

Researching Your Spiritual Ancestry (Part 1)

1 John 3:7-10

October 30, 2022

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Well, I encourage you to take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to 1 John as we continue our study of John's first letter to the churches in the Asia Minor area that he shepherded and pastored. 1 John chapter 3. As you're turning, let me just say thank you to you for your prayers on behalf of the elders. We were away the last couple of days on an elders' planning retreat. We had a great time of fellowship, some wonderful discussion of the issues of our church, and looking at the future. In fact, the most exciting thing; and I'll share more with you about this at the annual meeting in January and with all of us shortly thereafter; but, we laid out a plan for church planting over the next 10 years. We want to continue, if the Lord wills, to impact our Jerusalem and Judea with the truth of the gospel. So, we'll share more in the days ahead about that.

As you know, over the last few decades there has been an increasing popularity of researching your physical ancestry. I won't ask for a show of hands, but I suspect some of you here have done that. There are dozens of companies now that offer this service, usually by analyzing the DNA that you send off in a saliva sample. Sometimes what you learn is surprising, even shocking. Sadly, I've spoken to people who find out tragic information that saddens them. And sometimes, the information you learn as a result can be inaccurate because it's only as good as the panels against which your information is compared. But they send you a report saying what percentage of your ancestry comes from this region and so forth.

Well, I don't really want to talk about your physical ancestry this morning because that's not the thing that most defines you. What I want you to understand is that every single person here this morning has a spiritual ancestry. Every person here, as you sit here this morning, you are either a child of God or you are a child of the devil. Those are the only two options Jesus gives. They're the only two options the Bible gives. There's no percentages. You are either 100 percent a child of God or you are 100 percent a child of the devil. And the good news is that there is a perfectly accurate test to determine your spiritual ancestry. And John gives it to us in the passage that we come to this morning.

1 John is about the tests of eternal life. He has three tests that he cycles through. We're studying the second cycle of those tests. And he begins the second cycle by returning to the test of obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word. You can know whether or not you have eternal life based on your obedience to Jesus Christ.

Now, we're looking then at the passage that runs from chapter 2:28 through chapter 3:10. And we're learning in this passage – we've already seen a couple of things here. We've learned that our obedience shows our real birth. Chapter 2:28 through chapter 3:3 answers the question: Am I still dead in sin or am I born of God? Chapter 3:4-6 teaches us that obedience shows our real relationship to Jesus Christ. And it answers the question: Am I still a slave of sin or have I been freed from sin and am now a follower of Jesus Christ?

Today, we begin the last section in this extended paragraph. And we learn here that obedience shows our real father. Chapter 3:7-10. And it answers the question: Am I still a child of the devil – that's how all of us was born, it's how I was born, it's how you were born. Am I still a child of the devil or have I in fact through the new birth become a child of God? Let's read it together. 1 John 3:7.

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 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. 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. 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.

Now the theme of these verses is stated clearly at the beginning of verse 10. Look at it again, “by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious”. I could summarize these verses in this way: The surest, most accurate test of our spiritual ancestry is our habitual conduct.

A child of the devil practices sin. And a child of God practices righteousness. Now these verses give us three crucial insights into our spiritual ancestry. If you want to know your spiritual ancestry, here it is: you need to get these three insights.

The first one is this: A lethal deception about our spiritual ancestry. You need to understand that there are people out there peddling a flawed test of your spiritual ancestry. Verse 7 says, “Little children, make sure no one deceives you”. John, always the gentle pastor, here gives a solemn warning to those he calls his little children. Both his little children, because they’re his in the faith, but to God’s little children because they have been born again and been adopted by God.

