

## WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 2:28-3:10

Key Verse: 3:1b, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

Thus far Apostle John has exhorted us with the message "God is light." He has identified true Christians as those who walk in the light, keep God's commands, love brothers and sisters, and do God's will. He exhorts believers saying, "Do not love the world." In today's passage, he continues the identifying marks of a true Christian. They are those who do right and who do not continue in a life of sin. In contrast, children of the devil do not do what is right and they keep on sinning with no desire or intention to change. Let's think about John's message to us in two parts: (1) We shall be like him (2:28-3:3), and (2) Living to do right, rather than sin (3:4-3:10).

I. We shall be like him (2:28-3:3).

John begins by saying in 2:28, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." Here let's think about 3 key words: children, continue, and unashamed.

First, children. John's favorite address to his readers is "dear children" or "dear friends." John loved them dearly, like his own children, like Jesus loved his disciples. John had deep, sincere love for the family of God, the faithful in Christ Jesus. Jesus once said that those who hear God's word and put it into practice are his real family, his brothers and sisters. They were closer than blood relatives. They were his true spiritual family. Apostle John felt the same way. Jesus commanded his disciples to "love one another." This is not optional for us. Our society is in many ways quite individualistic. It is natural and normal for us in this society to live separated lives, even not to know our neighbors' names, especially if we live in a big city like Chicago. This attitude can even carry over into our church. This should not be. We must not live like the world does. Recently, one of our church families became ill. Then many of our church members took turns to bring them food. It was a beautiful show of Christian love for a family in time of need. May we continue to show this kind of love to one another.

Second, continue. John said, "continue in him." The word continue can also be translated "remain, abide, stay." Christians must remain in Jesus. Christians must be faithful to Jesus Christ. That means much more than attending Sunday worship services or praying before meals. It means to stay in close fellowship with Jesus by listening to his word and Spirit, and loving and obeying him. It also means confessing our sins in repentance when we fail. Sometimes instead of admitting our sins to God in repentance, we sometimes make excuses for our sins. We make excuses like: "well everybody sins" or "it's my heritage or upbringing that causes me to do that" or "Hey I'm just speaking the truth. It's their problem if they can't take it." Excuses for sin are not the way of Jesus' people. Jesus wants us to confess our sins and walk in the light and continue in him.

Third, unashamed. The Message version of the Bible translates 2:28 like this: “And now, children, stay with Christ. Live deeply in Christ. Then we’ll be ready for him when he appears, ready to receive him with open arms, with no cause for red-faced guilt or lame excuses when he arrives.” Shame or embarrassment can cause our faces to blush. It’s not a good feeling. We don’t like shame or embarrassment. How can we avoid this? Jesus wants us to simply be honest with him when we fail. We shouldn’t pretend to be sinless or try to hide our sins. To do so is to stay in darkness. If we live with the hope of seeing Jesus face to face one day, we can live unashamed. We will all see Jesus one day. Either he will return to earth during our lifetimes, or we will die and stand before his judgment seat. 2 Cor.5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Now look at verse 29. “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” God always does right. In other words, God cannot sin. God never does, says or thinks evil. As for us, we are born into sin. We naturally say, do and think evil things. What is evil? Evil is what is contrary to or against God, because God is holy, righteous and good.

Here John introduces the concept of being “born of God.” It means to be a child of God. Children are like their parents. Not only do children look like their parents, if their parents raised them, then they think and speak and act like them. Children raised by grandparents can even learn to walk and talk like elderly people. We are like those from whom we have been borne and raised. So it is with us spiritually speaking. Those who are born of God through faith and trust in Jesus Christ, have God’s seed in them, which makes them like God as children of God. We’ll talk more about this as we go on.

Everyone who does what is right has been born of God. Then what does it mean to do right? It doesn’t mean to say a kind word to someone one time. As mentioned in the introduction, to do right means to walk in the light, to keep God’s commands, to obey his word, and to do God’s will. It also means to live in love, not hatred. We’ll keep learning more about this as we continue this study of 1 John.

