

LET THERE BE NO MISTAKE

1 John 3:4-12

Intro: We all know that every day throughout our lives, we are continually making decisions. Some are so incidental that we hardly pay any attention when we make choices of various kinds – when we will get up, the clothes that we will wear, what we will eat for breakfast, when we have to leave to get to school on time, or to work on time, and for those of you who are housewives, what you are going to do first of all of the tasks that are waiting for you. And on we go throughout the day, making decisions.

Other decisions take more thought and prayer, like where we are going to college, or are we going to get a job without college. We decide on what is going to be our life work. For some they seem to know what that will be early in life; with others it may not be so easy to decide. Then come the questions about marriage, and a family. The opportunities for work may make it necessary to live in another part of the country. And so life goes on. Occasionally I have met people who are well along in life, who have been busy in work that they really have not enjoyed. There are things about every life that we don't particularly enjoy, but we all have to say that the Lord is far better to us than we deserve.

However, apart from the grace of God all of us will go through life without ever giving any serious thought to prepare for what is coming after this life is over.

For several weeks now, on Sunday mornings, we have been going through this First Epistle of John. We have seen that he was concerned about those who professed to be children of God and yet lacked the assurance that they really had eternal life. He gave them, and it all comes down to us today, various tests by which they could come to assurance. In the verses that we considered together last Sunday, the first three verses of chapter 3, the Apostle John reached the high point in his teaching as he projected himself and his readers, and now us, into what is before all of us who know the Lord: that wonderful day when the Lord will return for us, the day when we will see Him for the first time, will be with Him forever, and what is most incredible, when “we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” And, as we learned in our Sunday School lesson this morning from 1 Thessalonians 4, and verse 17, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” It is impossible for us to know now just what that will be

like. If words like these don't fill your heart with great joy just in anticipating what all this will mean, you need to take a good look at yourself in the light of Scripture because you may not be a child of God as you claim to be.

What is the Apostle John doing as we leave verse 3 of chapter 3 and go on to verse 4? I think he was saying to his readers, "*Let There Be No Mistake.*" Of all of the issues that you and I face in life, this is the most important question that you will ever have to answer. You can't afford to be wrong. When it comes to the matter of your relationship to God and to Jesus Christ, you can't afford to be wrong. Eternal life and eternal death are the issues that face every one of us. The Apostle John had lived a long life. He had seen a lot of people come and go. And he knew that it is very easy to be mistaken about this most important of all matters.

If I were to come to you personally this morning and ask you, "How do you know that you are a child of God," what would your answer be?

When I was a child and then on into my youth, a lot of people would be insulted if you were to ask them this question because they felt that the United States was a Christian nation, and that if you were an American you had to be a Christian. The United States is far from being a Christian nation today, in fact, it is getting more and more pagan all of the time, so people don't talk like that. People never were Christians just because they were born in the United States. So that is not the right answer. We can be thankful that we were born in a country where the Gospel, so far, is freely preached, but that is not what a Christian is.

Often you come across people who think they are Christians because their parents were Christians, and they were raised in churches where they learned a lot about the Bible, and maybe committed many Bible verses to memory. You can be thankful if that was true in your case, but there have been thousands of people with that background who today are not walking with the Lord. I have often been surprised in talking to people who made no pretense of being a Christian, to learn that they parents were Christians, and that they were raised in a good, Bible-teaching church. But now they never go to church.

In the church that many of us were formerly connected with, we had a large camp where literally hundreds of boys and girls, young people and adults, went to camp and there professed faith in Christ, but with many of

them today there is no indication in their lives that they are interested in the Lord. Many of them don't even go to church. And yet if you were to ask them if they know the Lord, most of them would probably say, "Yes."

Now it is good if you have made a profession of faith in Christ *if* there is evidence in your life today that the Lord has done a work of salvation in your heart. Well, you may say to me, "What kind of evidence are you talking about?" And my answer to that would be 1 John 3:3. The Apostle John said that if you have this hope in you, that is, in your heart where it is evidence that you have been saved, then you are going to be interested in purifying yourself. What does this mean? It means that you are going to be doing all that you can to avoid sin, and you are going to be interested in holiness because your Lord is holy, and you want to be like your Lord. If you should sin, it is going to bother you until you confess your sin and are restored to fellowship with the Lord. Go back and read again 1 John 1:5 through 10.

Now this brings us to our text for today. In many respects the Apostle John was going back to speak of sin like he did in chapter 1.

For many years people in the world have been telling us that things that used to be sinful, are not sinful any more, that there are times when it is OK to do what used to be considered sinful. That is one of the biggest lies that has ever been told. Verse 4 could be translated this way: "Everyone who practices sin practices lawless, for sin is lawlessness." Originally the expression, the Law, referred to the Law which God gave to Moses. But as time went on, that expression, the Law, was used to refer to all of Scripture. So what John was saying here is that sin is any violation of the Word of God. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not . . .," but people do it anyway. Or the Bible says in so many words, "Thou shalt . . ." but people don't do it. The Bible defines sin for us. And the Bible never changes. It is the Word which God has given us, and God does not change, and neither does His Word change.

But verse 5 takes us a step farther. The whole purpose of the coming of Christ in the world was "to take away our sins," not to leave us to go on in our sins. And the reason that the Lord came for that purpose was because no one could qualify to save us. He qualified because "in Him," that is, in Christ, "is no sin." He came "to take away our sins," not to leave us in our sins, but ultimately to make us like He is.