And to those who are believers, he says this, “let no one deceive you”. This is a call to stay alert. To stay alert in the first century and Christian, to stay alert now. You see, you need to understand that today as you sit here in your seat in Dallas in the 21st century, false teachers are still trying to deceive you. The Greek word translated “deceive” means “to lead astray”. John says, “make sure”. Continue to keep up your guard “so that no one leads you astray”. He was warning the believers then that Satan was going to use those false teachers and false brethren, false brothers, who had left their churches. You remember back in chapter 2:19, “they went out from us because they were not of us”. He was going to use those false teachers and those false Christians to try to deceive true believers about the truth. To try to lead them astray. This is how spiritual deception always happens. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, we read that Satan transforms himself into what? An angel of light. In other words, Satan doesn’t show up in a red suit with a pitchfork and a tail with horns. He shows up like an angel, magnificent. False teachers don’t come with “False Teacher” embroidered on their coat. They seem like the real thing. They’re there to help you, there to win you over. Messengers of truth.

Using false teachers, Satan tries to deceive true believers. And he tries to deceive them in two ways. First of all, doctrinally. In other words, he wants you to believe something the Bible doesn’t teach. He wants you to be persuaded with false doctrine. Look back at 1 John 2:22. Here’s an example. “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Messiah? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” He says listen, some of these false teachers are trying to teach you bad theology, bad doctrine. Don’t believe them. He also uses

false teachers to try to deceive believers morally. You see, if he can't get you wrong on what you believe, he wants to get you to step off the course of righteousness into sin. This is the point in this text. It's like in Revelation 2, you remember? Where John is talking to the churches and he says listen, there is a lady in your church who's trying to convince you that sinning sexually is actually good and acceptable with God. As Bruce writes about this passage, he says, "False teachers with their sophistry", that is, with their sophistication and their intellectualism, "were capable not merely of condoning sin", that's not where they stop, "but of making it seem virtuous". That's what they want to do.

Now in this passage, Satan is trying to deceive people in the church about their practice. "Practicing sin or practicing righteousness." And his deception about righteousness usually comes in the form of one of three lies. Let me give you the lies. Here they are. Lie number one: You gain a right standing with God by trying to be righteous. In other words, the way you get to heaven is you earn your way there. Just be a good person. Do the best you can. Make sure your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds and you'll be there. Listen, the Bible crushes that idea. Isaiah 64:6, "all of us have become like one who is unclean". That's you, that's me. "And all our", listen to this, not our sins, "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment". The best unregenerate human beings can do is produce righteousness that looks good to us, but in the eyes of God it looks filthy. Unacceptable. You will never earn your way into heaven. You are never going to be good enough. Romans 3 says, "There is none righteous, not even one". "There is none who does good, there is not even one." Not me, not you. You're not going to be the exception. This is a lie. You can't earn your way into God's favor.

A second lie is that if you appear externally righteous, you are righteous. In other words, if you look good to everybody else, you must be good. That's the lie of the Pharisees. What did Jesus say to them in Matthew 23? He said listen, you look great on the outside, but I know your heart. And in your heart, it's like you're full of death and decay. So, looking good on the outside is not good enough. It's not real righteousness.

The third lie that Satan peddles is this: You can be righteous without practicing righteousness. This is the chief deception that John's addressing here. Look at verse 7, "Little children, make

sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous”. You see, the heresy that had infected the churches that John ministered to in the first century was an embryonic form of Gnosticism. Theologians call it Pre-Gnosticism. It was influenced by the dualism of the Greek philosophers. And it taught that matter is evil and spirit is good. And so, the Pre-Gnostics argued this. They said your body is matter, therefore your body is evil. Your spirit, on the other hand, is good. So, your body is always going to be evil. You can’t do anything about it, so just let your body do whatever it wants. And it’ll never really affect your spirit. You and God will be good. You do whatever you want, engage in whatever you want, and you’re still righteous.

