

March 17, 2024 (Lesson 3)

## LIVE AS CHILDREN OF GOD

1. **God's Love Frees From Satan's Power** (1 John 3:1-6)
2. **Children of God Demonstrate Righteousness** (1 John 3:7-10)
3. **God's People Love One Another** (1 John 3:11-18)

**Central Truth:** Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life.

**Focus:** Explore and demonstrate practical results of being children of God.

**Evangelism Emphasis:** Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life.

**Golden Text:** "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10).

Today's lesson teaches the value and wonder of being children of God. We are the objects of God's love—a thought almost beyond our comprehension. But the world looks at Christians differently, sometimes with disdain, because we adhere to a higher standard and answer to a higher power. When we are treated adversely by those around us, we must remember God loves us with a love we cannot fathom.

When we were received into the family of God, we became a new creation. The change that began at conversion grows as we mature in Christ, and will culminate in a complete likeness of Christ at His appearing. There is no way for us to grasp what lies in store for us when we reach Heaven.

Being a child of God calls for a life of purity. Therefore, we renounce sin and, if we do commit sin, we ask for His forgiveness and turn away from our wrongdoing. As children of the Lord, we live righteously.

There are two groups of people in the world: the children of God and the children of the devil. Those who practice sin are not part of the household of God; their allegiance is to Satan. Our

challenge as believers is to influence as many people as possible to abandon the kingdom of Satan for the kingdom of God.

A vital characteristic of the children of God is our love for one another. Jesus identified this attribute as a sign of true discipleship. It is also one of the standards by which the world understands we are followers of Christ. This love which emanates from Christ manifests itself in deeds of kindness toward others. No true believer can see another believer in need without showing love and compassion toward that individual. This means more than just speaking words of comfort; it involves providing for the needs of the person if we have the ability to do so. In doing good toward others, we gain the favor of God. He will not fail to reward such actions, even though it is not being done for recognition.

## **1. GOD'S LOVE FREES FROM SATAN'S POWER**

### **A. Children of God (1 John 3:1)**

**1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.**

Verse 1 presents two views of the believer: the view of the Father and that of the world. The Father sees believers as His children, and that view stems from His love. Because of His great love, God will adopt us into His family, even though we are unworthy. There is no love higher than the divine love that reaches down and lifts us up. When we remember how insignificant we are and how insensitive we have been as sinners, we stand amazed at the love which would welcome us into God's household. If the child of the poorest man in the world was adopted by the greatest ruler who ever lived, it would be worthless compared with being adopted as a child of God.

What was said of Israel concerning their day of restoration can be said of all believers: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or

numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God'" (Hos. 1:10 NKJV). God transforms "nobodies" into "somebodies"—into children of the living God.

The world does not understand who we are nor what motivates us. We are a mystery to them. Believers are not governed by the world's ways; we get our marching orders from the Lord. We look to the Word of God for our standard of living. Our principles and lifestyle are different from those of the world, and sometimes that leads unbelievers to react to us harshly. But should we be surprised? They did not understand the Lord either.

### **Incredible Witness**

What an incredible witness it is to a lost and fearful society when the Christian acts like a child of God, living under the loving sovereignty of the heavenly Father!—Henry Blackaby

#### **B. Children of Hope (1 John 3:2-3)**

**2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.**

In our present state, it is sometimes difficult to fathom what the Lord has done in us. We do know the old life of sin has passed away and we have been given a new life of peace, love, and holiness. If we have a problem fully realizing what we are and who we are in Christ in the present, imagine how much more difficult it is to picture what we will be in the future. Presently, we have been regenerated and we are growing in our Christian walk, but then we will be completely transformed into His likeness.

John acknowledged he did not know everything about the believers' future, but he did know we will be like Christ. The apostle also knew Christ will appear and believers will see Him with

“unveiled faces” beholding His glory (2 Cor. 3:18 NIV). That glimpse of Him in glory will result in our becoming finally and completely like Him. We will be with Christ, and we will be like Him.

We can face the future with the same assurance of Job, who said, “After my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!” (19:26-27 NLT). In Heaven, we will not be dependent on secondhand knowledge as it relates to Jesus; we will see Him for ourselves.

We rejoice at the descriptions given to us by John and Paul and others about Christ, but in that day we will behold Him in His glory and personally reach our conclusions about Him. Those conclusions will lead us to fall at His feet in adoration. We will enjoy the same satisfaction David anticipated when he said, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Ps. 17:15).

This hope of seeing Him, being with Him, and being made like Him is incentive enough to live a life of purity, one that is modeled after Jesus. Eugene Peterson paraphrased it this way: “All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus’ life as a model for our own” (1 John 3:3 TM).

§ *How does someone “purify himself” (v. 3)?*

### **C. Nature of Sin (1 John 3:4-6)**

**4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. 5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. 6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.**

Whether you practice righteousness or practice sin, it defines you in relation to God. The first is acceptable in His sight; the second is not. Simply put, sin is rebellion against God. Although we live

under grace, the Law still defines sin and shows us God’s standard of living for His people (v. 4). When we rebel against the standard God has set in His Word, we are guilty of sin. It doesn’t matter who a person is—high or low, rich or poor, famous or infamous—if that person rebels against God’s commands, he or she is guilty of sin.

