

“Children of God”

1 John 3:1-9

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us,

because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

Verse 1 tells us “What we *are*.” Verse 2, “What we *will be*,” and verse 3, “What we *should be*.”

Chapter 3 begins with John waxing eloquent on the work of Christ and the love of God. He pens those famous words “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” “*See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!*”

All of what has occurred ... our salvation...the redemption, the restoration, the joy and purpose of life...all of it has been given to us simply because God loves us! Oh indeed, there is responsibility, accountability and faithfulness involved on our part! But such is not the *cause*, but rather the response...the acknowledgment...the confession of that love! It is never the power or the catalyst of what has occurred to and in us! For “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom 5:8) So He loved us and threw us a lifeline while we still were estranged from Him ...still indulgent, faithless rebels! The basis for all that has occurred concerning our salvation is the great love that God has for us! And now we have been reborn...*children again*... “children of God.”

We must know that the “tie that binds”...the bond of unity between us and our Creator, is not our works, our effort, or our diligence. It is our love! The problem with this recipe, is that while God loves us perfectly, unilaterally, and unconditionally, we seldom reciprocate in that same light! It seems that whenever we are under pressure, its God and His bride the church that takes the hit, never our worldly pursuits! In fact, we as Christians often fail to grasp the concept of “God love” and attempt rather to inject a human and earthly version of such into the relationship! One that is emotionally based and emotionally reflected, and is usually just played out in mere verbal affirmation. As long as we fail to understand just what agape love really is ...and the depth of it... we will forever fail to be able to engage God in any kind of reciprocal love.

Frankly, ‘love of God’ in our generation is often just a repetitive mantra recited in religious dogma rather than something that grabs hold of my heart, my brain, and my life to affect a whole-life response on my part. Jesus called upon us to ‘... *love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and*

with all your strength.' (Mark 12:30) Yet that sounds very different than the version of 'love' that is so widely practiced in the greater church today...one that is quite often self-serving, often lazy, usually fleshly and generally quite passive. It is far from the love that "seeks first the kingdom of God." Far from a genuine love that "loves our neighbor as ourselves." Therefore, unless we come to understand...at least on some level, the love God has for us, we will never be able to actually reciprocate "God love" towards anyone else!

Look what Jesus had to say to the church at Ephesus in the Book of Revelation. It is there that He truly 'cuts to the chase'... emphasizing the importance of believers both recalling to their mind the love of God, as well as conducting themselves in light of that love! (Rev 2:1-4)...

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance...(but) you have left (left, not lost!) your first love."

Christ is not scolding or rejecting the deeds, the toils, and the perseverance, but such can never be a replacement for love. It must always rather be in response to His love!

How we can struggle with this principle! We feel that we must choose either to "sit at the feet of Christ," or to actually get up and do something productive. Later in this chapter, we will see clearly that John is not against "doing." But our doing must, if it is to be real and fruitful, be an actual *reflection* of our time with Him... a *response* to our relationship with Him. John says in chapter 4 of this letter that God didn't just *say* He loves us, he *actually* loved us, and he manifested such in action: *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, ...(and why?) ...that we might live through Him."* 1Jo 4:9

God love...*agape love*, is unconditional, sacrificial. It is a love that God *is* (1Jn 4:8,16), that God *demonstrates* (Ro 5:8, Jn 3:16, 1Jn 4:9) and that God *enables* in His children. Yes, agape may involve emotion, but it must always involve **action**. Agape is unrestricted, unrestrained, and unconditional. Agape love is the virtue that surpasses all others and, in fact, is the prerequisite for all the others. Jesus, when asked "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" replied "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" "This is the great and foremost commandment." (Mt 22:36, 37, 38)

John says to us, "Look at the love God pours out upon us!" *A love that gave. A love that still today gives and gives more.* The dictionary definition of "give" is "to pass or transfer the title or property of a thing to another person without an equivalent or compensation." This is how God's love comes to us, and how WE are to give it out! Not just in an affirmation toward God, but in a lifestyle toward others. And in the vein of this letter as a whole, this love manifest is not merely a Christian command but *a fruit of the Spirit...*a "**proof**" that God is in us!

John has already spoke about false confessors and little anti-christs that will arise around us. He is speaking now about the authentic hearts, those that are indeed "possessors." He says that the world doesn't know *us*, because they don't know *Him*. Such explains much in our interaction with the world around us. If God is dwelling in us, we will always seem out of place and strange to those outside the family of God. They don't get it. They don't understand. They don't know who you are or what you are. You are merely an enigma.

The reality is that they hate Jesus and they will generally hate you too. Intimate understanding and knowledge of another person is based upon fellowship. Since the people of the world have nothing in common with the children of God, they have no fellowship with them, and therefore have no appreciation and understanding of them.

