Remember Whose Son You Are

by

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“And now little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 2:28—3:10).

FROM 1967 to 1973, I preached at the Tenth and Broad congregation in Wichita Falls, Texas. Two special ministries enabled me to understand better Christian young people: the Bible Chair ministry on the campus of Midwestern University and the evangelistic outreach program among the airmen at Shepherd Air Force Base. The airmen and the freshmen college students would soon fall into two very distinct groups. Some young people who were, for the first time in their lives, away from Mom, Dad, and the church back home, would do as they pleased. They got involved in various kinds of sin—dope, alcohol, and sex—and lost their faith. Other young people who were, for the first time away from Mom and Dad, and the church back home, seemed to react just the opposite by accepting the challenge of making their own decision to become strong, dynamic Christians. Many of those young people, especially some of the Air Force young men we knew, are now gospel preachers and missionaries. What was the difference?

At times I would ask these young people, “What is the difference? You have the same temptations these other young people have. Yet you do not become overcome. Why not?” Different reasons were given at different times, but one reason came up again and again. They would say, “This is my first time away from home, and I thought about how I would hurt my dad and mother. It’s not because I’m any better than those other young people. At one point in my life, I may have been just as willing to do what was wrong, but I knew it would hurt Mom and Dad, so I didn’t give in.”

We think about the Christian life as a whole. In a greater, more spiritual way, a force very similar to that enables us to live the Christian life. What causes some people faced with temptation to fall into sinful living, while others are able to resist sin and grow spiritually? John talks about this question in 2:28, 29—3:10. He gives us three reasons why Christians are able to refrain from sin.

I. WE KNOW OUR FATHER

First of all, notice 2:28—3:1. The first truth that enables a Christian to refrain from sin is that he knows who his Father is. He knows who God is. He knows that God is not a tyrant hiding behind a tree, just hoping we will sin so he can zap us and send us to hell. John says He is a God in whom we can have confidence. We can believe that He will keep His word and that He will send His Son Jesus. We can know that if we are truly born of God, we will behave in a righteous way. A child will try to “be like Dad.” Little girls will try to imitate Mom. John says we are “born of Him. If you have been born of God, you will want to be righteous because that is one of the signs of being born of God. He says, “After all,
look how God has loved us. Look what God has
done for us. He has bestowed upon us the right
to be called sons of God.” The word called here
means this is a title or a right that is bestowed.
One version even says that “we should be called
the sons of God, and such we are.”

It is one thing to say, “I’m a child of God. I’m
a Christian.” Many people make that claim. But
John is writing to people who are called the sons
of God, not because it is a name tagged on them
like a nickname or a label, but because it is what
they really are. Anytime we decide to fight with
Satan on our own, we are bound to lose! He is
stronger than we are. But when we remember
that we are children of God, we have a power
within us. He says, “For this reason the world
does not know us because it did not know Him.”
When you are a child of God, the world will not
understand you. They will not understand why
you do not make compromises in the business
world or participate in some sinful recreation.
They did not understand Christ. Being a child of
God enables you to do what is right even though
it may not be understood by those around you.
We need to remember whose children we are.

II. WE HAVE A PURPOSE

John explains, second, that God’s children
are pure in 3:2, 3. Every family has family tradi-
tions. Some traditions may be very insignificant,
such as the time of getting up in the morning.
Others may be very important. The family tradi-
tion of Christians is to be pure like the Father and
the elder Brother. Besides imitating Mom or
Dad, sometimes the younger children in the fam-
ily imitate the older brother. Often, by imitating
someone else, a person will actually end up
having power to do something he would not
have been able to do. Little eight-year-olds go
out and hit homeruns when they are not really
homerun hitters. They are just acting like big
brother. The tradition in our family as Christians
is to be pure.

