

1 John
The Christian's DNA (Part 1)
1 John 2:28-3:3
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Well, we do turn now to God's Word and to 1 John, chapter 2. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, DNA is an organic chemical of complex molecular structure that's found in cells and in many viruses. DNA actually codes genetic information for the transmission of inherited traits. The article goes on to say that the chemical DNA was first discovered in 1869, but its role in genetic inheritance was not demonstrated until 1943. In 1953, James Watson and Francis Crick determined that the structure of DNA is a double helix polymer, a spiral, consisting of two DNA strands wound around each other. And that's where you see that common picture of DNA.

I think you understand this, but we all inherit our DNA from our parents. You received 50% of your DNA from each of your parents; they in turn received 50% of their DNA from their parents, and so forth, all the way back in human history. However, the mix of your parents' DNA that you inherit is unique to you. It doesn't matter how many siblings you have, the specific combination of DNA that is yours from your parents, is unique to you. I have nine siblings, and none of us share the same DNA although it comes from our parents. It is true then when you think about it, that your DNA comes from your parents and that you are, in fact, the product of their genes. All of those colloquialisms and euphemisms are true: "The nut doesn't fall very far from the tree; you really are a chip off the old block; like parent, like children."

Well, that's not only true physically; that is also true spiritually. As Christian brothers and sisters, if you have been truly redeemed, if you have been saved by the work of the Spirit of God, then we all share our Father's DNA. We are, according to 2 Peter 1, verse 4, "...partakers

of the divine nature.” According to Colossians 3:10, we “...have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” You are a new creation in Jesus Christ, and you, Christian, have your Father's DNA. In the text that we come to in our study in 1 John today, John makes a profound connection for us between the reality of our spiritual DNA, and how we live; the connection between the genes that are ours because of our new Father and the pattern of our lives.

Now just to remind you, as we begin a new section today in 1 John, this book, the theme of 1 John is the tests of eternal life. Look at chapter 5, verse 13, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Christ designed this book, the Spirit inspired it, and John wrote it in order to help true believers gain personal assurance of their salvation.

Now, the structure of this book, as I've noted for you, is a little difficult to follow, but two images help us understand the structure. Think of the structure of 1 John like the musical themes in a symphony that the composer repeats again and again with each new movement; but each new movement, while it contains the same basic notes and themes, does so with distinct variations. Or think of the structure of 1 John like a spiral staircase, and the three tests of eternal life hang down the center of that spiral staircase. And as this letter unfolds, John walks around that spiral staircase again and again, examining these three tests from different vantage points.

So, the three tests of eternal life recur in three cycles or three movements of the symphony, if you will. That's how this book is structured. Now, last week we finished the first movement or

the first cycle, and that is from chapter 1, verse 5, through chapter 2, verse 27. All three tests were there: the test of obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word; the test of love for God and His people; the test of faith in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel.

Today, we begin the second cycle or the second movement, and we're going to see these same three tests again. This second cycle runs from chapter 2, verse 28, through chapter 4, verse 6. It begins with the test of obedience, verse 28 of chapter 2, through chapter 3, verse 10. Then he repeats the test of love for God and His people, chapter 3, verse 11, through the end of the chapter, verse 24. And then finally, chapter 4 verses 1 through 6, he comes back to the third test, which is faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel.

Now, John begins the second movement by returning, as you can see, to the test of obedience that began the first movement as well. So, we have the same test, the test of obedience, beginning the first movement of the first cycle of this book, and beginning the second as well.

Now there are similarities between these two tests of obedience. Both are here to distinguish true Christians from false Christians. You remember false Christians are those who say they're Christians, but they haven't really been changed; they haven't experienced the new birth. They're attached to the church, they claim Christ, but they've never truly had a heart change. These tests of obedience are here to distinguish one from the other. Both of these tests of obedience focus on patterns, patterns of sin and obedience.

