

Sunday, October 9, 2022

# Children of God

(Series: Life, Light and Love; a series on 1 John)

(Message Five)

(1 John 2:28-3:10)

## Scripture:

*<sup>28</sup>And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

*<sup>29</sup>If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.*

*<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

*<sup>4</sup>Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

*<sup>7</sup>Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.*

## Message:

I came across an article entitled, "*Hints on Safety: Do not ride in an automobile.*" The article went on to say that automobiles cause twenty percent of all injury accidents. Seventeen percent of injury accidents happen at home; sixteen percent occur in air, rail, and water travel; fifteen percent happen to pedestrians while walking, but only one one-hundredth of a percent of all accidents happen in church. I wonder why? Maybe because no one is going anywhere or doing anything.

John writes, "*and now, dear children* (there is that term of endearment again), *continue in him* (Jesus) *so that when he appears* (i.e., when he returns, and he is coming back shortly) *we may be confident* (i.e., assured) *and unashamed* (i.e., not embarrassed by how we are living) *at his coming* (i.e., and we should be looking forward to it).

*"If we know that he* (Jesus) *is righteous* (and we know that), *then we also know that those born of him* (i.e., who believe in and follow him) *do what is right.*"

Followers of Jesus strive to be like him, adopt his attitudes, his behaviors, and his lifestyle. They pursue righteousness; that is, they pursue right living.

In fact, John says, we are called to be **sinless**. Jesus was without **sin** and if we really want to be like Jesus, we too, should be without sin.

And that is where the **tension** comes in that we live with as Christians. We have a sinful fallen nature, we are a flawed people, we live on a fallen planet. We are to be **sinless**, but the reality is we **sin**. Again, and again. Even when we try hard not to; even when we think we're doing the right thing; even when we're doing nothing at all.

But while we're not fully given over to sin or completely without sin, the goal is always to live more and more like Jesus and less and less like a sinner. The goal is to see progress!

**The Christian life can get quite discouraging. Ever felt so frustrated trying to be good you just want to take a break, lick your wounds or give up entirely?**

Ted Williams said, "*Every baseball team could use the man who has played every position perfectly, never struck out, and never made an error. The trouble is, there is no way to get him to put his hotdog down and come out of the stands and play!*" Likewise, it is not what happens in the pew that characterizes us as a follower of Jesus but how we live out our life.

Christians who think the Christian life is easy are not trying very hard to be Christians – so John has some words of encouragement and challenge for us this morning.

## **DON'T EVER FORGET GOD'S AMAZING LOVE**

**First, his love makes us children of God (1 John 3:1 – “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.”)**

If you have never stood before God afraid, you've never stood before God, if you've never stood before God amazed, you have never stood before God. When you and I, like John, finally stand before God, we'll realize how much—in spite of everything—God loves us, and we will be absolutely amazed: “*The wonder of it all, the wonder of it all, that God loves me!*”

Campbell Morgan, one of the better Biblical expositors, said, “**John 3:16** (“For God so the world...”) is a text I've never attempted to preach on; it is simply too big. After I have read it, there would be nothing to preach about.”

The Father's love makes us a child of the **king**; we are now related to the creator of the universe.

The Greek here is in the perfect tense. That means that this love goes on and on and on; that is, our status as children of God is a **permanent** forever relationship. Paul writes, “*At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*” and made us part of His family. **(Romans 5:6).**

In *The Wittenberg Door* - a former tongue-in-cheek publication of Youth Specialties - Mike Yaconelli once suggested Billy Graham should retire, close down the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and spend more time with his grandchildren. That set off a firestorm of letters, including this one:

*Dear Mike.*

*Your suggestion that the Billy Graham Association close its doors with integrity, give God the glory for giving a group of men the vision for impacting the world for Christ and allow Dr. Graham the freedom to spend his last years with his grandchildren could indeed happen. However, the eternal security for literally hundreds stands in the way. Will integrity and obedience win out? Will an interloper rise up? Only God knows. One assumption you make, however, is mistaken. Dr. Graham is certainly humble enough to do the above. He is a man of integrity, contrary to what some media types might assume. By the way, I seldom call him Dr. Graham, I usually call him “Dad.” Sincerely, Nelson E. Graham.*

While it would be great to speak for Billy Graham as a son or a daughter, you and I get to call the **God** of the Universe, “**Father.**”

When you're discouraged, frustrated, and tired, don't forget you are a child of God.

**Second, his love makes us **family** (3:2a - "*Dear friends, now we are children of God...*")**

It is increasingly difficult to **persevere** as a Christian in our world. The media (news, talk shows, sitcoms, films, etc.), comedians and politicians continually mock and ridicule followers of Jesus. Tell your co-workers or fellow students at a secular university that you are a follower of Jesus and watch what happens...

The constant belittling and badgering of the world takes its toll; there are millions of people who "used to be" followers of Jesus who couldn't carry the burden. Pastors were leaving the ministry at a rate of seventeen hundred a month before the pandemic; now it is over double that.

