



Lesson 5 – What It Means to Be God’s Child

1 John 2:28-3:10

Have you ever heard someone’s last name and immediately get an idea in your head about the kind of person they are, even if you never met them? Perhaps you knew their parent, or some of their siblings, and when you hear that they are a _____ [Smith, Johnson, Williams, etc.] you suddenly get a picture in your mind what they are like. Sometimes the opposite happens. You see someone, get to know them, and then find out their last name and think to yourself, “Wow, I would never have pegged them as a...”

As we come to the passage we are studying today, we see John use this common experience as an important illustration. John argues that there are people in the family of God, and people in the family of Satan. Both groups live in such a way that you can look at their lives and think to yourself

I. **Being a child of God brings both responsibility and blessing (2:28-3:3).**

Growing up as a British royal living in Windsor would have been an exciting experience. The beautiful and ornate rooms, the servants ready to help you with whatever you needed, and the grand parties with important guests would have made for quite the childhood. But there would also have been a lot of responsibility. The expectations would have been enormous: your behavior reflected not just on you and your parents, but on the king or queen of England and ultimately on the whole country.

As we think about being God’s child, we represent someone far greater than the king or queen of England. We represent and are the children of the King of Kings. This brings with it both responsibilities and privileges. There are wonderful gifts we have been given, but it is a high calling to which we have been called. John emphasizes in this opening section both what we must do as God’s children and what blessings we enjoy as God’s children.

A. **Being a child of God brings great responsibilities.**

This opening section on being God’s child focuses much on living rightly in expectation of Christ’s return. These responsibilities do not *make* us children of God. We *are* children of God and as such there are certain responsibilities we have.

1. The responsibility to abide (2:28).

The opening statement is to abide in Christ. The Greek word for “abide” is an important word for John. It is used 67 times in the letters and the gospel of John, and 23 times in 1 John specifically. It is translated as “abide,” “remain,” and “continue.” The first and most important task of a child of God is to remain in Christ.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? How might John 15:4-10 help us understand this concept more fully?

By praying, meditating on and following God’s Words we abide in Christ. By seeking to love and live for Christ, by trusting him for daily strength and remaining sensitive to his leading and his will, we abide in Christ. As his children, our first and most important task is to abide in him, because as he has reminded us “without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

2. The responsibility of living righteously (2:29).

Being born of God means acting like God, because children act like their parents. From yelling at a television screen during a football game, to mimicking odd quarks, to copying the words and even sounds they hear, little children are always watching and copying. John uses this very relatable human observation to make a bigger point about God and his children. We ought to live righteously, not in order that we might be God’s children, but because we already are and because children tend to act like their parents (cf Ephesians 5:1, “followers” could also be translated “imitators”)!

How is it that believers can “copy” Christ when he is no longer on earth for us to observe?

Jesus makes us righteous in two ways. First, there is **positional** righteousness. We are given the righteousness of Jesus judicially as we stand before God so that he sees us as righteous based on the work of Christ. But there is also **practical** righteousness, which is where we live more and more like Jesus did every day.

3. The responsibility to purify oneself (3:3)

Although we are to be righteous because we are now born of God and are following the example of Jesus, the one who is righteous above all, we still fall short. We are still thoroughly stained with our sin and addressing that selfish, sinful nature is a life-long endeavor. John recognizes this and that’s why he states later in this section that the hope of Christ’s return encourages us to purify ourselves because Jesus is pure.¹ Just

¹ In English, there is some ambiguity in the phrase “purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” This could either mean someone purifies themselves because before God they already stand pure. The idea then would be that they are

as our righteousness is based on the righteousness of Jesus, our purifying of ourselves is based on the purity of Jesus. As we wait for Jesus the pure to return, it should motivate us to live pure lives now.

How does knowing that Jesus is pure and righteous lead to us being pure and righteous?

B. Being a child of God brings great blessings.

Because of our status as God's children, and at times because we are fulfilling the responsibilities of a child, we have tremendous blessings.

1. The blessing of confidence at his coming (2:28).

Notice that this first blessing is conditional. If we abide in him, we will have confidence and not be ashamed when he returns. The return of Christ should be constantly on our minds and should motivate us to live rightly before God so that when he comes, we are ready. Christ told several parables with this theme (Matthew 24:44-25:30), and Paul similarly encouraged his churches to be ready (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8).

We live in a hectic, fast-paced era where thinking about Christ's return can be easily lost in the business of life. How can we as Christians be intentional thinking about Christ's return?

2. The blessing of the privilege of being God's child (3:1-2).

John gets excited here. He almost can't help himself contain his joy at what he's about to say. "Behold! Look at the kind of love God has shown to us! We are called the very sons of God!" This status means two things. First, it means that the world doesn't know, because God and the world are on opposing sides, and by being God's children we set ourselves up as against the world. Second, it means that there is more in store for us as God's children. One day we will see Jesus and when we do, we will fully and finally be made like him.

Why do believers still desire to be like the world and to be liked by the world even if they are now God's children?

