

1 John 3 • Living as a Child of God

Introduction

What is supposed to happen **after** we ask Jesus to be our personal Lord and Savior? The biblical expectation is that we no longer live as a child of this world but as a child of God, that our behavior actually changes both in our own eyes and in view of those around us. John provides us not with the theoretical theology of what it means to be a child of God, but the practical application steps that give us confidence and knowledge that we're actually achieving this goal.

¹See 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. ²Beloved, 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. ³And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: Is being called children of God just a noble title or label?

A: No. It is the result and evidence of the very love of God.

Q: Why is it that only children really understand the depth of love of a parent? How does this apply to what we know about God versus what the world knows?

A: No one really experiences firsthand the love of a parent except their children; others can only observe and comment on what it *looks* like, but not actually speak from experience. Because the world is an outside observer, it cannot fully grasp the depth and quality of our relationship as His children.

Q: What is the biblical definition of “hope”? How does it apply in its usage here?

A: Biblical hope is “future fact”; it's having knowledge grounded in the fact that God has already accomplished in the future something just as sure as a thing already accomplished in the past. In this context, our hope—the future fact of the matter—is that we will see Him just as He is and be like Him.

Q: How is this hope supposed to be evident—visible to both ourselves and everyone around us—in THIS life?

A: We purify our self “just as He is pure”. The biblical definition of “pure” is “unpolluted by sin”.

[Read v.4-10]

Q: How is this paragraph contrasted to the previous? Summarize and compare the basic thought.

A: This paragraph identifies the characteristics of the children of the devil; the previous paragraph the characteristics of the children of God.

Q: What is the 1 defining difference between the children of the devil and the children of God?

A: The children of the devil practice sin and lawlessness; the children of God practice righteousness.

Point: *The difference between these groups is not the intensity of their love or feelings, but the degree of their obedience.*

Q: Does v.9 mean that it's impossible for the children of God to sin?

A: The context of the phrase “and he cannot sin” is only understood properly as applied to “His seed abides in him”. This means that obedience to God's ways is growing more and more within us and we therefore actively seek **NOT** to sin. A visible indicator of the child of God is his/her disdain for, and avoidance of, sin.

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

Q: What is the significance of the use of the word love in v.10 in the context of this passage?

A: Love of others is one of the results and visible indicators of our obedience to God, not just something we proclaim with our mouth. The only way to achieve God's love in our life for others is through our personal obedience to God first and foremost.

¹¹For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹²not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

[Read v.11-12]

Q: First, what was the difference between Cain and Abel as it applies to us in this discussion?

A: Cain's deeds were evil (the child of the devil), Abel's deeds were righteous (the child of God). Both were acknowledging God's existence in offering their sacrifices, but their true beliefs were born out by what they practiced, not mere thoughts or talk.

Q: Second, how is the example of Cain and Abel applicable to John's discourse so far?

A: It's the oldest biblical example that the evidence and fruit of an obedient relationship with God is in our love for others. We know that we are to love each other, but it's only possible to the same degree as our obedience to God's Word.

Application

- *How do you approach relationships with others? Do you start with "love" or is it the natural by-product of your relationship with God?*
- *"Practice" means those things you engage in doing over and over again, such as habits, routines, comfort zones, etc. We get better and better at whatever it is we practice. What things do you practice that might tend more towards a child of the devil than a child of God?*
- *Do we see that to fulfill Jesus' command to love one another we must proceed first from the point of obedience? Have you ever thought of your disobedience in even the smallest area as actually impacting on the love of the body?*

¹³Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

[Read v.13-15]

[Note: Sometimes—to understand Scripture properly within context—start with the last thought and work backwards to discover how it is defined in its proper context.]

Q: Who will never achieve eternal life?

A: Those who break the law, such as murderers.

Q: What is the biblical definition of a "murderer"?

A: Not just one who physically kills another, but someone who merely hates others or shows no love for them.

Q: Working back to v.14 then, who WILL achieve eternal life? How are they described?

A: Those who "love the brethren". They are described as having "passed out of death into life".

Q: In the preceding verses, what did we learn was the only way we can love others?

A: If we're obedient, practicing God's righteousness.

Q: So why will the world hate the children of God?

A: Just as Cain hated Abel, the world hates anyone who actually **practices** righteousness rather than just talking about it like they do.

¹⁶We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

[Read v.16-17]

Q: How is this a practical application and proof of the presence of God's love in our life for others?

A: We care for their life even more than our own. We cannot simply **SAY** we love someone if we allow the needs we can address to go unfulfilled. It's not just about laying down our **physical** life for another, but subordinating the **quality** of our life to the needs of others.

¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

[Read v.18]

Application: Provide an example of when you've successfully applied this teaching in real life, and when you haven't. How will you measure your love for others going forward?

¹⁹We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him ²⁰in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

[Read v.19-20]

Q: So what is the evidence that God's truth has taken residence in our life?

A: Whether or not our heart bears witness to the presence of sin in our life.

Q: Why is a convicting heart the assurance our heart has become the heart of God?

A: Because His truth has taken root to such a degree that we **WANT** to identify and cleanse all potential pollutants of sin from poisoning our heart and, by extension, our love. Lack of conviction indicates a heart so polluted that it no longer cares either for itself personally or for others corporately.

²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

[Read v.21-22]

Q: So what are the circumstances under which we would come to God timidly, NOT confident in our standing in the presence of God the King and Father?

A: If we have been disobedient, not responding to the convictions of our heart.

Q: How can we be assured that we are personally "pleasing in His sight"?

A: By keeping His commandment and responding to the convictions of our heart.

Summarize the 5 main points of this mini-sermon in v.13-22:

1. v.13-15: Only those adhering to the Law will achieve eternal life.
2. v.16-17: The degree of our love for others as proved by our actions on their behalf in this life is a measurement of our obedience to God's Law.

3. v.18: Our obedience to God's Law is proved by our deeds, not our tongue.
4. v.19-20: A heart devoted to God actively convicts of sin so as to keep one on the path of obedience.
5. v.21-22: The sum of these things is the personal confidence that we are pleasing children of God. His work is complete in both our personal life and our interactions with others.

²³This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

[Read v.23-24]

Q: What is the term John uses to summarize the chief characteristic of the life of a child of God?

A: Abide. It means to stay in a constant, right relationship with our Father through His Son Jesus.

Application

- *Do you have the mistaken belief that sin is something you just had to deal with once at the point you received Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? What is the right way to deal with sin in your continuing walk with Him?*
- *Do you have the mistaken belief that your sin is just something between you and God and that it has no bearing on the rest of the body of Christ? In light of John's teaching, how should you view your obedience going forward in this respect?*
- *Do you have the mistaken belief that everything should **BEGIN** with love? Based on John's teaching, do you still believe you can successfully cultivate God's love in your life for others **without** working on the quality of your walk?*
- *What will you do to "abide" in Christ, rather than just "believe" in Him?*