Now look at verse 6. Abiding in Christ could be translated remaining in Christ, or continuing in Christ (as we learned back in 2:24). When a person is saved, he is joined in a living relationship with Christ, and it is impossible for such a person to go on living in sin. He can still sin, but he will not live in sin. Therefore if a person claims to know Christ, but has not experienced a change in his life with regard to sin, you know that He has not seen the Lord, nor does he know the Lord. This is what the Apostle John said back in 1:6:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

This means that if a person claims to be a child of God, but continues to live sinning as a way of life, he might think that he is a Christian, but he isn't! He is a liar because he does not the truth. I remind you, the truth of God is not just something to believe, but it is the way a true Christian lives; it is what he *does!* *The Apostle John was saying in so many words, "Let there be no mistake about this!" The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." To be saved is to be born again. A Christian is a new creature in Christ. And his life is going to show how God has changed him.*

I am sure that if the Apostle John were setting the print for verse 7, it would all be in capital letters. He knew that many people were deceived into thinking that something less than this was what a child of God is. If teachers come along telling us something different from what the Apostle John has just said, they are deceivers. They are liars. They will try to make you think that you are a child of God when you aren't! *Let there be no mistake about this!*

Remember that the word "righteous" has to do with measuring up to a standard. The standard is God. We can't do this for ourselves, but this was accomplished for us at Calvary. Nothing less is salvation.

Verses 8 and 9 stand in contrast with each other. Verse 8 describes one who is not saved regardless of what his profession might be. Verse 9 describes a person who is saved.

The person who lives in sin (and it doesn't have to be gross sin) "is of the Devil. The Devil introduced sin into the human family. He was a sinner "from the beginning." And here the Apostle John spoke of a second reason for the manifestation of Christ in the world. He came to "destroy the works of the Devil." The verb is λύω. It is used here, Thayer says, in

a metaphorical sense of *overthrowing*, or *doing away with* the Devil and his evil works. By the death of Christ the doom of the Devil was finally sealed. The Lord Jesus declared to His disciples shortly before His death, that “the prince of this world is judged.” Judgment has not been executed on Him, but it will be in accord with what we are told in the book of Revelation. The archenemy of God and the Gospel and of all of the people of God will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. After being set free for a short time he will seek to continue his deception of the nations, and then he will finally be cast into the lake of fire, “and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

The Lord was talking to Jewish leaders when He said,

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

The career of the Devil runs throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. He has never been more active than he is today unless it was while the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth. He knows that his time is short. He knows that his doom is certain. And so he is doing all of the evil that he possibly can before his judgment is executed upon him.

Verse 9 gives us the other side of the picture, concerning those who are “born of God.” The mark of those who have been “born of God” is that they do not live in sin. As the Apostle John said here in 1 John 3:9, “he cannot sin because he is born of God.” The word that the Lord used here for “seed” is the word from which we get our English word, *sperm*. And here the Apostle John used again the verb, μένω, *to abide* or *remain*. It speaks of the fact that we have the very life of God in us, and it is a life that we will never lose. It is a holy life. It is an eternal life. It is that life which we now have, if we are truly trusting in Christ, which we have by the new birth, and which we can never lose. Thus, we are actually unable to continue living in sin, is what the Lord Jesus said here. When the Bible speaks of our adoption, it is not using the word as we use it in our society today. We are not adopted children as far as the family of God is concerned; we are born children. We have the very life of God and of Christ in us, and that is why we cannot go on living in sin. We can sin, but we don’t live in sin. I trust that the Lord will show us all what our Lord was speaking about.

In verse 10 the Lord summarized what He had been saying. There are only two kinds of people in the world: the children of God and the children of the Devil. And the difference between the two is that you see righteousness in the one, the children of God, but you don't see righteousness in the other, the children of the Devil. It is only since we have been born again that we are capable of doing anything that is pleasing to God. And at this point the Apostle John ties in a righteous life with another characteristic that the children of God share with each other. It is that we love one another. So a true child of God is known by the life he lives, a life of righteousness, and by the love that he has in his heart for all others who are the children of God. *The Gospel is the only solution to the race problem that is so terribly strong in the world today!*

And so the Apostle John says that this is the message that his readers had heard from the beginning. It is not just an option, or a possibility that we can accept or reject. It is a commandment!

The text that I have chosen for today ends with a word about Cain and Abel. As you know, they were brothers, the first children of Adam and Eve, born after our human parents had become sinners by their disobedience to God's commandment. The love that we have as the children of God is stronger than the love that children are capable of who are born in the same family, especially when one knows the Lord and the other does not. How did Abel show that he was saved? By the offering that he brought to the Lord, a blood sacrifice. Cain did not bring such a sacrifice. And he didn't want to bring such a sacrifice. So he was not content just to let Abel bring the only sacrifice that would be acceptable to God. Cain was "of that wicked one," meaning the Devil, and so in jealousy he killed his brother Abel.

Concl: So, let me say it again: There are only two classes of people in the world – those who are the children of the Devil, and those who are the children of God. And those of us who are the children of God are not in the family of God because of who we were by nature, or because we took the initiative in turning to God. We are the children of God because God chose us, and God sought us, and God drew us to Christ, and God saved us by the new birth. The story of Cain and Abel shows that just because you are biologically members of the same family here on earth, that you will all be members of the family of God.

So thank God if He gave you parents who know the Lord and who told

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you about the Lord Jesus Christ. But I hope you realize that that does not save you. It is when by the grace of God you are given faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are have been born again and are able to live a righteous life, a life that is pleasing to God. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells the whole story.