Listen. Sadly, that idea that a person can be righteous without practicing righteousness is still alive and well today. It’s not called Gnosticism – that’s not around. It’s called by various theological labels such as cross-centered sanctification, anti-lordship, free grace theology, easy believism, or decisionism. But the most common expression of this antinomianism isn’t so sophisticated. It’s just pop Christianity. Pop Christianity says you can continually live in sin as a pattern of life and still be a Christian. If 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago you prayed a prayer and you said “Jesus, come into my heart” and you wrote it in your Bible, you can live like an absolute pagan the rest of your life and still be in. You got your fire insurance in your pocket. You’re going to be in heaven. I hate to tell you this brother, sister, but that is one of Satan’s lies. He is deceiving you. It’s absolutely contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Go back to 1 Corinthians 6:9. Paul couldn’t be any clearer here. He says, “Do you not know”. He’s saying you ought to know this. This is something obvious to every believer. “Do you not know that the unrighteous”. That is, those whose lives are characterized by unrighteousness, who live in patterns of sin. “Will not inherit the kingdom of God”. You are not going to be in Jesus’ kingdom if you’re unrighteous. That’s what he says. And then he gives some examples. “Do not be deceived”. And by the way, these aren’t the worst examples, they’re just examples. He says, “neither fornicators”, there’s premarital sex, “nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals”, those are the two sides of the homosexual or lesbian relationship – the passive and the active, “nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God”. He’s saying listen, if you are unrighteous in one of those ways or some other way, if your life is characterized by sin, you’re not going to be in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. You’re not today and you’re not going to be in the future unless you repent. “Such

were some of you”, verse 11. That’s what some in our church used to be. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”. You’ve been changed. Old things are gone. New things have come. If you’re a true Christian.

So, John says listen, if you claim to be a Christian, make sure nobody deceives you. Satan has planted false teachers in his church. He’s planted false believers in his church, tares Jesus called them. And those false teachers and those false believers will be his tools to try to deceive you about sin and righteousness. To tell you something other than what the scripture says. You’d better make sure you’re looking at what the Bible says and not listening to what some human being is telling you. So, the first insight that we have to learn has to do with a lethal deception about our spiritual ancestry.

Secondly, we learn the Biblical correction about our spiritual ancestry. He says listen, don’t be deceived, and now let me tell you the truth. You see, he says, Scripture teaches that our habitual conduct proves whose children we really are. The surest test of our spiritual ancestry is our habitual conduct. A child of the devil practices sin. A child of God practices righteousness. Now John makes that very same point in three different ways. Let’s look at the ways he explains this Biblical correction.

First of all, he explains it this way: the one practicing righteousness is righteous. Verse 7, “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous”. Literally the Greek text says, “the one practicing”. So, we’re not talking about somebody who occasionally performs a righteous deed. We’re talking about somebody who habitually, as a pattern of life, lives in righteousness. That is their life reflects the teaching of Jesus Christ. It reflects what the Word of God commands. Now don’t misunderstand what John is saying here. He is not saying that practicing righteousness earns you a right standing with God. That practicing righteousness is how you earn eternal life; it’s how you get into heaven. Notice, John does not say; look again at verse 7. He does not say the one who practices righteousness becomes righteous. He says the one who practices righteous is righteous. In other words, habitual righteous conduct is the evidence of a righteous heart. D. Edmond Hiebert says, “The practice of

righteousness does not make the individual righteous but reveals his inner nature”. In Matthew 7:16 Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?”. In other words, this is all John is saying: look at the fruit of your life. Look at how you live. And that shows the kind of tree you are. If you’re a bad tree, look at the fruit your life produces and you’ll see bad fruit. If your heart is right with God, you’ll see a life characterized by good fruit – the Fruit of the Spirit, good deeds, the things that reflect the character and life of Jesus Christ. And this doesn’t surprise us. Folks, life is filled with examples where practicing something consistently proves who you are. You understand this.

Let me just give you an example. I hope this isn’t true. Imagine that you need to find somebody who specializes in open-heart surgery. So, you go to the internet – and I hope you don’t do that either, and you search for “specialist in open-heart surgery” to find those who say they are experts. Now, what’s going to be the first thing that you do, if you’re wise at all, when you meet with those few that you’ve narrowed this to? You need open-heart surgery, you’re going to meet with them; you’re going to say, “Listen doctor, you mentioned online, and some friends have shared with me that your specialty is open-heart surgery. Tell me, how many open-heart surgeries have you performed?” Now, what if the doctor said, “Well, to be honest with you, none yet. I usually handle gallbladders, but actually you’d be my first heart surgery.” Or what if he said, “Well, you know 35 years ago when I was younger, I did an open-heart surgery. I participated in one. I served alongside somebody who did. And since then, I’ve sold insurance, but I want to get back into that field.” What would you conclude? Their practice proves they’re not really what they claim. But what if another doctor you met with had successfully performed 300 heart surgeries and had done so without interruption to his practice for more than 25 years? You would say his habitual practice proves his claim.

