

## **The Authentic Christian and Life Change**

---

**Rich Nathan**  
**November 4 & 5, 2017**  
**The Authentic Christian**  
**1 John 3:4-10**

I read a story some years ago about a pastor who unintentionally left his mic on after one of the services at his church. Apparently, something had gone wrong during the service and the pastor tore into an unfortunate staff member for the problem. The staffer was screamed at and cursed up and down for this mistake.

What the pastor didn't know was that his tirade was not only heard by the staffer, but by every church member sitting in the auditorium, as well as people in the parking lot where the sermon was broadcast. A few weeks after that incident, the pastor was apparently "called by the Lord to another church" and quickly left town.

It's common today to read about professing Christians who display almost no Christian virtues or to read about Governors, Senators, and Congressmen who claim to be Bible-believing Christians and who are discovered to have been carrying on long-term affairs. It's common to know a professed Christian business owner who is utterly unethical in their business practices.

A few years ago, a friend who was attending another church, put it plainly when he asked me: "Rich, how come the people I know who go to our church never seem to

change? They're Christians but they seem to struggle year after year with the same patterns of bitterness, anger, and anxiety. They seem to have all the same problems year after year in their marriages. How come the Christians I know never seem to change?"

Many Christians who are in church for years look back at their lives and the lives of those around them and conclude that change is not possible. Maybe addictive behaviors, being a gossip and gossiping in small group or constantly feeling anxious or hopeless is just the way life is. "Hey, we're all sinners. Maybe this side of heaven, most Christians, including many pastors and leaders in our church, will always be grouchy and irritable and petty and judgmental and unforgiving." We've rationalized what we see in our lives and see in the lives of others in the church and we say, "Well, we're just all human. You can't expect perfection. Doesn't the Bible tell us that the hearts of people are desperately wicked and that sin will continue until we die? Maybe there are a few extraordinary people who learn how to be loving and kind and sacrificial in their giving. Maybe there are a few people who we call saints who aren't perpetually irritable, petty and self-pitying and gossip-y and nasty like other Christians. But real change is for special people. People like the Mother Therasas of the world not for ordinary Christians."

Over the last month or so, we've been looking at a little New Testament book written by the Apostle John that we call 1 John. And as we have seen, 1 John is all about figuring

out whether you or someone else is an authentic Christian. So many people claim to be Christians – as long as I sit in a church or know some Bible verses or go through certain Christian rituals like baptism I can call myself Christian. Even if I have no Christian virtues that are evident in my life and even if I live a lifestyle of what the Bible calls “sin” I can still call myself a Christian.

The question that John raises for us today is: can you be a real deal, authentic Christian and never change? Can you be a real deal Christian and show none of the fruits of the Holy Spirit – no love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control – in your life. I’ve called today’s talk “The Authentic Christian and Life Change”. Let’s pray.

1 John 3:4-10

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

<sup>7</sup> Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> The 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. <sup>9</sup> No 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. <sup>10</sup> This 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.

Part of the challenge of reading 1 John is that John keeps repeating himself so it's very difficult to outline this book. It's written in a circular fashion – like a spiral. John keeps coming back to the same themes over and over again. Let me remind you of what compelled John to write this letter about how you know whether you're an authentic Christian.

If you've been listening to these messages you know that heretics entered the churches that John was overseeing. These heretics were noted by three things. First of all, they denied the incarnation. They said that Jesus at his birth and death was a mere man and not almighty God coming in flesh. The heretics also denied the need for Christians to live a holy life. They taught that sin was irrelevant for the spiritually enlightened which they claimed to be. They also denied the need to practically love other people in the church since salvation was proven by your knowledge instead of by love and practical deeds of service.

John responds over and over to these heretics with three tests or three proofs of authentic Christianity. First, he says that there's a belief test. An authentic Christian believes that Jesus is the Christ, the divine Christ. Second, John says that there's a moral test. An authentic Christian repents of sin in their life. They don't live lifestyles of sin.

Third, there's a love test. Authentic Christians love their brothers and sisters in the church. Three tests to know if you are a real deal Christian: a belief test, a moral test and a love test. John says that if you are truly a Christian, you'll believe certain things, you'll behave certain ways, and you'll love your brothers and sisters in the church.