In the first cycle, it was walking in the light or walking in the darkness. In the second cycle, it's practicing sin or practicing righteousness. Both of them are characterized by stark contrasts. In the first, you have light versus darkness; and in the second, sin versus righteousness. Both of them mention the reason for Jesus's first coming. In cycle one, His death for sin as our propitiation, the satisfaction of God's justice. In the second cycle, we learn that the Son of God appeared to take away sin and to destroy the work of the devil.

But while they are similar, there are also a couple of important differences between these two different tests of obedience. They focus on, they both mention both Advents of Christ, but they focus on two separate Advents. Cycle one focuses on the incarnation; cycle two focuses on the return of Christ as we'll see. But another really important difference between these two is that they call attention to different aspects of our relationship to God. In the first cycle, the description of our relationship to God is having fellowship with God. In this second cycle, it's on being children of God which is a more intimate thing.

As we come again to the test of obedience, let me just remind you of what the point is. John is telling us that believing the right things about Jesus and His gospel, simply believing those facts to be true, does not prove that you have eternal life. Genuine Christians also demonstrate a pattern of obedience to Christ. There's the rejection of sin on the one hand, and there's the pursuit of righteousness on the other.

Now, let me give you an overview of this second cycle of the test of obedience. It runs from chapter 2, verse 28, down through chapter 3, verse 10, and essentially, it's teaching this, "Our relationship to sin and to righteousness shows three things."

First of all, it shows "Our Real Birth," it shows our real birth. Are we "Dead in Sin or Have We Been Born of God?" Secondly, it shows "Our Real Master," chapter 3, verses 4 to 6, are we "Slaves of Self and Sin or Are We Slaves of Christ?" And our relationship to sin and righteousness also shows, thirdly, "Our Real Father," chapter 3, verses 7 to 10, "Are We Children of God or Are We Children of The Devil?"

Now, as we begin today, we start with this first section, "Our Relationship to Sin and Righteousness Shows Our Real Birth." When you look at how you interact with sin and how you interact with righteousness, it tells you whether you are still dead in your sins, the state in which you and I and everyone else was born, or whether you have, in fact, experienced the new birth, you've been born of God.

Let's read it together, 1 John, chapter 2, verse 28, and I'll read not only the section we're looking at today, but I'll read through this entire second test just so we get the flow of the author's thought. Chapter 2, verse 28:

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of

God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen him or knows him. 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 point of this entire section is that a true Christian has been born of God, and will therefore be like his Father, in character and in conduct, like Father, like child. If we have been born of God, we have His DNA; and if we have God's DNA, then our character and our conduct will reflect the nature of our Father.

Now, John lays out the core argument, logical argument, at the end of chapter 2, in verses 28 and 29. But he does so in a reverse way because of what he wants to emphasize. So, let me just show you his argument in its logical order which is exactly backwards from what we read in

verses 28 and 29. So here's his argument, first part of his argument is this, "Every true Christian has been born of God," that's the end of verse 29, every true Christian has been born of God. Second point of argument, "Having been born of God, every true Christian will display the righteous character of his Father by consistently practicing righteousness," That's the beginning of verse 29. Third part of his argument is that "Everyone who perseveres in practicing righteousness (in other words, every true Christian) will have confidence when Christ returns and judges," that's his argument. And he treats it, as I said, in a reverse fashion.

Now, in chapter 3, verses 1 to 3, he explains further implications of this new birth; but at the core of this first part of this paragraph is, in fact, this concept of the new birth. And in this passage, John gives us several crucial insights into what it means to be "born of God," several crucial insights.

Let's look at them together. The first insight is that if we have been born of God, the reality of that new birth will be "Certified at Jesus's Revelation," that is, at His coming, it'll be certified at His coming. When Christ returns, He will openly declare whether we have been born of God or whether we are still dead in our sins. That's the point of verse 28.

Now, he begins before he gets to the return of Christ, he says, we have one basic duty until He comes, until His revelation, and that duty is "abide." Notice verse 28, "Now, little children," and by the way, that expression marks the beginning of a new section. That's why I have marked it out this way as do the themes. He says, "Now, little children, (In light of things as they now stand, and here's the command, the duty.) abide in Him."

