

# The Test of the New Birth

a sermon in the series  
Life in the Son

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I John 3:5-10

*And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

John has given us several tests of faith throughout this Epistle; there is the moral test of faith, the love test of faith and the fellowship test. Now He brings us to the pinnacle of all tests, the test of the new birth. Without the new birth there is no Christianity.

The whole basis and foundation of the Christian life is not what we have done for God, but what He has done for us. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “you must be born of the Spirit”—God must birth you from above. It would seem to be an illustration, but I believe that the new birth is not an illustration but is exactly that—a spiritual birth. Something which was not in existence comes into existence. That which was not now is. Why? Because God alone has the power and ability to call forth things that are not as if they are. There was no life in you, the life of God was nonexistent, but the Word of God came and spoke as a word out of darkness bringing light and you saw the truth. Then you believed “from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”

For those who have been born again, this will be so elementary. You don’t even need a sermon on it. However, there may be one who is born again but because of the snare of the devil, you have fallen into sin. Now the condemnation of hell is raining down on you and there seems to be nothing but darkness, no light of God’s love. You seem to be all alone and think perhaps your Christianity was all a lie, only an emotional experience. You start to wonder if you’re truly born again. Well, this message is for you.

It will also be for he or she who is yet to be born again. For you who may think you are a Christian. Please listen carefully and judge yourself by this test. The flesh never wants to be

examined, tested or challenged, but I pray you will submit to this test for your eternal soul's sake.

## I. The Sinlessness of Christ

The whole Gospel begins with Christ and rests upon Him and Him alone. He has to be spotless if He is to be a sin bearer because He cannot bear our sins unless He has no sin Himself. If there are no sins for Him to bear, then He can take our sins. But if He has committed sin Himself, if He is not so spotless, then as He hangs on the cross under the wrath of God, He experiences the wrath for His own sin, not ours.

The doctrine of Christ's sinlessness is of a high priority to the Apostle John. You see it over and over again. From the first chapter he talks about the word of truth he had handled. He talks about Christ walking in the light and that we are to walk in that same light. Well, that requires a sinless Savior. John believes in the sinlessness of Christ not just because it's a truth that must be upheld but because it has radical implications for you and me.

*“Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him” (1 John 3:6).*

Jesus Christ came and was spotless and that has an application to you. If you claim to be in Jesus you ought to not be sinning like you used to sin. We do sin and we will deal with that; perfection is not what John is after. He's not advocating that only the perfect ones are saved, what he is saying is this—whatever is true about Jesus Christ has a radical impact on you. If there is no sin in Jesus, then there will be no abiding in sin for the believer.

Why? Because Christ has a profound influence in the believer. The life and the experience of Christ comes to bear upon the Christian. Friends, this is not just doctrinal stuff. This is not just for guys in ivory towers who talk about the *impeccability of Jesus*. You know men really wrestle with that topic, the question if Jesus could have sinned while He was on this earth? Do you know there are men who will spend their entire lives discussing that subject? To me it is a worthless subject in one sense of the word because John has already muted it and put it to death. Jesus had no sin. He was without sin. Whether He could or not is not the issue, the issue is He was sinless. Why debate hypotheticals?

If anyone is in Christ, because of Christ's sinlessness, that man or woman can't stay in sin. That's what he means by this word *sin*. If you're like me, the first time you read this verse your heart skipped a beat. I remember reading verse nine, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin,” and I thought, *uh-oh*.

I had never heard a man preach on this. I had no past experience with this text to know how to deal with it. I must tell you that just at face value it alarmed me. And I think it was good that I was alarmed. What does he mean? Does he mean that if you sin after professing faith in Christ you are not a Christian? No and I am thankful that John does not mean this.

The word sin here is in the present tense, which means practicing. John is saying if a person who professes to be a Christian and is practicing the same lifestyle of sin he or she practiced before they were saved, they are not believers.

John knows Christians sin. In 1 John 1:8 he says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." He's warning Christians not to follow the Gnostics who taught a heresy that the Christian does not sin and doesn't have any sin in him. The Bible teaches that there is sin in me, that is in my flesh there is no good thing. And in 1 John 2:1 John holds out hope for any Christian if they sin, "My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin."

You shouldn't sin, believer. You represent your Father and does your Father sin? No. So you shouldn't sin. "However, if anyone sins we have," John includes himself, "an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Therefore, John cannot be contradicting himself and saying if a Christian sins he is not a true Christian. No—John is dealing with the practicing of sin.