The text that we read (verses 4-10) divides into two parts. Verses 4-7 and verses 8-10. These two parts repeat each other in a kind of parallel fashion. Verses 4 and 8a speak about the seriousness of sin and the place of God's commandments. Verses 5 and 8b speak about the reason Christ came and verses 6 and 7 and 9 and 10 speak about the conclusion of the implication of John's argument that if you are an authentic Christian you will change.

1 John 3:4

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

As I said, that's paralleled by verse 8:

1 John 3:8a

<sup>8</sup> The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

The second step in John's argument is that he talks about the reason Christ came. We read that in verse 5:

1 John 3:5

<sup>5</sup> But you know that he [Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

That's paralleled by the second part of verse 8:

1 John 3:8b

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Finally, in both passages, there's a conclusion, an implication of his argument and the conclusion is found in verses 6-7 and is paralleled in verses 9-10.

1 John 3:6-7

<sup>6</sup> No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

<sup>7</sup> Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

1 John 3:9-10

<sup>9</sup> No 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. <sup>10</sup> This 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. Let's consider John's argument:

How do people change?

Here's what we read in verse 4:

The place of God's Commandments

1 John 3:4

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

John says that the heretics who were coming into the church were teaching lawlessness or rebellion against God's commandments. It's appropriate that we should think about the law of God, the commandments of God because this week many Protestant churches are celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his objections to the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences or releases of departed souls from Purgatory. He posted these objections on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

It was a catalyst of one of the world's largest religious splits. Thousands broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's legacy 500 years later is 560 million Protestants across the globe, making up one-third of all Christians.

One of the major things that Luther taught was a distinction between the law and the gospel. The law tells us what we ought to do and the gospel tells us what God has done. The law shows us that we need to be forgiven. The gospel announces that we have been forgiven. The law shows us our condition. The gospel saves us from our condition. In other words, the law brings us face-to-face with our sin. It shows us what God's holiness requires. The gospel reveals to us God's grace and it shows us that law breakers can be forgiven.

Let me say parenthetically that whether a person these days ever reads the Bible or knows anything about God's commandments, whether a person has ever heard of the Ten Commandments, everyone lives under the weight of the law. It may not be the law of God. It may be the law of marketers from Madison Avenue who say to us: "Thou shalt be skinny. Thou shalt be young. Thou shalt be beautiful. Thou shalt be successful. Thou shalt be true to yourself."

High school students show increasing levels of anxiety and depression because high school students are living under the weight of law. It's not the law of God. It's the law



of our 21<sup>st</sup> century society that says, “Thou shalt get into a highly selective college. Thou shalt get a 36 on your ACT and take at least five AP classes and be involved in six clubs at school and play two varsity sports.” Everyone is living these days under the weight of some law that says, “Thou shalt have kids if your biological clock is ticking; your kid must be perfect; thou shalt make a certain salary or achieve certain things by the time you are 40. Only then are you acceptable.”

Don't we want to throw off the heavy weight of the law, whether it's commandments of God or humanly created expectations? Isn't it a good thing to be free from the law? Obeying God's commandments is in no way a condition for our salvation, but obeying God's commandments is a result of our salvation. We're free from God's commandments as a way of being right with God. We are right with God simply by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. But having been made right with God, God calls us to obey his commandments from our hearts. This is what the new covenant is all about, brothers and sisters. Here's what we read:

Hebrews 10:15-16

<sup>15</sup> The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

<sup>16</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with them

after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,

and I will write them on their minds.”

The false teachers in John's churches were like the people Jude refers to:

Jude 4

<sup>4</sup> For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

False teachers say that because salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, because God accepts us not because of our past but based on Christ's past, not because of your performance but because of Christ's performance, not because of your merit but because of Christ's merit, because we are saved by grace and not by works, false teachers say that it doesn't matter now what we do. We're free.

We're free to do whatever we want to do sexually because we're already accepted by God. We're free to be gluttons and eat as much as we possibly can because we're saved people. We're free to be greedy and hoard up all of our money for ourselves because heaven is guaranteed. After all, we're saved by grace, therefore we're free! We can all run around like William Wallace in *Braveheart* screaming "Freedom! Freedom!"

What's wrong with this view? Not only does the New Covenant teach us that we're saved in order that we might obey God's commandments from our hearts but the

problem with this view of freedom is that the person who throws off God's commands will over time find themselves more constrained, more in bondage, having fewer choices not more choices.