Now, the pronoun “Him,” the rest of the verse will make it clear that we're talking about Jesus Christ, so, “abide in Jesus Christ.” We’ve already encountered this word “abide” a number of times and let me define it for you again. It simply means, there's nothing mystical in this sense of abide, it means ‘to stay,’ it means ‘to remain.’ Here's the leading Greek Lexicon, it defines this word this way, ‘it is not to leave a certain realm or sphere, to remain, to continue, to abide.’

As I noted for you last week, to remain in Christ means ‘to persevere, to endure, to persevere in faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel.’ Go back to chapter 2, verse 24. We saw this in this verse, “As for you, let that abide in you (Let it remain in you.) which you heard from the beginning.” That is the truth about Jesus, the truth about His gospel, how we are made right with God; keep on believing that gospel that you believed at the beginning, don't be swayed off of that by some suave, or not suave, false teacher, don't be carried away with false doctrine. Persevere in believing in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel, and persevere in obeying Christ, in obedience to Christ.

Go down to chapter 3, verse 6, “No one who abides (There's our word, who remains in Christ, who continues to believe in Him.) ...sins.” It doesn't mean you never sin; we've already said earlier in 1 John, he says, “Believers sin and they confess their sins; they deal with their sin.” (Summary.) He’s talking about what characterizes your life. Remember the image in the first test, walking in the darkness or walking in the light? What does the preponderance of your life look like? Is your life characterized by light and obedience to Christ? Or is it characterized by walking in sin and darkness and disobedience to Christ? That's the point.

And he says, “No one who abides in Him continues to sin unabated as the pattern of his life; no one who sins like that has seen Christ or knows Him.” (Paraphrase.) So, this is a call to persevere, to persevere in believing the biblical gospel, and that includes a call to continue following Jesus Christ as His disciple, to obey Him. This is not passive, it's not something that happens to us. We don't abide by just sort of sitting and, you know, crossing our legs and looping our fingers and repeating some mantra. That's not what this abiding is. It's an active thing. It's in the present tense. We must persevere in faith and obedience.

As you know, I was in Baltimore last week doing a conference there, and I got to visit, Sheila and I did, with our friends, we got to visit the grave of J. Gresham Machen. Some of you may not have heard his name, J. Gresham Machen. He was a professor at Princeton Seminary and a Presbyterian pastor in the early 1900's, at least that was the thrust of his ministry. He was responsible in those years for protecting the Christian faith from liberalism in the early 1900's here in the U.S. He is one who helped articulate what are called “The Fundamentals of the Christian Faith.” You've heard that expression. He helped articulate those and inspired an entire generation to battle for the truth of Scripture.

When I visited his grave, I loved being there because on one side of his tombstone is the information you would expect, the name and the dates. But on the other side of his grave are these Greek words “*pistos akri thanatou.*” It's taken from Revelation 2:10, and it means ‘faithful until death,’ faithful until death. That, brothers and sisters, is the kind of perseverance you are called to, faithful until death, keep on believing. John says, “Remain in Christ. Keep on

believing in the biblical Christ and the biblical gospel, and keep following Him, keep walking in a pattern of obedience.” (Paraphrase.)

Now let me be clear, perseverance or enduring in faith and obedience is not the cause of salvation, it is the evidence of it. It's not a replacement for faith, it is the proof of true faith. Our Lord made this so clear in His ministry. Go back to John, chapter 8. You'll remember that several times in John, people attached to Jesus, but it becomes pretty clear that their attachment is not real salvation; it's not truly following Him. You see that here in John 8, verse 30, it says, “As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him,” and immediately you're going, “Oh, great, let's celebrate! They're believers, they're followers of Christ!” Not so fast, verse 31, “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue (There's our word, if you remain, if you stay.) in My word, (in what I've taught you), then you are truly disciples of Mine.’” If you know what I've taught you, if you believe what I've taught you, and you live in obedience to what I've taught you, “...then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Do you remember in Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the soils, and there are a couple of soils, a couple of kinds of hearts that receive the seed of the gospel, and the plant springs up, and you think, ‘Oh, boy, that's a real Christian!’ But it's not long until it's obvious, “No!” that's not a real Christian, because either the cares of this world or persecution killed the seed, and it never grows to fruition. Those are not real Christians who turned away, those are not real Christians at all. “You're truly my disciples,” Jesus said, “if you continue in My word.”