If we DO find acceptance out there, Jesus told us we should be concerned! Luke 6:26-28 reminds us "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.*" The fact is, the more you are conformed to the image of Christ, the more separated you will be from the world and the less it will understand you.

Verse 1 told us what we ARE...now verse 2 tells us what we **will be**. God's love for us does not stop with our new birth. It continues throughout our lives and will carry us right up to the return of Jesus Christ! When our Lord returns, all true believers will see Him and will become like Him (Phil 3:20, 21). New bodies, and a new home. Until then, how shall we live? For we are, according to this passage, "sons of God." Right now. **Today**. Such does not just begin when He returns...or when we die. As reborn believers, we are now "new creatures." We are already children of God. It is done. "It is finished." John wants to emphasize that this is now our current position, and therefore this great truth should dominate our thinking and transform every aspect of our daily lives. Our position and privilege as children of God should saturate and shape how we think, how we live, and how we relate to the world around us.

Dr Martyn-Lloyd Jones says the following:

"I do feel that this is perhaps the greatest weakness of all in the Christian church, that we fail to realize what we are, or who we are. We spend our time in arguing about the implications of the Christian truth or the application of this, that and the other. But the central thing is to realize what the Christian is. We grumble and complain, and it is all due to the fact that we have not really seen ourselves in terms of this picture. Surely, as we read these words, we must ...of necessity... be humbled, indeed in a sense *humiliated*, as we realize the inadequacy of our ideas and the unworthiness of our view of ourselves as Christian people." (Lloyd-Jones, D. M. Children of God)

Godly conduct is not only possible ...but expected...and a reality, if we can grasp our true, great position as children of God! It has been rightly said that imitation is the highest form of praise, and this transformation ... "we will be like Him" ... is the supreme tribute to Jesus Christ.

In verse 3, John tells us *what we SHOULD be*, ...in light of all this great truth! Believers don't live holy lives to **prove they are children of God**, but they live holy lives **because they are children of God**. But make no mistake...our participation, as John has been saying throughout this letter, is crucial! We have all we need, now we are called to live in it! Once again, sanctification comes through the power of the saving grace of God, but **we must play a part**. Action motivated by His love, our "response in love," and our ever-deepening relationship with Him.

Scripture speaks of this ongoing cleansing as "progressive sanctification." In 1Peter 1:22 Peter says, "*seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth*" (ASV). That initial purification with its transforming result is the necessary precursor to the ongoing cleansing that happens in our daily experience. The more intimate the believer's fellowship with God, who is "light" (1Jn 1:5), the more conscious he becomes of his need to cleanse himself from all that is darkness.

Multiple polls tell us that when it comes to lifestyle, behavior, priorities, materialism and our general world view, there is virtually no difference in America between those who claim to be born again Christians and the population at large. It is a fact that keeps coming up here repeatedly. We may claim to hold "Jesus first," but our lives simply do not back up those claims.

John herein makes it clear that actually living a righteous life is a distinguishing mark of one that truly has been born of God. Because sin is serious and it is opposed to the reasons why Christ came, Christians *do not* and *cannot* live in sin.

With his use of the word "lawlessness," John is not herein talking about merely the breaking of a specific rule of God...a specific instance of sin, but rather, referring to one who makes a **practice** of sin. Not merely an error... a 'stumble,' but what is essentially a "revolt against God." While individually we may acknowledge when we have messed up or when we are guilty of a shortcoming, few of us will admit the reality of a "revolt" against our Creator, but for many of us, that is exactly what our lifestyles represent.

John is presenting a position that sin is much worse than just 'messing up.' All such action is an offense to our Creator! And to actually make a practice of it in any way is indeed to be in open rebellion against God Himself.

Without a biblical view concerning sin, you will no doubt fail to grasp the necessity of any real and radical action concerning such...by you or by God in response! Why would Jesus have "appear(ed) in order to take away sins" (3:5), if all we needed was a few tips on how to have a happier life or improve our self esteem?

It seems it is our tendency to play down the serious nature of sin. Satan's strategy has always been to get rebellious man to think more highly of himself than he ought to think: "I may not be perfect, but I'm not wicked. It's not like I follow Satan or something!" Satan wants us to "measure ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves." (1 Corinthians 10:12) When we become the standard, truly we are the most pitiful of people! Because the measuring stick is Christ.

At the same time, we tend to want to "revise" the person and nature of God Himself by clutching the attitude of "*Surely, a loving God is hip to today's culture and He understands that I'm only human. He made me after all! And if He really loves us He would never send anyone to hell.*" Satan tries to pull God down from His absolute holiness and therefore undermine the cross. Then...if God is not so holy and I'm not so sinful... then I don't need anything as radical as someone actually dying as a sinless substitute to pay for my little "shortcomings."