But the burden is lighter when we know others, "**friends**," share it with us (2:2). *Friends* here (lit. *beloved*) is plural; it is a term of endearment. John reminds us, as children of God, as beloved, he is talking to us as family. This new forever relationship continues to amaze John, as it should each one of us

Then John reminds us that God **himself** has shared in our **burden**. Jesus shared our time and space; he was tempted; he was ridiculed; he was persecuted; he suffered; he was alone; he was marginalized; he was ignored. Jesus reminded us that if they misunderstood him; they'll misunderstand us; if they didn't like him, they won't like us; if they persecuted him, they'll persecute us.

Someday the whole world will know the Truth. Meanwhile, we are together in Jesus. We're not actually on the outside; we're on the inside with family. When you're discouraged, frustrated, and tired, don't forget you are part of His family.

**Third, his love guarantees our **future**. We have hope. (3:2b - "*We know that when Christ appears we shall be like him...*")**

You and I who love Jesus are going to be just **like him**. And I didn't say that, John did. This is an active hope. We are to strive for this hope with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The assumption is we are not currently "**like Jesus**." We don't really know him, understand him, think like him, act like him, or reflect him. Sometimes because we know some Truth, we think we know all of the Truth. We don't. And it is impossible to live by the Truth we do not yet know. We are a work in progress.

I find great comfort in these words of John. God has promised that someday you and I are going to be like Jesus. Incredible – *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will (someday) be filled!”* (**Matthew 5:6**).

When you’re discouraged, frustrated, and tired, don’t **forget** you will soon be like Jesus!

**Fourth, his love purifies us. (3:3 – “All who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure.”)**

Gnosticism said, *“As long as you keep your mind pure, you can do whatever you want because the mind is noble, and what the body does is inconsequential.”*

John says, *“No, no, no! You show where your head and heart are and who you belong to by how you live.”* It’s supposed to be “like Father, like child.” You’ve heard the “apple doesn’t all far from the tree” or “they’re a chip off the old block.” That is usually true.

Purify yourself. Constantly cleanse yourself. Resemble your Father and family.

John understands it is a process – a **lifelong process** because we constantly mess up. Ever watch a toddler’s fascination with a wall socket? You can pull them away. You can gently slap their hand; you can tell them “No.” Their eyes drop; their smile disappears; they’ll look sad. But put them down and step out of eyesight and they’ll head right back to the socket. Over and over and over again. And we still love them.

God says, *“You’re like that too, but someday, you are going to be better. Sometimes I might discipline you too, but I will **always love you.**”*

When you’re discouraged, frustrated, and tired, remember the ending – we’ll be like Jesus. Knowing the ending gives us the strength we need to endure the temporary pain.

## **DON’T FORGET WE STILL HAVE WORK TO DO**

**First, note the **commonality** of sin.**

What John says in **3:6** (*“No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning...”*) seems to contradict what John said in **1:8** (*“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”*). But John is not saying that we **don’t** sin. He knows no one is pure or righteous. (**Romans 3:10f**)

In a cartoon of a sheepfold, with wolves taking off their sheep costumes, one wolf says: “You mean there aren’t any sheep here?” (**PIC**) Or the new priest who was called into the bishop’s office, “Son, you’re doing well, but when you’re in the confessional listening, it’s not appropriate to say, ‘Oh, wow!’”

Scripture teaches the universality of human sin. *“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* **(Romans 5:23)**

Sin is disobedience to God; it is incongruity with our Creator; it is the desire for autonomy; it is the longing to do it my way. That defies God’s love. That defies God’s law. That is lawlessness.

I recently asked one of my grandchildren to pick up the toys. My grandchild said, “No.” I restated my request. The response: *“I don’t want to. I’m not going to. You can’t make me.”* I’m assuming God hears that frequently.

We know right from wrong. All sin is **willful**. All sin is **first** degree. And all sin is ultimately against God.

### **Second, note the **classification** of sin. (3:6, 9)**

Translate *“keeps on sinning”* (3:6) or *“continues to sin”* (3:9) here as *“habitually sins”* or *“a life **characterized** by sin.”* John is admitting that sometimes followers of Jesus sin; sometimes they sin badly. But as a child of God our life cannot be characterized by sin.

Thomas Edison performed tens of thousands of failed experiments on his way to holding a thousand patents and perfecting the phonograph, light bulb, motion pictures, etc. His life was not defined by his failures but by his successes.

A **child** of God sins, but their life cannot be characterized by lawlessness, unfaithfulness, or disobedience; it needs to be characterized by the **character** of Jesus.

### **Third, note the **cure** for sin. (3:9)**

When you commit to following Jesus, Paul says the seed of Christ which God planted in you begins to grow. (Paul writes, *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* **Colossians 1:27**) That very day Christ takes up residence in our life and the seed never stops growing until we are “just like Christ.”

In talking about sin, everything depends on whom you **belong** to. If you belong to Satan, you need to deal with Satan; if you belong to **God**, you need to deal with **God**.

An unbeliever constantly fights with righteousness. A Christian fights against sin. So it follows that when an unbeliever gets tired of fighting, he/she gives up to Satan; when a Christian gets tired of fighting, he/she gives up to God.

As Christians, we constantly (continually) try to ignore God (evidenced by how little time we spend in prayer, the Word, worship, etc.), but it is only a matter of time.