Now, it’s exactly the same with claiming to be a Christian. You can’t claim to be a Christian and not practice the Christian faith, by that I mean obey the Word of God, for year after year because you made some profession 35 years ago and still say “I’m a Christian”. That’s illogical. It’s irrational. And it’s tragic because it’s a lie. Verse 7 says, “the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous”. Literally, the Greek text says “just as that One is righteous”.

John loves to refer to Jesus that way. “Just as that One, the special One. Just as He is righteous.” It doesn’t mean that we’re righteous to the same extent in this life. We’ll be made like Him when He returns. But in this life, it doesn’t mean we’re going to be like Him to the same extent. It means we’re going to be like Him in the same manner. So, if you really are righteous, if you’ve been changed in the new birth, you will live in a way that is morally consistent with the Lord you now claim.

This is a test, but remember, John is not writing primarily to confront those who aren’t Christians, he’s writing primarily to encourage those who are. So, if you’re here this morning and you say, “You know, Tom, I’m not perfect. I sin. But when I sin, I hate my sin. 1 John 1:9. I confess that sin. I’m seeing growth in my life in holiness. I’m seeing a decline and decrease of sin in my life. And I’m growing in holiness because I love Christ and I want to honor Him”. Then be encouraged. John says you’ve been born again. So, the first way John makes his point is that the one practicing righteousness is righteous.

The second way he underscores the importance of habitual conduct is in verse 8. And it’s this: the one practicing sin is satanic. Again, John begins with an assertion. Verse 8, “the one who practices sin is of the devil”. Now look at verse 8 and let me read it to you literally as it is in the Greek text. “The one who is doing sin”, in the present tense in the Greek it means this is your continual practice, “is”, literally, “out of the devil”. It speaks of the source of the one who practices sin. That person is out of the devil. That’s why down in verse 10 it says that this person is a “child of the devil”. In John 8:44, Jesus said to those who were unregenerate “you are of your father the devil”.

Now here, John introduces us to this person called the devil. You need to understand that throughout his writings John assumes, as did our Lord, the existence of and the incredible evil of a personal being. Once a holy angel created to serve God and to serve the saints, probably the prime minister of heaven – in Ezekiel 38 he’s called the “cherub who covers”. He was in perfection when he was created. And he chose to rebel against God, and he still exists, and he’s now called the devil or Satan. Here, the devil. It means “slanderer”. Someone who intentionally makes false charges either against God or His people, and clearly, he does both.

“The one doing sin is out of the devil.” Now, don’t misunderstand. Notice John intentionally does not say that those who are unregenerate are born of the devil. He doesn’t say, “they’re born of the devil and these are born of God”. No, he doesn’t say that. He says, brother, they are of the devil. The devil is not the source of their life but of the evil that marks their lives. Augustine put it this way when he said, “For the devil made no man, begat no man, created no man, but whoever imitates the devil, that person as if begotten by him becomes a child of the devil”. Every unregenerate person is a child of the devil. I was born a child of the devil. If you doubt that, ask my mom. And ask your mom about you. You were born a child of the devil. And every person here either is still a child of the devil if you have not been born again, as Jesus described it. If you have not received a new heart, you are still a child of the devil. Or, you’ve been born from above. But every unregenerate person is indwelt by and dominated by the principle of sin that Satan is the source of. And therefore, Jesus called them and John calls them children of the devil. They are inspired by him, motivated by him, and they are imitators of him. So, he makes it very clear. The one who practices sin is out of the devil.