But the fact is, that is exactly why Jesus came! He came to "take away sins." He didn't come to this earth to be a moral teacher, even if He indeed was a great one! He came to take away the guilt and the power of the sins of mankind. And that was not done with words, but with His blood. He came to *die*. For that to actually work as designed, He had to be completely sinless Himself; therefore, "*...in Him there is no sin.*"

John tells us that those who actually "abide" in Him do not live this way. John often spoke of this "abiding." It's not just about church attendance, but it speaks rather of fellowship, communion, and relationship. "Abiding" pushes our faith out to where it lives in truth...out into a "life system"...out into the light. When we pre-plan and then execute the practice of some sin, we are clearly not abiding in Him!

How are we deal with John telling us that "Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him?" He even goes so far as to tell us to "not be deceived." Whenever that is said in scripture, one would think we would naturally sit up and pay attention. It is obvious that people had been deceived and/or were being deceived currently. There clearly were those who had indulged in the perverse reasoning that somehow one could 'be' righteous without necessarily bothering to 'practice' righteousness. Indeed that concept is rampant in *our* day! It is the fruit of those who teach that you can accept Christ as Savior without submitting to Him as Lord.

John is telling us that there really is only two "camps." One group that knows Him and abides in Him, and one that does *not* abide in Him, proving that they do not know Him at all. To believe otherwise is to emasculate the gospel, rendering it impotent and powerless. Further more, to hold to that position places you outside the realm of biblical Christianity. It is scripturally unthinkable that a person can be born again as a New Creature in Christ and not allow Christ the Lordship control over all of your life. I am not saying that holiness is going to be a perfect display of godliness, because it never will be on this side of eternity. But to reject the "pattern" and "passion" for Jesus as Lord... *as well as Savior*, is simply a damnable doctrine of false teachers and blind prophets.

John says that "*He who (makes a practice) of sin(s) is of the devil.*" That is a harsh statement in a powder-puff age. It's not comfortable and yes, it is most definitely accusatory. It is the definitive "line in the sand." But are we going to be Bible people? This is why so many avoid this letter, for it is effectively the bright light of judgment. It is readily accepted by those who want to honestly know where they stand with God, and is just as quickly rejected by those who want to avoid looking in there at any cost! To reject His will over our lives is the essence of rebellion. When we want and live for our way...our control, we then commit the same original sin that Satan himself committed.

John however gives us the "good news" in verse 8, saying "*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, (or does not make a practice of sin)... for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*" When we have indeed been born again...the "seed" of God dwells in us and since God does not sin, neither therefore can we. Aren't those awesome words; ...we "*cannot sin!*" How often we battle against the power of sin ...gritting our teeth and steeling our spine...trying desperately not to fall, to not surrender. Yet while discipline is not to be abandoned, the reality is that if that is us we are on the wrong field of battle! Rather, the key is and always has been, to saddle up close to Jesus and allow Him the control of our lives. The decisions, the paths, the future, the physical placement of our very being. This is the road to righteousness.

It is very important to understand that John is not inferring that we might attain to sinless perfection. He has already dealt with that issue back in chapter 1 where he tells us that when we sin we have an advocate to step in on our behalf. However, he is talking there again about a practice of sin. A surrender to and coming under the power of the practice of sin. Sadly, the folks who often are adversely concerned about this passage are those believers who are greatly disturbed by the stumbles in their lives but are passionately desiring to please their Lord and to live for Him, and those who brush it all off are those who *should* be concerned! For the latter are those who do not believe that Jesus needs to be Lord of our lives in order to be saved.

A truly reborn individual...when he or she stumbles in sin, is alarmed, pained, and ashamed. There is immediate and very real action put forth to 'shut it down,' because he or she cannot remain in that sin. They simply cannot.

"A pig and a sheep may fall into the same mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that's its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature. If God's seed abides in you, you cannot wallow in the mud. If you like it in the mud and don't want to get out, you may need to ask whether you truly have been born of God."

Verse 10 in this section brings it all home: "*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.*"

Don't be deceived...don't be fooled. It's easy to say, "I believe in Jesus." But John says, "*Look at your life. If I do not practice righteousness, if I do not live in obedience to God's Word, especially with regard to the horizontal love for those around me, my claim is false.*" John's final comment shows that true Christianity....true redemption, includes **love for my brother**. Such is the "relational test"...the horizontal manifest of our salvation.

Philippians 2:12 Paul calls upon us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And he says again in 2Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." So I leave you with the words of John herein: "Do not be deceived..."