He's not dealing with even repeat offenders. How many of you have been saved but still repeatedly sinned the same sin until God brought you deliverance? Maybe today He has not yet brought deliverance and you are seeking it. I want you to know that John is not even dealing with that particular situation.

He is dealing with someone who abides, that's the critical word here, in sin. If you abide in Jesus you can't abide in sin. That is the contrast.

This is more than just your behavior. Remember in verse four John defines sin as lawlessness, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness and sin is lawlessness." Lawlessness is more than not hitting the bullseye or missing the mark—it's rebellion. It's to totally disregard God's authority. Those who practice sin are in rebellion and their lives are in effect treasonous to God. To practice sin is a mutiny against the authority of God. A true Christian, though he may sin, will not live in it. His life is not in rebellion. He wants to be under the authority of Jesus Christ. He delights to obey his Father, but because of several factors he often fails.

But I want to tell you something else. This same text of Scripture says a believer can't stay in that particular failure either. Yes, we still sin, but here is the story of the New Testament Christian: Before he was saved, sin was the norm and righteousness was abnormal; it was nonexistent! Now that he is saved, sin is becoming the abnormal and righteousness is becoming the norm. That's the story of sanctification by which God has committed Himself to perform in every believer. He has committed to grow and conform you to the image of Christ so that sin is becoming less and less an issue. Perfection? No. On the road to it? Yes. It will be completed in heaven with God.

## **II. Reasons Why Christians Don't Live In Sin**

## **A. Jesus Came to Take Away Our Sins.**

*“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin... and for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:5, 8).*

Friends, Jesus accomplishes what He sets out to do. It's foolish for us to assume here today that Jesus has failed at anything. In fact, I would say it is blasphemy to even insinuate such. If you're sitting here saying, "I'm just going to be what I'm always going to be, a failure at trying to live a Christian life," be careful. You are treading on dangerous ground, my friend, because ultimately we're not talking about what you can do for God, we're talking about His commitment to you and what He promised. He promised He would do something in you that would not leave you the same. That doesn't just mean forgiveness and guilt of sin removed. No, He's in the business of changing us even as I speak, for that too is in the present tense.

I remember after I was saved there were certain sins that dropped off—chains immediately unshackled and fell and I haven't wrestled with them since. Yet, I also remember there were some that were unlocked but didn't fall so quickly. But I can testify to you of God's grace coming to me in very powerful ways. Sometimes in chastening and discipline, bringing correction to my life until I wanted to be free of that thing and finally the chain fell off. Other times it was just a gentle rebuke. Today, I'm still experiencing the discipline of God in my life. I'm thankful for it. I look for it. I get scared if I knowingly sin and there seem to be no consequences or repercussions. I eventually will get on my knees and say, "Lord, what's going on? You said You loved me and I know I sinned, why aren't you chastising me?" Then God will then say, "You see, I have, you just didn't recognize it. Sometimes My correction is so sweet. Not always harsh or hard." Sometimes the discipline of God is Him just backing away from you for awhile. You don't sense His presence, but suddenly you stop and think, "Where is the Lord? I haven't sensed His presence in my closet of prayer. The Word of God seems dead to me. I just don't have the joy I used to have. Where are you, Lord?" And that is enough to bring you to your knees and ask God to have mercy on you, "Restore the joy of Thy salvation and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Jesus has come to take away our sins and He will do it one way or the other and He will not fail.

## **B. Christians Abide in Christ**

*“Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him” (1 John 3:6).*

We abide in Christ. In other words, our life comes from Jesus. Let me refer you back to John 15 and the parable of the vine and the branches.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).*

How is a branch able to bear the fruit? It cannot bear fruit of itself. If you cut that branch off and put it up on your windowsill, how many tomatoes or grapes you will get from it? You will get none. Why? Because the branch's ability to produce fruit didn't come from the branch it came from the vine, and the life source was severed so that the power of the vine cannot flow into the branch. The life of the plant is shut off of the branch. So if I'm abiding in Christ I cannot sin.

When you were abiding in Christ it is impossible for you at that moment to sin. You cannot do it. If you are at that moment looking to Jesus, relating to Him properly as the Scriptures says and looking to Him for grace, you cannot sin. You can only produce fruit. The only way for a believer to be able to sin is to disconnect himself from Jesus' life and trust in his own life and strength, and at that moment you've sinned. You sinned by shutting off the power of grace in you that would supply the escape you need from sin.