And then he gives two arguments to prove that. Notice, “the one practicing sin is satanic”. First of all, because sin is perfectly consistent with Satan’s nature and work. He goes on in verse 8 to say, “the one who practices sin is of the devil; for”, because, here’s why I say that, “the devil has sinned from the beginning”. Now, the beginning here doesn’t refer to when God created Satan. Because if Satan was evil from his creation, then it makes God the author of sin, which is impossible. John 1 makes it clear. God never puts any person, any entity, in a place where all they can do is sin. They’re responsible for their sin. So, Satan wasn’t created evil. So, it’s not talking about the beginning of his creation. Nor does it imply some form of dualism in which Satan and God eternally coexisted. Instead, by the beginning here, John means from the beginning of Satan’s sin. From the moment of his fall. From the moment he chose to rebel against God. Sin originated with Satan’s first rebellion against God. Now, again it’s interesting what the Greek text says here. The Greek text literally says, “from the beginning”, that is from his fall, “the devil is sinning”. From the moment of his fall, he is sinning. That has continually been his activity. And therefore, it’s his essential character. Think about this. Since his fall, this amazing being God made, the cherub who covers, maybe the prime minister of heaven before his

fall, the greatest of the created angels, this being since the day of his fall, has continually sinned and rebelled against God. That has been his existence. Now, if Satan is consistently sinning, it makes perfect sense that those who belong to Satan are constantly sinning. Sin is perfectly consistent with Satan's nature and with his work. So, John says "the one who practices sin is out of the devil". He's just doing what his father does. She's just doing what her father does. He sins all the time. He's sinned since the beginning. He sins every day of his existence. And so, does every person who belongs to him.

Now, John's second argument here is that the one practicing sin is satanic because sin is diametrically opposed to Christ's nature and work. Sin is consistent with Satan's nature and work, but sin is diametrically opposed to Jesus Christ's nature and work. Notice how he puts it in verse 8, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil". This is the first of seven times that John uses this title, "The Son of God" for Jesus Christ. Obviously, it emphasizes His true identity as God, as the eternal Son of God. But notice that John again says "He appeared". Clearly a reference to the incarnation to what we celebrate at Christmastime, to the 33 years He spent on this planet as one of us. But as John says "He appeared", he does so to emphasize that Jesus' existence did not begin in Mary's womb nine months before his birth. He eternally existed as the Son of God and He appeared. Why? Why did He appear? What was the purpose of the incarnation?

Verse 8, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil". Now, what are the works of the devil? I wish I had time to sort of lay out for you all that I've learned this week as I've thought about that. Think about for a moment, what God has created. We enjoy the creation. He made us. He made all that we see. He made the universe. He made everything good. He fills our lives with good. God made nothing bad. It's all good. At the end of the creation, you remember in Genesis 1:31, He looked at everything He made and He said what? It's all very good.

So, what has Satan created? Think about that with me. When I look at the Scripture there's several things that are said specifically. First of all, Satan created, in one sense we could say, sin. Because he was the first one to sin. Ezekiel 28 talks about his heart was lifted up within him and

he chose to sin. And he's been sinning ever since. That's what he gave us. Satan gave us sin. He also gave us lies. In John 8:44, Jesus says Satan is the father of lies. He was the first liar. He lied to the angels that he led with him in rebellion against God of Heaven. He lied in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve. And he's lied, lied, lied since. He never speaks the truth. He lies constantly. And he lies through false teachers, he lies through the philosophies of the age, he lies through humans. He just lies. It's all lies. He gave us that. He also gave us murder. In John 8:44, Jesus says, "he was a murderer from the beginning". He loves to destroy life. That's who he is. That's what marks him. You and I look at the images on our television of the war in Europe and we cringe. Why? Because we're made in the image of God and we hate that destruction. But guess what? Satan loves every bloody moment of it. Because he's a murderer. He also gave us enslavement to the fear of death. Hebrews 2 says Jesus came. He became like us in order to set us free from the slavery we had to death and He set us free from the one who had the power of death, that is Satan. So, there's what Satan has given us. If you're not in Christ and you're still living as a child of the devil, I want you to think about what your father has really given you. Your father the devil has given you nothing good. He lies to you. He's misled you. He's destroyed you. And given the opportunity, he will destroy you completely. This is who he is. Those are the works of the devil. Physically, he inflicts disease, suffering, decay. And he brings death on the creation by leading us into sin. Intellectually, he blinds, deceives, misrepresents, lies, leads anyone he can into error. He lies about the truth of Scripture. He lies about the character of God. He lies about the goodness of God. He lies about the consequences of sin. He lies about God's willingness to accept you if you come to Him in repentance. Isn't it ironic? Before you sin, Satan says "Hey, it's not big deal. Just go ahead and do it". And after you sin, he says, "Listen, God never wants to see your face again. Don't even think about coming to Him in repentance". He lies. Morally, he tempts men and angels to sin. Spiritually, he enslaves people in his kingdom under the fear of death. Given the opportunity, he damns them to eternal hell. The eternal Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil. The chief characteristic of Satan's work is sin and death. The chief characteristic of the work of the Son of God is to save from sin and death.