Turn over to chapter 15, John 15. You remember the image He uses here, the metaphor of His being the vine and His followers being the branches. Every true branch, every real Christian, is connected to Christ, remains with Christ; He uses the same language. Verse 4, “Abide in Me, and I in you.” Stay connected to Me! But look at verse 6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, (There's our word again. If they don't remain in Me, if they don't continue to believe in Me, following Me, obeying Me), he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”

What's happening here? Jesus is saying, “By the failure to abide in Me and My Word, to keep on believing, keep on following, keep on obeying, they show that they were never really branches at all, and they're cut off of the vine and thrown into the fire.” (Paraphrase.) In other words, these are false believers; these are those who profess Christ but are not the real thing. We are called to persevere, to keep on believing and obeying Christ, that is our duty.

You say, “How can I do that? How can I persevere?” 1 Peter 1:5 says, through “your faith.” In other words, the only way that we can grow in our resolve to persevere is by growing in our knowledge of Scripture. And as we grow in our knowledge of Scripture, our faith in turn grows. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.” The way you can persevere is you can keep on growing in your understanding and your knowledge of God's Word. And that strengthens your faith, which means you will continue to persevere if you're really His.

Now, while it's our duty to persevere in the faith, and, therefore, it's our duty to do what we can to ensure that, that is constantly nourishing our souls on the Scripture. In the end, we're not the

cause of our perseverance. In the end, perseverance is only possible because we are “protected by the power of God,” as we saw last week in 1 Peter 1:5.

How does God protect our faith so that it doesn't go away? Well, the abiding presence of the Spirit. We saw it back in chapter 2, verse 27 of 1 John, “the Anointing.” The Spirit is the Anointing, and He protects us from damning error, keeps us on the path of believing in the true biblical Jesus and the true biblical gospel. It's the intercession of Christ. You remember what Jesus said to Peter? He said, “Simon, I have prayed for you (What?) that your faith fail not.” Jesus's intercession is why we persevere.

And the eternal love of the Father, Romans, chapter 8, says, “Nothing that happens to us in life or death, nothing in this universe can ever separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Paraphrase.) That's how we're protected by the power of God. It's the work of the Spirit, the Son, and the Father. Our one duty that we've been assigned until Christ comes is to remain in Him, to keep on believing.

But when He comes, verse 28 tells us there will be “Two Responses,” two responses. Verse 28, “...abide in Him, so that when He appears...” Now, the word ‘when,’ you who are experimenting a little bit with Greek, if you look in your Greek testament, you'll see that word is literally “if.” But don't be shocked by that. It often means ‘whenever.’ It's not that there's any doubt about the fact of His appearance, but only the timing of His appearance. You could translate like this, “Whenever He appears.” Jesus will appear; it could be today, but it will be soon because John says back in chapter 2, verse 18, “It is the last hour.” We live in the last

days. This passage uses two different Greek words for Christ's return. Verse 28, you'll notice, "...when He appears." This Greek word describes Jesus's return as the visible appearance of one who is now unseen. You remember, "we love Jesus, whom we've not seen." But, brothers and sisters, someday we will see Him, "He will appear." He who is now not visible to us will become visible. "When He appears."

The other description in verse 28 is "...His coming." The Greek word translated "coming" here is 'parousia.' It's a word if you've been in the church, a Bible Church any time at all, you've heard this word; Paul uses it often. In the 'papyri,' that is the ancient Greek documents that have been recovered, this word is used for the visit of a king, or an emperor. The word 'parousia' or coming literally means 'to be alongside of,' and therefore it came to mean 'presence.' Jesus is going to be present.