So what do we do about this sin problem? Christ came into the world to take away our sins, something He alone could do (v. 5). By the shedding of His blood on Calvary, Christ accomplished what all the blood of sacrificial animals had not been able to do. When we accept Him as Savior, He washes away our sin and makes us acceptable to the Father. Christ was guilty of no sin; therefore, His death on the cross was not on His own behalf, but rather for us so we might become like Him.

John then said those who abide in Christ do not practice sin (v. 6). This does not mean they are incapable of sinning or they never sin. If believers never sinned, there would be no need for the provision of an Intercessor who pleads our case before the Father (see Heb. 4:16; 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2). Clearly, the norm for the Christian life is that we do not sin; but if we do sin and confess it, God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). However, those who practice a sinful lifestyle do not know Christ (3:6).

### **Hating Sin**

Those who take delight in sin are not the children of God. If you are a child of God, you hate it with a perfect hatred, and your very soul loathes it.—Charles Spurgeon

## **2. CHILDREN OF GOD DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS**

### **A. Children of Righteousness (1 John 3:7)**

**7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.**

Believers who do what is right are righteous. They are following the example of the Lord. However, pretenders are not righteous. They may boast of their good deeds and may be applauded by others, but unless they are in a right relationship with God, they are not righteous.

Character precedes conduct. Sometimes we are guilty of only seeing what a person does without regard for the motives behind the action. *Why* something is done is as important as *what* is done. How many times did Jesus call out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy? On the surface, it appeared they were righteous, doing religious deeds—praying, tithing, giving alms—but the Lord looked deeper and saw what they were doing was only for show. They were more interested in having the approval of people than the praise of God (see Matt. 23:23-28).

Why do we do what we do? Are we following the example of Jesus and seeking to glorify His name? If our motives are pure and our actions designed to honor the Lord, great will be our reward. If our walk is a walk of righteousness, we will hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23 NKJV).

### **Motive Matters**

The same Christian activity can be either an expression of our own righteousness that we think earns favor with God, or it can be an expression of love and gratitude because we already have His favor through the righteousness of Christ.—Jerry Bridges

#### **B. Children of the Devil (1 John 3:8-9)**

**8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**

If we trace sin back to its origin, our search takes us to the devil (v. 8). He was the first being in the universe to sin, and he hasn't stopped. He is still the primary practitioner of sin, and he seeks to get all of humanity to follow in his footsteps. Those who practice sin as the devil does are said to be his children. The reference here is to those who live in sin, making sin a daily practice of their life. To live this way is to go against all Christ came to eliminate.

Christ will ultimately destroy the devil and his works. Satan is an eternally defeated foe; Christ took care of him on Calvary. Not only did He destroy the works of the devil, He made it possible that righteousness might be established in human hearts. All who are born again should practice righteousness internally, externally, and with resolute determination.

Believers become partakers of the divine nature, and thereafter sin and sinning are foreign to their nature (v. 9). Again, this does not mean we become incapable of sinning or we will never falter along the way; otherwise, there would be no need for the many warnings in Scripture to avoid wrongdoing. However, as children of God, we long to please Him. Our whole outlook on life has changed. The things we once loved, we now hate. The grace of God sustains us, and the Spirit of God enables us to withstand temptations. John made a comforting and powerful statement about the Lord's care for His own: "We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them" (5:18 NLT).

§ *How did Jesus Christ "destroy the works of the devil" (v. 8)?*

§ *Explain the phrase "God's seed remains in them" (v. 9 NIV).*

### **C. A Simple Test (1 John 3:10)**

**10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.**

We are either the children of God or the children of the devil; and John gives us criteria by which we may distinguish one from the other. It is not determined by our belonging to a certain church or following a certain creed. As believers, we are set apart from unbelievers by our daily practice of righteousness. Another mark that distinguishes the true from the false is having love for all Christians.

We demonstrate our righteousness by our works done in love. It is not enough to do good deeds; it is the love behind them that makes them acceptable to the Lord. While works of righteousness prove we are the children of God, they are not done to be seen of others. Only when they are done to the glory of God do they become witness to our relationship with the Lord. When we do the right thing and our motive is love, it will always bring glory to God.

Righteousness and love coexist in the Father and were manifested in the Son. They are equally a part of the makeup of every Christian. Love for fellow believers is as much a part of being a child of God as is the practice of righteousness. In fact, those who call themselves believers and do not treat other Christians with love are deceiving themselves. Believers make up the body of Christ. How can we say we love the Lord if we do not love the members of His body?