3. The blessing of the hope in Christ's return (3:2-3).

Jesus' return should bring us hope. Hope that we will see Jesus again and hope that we will be fully and finally transformed to look like Jesus. Being a child of God means

positionally pure before God but are working out practically what that purity looks like; they are becoming what they already are in Christ. While this is a biblical idea, the Greek here makes it clear that "he" is a reference to Christ. In Greek, the phrase could more literally be translated "purifieth himself, even as *that one* is pure." "That one" is clearly a reference to Christ.

both that we currently are a child of God, but also that there is a future destiny for us where as children of God our imitation of our heavenly Father will be much more exact. Theologians call this glorification, and this hope should encourage us to be striving today to look more like Jesus as we await his return.

How does the hope of ultimately being like Jesus motivate me to be like Jesus today?

II. Being a child of God means taking sin seriously (3:4-6).

John has already discussed the theme of sin, but we see him circling back around and this time considering sin in light of our relationship as children of God. John will use the word “sin” six times in the short span of three verses, and will make several very important observations on sin and our status as God’s children.

A. We shouldn’t sin because sin is dangerous (3:4).

John’s definition of sin might seem odd to us: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” What John appears to be pushing back against here is an attitude that had likely become popular that sin didn’t really matter. Perhaps some had tried to redefine sin or to explain away why they sin. There were some who apparently thought they could sin and still have fellowship with God (1:6).

What are some ways people try to minimize sin today?

John pulls no punches. Sin is not just a little mistake. It’s not an oopsie. It is a breaking of God’s law. And those who sin repeatedly and unrepentedly are demonstrating by their actions that they are care little for the instructions of their Father.

B. We shouldn’t sin because Christ came to deal with sin (3:5).

After calling sin what it is – rebellion against God’s law – John then moves on to his next argument as to why God’s children should not sin. Christians should not sin because Christ’s purpose in coming was to address sin. Not only that there is no sin in Christ. Those who treat sin casually demonstrate that they have a very poor understanding of who Christ is and what matters to him.

C. We shouldn’t sin because sin is impossible for those who truly know God (3:6).

Perhaps the title of this section seems a bit extreme. After all, don’t we all sin? Didn’t John himself say this (cf 1:8)? Yes, but John also said “whosoever abideth in him sinneth not” (3:6). We need to be careful to realize that John is probably working with two slightly different understandings of “sin” in these verses. In 1 John 1 there is the recognition that despite our best efforts, we will still struggle with sin. In 1 John 3, John is talking about those who commit sin (3:4), which likely has the idea of ongoing and brazen sin. John is not saying that absolute perfection is possible, but he does mean that those who as a

habit of life are living in sin should not fool themselves into thinking they are truly born again.

So where do we draw the line? How much sin, and for how long before we get to decide that someone is not and never was truly saved? Those are questions that are not ours to answer. God is the one who makes the final declaration, and we can trust him to do all things right. But we do have a responsibility to warn those who carelessly go on in their sin of what God's Word says, and to personally take heed to these warnings. We are not saved because we never sin. But once we are saved, once we have seen God and are abiding in Christ, sin will not dominate us. If it does, we have every right to be concerned and to be concerned for those whom we love and care for.

What would you say if you shared this with someone and they responded that it's none of your business? or that God is a God of mercy and grace? or that you were being too judgmental?

III. Being a child of God puts us in opposition to the devil (3:7-10).

Several years ago a comedian used to joke whenever he did something wrong "the devil made me do it." While it probably got a lot of laughs, there is much more truth in that statement than the comedian realized. The Bible does paint the world as belonging to two different families: God's and Satan's. While that might seem extreme, it is exactly what this passage is teaching. "If you want to know the difference between the two," John is saying, "look at their behavior, because both groups of children act like their parents."

A. The children of the devil sin like their father (cf John 8:41-44).

God's work is to come and destroy the works of the devil. But those who make sin a regular practice of their life are just showing that they are truly the children of the devil, whatever else they might say. Once again, John has particularly in mind here the sin of not loving the brother.

What about really nice, kind unbelievers? What about unbelievers who do a lot of good and seem to live reasonably moral lives?

B. The children of God do not sin.

Once again, John brings this back to believers and repeats the point he has been making over and over throughout this section: you can tell who someone's parent is by watching how they behave. Those born of God do not practice sin and they do practice righteousness.

These verses can be a hard pill to swallow for many. John is blunt, uncomfortably blunt. But what he is saying here is said intentionally. It is said out of love for a community that is wavering on

how important it is for God's children to follow God's rules. John wants them to know it's very important because children act like their father. Human children act like their father. God's children act like their Father. And the devil's children act like their father. And so while none of us will be perfect, all of us should be fighting sin and should be totally uncomfortable with a lifestyle that rejects God's Word and a heart that harbors hatred toward other Christians. John warns us that if that is not the case, we might just be revealing who our real father is.

What about Christians who find themselves overwhelmed by repeated more failure (addiction, repeated failure, etc.)?

What about Christians who wander from the Lord but come back?