

Children of God

1 JOHN 3:1-10

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This morning, we return to our study of the book of 1 John. Today we move into 1 John 3, and as we do, we see a slight shift. Up to this point, John has referred to his readers a number of times as his ***“children.”*** In fact, the word ***“children”*** is used five times in Chapter 2 alone, and in four of those references, John addresses his readers as either his ***“children”*** or ***“my little children.”***

At the beginning of Chapter 3, though, the picture changes a bit as John now describes all of us as Christians as ***“children of God.”*** And this will be the focus of our thoughts this morning as we explore what this means for us. We know that our parents will often have a huge impact on who we are – in a good way, in a bad way, or in many ways. And once we leave home, we spend the rest of our lives either living up to the example our parents set for us, or we spend the rest of our lives trying to overcome one issue or another. Or, with many of us, there is some combination of all of these. I think of something as simple as going to the doctor for a physical, when the doctor gets to the point of asking, “So, why don’t you tell me about some of the medical problems that your parents and grandparents have had?” At that moment, many of us are reminded of the influence of our parents on our lives! Our parents, therefore, have a powerful influence on us.

In 1 John 3, then, John refers to his readers not as HIS children anymore, not as ***“my children,”*** or ***“little children,”*** but he refers to all of us (including himself in this) as ***“children of God.”*** And I am so thankful that Rob was able to lead us in several songs this morning emphasizing this idea that God is our Father, that we are his children. If you will, then, please look with me at 1 John 3:1-10, and as we read, I hope we can pay special attention not only to the fact that we are God’s children (which is reassuring in itself), but also that we can pay special attention to what this really means for us in our daily lives. Let us all look together, please, at 1 John 3:1-10.

¹ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰ 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.

- I. **As we look back at what John wrote here, I want us to make sure we understand, first of all, WHO WE ARE – and John’s emphasis in these first few verses is that we are, in fact, CHILDREN OF GOD.**

And we need to remember: John is not a young man as he writes these words! As we’ve learned in our study of this book, John is most likely in his 80’s or 90’s. He is most likely the last living apostle. He’s been through so much in his life. And at this point we might think that John has come to grips with his position in God’s kingdom, but that is not what we have here. What we find is a man who is still almost completely overwhelmed with how awesome it really is to be called a “child of God.” ***“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.”*** The feeling we get there is that after all these years, John can hardly believe it! He is amazed. Not only have we been ***“called”*** children of God, but we actually ***“are”*** children of God!

How do we know this? How do we know God loves us? We know this because God sent Jesus! God sent his Son! That’s how the sentence starts, ***“See!” “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us.”*** We can see the love of God in Jesus. REMEMBER: The Gnostics, the false teachers he’s been dealing with in this book, they said that Jesus wasn’t really God. John, though, points out that God’s love has been seen. As he pointed out at the very beginning of this book, he had personally heard, seen, and had even touched the Lord. Jesus wasn’t just a spirit, as the Gnostics were suggesting, but the Lord Jesus came to this earth in human form.

So, we are God’s children (which is amazing), but then in the rest of verse 1, John continues sticking it to the Gnostics as he says, ***“For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”*** Twice in that one line, John uses the Greek word for “knowledge,” the same word that serves as a basis for the word GNOSTIC. The Gnostics were those who supposedly “knew” certain things that other people didn’t know. John, though, is making the point, that if you don’t KNOW Jesus, then you don’t really KNOW us, because we are the ones who truly KNOW the Lord. And the knowledge John writes about here seems to be the kind of knowledge that comes from experience. There is a difference between knowing a few facts about something and actually knowing something by experience.

Back in October when I wanted to drive out to see my sister in Washington state for the first time, I had the atlas, I had Google Maps, but before I set out on a 30-hour trip, I wanted to talk to somebody who had actually done it, and so I got in touch with Ruth’s son, Jason, who used to live in Seattle and who made that trip a number of times. And he had some great advice. He told me where it was safe to sleep in the car. He told me what cities to avoid. He warned me about a certain spot in northeast Wyoming where the animals seem to have a kind of death wish in terms of jumping out in front of the car. That advice was so helpful. He knew how to make that trip – not book knowledge, but he had actually done it. And it seems to me, that is the kind of knowledge we have as God’s children. We know Him in a way the world does not.

And then, in verse 2, John repeats it before moving on as he says, ***“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”*** And so he’s saying here that since we are, in fact, God’s children, there is a time coming when we will not only be like him in every way – with spiritual bodies, bodies that don’t get sick and die, bodies that are free from heart disease, and diabetes, and high blood pressure, but even more importantly than these external things, John points out that we will see Him just as he is. We will see him in all of his glory. Imagine the apostle John now near the end of his life, mistreated and eventually locked up on the Roman prison island of Patmos (the ancient equivalent of Alcatraz) – I would imagine John probably woke up every morning longing to see Jesus face to face once again! As a child of God, John’s attitude was as he expressed it at the very end of Revelation, the last book he wrote, ***“Come, Lord Jesus!”*** And so today, when bad things happen to us, when we get discouraged, we need to remember what John wrote here. We are children of God, and because of this relationship, there is a time coming when we will get to see the Lord ***“just as He is,”*** face to face.