Now this word 'parousia' is used of the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15:23 and in 1 Thessalonians several times including the key passage 1 Thessalonians 4:15; but the same word 'parousia' or coming is also used of the Second Coming in Matthew 24, verse 27. In both cases, the point is the same. When this word is used, it describes Christ's return as the personal presence of one who is now absent. The word 'appears' is becoming visible what is now not visible to us. This word 'parousia' describes His personal presence, one who is now absent.

Now, notice when He appears, there will be two responses, verse 28, tells us. He says, "...abide in Him (Remain in Him.), so that when He appears, we (And here John includes himself as a

professing Christian.) may (1) have confidence (And here's the other response.) and (2) not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”

So, the question is, “Who are these two groups with such different responses?” Well, one interpretation of this passage says that these are actually two groups of genuine Christians. This view teaches that when Jesus comes, some Christians will have confidence and other genuine Christians will be ashamed. Now, this can't be true in the context, because, as we've seen here and in John's gospel, all genuine Christians abide in Christ. And if they don't abide in Christ, they're proven not to be genuine, they're cut off, and thrown in the fire. So, these are not two groups of Christians.

That means that these two groups are one group of true Christians and the other group of false Christians. Every true Christian will have confidence in His coming; every false Christian will shrink back in shame at His coming. So, let's look at that a little more. First of all, “True Christians Will Have Confidence,” true Christians will have confidence. Verse 28, “...abide in Him, (Be remaining, continuing to believe, continue to follow Him, continue to obey Him.) so that when He appears, we may have confidence.” Now, the Greek word ‘confidence’ is a compound word that literally means ‘all speech.’ It was used in Greek culture to refer to freedom of speech, the right of a citizen to openly express his opinion and to do so publicly. Eventually, the word moved beyond that to speak of confidence, boldness, assurance, and that's the idea here. John says that the true believer has confidence.

Now it's interesting, He uses this word 'confidence' in two different ways. First of all, he speaks of confidence in prayer. You can have free speech with God in prayer. Look at chapter 3, verse 21; 1 John 3 and verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever now we ask we receive from Him." It's not talking about the future; he's talking about right now. We have free speech with the God of the universe right now in prayer. Look at chapter 5, verse 14, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." So, right now we have this confidence, we can speak freely with our king, with our Emperor.

But back in our text, verse 28 of chapter 2, it's talking about having confidence at His coming, when he returns. Now, what does that mean? Well, I think he explains that a little more in chapter 4, verse 17; chapter 4, verse 17, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence (Here it is.) in the day of judgment." That's the point, not just when He returns, but when He judges. We can have confidence at the judgment. By the way, there's a Greek word play here in this text. The word for confidence, is 'perresia,' and as you know, the word for coming is 'parousia.' So, true believers will have 'perresia' at the 'parousia,' confidence in His presence. The picture is a citizen who has confidence to stand before his king without fear. Isn't that amazing? I mean, if you're a true Christian, you will be able to appear before Christ confidently when He comes and at the judgment to speak respectfully, yes, but boldly and with assurance. It's like Charles Wesley's hymn, "Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown, through Christ my own." That Boldness is not because of anything in us; it's because of what Christ has done. But we will be able to have free speech before the God of the universe; we will be able to speak with assurance, with confidence. If you're a true Christian, that's what

it will be like. You know, I think we fear (Right?) what that will be like. If you're a true Christian, you will have confidence; not in yourself, but in Christ.

But there's a second response in verse 28, and it's that "False Christians will Shrink Away from Him in Shame," false Christians will shrink away from Him in shame. Look again at verse 28, this is if you don't abide in Him, this is the opposite. For those who don't abide in Him, who don't keep believing, who don't keep following, who don't keep obeying, they will "shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Shrink away in shame, by the way, is used only here in John's writings. And what's interesting about this word is it can mean one of two things. It can mean 'to have a sense of shame,' or as we would say, 'to be ashamed.' It can also mean 'to put to shame or to be disgraced.' So, John could mean here that at Christ's return and the ensuing judgment, false Christians, those who claim Christ but aren't truly His, will shrink away themselves from Christ in shame because of His glory, because of the charade will have been discovered, their mask, their hypocrisy will be taken away, they'll be seen for who they are; that's possible.

