

053: What Are You Practicing?

1 John 3:4-10

Andrew Kneeland, April 18, 2021

Let's pray: God we thank you for your Word, and the chance to look at it together this morning. Bless our time, may you be glorified by all that we say and do. In your name we pray, amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What are you practicing?

When I was in high school I ran for the cross-country team. Thinking back to those days, the idea of *voluntarily* running makes me think I was a little bit crazy -- running without something chasing me. But I did use to run. I used to run a lot.

The thing about cross-country, is that it's not something you can just decide to do one day. It takes hours and hours and hours of practice. Our season was in the fall, which meant that our season was just a couple of short months before the snow came. The season wasn't long enough to start from scratch at day one and hope to be successful... to prepare for the fall season you needed to have been running all summer long.

So we had a saying on our team. "Fall reveals how you spent your summer." On the first day of the cross-country season it was painfully obvious whether you had spent your summer vacation sitting around playing video games, or running.

If you struggled to keep up on the first run of the season, it was obvious that you hadn't been practicing the right things over the summer. It was obvious that you had spent your time and your energy in other places.

"Fall reveals how you spent your summer." We all practiced *something*. We either practiced running, or we practiced something else.

Today too, we all practice something. Have you noticed that? Practice doesn't just mean practicing a sport or practicing an instrument. We all practice something.

We all have rhythms and routines in our lives, we do things a certain way. When you wake up, you have a routine that you practice. It's probably very similar every day. If you work, you have a rhythm of how you get your job done. When you get home, you have a routine that you follow. You relax and recharge in a particular way, a practiced way. We all are always practicing *something*.

In our text today, in 1 John, John goes back and forth between two ideas. He talks about "practicing sin" and "practicing righteousness." We can either practice sinning... Or we can practice righteousness.

John's purpose in writing these verses is to tell us that because of what Christ has done — what Jesus has

practiced -- we can live lives that practice righteousness. What are you practicing?

The first thing we'll look at today is "Practicing Sin." Verse four says: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."

What does it mean to "practice sin?" It means to make sin your regular habit. Scripture talks about two different kinds of people who "practice sin." There are the "grace abusers," and there are the "apathetic sinners."

Grace abusers are those of us who don't think twice about committing a "favorite sin," because we are confident that it will be forgiven. Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you treat God's forgiveness as justification for living any way that you want? For doing anything that you want?

Maybe you're content to sin because you know that it will be forgiven. You're confident that the grace of God will cover those habitual sins so you've stopped resisting those sins. You've accepted them as regular practices in your life.

If that's you, Paul specifically writes to you in Romans 6. He says: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Grace abusers take advantage of God's grace when they continue to practice sin.

Or maybe you're an apathetic sinner. Maybe you just don't care anymore about God, or about His Law, or about how He tells us to live. The rules and laws in this old book are just out of date and antiquated traditionalism.

Or maybe you're just comfortable living in a particular sinful habit. There's a certain sin that you keep coming back to, and you just don't care enough to do anything about it.

You say: "Jesus can be the Lord of my whole life... except my pride. I need others to see and notice how busy and important I am."

Or, you say: "Jesus can be the Lord of my whole life... except my thought life. What I think about is my business."

Or, you say: "Jesus can be the Lord of my whole life... except the things I look at on the internet. I'm keeping that for myself."

Whether it's a sin you keep practicing because you know it will be forgiven... or a sin you keep practicing because you don't care about the consequences. Either way, you are making a practice, a habit, of sin. You have given up the struggle against your sin, and John says that you are spiritually dead.

If that's you today, John has some harsh words for you. Look at verse six: "No one who abides in him keeps on

sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen or known him.”

Now, that might seem confusing, but John *isn't* saying that if you sin you don't know Christ. He's saying that if you *keep on* sinning, you don't know Christ. That if you are *actively practicing* sin, you don't know Christ. If there's sin in your life that you have stopped fighting against you are spiritually dead.

Believers sin. In fact, we believers can't *not* sin. A few chapters earlier, John wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” We sin, and we will continue to sin, but the question is... are you content with that sin? Are you regularly *practicing* that sin in your life?

If you are practicing sin, John says that you are not abiding in Christ. You have left his protective, sheltering, powerful arms and are trying to figure things out for yourself. You've gone out on your own.

He also says that if you are practicing sin, you have not *seen* Christ. You are spiritually blind. And then John says that if you are practicing sin you do not even *know* Christ. If there's a sin in your life that you have stopped fighting against, that you have contentedly accepted as part of your life, you don't even *know* Christ.

You might know *about* Christ. In fact I'm sure you know *about* Jesus -- you've heard all the stories over and over, you know all *about* what Jesus did for you, *how* you can be forgiven and be given a new heart and saved from your sins. You've heard all about that. But you don't *know* Christ. You don't truly *know* Christ in a personal and intimate way.

There's a difference between knowing ABOUT someone and actually KNOWING someone, isn't there? The type of “knowing” that John is talking about here in verse six is a relational “know.” An experiential “know.” If you are practicing sin you do not *know* Christ. And Christ doesn't *know* you.

But if that's not harsh enough, John goes even further in verse eight: “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning since the beginning.”

If you are practicing sin you are of the devil. In verse ten John says again you are “children of the devil.” Harsh words, aren't they?