You cannot sin when you're abiding. "Whoever abides in Him does not practice sin." When you sin you turn your back on Christ, *I know what you say about this, God, but my flesh is so strong right now that I want to do it anyway*, then yes, you can now sin. But if you are truly humbled before God in spiritual poverty, trusting that He will provide the grace He promised to do, loving Him, wanting him, drinking in His life that lives within you, then it is impossible to sin.

A branch, James says, cannot both bear sweet and bitter water. Cannot! It's an impossibility to do both.

### **C. Christians Have Had a Life-Changing Encounter With Christ.**

*"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (1 John 3:6).*

Those are words that depict a life-changing encounter with Christ.

Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God* often talks about a life-changing encounter with God. Moses is the best illustration of that, Saul of tarsus on the Damascus road is another example, and anyone here who is a Christian today is an illustration of a life-changing encounter. There was a moment when you were dead in your trespasses and sins and the next moment you were alive, seated in heavenly paces in Christ Jesus. What was the difference? Jesus came and encountered you.

*Oh no, preacher, I came to Christ. I responded to the invitation, I got down on my knees and prayed, "Dear Lord, forgive me." Why were you on your knees praying? And why did you respond to the invitation? Listen to what Jesus said.*

*"No man can come to Me except the Father draws him" (John 6:44).*

That drawing is a life-changing encounter. Those of you who are not yet Christians, that's what

you need. You need God to step into your world. You need Christ to intersect the road you're traveling down. For some of us it's like a head-on collision, it was dramatic. For others, it's just a fender bender. But there was an intersecting where two lives collided. When you collide with Jesus, guess who wins? Jesus always wins.

That's what John is saying. When you have that life-changing encounter, you can't stay the same. Something happens to you. You lose. Your will is broken, you are submissive to Christ. You're not full of pride saying "I'm going to do this on my own, no thank You, God." No, you're crying out saying, "I need You, God. Don't leave me, God. I can't do this without You." What changed? Did Jesus change? Did He start loving you that moment? No. You started loving Christ because you met Him. And when you met Him you just couldn't help but fall in love with Him. Christians are people that have had a life-changing encounter with Christ. If I were not a Christian today, I wouldn't leave this room today and I wouldn't do anything else but cry out to God, if I knew that I was lost.

I will never forget the day I shared with Lance the Gospel and I said these words to him, "Lance, if I were you," because I could tell he was visibly affected by what he had heard, "I'd call in sick, I wouldn't go to work, I wouldn't do anything I'd planned today. I would get alone and cry out to God. *God meet me, God save me, don't let me die in my sins.*" An hour or two later, God met him.

You can't change you, not this way. You can't change the soul of a man. You can't change your own spirit, but God can. Salvation is meeting God as He intersects your life.

#### **D. Christians Have Been Born of God and Retain His Nature**

*"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9).*

The new birth is to be born from above and only the Spirit of God can do it. When I take a little tomato seed and plant it in a peat-pot I put the whole life of that seed in the soil. Within that seed the entire tomato plant exists, a plant that will grow about four to five feet tall and produce a couple dozen or more tomatoes. It will come from that one little seed.

For those who have been born again, the very seed of God's nature has been deposited, planted in their souls. It may start out small and seem to be no big thing, but dear friends, the life of God in that person cannot stay miniature—it will grow. God's nature has been put in you. You have become a partaker of God's own character.

The new birth is not about praying and asking Jesus to come into your heart, it's God literally implanting, embedding His life into you. Jesus compares it to conception. As Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and that which was born was of God, so is, in a sense, ever one born by God. The miracle of the incarnation is an illustration of the new birth. The Holy Spirit comes upon and overshadows the spirit of a man, something is implanted in his or her heart and that's why



they don't live a lifestyle of sin. It would be contrary to that new nature that has been deposited within them.

There are a lot of people who claim to have experiences with God. Some of them do real crazy things. I've seen some folks crowing like roosters or barking like a dog or roaring like a lion and they say the Holy Spirit came on them and did that. Let me ask you—does God crow? Does God bark like a dog? Absolutely not. It's not in the nature of God. I would never equate anything from the barnyard to the heavenly person of God. I may crow today or bark like a dog but I'm not going to go home and eat out of a bowl of dog food. My wife is not going to park me in a doghouse, though sometimes she might want to. I'm not going to scratch fleas like a dog, I'm not going to lick around and sniff like a dog, why? Because it's not in my nature. I may pretend to act like a dog, but it's acting contrary to my nature.

When I quit play acting and come back to what I am, I'm going to act out of my nature. That's why Christians cannot stay in sin; it's contrary to who they now are. That's how great a salvation you've been given.

### **III. Genuine Salvation is Tested**

You can test whether or not you have been converted. John gives the test.