Now look at 3:1, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” The ESV translates 1a as follows: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

What kind of great love is this? It is a love that the world does not have or show. It is God’s giving love. We see a portrait of this love in the parable of the prodigal son. The son was rude and disrespectful to his father, leaving home, wasting his inheritance money in wild living. Surprisingly, when he returned home to work for his father for pay, his father didn’t scold him saying, “I knew you were making a big mistake. And now you want to return? Go somewhere

else.” Rather, the father kissed his dirty son and threw a homecoming celebration party for him. This is God’s love for sinners.

God’s love is even greater than that in the parable. God’s love is that he gave his One and Only Son (Jn 3:16) to leave heaven to be born in our fallen, hateful world, and to die on the cross an undeserved, barbaric death, in order to bring us back into his family and kingdom. That’s amazing love! Yes, it is. That’s God’s love for us in Jesus Christ our Lord. That’s the message of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

See, the great love God has for us to call us “my children” through Jesus Christ! God has adopted us by his grace and mercy through Jesus Christ! We have a new identity in Christ. We are no longer sinners destined for God’s judgment. We are saved children of God! We belong to God! We are born of God. We are loved.

Perhaps the deepest need of every human is the need to be loved. People who don’t know they are loved do many harmful things to themselves and others. Actually, I believe that without knowing God’s love, no one really feels loved. Rather, they feel used or manipulated or stuck in a fake system of self-centered motivations. Of course there is parental love. Every normal parent loves their children. But what about children who dishonor, disrespect or hate their parents? It might be difficult for parents to love rebellious children.

This past week a Northern Illinois woman was sentenced to 35 years in prison for abusing and killing her 5 year old son. Every now and then we hear terrible news stories like this. The woman said she was a drug addict. Her excuse was that she took drugs to try to fill the void of not being loved. According to her, her parents’ love and husband’s love were not enough. That’s an extreme example. But we all need God’s love in Jesus Christ.

God’s great love was that Jesus became the atoning sacrifice, the ransom, for our sins. Jesus died to purchase us out of slavery to sin and Satan and to make us children of God! This is the true identity of those who have repented of sin and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. For this, every Christian owes eternal thanks and praise to Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Savior. Thank you Jesus!

Another deep desire in every human is the desire to be recognized. The world does not recognize or honor God’s children, because the world does not recognize or honor Jesus. But we do not have to feel sorry that we are not recognized or honored by the world. Why not? Because we are recognized and honored by God as his children! This is our identity. Apostle John is encouraging us to live with this identity in God. A US passport identifies us as American. With it, we can travel to almost any nation on earth. But identity as a child of God is so much greater, with much higher privileges and benefits than any passport, or driver’s license, or birth certificate. We have a spiritual birth certificate that says “born of God,” thanks be to Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now look at verse 2. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

We followers of Jesus and lovers of Jesus are children of God. We have forgiveness of sins. We have the Holy Spirit living within us, testifying with our spirit that we are God’s children (Rom 8:16). We have experienced, even a taste, of his grace, love and mercy and the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). We are so blessed. Still, there is much more to come. This world is not our real home or our real hope. Our hope and home are with Jesus in heaven, in glory, in his kingdom. This is the hope that our souls are longing for. We shall be like Jesus. Young, able-bodied people may not appreciate this much. But as we get older, even a restored body sounds appealing. I can testify to this already at age 55 with many more aches and pains. We also long for inner perfection and growth: to be wiser, more loving, more graceful, more truthful, more holy, more like Jesus. This is the longing of our souls. We shall be like Jesus. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

## II. Living to do right, rather than sin (3:4-10)

Now look at verses 4-6. “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

Apostle John has already talked about sin in chapter 1. The liar says he is without sin. The Christian confesses sin and receives forgiveness and purification through the blood of Jesus. Here, John talks more about sin. Sin is breaking God’s laws. Consider the Ten Commandments. Martin Luther regarded the First of the Ten Commandments as the first, highest and best, from which all the others proceed: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). So to worship any other god or to follow any ideology or philosophy contrary to the gospel is to break this law of God. Those who live in sin don’t care about breaking God’s commands. They break God’s commands freely and persistently, with no intention of changing their lives.