John writes, *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* **(1 John 4:4)**

Don't look for demons under every bed; our issue is with God; and the seed is growing and will continue to grow...

#### **Fourth, note the **ensor** of sin. (3:7, 10a)**

In the original Greek, John says, *"If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck."* That is, what you are **inside** will soon be manifest, become visible, on the **outside**.

John is pushing back on Docetic Gnosticism which said, *"knowledge is what is important; and the flesh was evil and so whatever you did didn't really matter."*

Many engaged in debauchery because they knew the Truth was in their mind so they could still do whatever the flesh wanted.

John says, "Are you crazy?" What you are on the outside is the direct result of who you are – and who you belong to - on the inside.

Some time ago, I drove by a sign that read, "Ten fruit trees for \$100." I thought about stopping. I like apples, peaches, pears, peaches, cherries, peaches, oranges, peaches, tangerines, and peaches. (Ten trees). But where would I put ten trees? I just need one tree that grows apples, pears, cherries, oranges, tangerines and peaches all on the same tree. But that is not possible. Cherry trees only produce cherries. Apple trees only apples. It is only natural!

Christians will **eventually** act like Christians; unbelievers will **always** act like unbelievers. It is actually that simple. Don't let anyone try to tell you differently.

Over time, children begin to look more and more like their parents (not sure my/our kids are always happy to hear that). It's called genes; it is the result of modeling; it comes from being a child and spending time with the family. We take on the **characteristics** of those we spend the **most** time with. If we walk with the Father, we'll start to look a lot like the Father. If we spend time with Jesus, we'll start to look like Jesus.

Eventually, the actor always takes off their costume and then we'll know.

### **Fifth, note the **converse** of sin. (3:10b)**

John reminds us of God's command: *"This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he has commanded us."* (3:23).

John is telling us how to distinguish between Children of **God** and children of the **devil**. The distinction is found in the **evidence**.

Here I would have talked about the Ten Commandments. I'd have mentioned anger and bitterness, adultery and lust; filthy language and swearing. I'd have talked about how we can remain pure in an impure world. But John, as he is talking about righteousness (**right living**), talks about **love**!

John says, *"Do the Word! Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."* Follow the Law, obey the Torah! *"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."*

Sometimes, as Christians, we're so busy talking about what people should and shouldn't do we forget what's most important: loving God and others.

**One of the most captivating and scandalous stories in Scripture is in Luke 7.** Jesus is at dinner party (these don't ever seem to go well for Jesus). While Jesus is eating dinner at a very proper Pharisee's house, a prostitute barges in, kneels and starts to wash Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. Then she takes an expensive alabaster jar of ointment and breaks it over his feet.

Simon, the host, leans over to another Pharisee: *"If he knew what kind of woman that was, he wouldn't let her do that!"*

*"Simon,"* Jesus said, *"I got a question for you. Two guys owe their master money. One owes a little and one owes a lot. The master forgives both. Which debtor is going to love their master most?"*

Simon said, *"I suppose the guy who owed and was forgiven the most."*

Jesus said, *"You have spoken well! But do you really see this woman? When I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet; she washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon, you gave me no kiss, this woman has not stopped kissing my feet since she came in. You didn't anoint my head; she anointed my feet with oil."*

Jesus continued, *"[Simon] Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. He who has been forgiven little, loves little. Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

You can't really **love** unless you've been **loved** and then only to the degree to which you have been **loved** (and know what love is).



I'd love for us to have a reputation [here at Covenant]– not for great leadership, great preaching, great worship, great music, or great programs - but for our great love. I'd love for us to see the law, not as Ten Suggestions but as Ten Commandments; not as God's restrictions to keep us from having fun, but as God's loving path to real joy.

I'd love for our lives to be marked as Dr. Donald Barnhouse defines the fruit of the Spirit: *"Love is the key; joy is love singing; peace is love resting; long suffering is love enduring; kindness is love's touch; goodness is love's character; faithfulness is love's habit, gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness; self-control is love holding the reigns."*

**Soren Kierkegaard writes about a make-believe country where only ducks live.** On Sunday, all the ducks waddled into church, waddled into the pews and squatted. The duck minister came in, took his place behind the duck pulpit, opened the duck Bible and read, "Ducks! You have wings, and with your wings you can fly like eagles. You can soar into the sky! Ducks! Fly! Fly! Fly!" All the ducks shouted, "Amen!" and then they all waddled home.

**Christians** should be easy to spot. They are the ones who are **airborne**.

*Prayer:*

*Father, life can be very discouraging in the midst the pain and suffering, ridicule and mockery we often experience simply because we long to follow and live for Jesus in this world.*

*We thank you for your amazing love which reminds us we belong to you, that we are part of your family, that we have hope and a future and that we are slowly being purified to be like Jesus.*

*Father, assist us in putting off sin – not only in our heart, but also in our life. Father, by your Spirit, allow us to put on love, to live in righteousness, and to produce the fruit of the Spirit.*

*Father, help us run from sin and into your love. Let us soar on wings like eagles and not grow weary.*

*In Jesus' name – our life, light, and love – we pray. Amen.*

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