How did Jesus destroy the works of the devil? In two ways. First of all, by saving His people from the guilt, penalty, power, and eventually, even the possibility of sin. That's how He

destroyed the works of the devil. When you look at our text, go back to 1 John. Look specifically at verse 5. The expression there is paralleled to what's down in verse 8. In verse 8 it says He appeared to destroy the works of the devil. In verse 5, He appeared in order to take away sins. This is how he destroys the work of the devil for all of His people. He does so by taking away the sin. By taking them on Himself. You see, He does so by bearing the guilt and sentence of each one of our own sins in His own body on the cross. Think about this, believer. On the cross, God credited to Jesus Christ every single sin of every single person who would ever believe. Think of you sins. Every one of them. Not one of them was exempt – one's you have committed or will commit. They were credited to Jesus Christ. And with your sin, came its guilt. God saw Jesus as guilty. Not having sinned Himself, but with the guilt of your sin. And, He then credited to Jesus the sentence your sins deserved. And for those dark hours, He treated Jesus not only as though He were guilty of your sins, but He treated Jesus with the sentence your sin deserved. He got the penalty. He paid the debt in full. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, Peter writes.

Now, it's interesting that the Greek word translated "destroy" here, literally means "to loose". It pictures the work of Satan as enslaving us. He came to loose us from the works of the devil. The verb tense by the way, points to a specific, decisive moment in the past. When did He destroy the works of the devil? In His victory over Satan at the cross. Jesus Himself talked about that in John 12:31, as He anticipated His crucifixion, He said, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out". He says, by my death, I'm going to destroy the works of the devil. Hebrews 2:14, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood", that's us since we're human, "He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil".

But it's interesting, this word "destroy" does not mean to annihilate. And that's important. Because Jesus didn't annihilate the works of the devil at the cross. Satan is still doing them. What this word means is to render powerless or inoperative. To conquer. To overthrow. You see, at the cross, Jesus destroyed the works of the devil in that He rendered them powerless for those whom He was saving. He began the work of destroying Satan completely, but that work is not yet complete. Someday Christ will return. In Revelation 20:1-3 it says He will bind Satan for

1,000 years. He will reign on this earth. And at the end of those thousand years, Satan will be loosed, and then Christ will ultimately and finally destroy everything that Satan has done at the final judgement when He casts Satan and his demons and Satan's children eternally into the lake of fire. And then He destroys death. That's the last enemy to be destroyed. So, the one practicing sin – back to our text. The one practicing sin has to be of the devil and not of Jesus Christ because sin is diametrically opposed to Christ's nature and work. Christ destroys the works of the devil. How? By saving His people from their sin.

But Jesus Christ also destroys the works of the devil in another more terrible way. And that is by eternally judging those who remain unrepentant in their sin. This is a hard thing. It's a hard thing for me to say, to share with you. It's a hard thing for you to hear. But this is the truth of God's Word. Turn back to Matthew 3. I'm doing a readthrough of the Gospels, working through a harmony of the Gospels and walking through the life of Christ. I was struck, as I was walking through it, with what John the Baptist says. Matthew 3:11. John the Baptist says, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I", the Messiah, "and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you", either, "with the Holy Spirit", or with "fire". Why do I say "either"? Because look at verse 12. He makes it clear what he's talking about by fire. And then he goes to an agricultural picture. And he describes Jesus as someone who has a harvest of grain. "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor".