I think it's more likely though, that the opposite is being said here, and that is that Christ will put false Christians to shame, and He will disgrace them publicly. I think that's clear in light of what Jesus Himself says will happen to false Christians at the judgment. You remember in Matthew 7, verse 22, He says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, look at us, we're followers of yours.'" (Paraphrase.) And verse 23, says, "...I will declare to them (Now think about this; this is a public declaration of the Lord of the universe.) 'I never knew you.'"

Can you imagine living your entire life here on earth, claiming you're a follower of Jesus Christ, and at the judgment, Jesus Christ says, "I don't know who you are, depart from me." Now, if you're a true Christian, don't be frightened by that. He tells us exactly who He's going to say that to. In Matthew 7:23 He says, ("...I will say), 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" It comes right back to our text, "...YOU WHO (ARE PRACTICING) LAWLESSNESS."

In Mark, chapter 8, verse 38, Jesus says, "...whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation." By the way, He's not talking about a momentary denial like Peter's denial; obviously Peter was a genuine believer. In context there in Mark 8, He's saying if you refuse to accept My demands for discipleship, if you refuse to own Me as Savior and Lord, if you're ashamed of Me, in that sense, "...the Son of Man will also be ashamed of (you) him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." In other words, at the judgment; "...I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS." One commentator, Marshal, puts it this way, he says:

Those who will be ashamed when he comes are the people who did not live in union with Him on earth, those who were merely nominal in their allegiance to Him, and their rejection at His coming will be the final confirmation of a life of spiritual separation from Him.

In other words, the only people who will be separated from Him eternally are those who spend their lives separated from Him here. If we've been born of God, Christ will certify it when He comes. He will render a final verdict on our spiritual condition, and He will declare that we are

either still dead in our sins, like Ephesians 2, 1 to 3; or He will declare that we have experienced the new birth, that we have been born again, that we've been raised from the dead, like Ephesians 2, verses 4 and 5. He will certify that when He comes.

Now, if you're like me, you're saying, "Well, you know, that's great, I'm thrilled that that's going to happen, but is there a way to know now? Is there a way that we can know now whether or not we're born of God?" And the good news is there because there's a second insight here about the new birth in our text, and that is that "It Is Confirmed Now by Our Actions," it is confirmed now by our actions. Look at verse 29, "If you know that He is righteous." Now, who does John mean, "He is righteous?" Back in chapter 1, verse 9, he says the Father is righteous. In chapter 2, verse 1, he says Jesus is righteous. So, who is he talking about here?

Well, let me just admit to you that this is a little confusing. Let me walk you through it; stay with me. Verse 28 is clearly about Jesus, about His coming, His appearing. The second half of verse 29 has to be about the Father when it says, "...born of Him" because Scripture never says we're born of Jesus. And to be born of someone implies what? A father! So, there is a change from Jesus, in verse 28, to the Father. And either that change happens in the middle of verse 29 or more likely, it happens between verse 28 and 29. I think that's far more likely. So, in other words, verse 28 is about Jesus; verse 29 is about the Father. You'll notice verse 1 of chapter 3 is also about the Father. So, in verse 29, John says, "If you know that He (That is the Father.) is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him," that is the Father. "If you (all believers) know (as a fact) that God is righteous, then you will understand the logical consequence that everyone who is practicing righteousness has been born of Him."

(Paraphrase). Literally, the text says, “Everyone who is doing righteousness,” everyone who has a habit and pattern of life is doing or practicing righteousness. So, this is not an occasional good deed. This isn't you're sitting here this morning going, “You know, I think there were a couple of times this week, I did something pretty good.” This is not the typical American approach to, “Well, you know, my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds.” This is not external morality at all. This is the true Christians habitual practice.