Verse 4 says, “Everyone who practices sin
practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” It
is against the family tradition to sin. It is not part
of our behavior or pattern of living. Just trying to
feel differently is not the way to avoid sin. For
example, some say, “The way to control my
alcoholism is by no longer wanting to drink.”
Alcoholics Anonymous discovered long ago that
that is not the way to stop drinking. Many men
and women will never quit craving a drink. But,
they can quit taking a drink. Strong feelings may
exist in our lives that are wrong, but we can
always control the way we behave. That is within
our power.

Next, he says, “And you know that He ap-
ppeared in order to take away sins; and in Him is
no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one
who sins has seen Him or knows Him” (3:5, 6). If
you are going to abide, remain, and walk in
Christ, you cannot continue to walk in sin. He
says that if you commit the same sin repeatedly,
without any effort to remove it from your life,
you have not seen Him or known Him. He is not
saying that if you live the Christian life you will
never fall into sin in a moment of weakness or
temptation. But you will not make a practice of
sinning.

If we are going to remove the sin from our
lives, we must recognize whose sons we are and
that we are a part of a pure family.

III. WE ARE DIFFERENT

Third, we must realize that there is a differ-
ence between the children of God and the chil-
dren of the world: “Little children, let no one
deceive you: the one that practices righteous-
ness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (3:7).
This is a statement that is so true that we try to
make something difficult out of it. We think,
“There must be some real deep, theological sig-
nificance in this verse that I am missing because
it is just too plain on the surface.” John says it is
very simple: “Don’t be deceived.” These people
may have been involved in an early Gnostic
tendency to measure their Christianity by their
spiritual insights. Sometimes we say of another,
“He is very righteous,” but what we mean is this:
“He is very pious.” John says righteousness is
not measured this way. God measures right-
eousness by righteous behavior. If you act right-
eous, you are righteous. Many Scriptures are
hard to understand, but many others are easy to
understand. This is a verse that is easy to under-
stand. He is not talking about being hypocritical
or putting on airs. He is saying that when you
know what is right and you do what is right, you
are righteous. Righteousness is not some difficult
word to define. It means doing what is right. It
does not matter how you feel about it or what the
consequences are. Paul said, “There is none righteous, no not one,” because we sometimes fall short. But here John is looking at it in a different context. He is talking about the pattern of your life. He says Christians generally do what is right.

John then says, “The one that practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. . . .” (3:8). You may have been baptized into Jesus and rejected sin at one time—but if you are now living in sin, you are a child of the devil. Your name may still be on a membership roll, and you may still be attending the services of the church and giving of your money. But if you are continuing to sin, you are a child of the devil. John adds, “. . . The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (3:8). Jesus came to take that away from your life.

He also says, “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” (3:9). If you see what the real difference is: that the child of God is born of God and His seed remains in him, you cannot sin because you are born of God. You cannot sin in the sense of remaining and continuing in sin. Again, John says, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1:10). He is not saying, “Never, on any occasion, can a Christian be tempted in a moment of weakness or temptation, but a Christian will not remain in the state of sin. If we are going to conquer some of the weaknesses and sins that are in our lives, we have to let God’s Word remain in us and constantly be alert to the difference in being a child of God and a child of the devil.

CONCLUSION

Many people who become Christians fall into sin. Many others come from similar or worse circumstances and are tempted by the world and yet do not yield to that temptation. Some sin and some remain true. Some fall away and some, although they may stumble, remain faithful there. What is the difference? It is not that some have greater or more marvelous opportunities than others. While we are certainly born with individual characteristics some are not born good and others born bad. The difference is that some people, when they come into Christ, remember who their Father is. They remember they are part of a family that is attempting to live the purest life possible. They understand that they are no longer the children of the devil, but that God’s seed is within them. This strengthens them when they are tempted.

John says in 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 that does not love his brother.” How do you know if you are a child of God? John says it is very simple. If you are not doing righteousness, you are not of God. But, if you are trying to live the Christian life then you are one of God’s children. You may make mistakes and you may fall briefly, but if you are trying to live right you are a child of God. Whose child are you?

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