This leads us to verse 3, where John says that, ***“...everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*** And so John is hinting that as children of God, there is a sense of hope, a sense of expectation. We think of our own children: When they are born, we see their potential. We dream of what they might become. And so maybe in a similar way, even here in this life, being children of God means something to us very practically.

II. And this leads us to what this passage really means for us today, as John points out in the remaining verses, that since we are children of God, WE NEED TO BE LIVING LIKE IT.

And in verses 4-10, John makes a contrast – on one hand, there are those who practice lawlessness, and on the other hand, there are those who practice righteousness. And his argument is: No one who practices lawlessness can accurately claim to be a child of God. And the reason is: In God, there is no sin, and as children of God, we are to resemble our Father. And since our Father does not sin, we as Christians are not to sin. There is to be a family resemblance.

One of the highlights of seeing my sister a few months ago was stopping by her work and also meeting her friends at church, as they would say, “Wow, this is definitely your brother!” And then they would often say, “Except for the beard, you guys really look like each other!” And the reason, of course, is that we have the same parents! We resemble our parents. In a similar way, John is saying that we as Christians (as children of God) should also resemble our Father. When people see us, when people see the way we’re living, do they see the family resemblance? Are we being Jesus to the world around us? Or, are we practicing sin?

This brings us back to something we ran into back in Chapter 1, the difference between sinning from time to time and living a life of sin, the difference between walking in light as opposed to walking in the darkness. Some might come away from this passage with the idea that if we ever commit a sin, we are immediately on the outside, that we are immediately kicked out of the family of God, but that is not what this passage teaches.

If you remember the Gnostics, they were teaching that since the body and soul are separate, they could sin all they wanted without ever having that sin affect their soul. They were teaching that your soul could be righteous without you actually living a righteous life. John, then, comes in and clears that up. I appreciate the way John puts it in verse 7, ***“Little children, make sure no one deceives you.”*** In other words, people were out

there actively trying to deceive people on this, and John had to explain that yes, what we do with our bodies DOES have an effect on our soul. So, we need to be careful. We need to keep up the struggle against sin. We can't just give in and go with the flow, but we need to fight back. When we're tempted, we need to look for the way of escape God has promised, and we need to take it. When we blow it, though, when we give in to sin, it's important that we get back on track, that we confess it, that we stop it, and that we call out to our Advocate (our attorney) for help and forgiveness. We don't practice sin, but we practice righteousness.

If you have children, then you know that kids are going to get in trouble. The question, then, is not: Will our kids ever do something wrong? They will! The question is: When they do something wrong, will they learn not to repeat it? And that right there is our job as parents in a nutshell: Over a period of roughly 18 years (and beyond), we slowly and patiently try to train our children to make good decisions. And that is what we're talking about here: As God's children, we will sin from time to time, but we are forgiven, and we move on. We don't just settle down and get comfortable with sin, but we fight back, we resist, and we get back to living the Christian life. We get back to ***"practicing righteousness,"*** as John says. There is a difference between someone who ***"practices sin"*** on a regular basis and somebody who struggles with sin. All of us struggle, but it is important that we keep up the struggle, and that we never just give in.

Conclusion:

This morning, we are so thankful not just that we can be called God's children, but that we actually are! We have rights and privileges; we have an inheritance waiting for us. In the meantime, we are saved right now. We have brothers and sisters. And, as John has reminded us this morning, we also have responsibilities; primarily, we are responsible for ***"practicing righteousness."***

The amazing thing is: This relationship we have with God is not forced on us in any way. Instead, God has offered salvation, God has made the relationship possible, God made the first move, God sent his Son, but accepting the offer is completely up to us. The Bible shows us how much God loves us – we see it from beginning to end – and then the Bible explains what we need to do. To become Christians, we need to hear the good news that Jesus came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead. We need to believe that message. We need to have a change of heart concerning sin – that is, we need to decide to turn away from it. And then we are told to call out God to save us, and we do this (according to 1 Peter 3:21) in the act of baptism. As we are buried with Jesus in baptism, we make an appeal to God for a good conscience. At that point, the Christian life begins. But that is only the beginning. From that point forward, we have to lean on our Christian family for support, we have to encourage each other, and we need to keep on directing our lives back on the straight and narrow path to heaven.

Perhaps you're here and you have strayed off that path. Right now is a good time to make a commitment to get back on track. Or maybe you are burdened down and trapped in some sin – a habit that's hard to break, a bad attitude, selfishness, whatever – right now is a good time to make a decision to no longer practice those sins, but to recommit to practicing righteousness. If we as your Christian family can help with that, we would invite you to write down what you're thinking and bring that to the front so that we can pray with you and encourage you in some way. Or maybe you've never been baptized as the Bible commands. Baptism is described in John 3 as being born again. Through baptism, we are born into God's family. And so again: If we can help you in taking steps down that path, we would invite you to let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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