what they did...

Since the material world was already bad, it didn't matter how they lived in it...

Just keep your thoughts and your spiritual life pure.

Obviously there is something going on with this group's view of sin...

They weren't taking sin seriously...

It didn't matter to them what they were doing here in this world.

And it was enough to make John use some pretty strong language:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law.”

“No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.”

“No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

“The one who does what is sinful is of the devil.”

Are you feeling convicted yet?

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin...”

“Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child.”

These are tough words for anyone to hear...

Because none of us do what is right all of the time:

There are the obvious sins that we don't want anyone to know about...

Those sins we keep behind closed doors;

Maybe what we see as "bigger" sins.

And then there are those that are more acceptable not only in the world's eyes but also in our eyes....

We may talk about people when they're not around...

And talk about their situation that has nothing to do with us;

Maybe we know a wrong is being committed in the work place or at school...

But we don't say anything out of fear for our own reputation.

Maybe we fudge our tax numbers, our numbers at work, or find a way to cheat off of a test at school...

"Little things," we say.

"Things of no consequence."

Not so for John...

"Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child..." (1 John 3:10)

If you have any awareness of your own sin—

If you're being honest with yourself about your shortcomings in life—

You're saddened, confused, or even upset by John's words.

How can John use such strong language when talking to people that he knows sin?

In the first chapter of this letter—

The words we used for our call to confession—

John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves..." (1:8)

How can John, in one breath, say, "We are all sinners"...

And then in the next say, "The one who practices sin is of the devil?"

We have to read this passage in light of what comes right before it.

If we only stick with this part of John's letter we will be driven to doubt.

We started off reading verses 4-10...

Let's read the first 3 verses now...

1 John 3:1-3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

To understand why John speaks so strongly about sin...

We have to understand what he says here.

He says, "Look at what love the Father has given to us..."

"That we should be called children of God."

God calls us children.

God calls us sons and daughters.

The use of the phrase "children/sons of God" in the Bible usually points us back to the covenant...

This agreement or promise that God makes to Israel...

Where God takes for himself a group and makes them *his* people.

The status of Israel as God's son or child is a covenantal relationship.

God makes a promise with Israel to be their God...

And they will be his people.

Israel became God's child through the saving act of deliverance from Egypt. (Brown, AB, 389)

And now we are meant to think "covenant" when we read our passage:

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God."

Instead of being delivered from slavery in Egypt...

We've been delivered from sin and death.

The only reason that we are called God's children today is because God *gave* this status to us...

He bestowed it or lavished it on us.

We didn't do anything to earn it...

We didn't make the choice to be called his children...

We don't deserve being called his children.

He makes us his children only by his choice.

In Christ Jesus a New Covenant is established.

No longer are we saved by following the demands of the law—

This is the old way of doing things...

We're now saved through the death and resurrection of Christ.

In this covenant of grace, God makes us his children.

All of this talk about "covenant" is important...

Because in a covenant there is grace and there is response...

God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt...

And so he expected them to respond with obedience to his Laws.

As his children, they were supposed to live lives committed to the Lord.

The same goes for us:

We've been freed from the bondage of sin and death...

We've been brought back into a loving relationship with our Creator and Father...

And our response to His grace is one of gratitude.

Gratitude for all that's been done for us.

Thanksgiving that expresses itself in acts of love toward our neighbor—

Thanksgiving that does the right thing, no matter the cost.

As sons and daughters of God we're invited to practice righteousness.

So now, back the question of sin.

Why does John use such strong language toward our sin?

Who here has ever remodeled a house?

Get those images inside of your head.

What comes to mind?

Knocking down walls;

Crawling around in the dirty attic adding lights;

Tearing up the flooring;

Ripping out cabinets;

Removing old shower kits;

Scraping old tile off the wall

Then adding new walls;

New drywall;

New flooring;

New paint;

When you think about a remodel you don't think about hanging curtains on the existing structure...

You probably don't think about slapping new paint on old, dirty walls.

You think about a remodel...

Serious changes and additions.

This is what happens to us when we become sons and daughters of God.

When we become God's children...

He comes in and does a major remodel of our hearts.

God comes in, takes down walls, and begins a new creation of our lives (Scott Hoezee).

Or as C.S. Lewis says:

“God became a man to turn creatures into sons [and daughters]; not simply to produce better people of the old kind but to produce a new kind of person.”

And this is why John is able to use such strong language toward sin.

Because it's inconsistent with our identity now...

Sin doesn't make sense any more for God's children.

In this covenant with God—

This covenant where Christ has made it so that we are sons and daughters of God—

We become a new creation.

We're not the same people with just a physical makeover...

God doesn't just brush our hair, pluck our eyebrows and slap some makeup on us...

We've been changed from the inside out.

We've undergone a major remodel on the inside.

Our hearts have been changed.

The Spirit of the Living God is now living in us...

Making it so that we can do the right thing.

Making it so that we can live in service to our Father God...

Showing our gratitude for his love.

He calls us his children and empowers us to live new lives.

There's a story that came out in Christianity Today back in 2014 about Tommie Scott.

Tommie grew up in Los Angeles...

His father was in a gang and so it was his destiny to join the gang.

At just 12 years old he was initiated into the gang...

Initiated into the violence, crime, and drugs that came along with it.

Of his life in the gang he says, "I was suicidal and depressed. I destroyed lives by making others join gangs, sell drugs and take part in robberies and violence."

"I felt low, worthless, and unloved. I hated myself."

Tommie was eventually sentenced to prison for 10 years for a robbery.

It was in prison where the Lord grabbed hold of his life.

Through a Bible study Tommie heard the Good News that God loved him and gave *His* life for *Tommie's* life.

Tommie knew that he had new life.

He says, “Words won't do justice to what happened. I knew that I was saved. I felt *clean* and overcome with love and peace.”

This is what happens when we become children of God.

We're given new life.

And of his new life Tommie says, “I didn't turn over a new leaf. I didn't just become a better person. God supernaturally transformed me.”

God came in and did a remodel of this man's heart and life.

No longer wrapped up in drugs, gangs, or crime...

God did a remodel of Tommie's life and now God uses Tommie to speak to at-risk youth about the dangers of gangs.

Tommie is an evangelist sharing his story about how God changed his life.

God is working through His son Tommie...

Not just taking him from a life of sin...

But pouring new life into him...

So that he might live in response to God's grace.

Nothing less extraordinary has happened in us.

Many of us have been born into the faith...

We were raised as God's sons and daughters...

So we don't all have crazy stories of conversion.

But nothing less than a complete remodel has happened in our lives.

We've been transformed!

We are God's sons and daughters...

Living with His Spirit inside of us...

Free to follow him with transformed lives...

Telling the world the Good News of His love...

No longer being indifferent towards sin.

This is who we are as God's beloved children.

Praise be to God that He has welcomed us into His family.

Amen.