Let me bring this down. I believe that life is like a funnel and the people who define freedom as freedom from all restraints, freedom to do whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it, start off in life at the wide end of the funnel.

They're the folks who in high school cut class, don't study for tests, party all the time, and as young adults sleep around because they are free. What happens to people who live life without restraint? Over time their lives get narrower and narrower. They find themselves addicted to the drugs they partied with. They find that their vocational choices are really limited because they don't have the credentials to get a really good job. They find that their marital choices have shrunk because people who have achieved something don't want to marry them. They have no money and very few options.

The good life that God designed is a funnel turned upside down.

It starts off narrowly. See, we Christians believe there is a God and we are not our own makers. So we believe we need to find out what our Maker and Creator wants for our lives. We surrender ourselves to God's will concerning our sexuality, God's will concerning our relationships, God's will concerning what comes out of our mouth and

God's will about what goes into our mouth. We surrender ourselves to God's will concerning giving and serving and prayer. But over time as we surrender to God's will, this wonderful paradoxical thing happens. Rather than living a narrow life, Christians find that our lives become more expansive. We find ourselves free from addictions, free to love, free to choose – free to be who God made us and intends us to be, free to say yes to what will best serve God and our own highest good and we're free to say no to what will hurt us or hurt others. The Christian life is a life that gets freer and freer as you pursue it over the years.

That's grace. Grace, true grace, the grace of God is not the counterfeit grace we give ourselves. True grace expands our lives and does not shrink them like false grace that comes from the abuse of our freedom.

Bottom line, all that God commands us to do, whether in his written word or by his Spirit, it is always for our good. Moses recorded what the Lord required of his people. He said it was:

Deuteronomy 10:13

<sup>13</sup> and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good

John goes on. He says that life change happens not only when we obey God's commandments, but when we understand

The reason Christ came

The Apostle John says in verse 5:

1 John 3:5

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

He says something similar to that in verse 8.

1 John 3:8b

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

The heretics who came into the church said, "Oh, it doesn't matter what you do. If you are one of the enlightened ones you can do what you want." John responds and says, "You don't know why you were saved. You were saved to obey God's commandments. But if you hold to the heretics' position, you also don't know why Christ came. He came into the world to take sin away."

John the Baptist said the same thing:

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

The Lord didn’t die just to take away the guilt for our sins, the penalty for our sins. The Lord came into the world to separate us from our sins. He wants to free you up from all addictions. That’s what it means to be a saved person. The Lord wants to change your desires. The abundant life Jesus came to bring is not, “Oh, I desperately want to sin!” I desperately want to do this bad thing, but I know that God won’t let me. I want to tell this person off or hold on to my grudge or have an affair or be eaten up by envy, but the Lord won’t let me. I feel like a caged animal – desperately wanting what I can’t have.

The abundant life Jesus came to bring involves the Lord changing your heart so you don’t want to do what you used to want to do. You genuinely want to please God. “I know, Lord, that this sin I’ve been committing is killing me. I want to stop driving a pencil into my eye. I don’t like doing that. It’s nice not hurting myself. I don’t want to keep injuring others by my behavior. I like having a peaceful conscience. I like the feeling of having no regrets. I like feeling like I’m helping people and making a difference in other people’s lives.” Jesus didn’t just come to achieve a legal transaction

between you and God. He came to set you free from sin so you could live a good life. It feels good to be kind. It's a joy to really forgive someone from the heart.

So what is the result of all of this?

The result of God's activity

1 John 3:6

<sup>6</sup>No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

And we read in the parallel text:

1 John 3:9

<sup>9</sup>No 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.

These are some of the most difficult verses in the Bible to interpret. What does the Apostle John mean when he says, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." And then in verse 9, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin." Is John saying an authentic Christian never sins? If he is, he's contradicting what he himself said in John 1:8:

1 John 1:8

<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

And then in:

1 John 1:10

<sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

John is not saying an authentic Christian never commits any sin in 1 John 3:6 or 9.

So what do these verses mean? The tense of the verbs here is really important in the Greek. What John is talking about by not “keeping on sinning” is not having a continual, habitual practice of sin. John says that the person who is saved, the person that I’m calling the “authentic Christian” or the “real Christian” cannot go on sinning. He’s talking about a lifestyle of sin. The Greek here is present tense. Three times John in these verses uses the present tense. In Greek, the present tense means an ongoing action. It’s like a line that continues and continues and continues.