### **God Makes Us Good**

The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.—C. S. Lewis

### **3. GOD'S PEOPLE LOVE ONE ANOTHER**

#### **A. Characterized by Love (1 John 3:11-15)**

**11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. 13 Marvel not,**



**my brethren, if the world hate you. 14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.**

The apostle continues to stress believers must “love one another” (v. 11). Cain, Adam’s son, is an example of what happens when jealousy, envy, and hatred take possession of an individual. Abel, Cain’s brother, was a man who lived righteously and, therefore, found acceptance in God’s eyes. Sensing “the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering,” but “for Cain and for his offering He had no regard” (Gen. 4:4-5 NASB), Cain murdered his brother in a fit of rage. John uses this example to say if we hate our brother or sister, we have committed murder in our heart (1 John 3:15).

Drawing from Cain’s example, John advises his readers not to be surprised if the world hates them (v. 13). By “the world,” the apostle means unbelievers who oppose Christians. They subscribe to an ungodly system inspired by the devil. This kind of opposition did not begin in John’s day, and it will not end in our day. Thankfully, whenever Satan makes war against the saints, the grace of God is sufficient to carry us through the battle and to ultimate victory. Also, history shows when persecution against the saints has been the greatest, believers have bonded together and grown in their love for each other.

When we have been born of God, loving our Christian brothers and sisters becomes natural (1 John 3:14). It also evidences we have passed from spiritual death to a life of righteousness. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 NKJV). If we do not love our brothers and sisters, we do not have the life of God in us. We may be members of the church . . . may have been baptized . . . may be doing many of the right things; but

if we do not have love in our heart for others, we are still dead in our sins and do not have the favor of the Father or the Son.

### **It Is Enough**

According to the church father Jerome, the aging Apostle John always uttered the same address to the church: “My little children, love one another.” When the believers asked him why he always repeated the same thing, he replied, “Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and if this one thing be attained, it is enough.”—*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*

#### **B. The Outworking of Love (1 John 3:16-18)**

**16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.**

Jesus died so whoever believes on Him might be saved and enjoy eternal life. In this passage, John makes that reality very personal. He reminds his readers that Jesus died for them. We should all view Calvary in that light. He died for each of us individually. In dying for us, Jesus showed us what real love is. We should be so deeply influenced by His example as to be willing to lay down our lives for our fellow believers should He call upon us to do so (v. 16).

Priscilla and Aquila are excellent examples. Of them, Paul said, “They once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches” (Rom. 16:4 NLT). Paul spoke of his willingness to be executed in the service of the Lord: “But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy” (Phil. 2:17 NLT).

In 1 John 3:17, John raises the sobering question that if we have the means to help a brother or sister who is in need and show no compassion toward them, how can the love of God reside in us? A Christian not only *desires* to do good, but as much as he has the ability to do so, he actually *does* good. If God's love lives within us, we will do what we can to make life better for others. Seeing the needs of others involves more than just a passing glance; it involves taking the time to see clearly the circumstances they are facing and then determining what we can do about it. When we do that, we are loving them like God sacrificially loved us.

John concludes this section with a strong plea that we “not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions” (v. 18 NLT). That is another way of saying actions speak louder than words. Love is more than talk; it involves doing. It is not enough to make verbal expressions of love; those expressions need to be backed up with deeds. James addressed this issue in these words: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:15-16).

If we love people as Jesus loved them, we will want to help them. We will not be satisfied with a pat on the back or a kind word. This does not mean we should never speak words of encouragement; it only means we should not stop there. There are many ways we can help others, and it doesn't always involve finances. Loving in deed and in truth has far-reaching implications. It includes bearing one another's burdens, forgiving one another, praying for one another, and restoring with meekness. And it means ministering to the needs of others out of our resources.

Deeds of kindness done for others is pleasing to the Lord. In fact, there is a sense in which it is done to the Lord. Solomon said, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Prov. 19:17 NIV).

§ *Why is it so much easier to “love in word” than “in deed and in truth” (v. 18)?*

### **CAN YOU PROVE IT?**

Gustav Dore, the famous artist, reportedly lost his passport while traveling in Europe. At a certain boundary post between two countries, the officer in charge asked him for his passport. Dore fumbled about and finally announced, “I have lost my passport, but it is all right. I’m Dore, the artist. Please let me go in.”

The officer replied, “Oh, no. We have plenty of people representing themselves as this or that great person. Here is a pencil and paper. Now, if you are Dore, the artist, prove it by drawing me a picture.”

Dore took the pencil and drew some pictures of scenes in the immediate area.

“Now, I am perfectly sure you are Dore. No one else could draw like that!” said the officer as he allowed the great artist to enter the country.

So it is with professing followers of Christ. You say you are a Christian. But can you produce evidence?

#### **Daily Devotions**

- M. Being the People of God (Leviticus 26:9-13)
- T. God’s People Forever (2 Samuel 7:18-24)
- W. Promises to God’s People (Jeremiah 31:31-40)
- T. The Right to Become God’s Children (John 1:6-12)
- F. Confirmed as God’s Children (Romans 8:16-21)
- S. Children of God by Faith (Galatians 3:24-29)