But Jesus appeared to take away our sins. And in Jesus is no sin. Jesus and sin just don’t get along. They are incompatible. Jesus is the sinless One. It was impossible for Jesus to sin because he is God, who cannot sin. Jesus always said, thought and did the right thing. He never said, thought or did wrong. By his righteous life and atoning death, Jesus destroyed the devil’s work. So, no one who lives in Jesus keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. This scares a lot of Christians. Why? Because they realize that they still sin. So they may wonder, am I truly born again?

Let’s see what else John says about this in verses 7-10. “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 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. 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. 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."

On the surface, these verses seem to contradict what he wrote in chapters 1 and 2 about sin. He said that anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar. Let's review 2:1-2, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus' blood is what purifies us from all our sin (1:7). The way to receive forgiveness and purification from our sins is to confess our sins to God and trust in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for us.

Now John says that true Christians who have been born of God do not continue to sin and cannot go on sinning. This is similar to what Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:1-4, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Here's the point: Jesus Christ has given Christians—all who repent and trust in him—a new life. In fact, they have become new creatures. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Again, John 1:12-13 says, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." In John 5:24 Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Jesus gives all who trust in him new birth and new life in his name. Their life purpose, their life direction and their life motivation have all been changed. The Holy Spirit dwells within them. They desire to love and serve Jesus, not money, not recognition, not fame, not power, not themselves. They live for Jesus who loved them and died for them. Apostle Paul described it well in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Christians love Jesus and live for him. They do not live any more to gratify the sinful nature. They do not live for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of life. That's not their driving motivation and impetus. They now live to do the will of God. And when they fall into sin, they feel bad about it, and they confess their sin. They want to grow in Jesus' character and holiness continually as children of God. If this is not true of you, you need to

repent and trust in Jesus Christ and him alone for your salvation. Then you can have the assurance that you are a child of God, your sins have been forgiven by his blood, and you are a new creation in him, with a new purpose and a new motivation to love and serve Jesus Christ. It's all about Jesus. If it's still about you, something's wrong. It's all about Jesus.

Tim Keller said the three big idols of today are money, sex and power. Those who live for money, sex or power as their driving motivation and driving force of life are not children of God. They are still under the dominion of the devil, and they need to repent and trust in Christ and let the Holy Spirit change them. So, what are you living for? Or better—who are you living for: for yourself or for Jesus?

Kim Meeder prayed one day about where to go shopping—such a small thing to pray about—and God led her to a particular Goodwill thrift store. She tells the story in her book, “Encountering our Wild God.” When it was time to check out, the check out clerk named Angel was very angry and rude to Kim. Kim sensed God prompting her to give her testimony to Angel. At first the clerk said rudely, “Did you find everything you need?” Kim said, “Yes, I found more than I need, even some things for my speaking engagement.” (Angel): “Well, what do you speak about?” (Kim): “I speak about hope.” (Angel): “Well, that’s great! You speak about hope. Nobody takes responsibility around here. Nobody takes responsibility!” (Apparently she was pretty angry at some fellow colleagues in the Goodwill thrift store, I guess. But she was taking it out on this customer.) Kim drew back and said to herself, “Lord, what do you want me to do with that?” And she felt the Lord prompting her: “Share your testimony. Point blank her with your testimony.” And she thought, “Oh Lord, hear and now? With this angry clerk and impatient customers behind me? Ok, God, here I go. I’m going in.” And she said, “Angel...everyone needs hope in their lives. I’ll never forget the day I found genuine hope. I was nine years old. It was the same day that my dad murdered my mother and then killed himself. In my grief, I cried out to Jesus—the Author of hope—and He’s been in my heart ever since.” Angel stood speechless and began to cry. Then she said, “When I was twelve, I saw my mom kill herself right in front of me. I’ve never told that to anybody.” Kim opened wide her arms and Angel came over the counter weeping into the arms of a complete stranger, because she had been introduced to the love of Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters, this is life! This is the love of a child of God! Let’s live in this life and love as children of God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!

Today, John reminded us of the amazing grace of God that we are children of God. We don’t live a life of sin, which grieves God. We are no longer children of the devil. That’s not our identity. We are not slaves to sin. We belong to Jesus. We are his. I am a child of God. He calls me “child.” We are free to love and serve God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by his Spirit living in us. To God be the glory! We have hope to be like Jesus and with Jesus one day. Praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ our Lord, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Amen. Let’s pray.