

Christ's Love as the Rule

Lesson for August 11, 2024

Unit III: Eternal Hope

Adult Topic: Children of God

Scriptural Background: 1 John 3:1-10

Printed Text: 1 John 3:1-10

Key verse: *“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.”* (1 John 3:1, NIV)

I took Helen (eight years old) and Brandon (five years old) to the Cloverleaf Mall in Hattiesburg to do a little shopping. As we drove up, we spotted a Peterbilt eighteen-wheeler parked with a big sign on it that said, “Petting Zoo.” The kids jumped up in a rush and asked, “Daddy, Daddy. Can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?”

“Sure,” I said, flipping them both a quarter before walking into Sears. They bolted away, and I felt free to take my time looking for a scroll saw. A petting zoo consists of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids pay their money and stay in the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shop.

A few minutes later, I turned around and saw Helen walking along behind me. I was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing my error, I bent down and asked her what was wrong.

She looked up at me with those giant limpid brown eyes and said sadly, “Well, Daddy, it cost fifty cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter.” Then she said the most beautiful thing I ever heard. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is “Love is Action!”

Because she knew the whole family motto. It's not “Love is Action.” It's “Love is SACRIFICIAL Action!” Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another's account. Love is for you, not for me. Love gives; it doesn't grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action.

Dave Simmons, *Dad, The Family Coach*, Victor Books, 1991, pp. 123-124.

Key Words

1. **Lawlessness** (verse 4) – The quality or state of being unrestrained by law; disorder.
2. **Love** (verse 1) – To have benevolence or good will for.
3. **Pure** (verse 3) – Free from moral defilement; without spot; not sullied or tarnished; incorrupt; undebased by moral turpitude; holy. Genuine; real; true; incorrupt; unadulterated; as pure religion.
4. **Purify** (verse 3) – A cleansing from guilt or the pollution of sin; the extinction of sinful desires, appetites and inclinations. The act or operation of separating and removing from anything that which is heterogeneous or foreign to it;
5. **Righteous** (verse 7) – Just; according to the divine law. Applied to persons, it denotes one who is holy in heart, and observant of the divine commands in practice; as a righteous man.
6. **Sins** (verse 5) – Failures; faults; sinful deeds.

Lesson Background

First John is one of five New Testament books written by the apostle John. The others are the Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, and the book of Revelation. This is the first of his three letters in the New Testament. Its recipients were believers, but no specific audience is mentioned. Since John traditionally ministered among churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) in his later years, this letter was most likely written to one or more of these congregations.

This letter's audience was clearly dealing with problems related to false teachers. John warns against them throughout this entire writing. John also develops themes of fellowship, Christ-like love, forgiveness of sins, and assurance of salvation. It has been suggested that John's audience was already well aware of the basics of the gospel message, since these are not included in this letter. Instead, John focuses on specific needs related to the congregation.

Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the letter (1 John 1:1–4) followed by two conditions for Christian fellowship. First, fellowship requires a specific focus or standard: Jesus Christ (1 John 1:5–7). Second, fellowship includes the confession of sin (1 John 1:8–10).

Chapter 2 continues this focus on fellowship. This includes following Christ as our advocate (1 John 2:1–6). In addition, believers are called to follow the commandment to love one another (1 John 2:7–14). Third, believers are not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17). Fourth, believers are warned against teachings of antichrists, or false teachers (1 John 2:18–27). Fifth, believers are called to remember their position as children of God (1 John 2:28–29).

Chapter 3 further discusses the importance of being and living as children of God (1 John 3:1–10). A major requirement for the child of God is to love one another (1 John 3:11–24).

Chapter 4 teaches believers to “test the spirits” to see whether they are from God (1 John 4:1–6). God loves us and “God is love” (1 John 4:7–21), leading believers to love one another.

Chapter 5 emphasizes the believer’s ability to “overcome” the world (1 John 5:1–5) through the power of Christ. John gives testimony regarding Jesus as the Son of God (5:6–12). Believers can know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13–21).