Now, let me just briefly describe that to you. If you had a grain field in the ancient world, you would gather all of the grain, the actual parts you wanted to eat, it's all mixed with the chaff. And so, you would clear out a 30 to 40-foot circle. You'd put stones around the edge so the wheat couldn't leave that circle. Then you'd flatten it and you would wet the earth so that it got hard. And then you would throw your harvested grain into that threshing floor. You'd put that threshing floor up on a hillside somewhere where the afternoon breezes could blow. And then you would get what was called a winnowing fork, like a pitchfork. And you would throw that grain up into the air. And as you threw it into the air, the heavy part of the grain, the edible part – the part you wanted to keep, was heavy enough that it would fall straight back down to the ground. But the chaff, the part you didn't want, was light enough that it would be blown with the

breeze over the edges of the threshing floor and beyond. And here it says, when Jesus looks at everybody on this planet, it's like He will one day put them on His threshing floor, and notice, "He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor". In other words, He's going to separate everybody. Nobody's going to be left on the threshing floor undecided. And what's He going to do? "He", Jesus Christ, "will gather His wheat into the barn". In other words, those who are His, those who have repented and believed in Him, He will gather them into His barn. He will protect them. He'll treat them with care, with safety. He'll provide for them eternally. But, "He", Jesus Christ, "will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire". Listen. Get out of your mind some weak idea of Jesus who you can pull the wool over His eyes and when it gets to the judgement you're going to be able to talk your way in. Listen, He will determine and separate those who are truly His from those who aren't. And He'll use the determining factors we're looking at. "And He will gather His wheat", those who are truly His, "into the barn". He will protect them, care for them, usher them into eternity. But He will personally burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 25:41. These are Jesus' words. He says, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels". So, He says listen. The lake of fire is prepared for the devil and his angels, but his children I'm going to send there too. Those who haven't repented. Those who are still his children. The devil's children will share in his destiny in the lake of fire forever. Matthew 25 ends with this verse. Verse 46, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life". The devil's children will share his destiny in the lake of fire forever. And don't miss this, Jesus Christ will execute the sentence. One way or the other, Jesus Christ will destroy the works of the devil. Either by saving or by judging. He will gather His wheat into the barn and He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The surest test of your spiritual ancestry is your habitual conduct. Look at verse 7, "the one who practices righteousness is righteous". If you are practicing righteousness, that proves that Jesus has destroyed and is destroying the works of the devil in your life by saving you from the guilt, the penalty, and the power of sin, so that you are progressively being more like Him. On the other hand, verse 8 says, "the one who is practicing sin is of the devil". Habitually practicing sin in your life proves that you are a child of the devil, always sinning just like he does. And if Jesus

returns or you die like you are, please hear me. I don't say this with anything but concern for you in my heart. This is what Jesus said. Jesus will destroy the works of the devil in you by condemning you to the lake of fire forever along with your father, the devil himself. My appeal to you is Jesus' appeal to you.

This is why Jesus extended a universal invitation. He said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest". If you will repent and you will believe in Him, you will follow Him, this is what He promises. He would love for you to do that. That's His heart. He takes no joy in the death of the wicked. He'll find no joy when He says, "Depart from me, you who work lawlessness". But He will say it, nonetheless. Because He has to. He is just. So, I appeal with you today. Don't wait for His justice. Throw yourself, today, on His grace and mercy through what He did on the cross. Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for our time together this morning. Thank you for your Word. Lord, for those of us who, however imperfectly, are living in the light, are walking in the light, are obeying Christ; and Lord, when we sin, we hate it, we confess it, we get back on the path of righteousness; Lord, encourage us. Thank you that you've given us this assurance that we are in Christ. Father, I pray for those who are practicing sin. Help them to see their real condition. Lord, remove the false profession they may have made many years ago and help them to see the reality that by practicing sin, they're showing who their real father is. And may they throw themselves on your mercy today, your grace. May they accept the invitation of the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.