It’s incompatible for a person who has been brought into the light to continue to live in darkness. It’s incompatible for a person who has been delivered from the power of sin to live under the power of sin. It’s a contradiction for a person who has been saved in



order to obey God's commandments to continually disobey God's commandments. Is it theoretically possible to live a contradiction? Maybe, but that's not the abundant life that Jesus came to bring to God's children.

I'd like to widen the lens and pull the camera back as I wrap up today. Let's think more broadly about why it is that so many of us Christians never seem to change. What John is getting at in this text is a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a saved person.

So, the question is:

What does salvation mean?

To sum up in a simple sentence what it means to be a saved person, here's my simple summary:

My whole self grasps the whole of Christ and the whole of salvation

Let me break this sentence down. Christ and the gospel is to be grasped by my whole self.

My whole self

I think one major reason why people don't change is that many Christians compartmentalize their lives and say "I'm going to obey God in this area, but not in that area of my life. I'm going to listen to God regarding going to church or being involved in a small group or maybe reading the Bible, but I'm not going to listen to what God says regarding my money or who I should date or my sex life."

There was a little booklet that I was given more than 40 years ago when I first came to Christ. It was called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. You can find it online by Robert Munger.

Munger describes our heart as being like a house. He says that many of us invite Christ in to our house, but we leave him in the hallway. A saved person invites Christ into every room of our house – into the living room of our entertainment choices, into the dining room of our appetites, into the bedroom of our sexuality, into our study where we have our checkbook, into the workroom of our vocation. We even need to let Christ into the locked closets that we've always kept everyone out of and into our basements of our desires and lusts. Our whole self. Not just my mind, but my emotions, my feelings, my fears, my anxieties, my whole self. Not just my religious self, but my work self. Have you done this friend? Have you let Christ in to every room of your house or are there some rooms you've kept locked and off limits to him? Whole areas of your life that you have never yielded the management of to Christ?

Authentic Christians are people who with our whole selves

Grasps the whole of Christ

The Christ we let into our whole life must be the whole Christ. Often the Christ we invite in is only half a Christ. It's the rare Christian who wants all of Christ. So many people accept Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord. "I want you, Jesus, to save me and forgive me and bless me and give me eternal life, but I don't want to bring myself under you and submit to you."

The basic Christian confession in the New Testament is not, as we might assume, in the modern evangelical church "Jesus is my Savior". The basic Christian confession in the New Testament is "Jesus is my Lord." Here's what we read:

Romans 10:9

<sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Here's what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 12:3

<sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

To have Jesus as Lord means that I submit myself to him, that I obey him, that I am under him. To have Jesus as Lord means he’s my master, that I’ve yielded the management and control of my life to him. My whole self needs to grasp the whole Christ, not just those parts of him that I like. I need to grasp him as God who is holy not just as the God who is love.

My whole self must grasp the whole of Christ and:

The whole of salvation

As a saved person, my whole self must grasp the whole of Christ and the whole of salvation.

Whole salvation involves not simply justification but sanctification. Justification focuses on what Christ has done for us on the cross by dying as our substitute and our sin-bearer. Sanctification is what Christ does in us as his Spirit transforms us. Justification happens outside of us, but sanctification happens inside of us as the Holy Spirit changes our hearts and our attitudes.

Here's the deal, salvation cannot be reduced to justification alone. Salvation includes sanctification. Virtually every great Christian thinker in history, as they have looked at scripture, has said, "We need to hold both together – both justification and sanctification – if you're a real deal Christian." If we come to Jesus – really come to him – asking him to save us, we are signing up not only for justification (right standing with God), we're signing up for the Spirit's work of sanctification (actually becoming right inside and out). We're asking the Lord to change us, to make real change happen in our life.

Brothers and sisters, God doesn't just want to save us on the Day of Judgment. God wants to change us now. Jesus came to give us an abundant life, an authentic Christian life.

Let's pray.

## **The Authentic Christian and Life Change**

---

**Rich Nathan**

**November 4 & 5, 2017**

**The Authentic Christian**

**1 John 3:4-10**

- I. How do people change?
  - A. The place of God's commandments
  - B. The reason Christ came
  - C. The result of God's activity

- II. What does salvation mean?

My whole self grasps the whole of Christ and the whole of salvation

- A. My whole self
- B. Grasps the whole of Christ
- C. The whole of salvation