Just as the devil is opposed to God, so is the person who keeps on practicing sin. Just as the devil is an enemy of God, so is the person who keeps on practicing sin.

Let's be clear here: There's no middle-ground. There's no “keeping your options open” or “keeping one foot in both camps.” You are either a child of God or you are a child of the devil. Those are your only options. And if you are continuing on in unconfessed sin, if you have given up the struggle against sin, you are a child of the devil and you are not a member of Christ's Church. You are a member of the mission field.

What are you practicing?

If there's a sin in your life that you are regularly practicing I hope you're feeling uncomfortable right now. I hope this Word has been convicting to you and is making you squirm in your seat a little bit. That's good! Feeling conviction is a sign of spiritual life!

God wants to *rescue* you from the sin that holds you in bondage. He wants to *deliver* you from the kingdom of darkness into his marvelous light.

John also tells us what Jesus did. **What Jesus practiced FOR YOU**. In verse five: "You know that he appeared in order to take away sins." And in verse eight: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

Jesus practiced righteousness in order to defeat the practice of sin.

Those verses are, at the same time, tremendously scary and tremendously comforting. If you're practicing sin these verses should terrify you. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the sin which you have married yourself to. He appeared to destroy the works of the devil, and if you're a child of the devil this morning, that includes you. If you don't know Christ, you will be destroyed. If you are content to remain in your sin and continue practicing your sin, you will be destroyed.

But. These verses are also a great comfort. If you're feeling conviction this morning — like I am! — these verses are a great promise for us! The life and death and resurrection of Jesus enables us and empowers us to NOT live lives of sin. To leave our sinful practices behind and instead practice righteousness!

There is no sin in Christ. And when we confess our sins and believe in his name, we become new creations.

Through baptism, Christ's death and resurrection becomes our death and resurrection. Christ's victory over sin becomes *our* victory over sin! And Christ's righteousness becomes *our* righteousness.

We do not need to be enslaved to sin. We do not need to remain in our sinful practices and habits and rhythms. Christ appeared in order to rescue us from that! Christ perfectly practiced righteousness so that we can practice righteousness.

And that's **the last thing** for us to look at this morning: practicing righteousness. What does it mean to *practice righteousness*?

Too often, I think, we neglect to talk about the importance of *practice*. We talk about sin, and the consequences of sin, and then we talk about Jesus and how we can be forgiven and saved from our sin and spend eternity in heaven. But we sometimes don't spend enough time talking about how we live or what we do as forgiven

children of God. Practice is important.

It reminds me of a press conference a few years ago by a basketball player named Allen Iverson.

Years ago, before seminary, I was a sports reporter for a newspaper in Minneapolis called the Star Tribune. The most challenging part of covering sports, by far, was the post-game interview.

Most sports interviews are totally boring and predictable. But this interview a few years ago was definitely interesting.

Allen Iverson was a good player on a bad team, and he had stopped going to the team's practices every day. He was asked about why he was skipping practice, and he launched into a memorable rant where he said that he was too good for practice, that he was a superstar and didn't need practice, that the reporters shouldn't care about practice they should care about the games. He said the word "practice" 22 times in a five minute rant.

He thought practice was beneath him. But what we practice reveals who we are. Right? The fruit of a tree reveals the health of a tree, so what we practice reveals our spiritual health.

But HOW do we do it? There is a war going on inside of you. A war between your spiritual nature and your sinful nature. You feel that war, that tension, when you're tempted to sin. When you *do* sin. The Christian life is a life of struggle against sin.

When you give up that struggle, when you throw in the towel on that war, you are practicing sin. But when you continue to allow the Holy Spirit to work in your heart, you are living out your Christian faith. Conviction and a struggle against sin are evidence of spiritual life. Through the grace and power of God continue the fight against the sin in your life.

And finally, you practice righteousness by opening your Bibles. I really mean this, really hear me on this: you cannot practice righteousness without regularly reading your Bibles.

The Word of God is how we receive strength, spiritual nourishment, divine grace and empowerment from God. Trying to practice righteousness without reading the Bible is like trying to harvest a field without even planting any seeds. It's like trying to get in shape without ever leaving your couch.

We all practice lots of things in our lives. We all have daily routines and rhythms... so it is ESSENTIAL that you make "Reading the Bible" a daily habit.

If you need help on where to start, what to read, a good resource to use, someone to keep you accountable, me or Pastor Wesley would be more than happy to help.

Because you see, when we open our Bibles, we open them with expectancy. We expect things to happen

when we open this book because God promises that He is at work through these words.

This is more than a regular book. This isn't a collection of opinions of men or writings of men... this is the Word of God. And it's powerful to cut open your heart, to convict you of sin, and to assure you of forgiveness.

So make a practice of reading this Word. Make righteousness your practice.

We don't have to practice sin. Jesus perfectly practiced righteousness so that we, too, can practice righteousness in our lives. Amen.

God, help us to live lives that are pleasing to you. We thank you for your life of righteousness. You never gave into sin, you never gave in to temptation, you were perfect. Please help us to also resist temptation, and to continue this struggle against sin. We look forward to the day when there will be no more sin, no more tears, no more sickness or death... but until then we press forward as your chosen and precious children. In your name we pray, amen.