

Spiritual Fallout

Scripture: 1 John 3:4–10

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The disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor power plant released four hundred times the amount of radioactive material released in the bombing of Hiroshima. Experts estimate that as much as 60 percent of the fallout from the Chernobyl disaster landed in the neighboring nation of Belarus.

I've had the privilege to minister alongside faithful pastors and church leaders from Belarus, and they can attest to the dramatic, tragic effects of the disaster. The plume of smoke and debris deposited radioactive material across much of the country. The toxic pollution permeated the soil and the water supply, effectively poisoning the entire country, and extending the impact of the disaster to future generations.

Just as environmental pollution can wreak long-lasting devastation across a wide region, the same is true of *spiritual* poison. False teaching can create years—even generations—of spiritual confusion, corruption, and collapse. But unlike a rogue cloud of radioactive material, false teaching can and must be defended against.

There is a particular stripe of false teaching that has caused a great deal of destruction in the church for several decades—a spiritual scourge that has sown confusion and corruption into congregations around the world. See if you can spot it in the statements below.

- Repentance is just a synonym for faith. Turning from sin is not required for salvation.
- Saving faith is simply being convinced or giving credence to the truth of the gospel. It is *not* a personal commitment to Christ.
- Faith might not last. It is a gift of God, but it can collapse, be overthrown or subverted, and can even turn into unbelief.
- Christians can lapse into a state of permanent spiritual barrenness and lifelong carnality. Born again people can continuously live like the unsaved.
- Disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt one's salvation. Spiritual fruit is not a given in the Christian life.
- Nothing guarantees that a Christian will love God.
- All who claim Christ by faith as Savior, regardless of their lifestyle, should be assured they belong to God. It is dangerous and destructive to question the salvation of professing Christians.
- The New Testament writers never questioned the reality of their readers' faith.

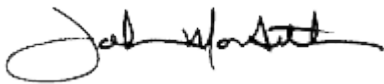
Those shocking statements do not resemble the gospel of Jesus Christ and His apostles. They are in fact satanic lies meant to give men and women false assurance of their salvation and cripple the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

And yet those lies have a pervasive impact in the church today. Like poisonous fallout, that false teaching permeates the very soil of evangelicalism, and the tainted fruit of this spiritual catastrophe is deadly.

But there is an antidote to this spiritual toxin. It's found in 1 John, a book which presents the people of God with several tests to determine the true nature of their faith. In particular, 1 John 3:4-10 gets to the heart of how believers are to think and act as new creatures in Christ:

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.

Over the next several days, we're going to consider the unmistakable truth spelled out in those verses: that the believer's life is completely incompatible with a lifestyle of sin.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Stott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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