You say, “Well, what does it mean to practice righteousness?” Let me give you the standard. Go back to chapter 2, verse 6, “the one who says he abides in (Jesus) Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” There's the standard. What does it mean to practice righteousness? It means to live like Jesus lived; it means to be like Christ in your behavior, in how you are and how you act. The person who consistently walks as Jesus walked, the person who consistently loves God and loves others, the person who consistently is marked by the fruit of the Spirit, the person who lives in a consistent pattern of obedience to the Scripture. We're not talking about perfection. Chapter 1 made it clear that all Christians sin and confess those sins. We're talking about what is the pattern and practice of your life. Is it characterized by darkness and sin? Or is it characterized by the light and obedience to Jesus Christ. If you, in fact, consistently live a pattern of righteousness, that person, “you” are a genuine Christian who has experienced the new birth.

And here's the reason every Christian practices righteousness, verse 29, “...everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” Everyone who is continually practicing a pattern of righteous living, thinking, speaking, has been born. The tense of the verb is very important.

The one who is practicing righteousness now has previously been born of God. You see the order? That's very important because it says that practicing righteousness is not the cause of the new birth; it's the result of the new birth, it's evidence of the new birth. Being born again comes first, the new birth comes first; and then out of that comes a life of practicing righteousness as an evidence of that new life.

Now, so far in his letter, John has described believers as knowing God, being in Christ and walking in the light. But this is the first time in his letter that he describes the believer as “having been born of God.” Here he says, “born of Him.” Now this verb we’ll see again and again in the rest of the letter. In fact, it occurs ten times in 1 John. Every other time, God is explicitly mentioned. So, here it means, when it says born of Him, it means born of God. Believers stand in a completely new relationship to God. This describes a radical change produced in the believer at the moment of salvation that has massive continuing consequences in his or her life.

You know, there are a lot of people who think Christianity is, you know, trying to be better, trying to turn over a new leaf, trying to live out the Sermon on the Mount, trying to be the best person I can, trying to make sure that my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds. That is a total misunderstanding of the Christian faith. You are introduced into the Christian faith, not by a slight mental decision you make, but by a radical transformation in who you are, that Jesus says it's like “being born all over again.” Theologians call it regeneration.

Because a person has been born of God, and we're going to see this unfold in the rest of the letter, John teaches us that because a person has been born of God, he believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come in the flesh, he does not continue to practice sin unabated. He practices instead righteousness, and he loves other Christians; that is a radical change, and it begins with regeneration, with the new birth, that happens at the moment of salvation, and only God can do it.

I should say John defines what it means to be born of God in two texts in his gospel. And this is such a huge issue that I'm going to take more time next week to look at it, Lord willing. This whole concept of regeneration is so important to understanding John that we're going to look at it in detail. I hope to look at those passages, but they are John 1, 12, and 13, and of course, our Lord's interchange with Nicodemus in John 3.

But back to our text here, the reason that true Christians' actions are characterized by a pattern of righteousness is our DNA. Our Father is righteousness; and because He is righteous, righteousness now marks our character and our conduct. 1 Peter 1, 16 and 17, "...YOU SHALL BE HOLY, (Because, what?) ...I (your Father) AM HOLY."

A child displays the character of the parent because he shares the parent's nature. Again, let me just remind you, I've mentioned this earlier, but the verbs in verse 29 make it clear that the righteousness we're talking about here, the practicing righteousness is not the cause of the new birth, it's not the condition of the new birth. Instead, it is the evidence of the new birth. The new birth happens, and because the new birth has happened, we practice righteousness.

As I mentioned, I visited the Green Mound Cemetery in Baltimore last week, and in that cemetery, I visited two graves, two graves that are less than fifty yards from each other. Both are graves of professing Christians. The first is the grave of J. Gresham Machen, a man whose life was characterized both publicly and privately by righteousness.