#### **A. True Christians Practice Righteousness**

*“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7).*

How do you know if you've been saved? Because you practice righteousness. Now again, I want to be clear on this. We're not talking about the kind of righteousness that religious people exhibit. Jesus confronted this all the time with the Pharisees and said unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, a lost religious person's righteousness is for self-glory or self-preservation, they don't want to die and go to hell. Or they were afraid of what people might think about them or afraid, they fear social, financial or relational loss. *If I act out what I really want my wife will leave me. If I really act out what I am my boss will fire me. So I will not steal from my employer because I don't want to lose my job.* That's the kind of righteousness the Pharisees had. The new birth changes that and deposits the love of true righteousness. Because God's seed is in you, you've had a life-changing encounter. God's nature has been deposited and embedded in you, therefore, you're going to practice righteousness because you love it. You love holiness and it grieves you when you act contrary to your own nature, the new nature God has given to you.

Christians actually practice righteousness. Christians practice righteousness more than they practice unrighteousness, even new converts.

In fact, here's the test.

*“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).*

John ties this whole thing to not just outward behavior, but something internal—love. You can act nice to people because it makes you popular in their eyes, or because you will get certain things from them. Or you're afraid you might not be well thought of in their eyes if you aren't nice to them, but this is not love. Love is to be able to care about that person's welfare even at the expense of your own. Love doesn't care about convenience. It's willing to suffer inconvenience so that you don't have to force it.

## **B. False Christians Practice Sin**

*“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8a).*

That sounds so reminiscent of John chapter eight. In fact, John's just picking up what he heard Jesus say.

*“‘You do the deeds of your father.’ Then they said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.’ 42 Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it’” (John 8:41-44).*

Jesus said a man lives out what he is and what he is, is determined to whom he belongs. If you act like the devil, you must belong to the devil. John is saying nothing different than what Jesus and other New Testament authors have said. He's showing that salvation is more than religion. It is a salvation by faith evidenced by works.

This is the Apostle James' point in the second chapter of his epistle. There are a lot of people who think James should not have been included in the New Testament canon. The most famous person to have believed that was Martin Luther. Martin Luther was a priest, a Roman Catholic monk who struggled to believe God for salvation and tried to earn it when God showed him he couldn't earn; it was given by faith. Thus, when he read James, especially this part we're about to look at, he just thought it was so opposite of what Paul and Jesus preached, salvation through grace by faith.

Martin Luther made a fundamental mistake. He was taking justification through faith, which Paul taught in Romans and Galatians—which is a justification in the sight of God—and misunderstood James to be talking about the same thing. James isn't. James is talking about justification before



others. He's not talking about whether you're justified before God, God knows whose are His. But how do others know you belong to God? How do you know you belong to God? James introduces the idea of works. Not that you're saved by works, but that your works and obedience will tell others whether or not you are justified.

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).*

Real faith always produces works. I like what one preacher said: “It’s a faith that works.” It’s not a question about a faith versus works, no, it’s about a faith that works. Works in you and through you so people can see your faith at work and glorify your Father in heaven.

*“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only . . .” (James 2:18-25).*

Abraham had already been saved and justified, but his act of sacrificing Isaac in obedience to God proved he was a follower of God. That’s what works and obedience does.

*“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).*

If your faith does not work, then you have a dead faith. That’s all John is saying. You can know a saved man from an unsaved man by the conduct of life.

The way you know you’re saved, or not, is by observing how you live. Does your faith work or is it a dead faith? Christ obeyed the Father perfectly in His life on this earth and if Christ lives in you then why would you expect Jesus to do anything less than He did when He lived bodily on this earth?

If Christ lives in you, then He is always going to be exerting an influence upon your will to do the Father’s will. And you will do it. Sometimes you will fail, but Jesus will exert influence that you will repent, which is the Father’s will. Jesus always acts according to the Father’s will. And if Christ is in you His life will have an impact on yours. That is the test of the new birth.

Has the life of God made an impact on your life? A life-changing, continual transforming impact?

If it hasn't, then my friend, I speak the truth as gently but as firmly as I can. You are deceived. You may be an awesomely good person, as men judge goodness, but you are deceived to believe that within your life and nature is the sufficiency to live like Jesus. You need God's nature in order to live out God's nature. And only God can implant that in you. But I hold out hope for you, because He wants to do that.

Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through Him. He wants to save you. He wants to impact your life radically. Will you humble yourself right now and say "Yes, Jesus, be my master. I want to follow you. Change me until I'm completely conformed to your likeness?" Amen.