The second was the unmarked grave of another professing Christian, the grave of John Wilkes Booth, the murderer of President Abraham Lincoln. Booth, you may not know this, was confirmed as an Episcopalian. He went to a couple of religious schools; he may have eventually converted to Catholicism, the faith of at least one of his co-conspirators. But he was buried in this plot by an Episcopalian Bishop. And he thought of himself as religious. David S. Reynolds writes this:

Booth's writings are full of firmly proclaimed devotion to God and to country. Booth looked back fondly on the American Revolution and wrote, "How I have loved the old flag can never now be known." (Reynolds goes on to say:) Booth saw his violent deed as God-directed and scribbled, in his pocket diary shortly before he was captured in a Virginia barn, "God simply made me the instrument of His punishment."

Folks, there are two men who professed Jesus Christ at some level. One was characterized by a pattern of righteousness; his actions confirmed that he had been born of God, now, in this life. The other was characterized by a pattern of sin that culminated in the murder of the president. One will have confidence when Jesus appears; the other will be put to shame by Jesus Christ Himself. But you don't have to be the assassin of a president to live a life that's inconsistent

with your profession of Jesus Christ. We live in a world where that's very common. It was in the first century. The heretics that John confronted were antinomians. That is, they were those who either ignored or downplayed the importance of right-living as an evidence of Christian faith.

Today, the Christian world is filled with various approaches that downplay righteous living. Let me just be honest with you; the most popular one in our area is this. It says, "If you ever, in your life made a profession of faith, if you've ever prayed the sinner's prayer, then you're a Christian, sealed, done, and it doesn't really matter how you've lived since you prayed that prayer or made that profession, you're forgiven, you have eternal life, go ahead and live your life. John says, "That's ridiculous! Like Father, like son, like Father, like daughter." True Christians always have their Father's DNA stamped on their persons, and they will be righteous and habitually practice righteousness as He does.

So, let me just take you back to where we began and ask you to apply this and think about yourself. Here's John's argument, every true Christian has been born of God. If you're a believer, you've experienced that radical act of regeneration, you've been changed, you're a new creation. And because of that, if you are changed, if you have experienced that, you also display the righteous character of your Father by consistently practicing righteousness. Let me put it this bluntly, righteousness is the primary marker in every true Christian's spiritual DNA.

Does your character and conduct resemble that of the Father you claim? If not, let me just be frank with you. This isn't me; this is Jesus through His Apostle saying to you, "He doesn't care

about your prayer. He doesn't care how many times you've prayed the 'sinner's prayer,' how many times you walked an aisle, he doesn't care what's written in the front of your Bible, he doesn't care what your parents told you about some childhood conversion." If your life is not marked by the DNA of your Father, righteousness, then you are not His. And my plea with you today would be to truly turn to Him because He will receive you. He's gracious, if you will truly repent, if you will acknowledge that, if you'll throw yourself on His mercy, if you'll come like the Publican in Jesus's story, the tax collector, and you'll say, you know, "Be merciful to me the sinner, change me, make me a different person, give me a new heart." He'll do that, if you'll repent of your sin and put your faith in His Son, in His perfect life, His substitutionary death and His resurrection. And my plea is for you to do that even today.

And here's the encouraging part for those of us who have. Everyone, who perseveres in practicing righteousness, shows that they've been born of God. And here's the encouragement, brothers and sisters, we will have confidence at the judgment; we will have confidence when He comes; we can speak freely to our King because we bear our Father's DNA.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this passage. Seal it within our hearts. Lord, for those of us who know and love you, through your Son, help us to keep on believing, keep on following, keep on obeying until He comes. Help us to be like Machen, faithful, until death.

Father, for those who are here this morning who have made a profession at some point, but they've never really been changed. Lord, may they throw themselves on your mercy today, pleading for you to do what only you can do, coming like beggars like the tax collector,

pleading for your mercy. And, Lord, thank you that you always are where there's repentance and faith in Your Son. Do that work in their hearts today, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.