Lesson in Depth

I. The Real McCoys (1 John 3:1-6)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Having just mentioned being *born of Him*, John speaks in amazement about this **manner of love** that makes us **children of God**. He wants us to **behold** it – that is, look at it and study it intently.

It is of great benefit to the Christian to take a good, intense look at the love of God **bestowed on us**.

Bestowed on us speaks many things. First, it speaks of the *measure* of God’s love to us; it could more literally be translated *lavished on us*. Secondly, it speaks of the *manner* of God’s giving of love; **bestowed** has the idea of a one-sided giving, instead of a return for something earned.

What is it that makes us slow to believe the love of God? Sometimes it is *pride*, which demands to prove itself worthy of the love of God before it will receive it. Sometimes it is *unbelief*, which cannot trust the love of God when it sees the hurt and pain of life. And sometimes it just takes *time* for a person to come to a fuller understanding of the greatness of God’s love.

Behold means that God wants to *see* this love and He is not ashamed to show it to us. “‘There,’ he says, ‘you poor people that love me you sick people, you unknown, obscure people, without any talent, I have published it before heaven and earth, and made the angels know it, that you are my children, and I am not ashamed of you. I glory in the fact that I have taken you for my sons and daughters.’” (Spurgeon)

That we should be called children of God: The greatness of this love is shown in that by it, we are **called children of God**. As God looked down on lost humanity, He might have merely had a charitable compassion, a pity on our plight, both in this life and in eternity. With a mere pity, He might have set forth a plan of salvation where man could be saved from hell. But God went far beyond that, to call us the **children of God**.

Who calls us the children of God?

- The Father does (*"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty,"* 2 Corinthians 6:18).
- The Son does (*He is not ashamed to call them brethren,* Hebrews 2:11).
- The Spirit does (*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* Romans 8:16).

There is a sense in which this is a totally "unnecessary" blessing that God gives in the course of salvation, and a demonstration of His true and deep love for us. We can picture someone helping or saving someone, but not going so far as to make them a part of the family – but this is what God has done for us.

In this, we gain something in Jesus Christ greater than Adam ever possessed. We never once read of Adam being called one of the **children of God** in the sense John means here. He was never adopted as a son of God in the way believers are. We err when we think of redemption as merely a restoration of what was lost with Adam; we are granted more in Jesus than Adam ever had.

If we are truly **children of God**, then it should show in our likeness to our Father and in our love for our "siblings."

It is important to understand what it means to be the **children of God**, and that everyone is not a child of God in the sense John meant it here. God's love is expressed to all in the giving of Jesus for the sins of the world (John 3:16), but this does not make all of humanity the **children of God** in the sense John means it here. Here he speaks of those who have *received* the love of Jesus in a life of fellowship and trust with Him; *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12).

Therefore the world does not know us: Because of our unique parentage from God, we are strangers to this world (or should be).

This shows the great danger of a Christianity that works so hard to show the world just how much like the world they can be; we cannot be surprised or offended to find out that **the world does not know us**.

Because it did not know Him: Ultimately, we should expect the world to treat us as it treated **Him** – rejecting Jesus and crucifying Jesus. While it is true that Jesus loved sinners and they, recognizing that love, flocked to Him, we must also remember that it was the world that cried out *crucify Him!*

Now we are children of God: Our present standing is plain. We can know, and have an assurance, that we are indeed among the **children of God**. [Romans 8:16](#) tells us, *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*. If you are a child of God, you have an inward assurance of this.

It has not yet been revealed what we shall be: Though our present standing is plain, our future destiny is clouded. We don't know in the kind of detail we would like to know what we will become in the world beyond. In this sense, we can't even imagine what we will be like in glory.

“What we are does not now appear to the world; what we shall be does not yet appear to us.” (Stott)

“If I may use such an expression, *this is not the time for the manifestation of a Christian's glory*. Eternity is to be the period for the Christian's full development, and for the sinless display of his God-given glory. Here, he must expect to be unknown; it is in the hereafter that he is to be discovered as a son of the great King.” (Spurgeon)

We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is: We are not left completely in the dark about our future state. When Jesus is revealed to us, either by His coming for us or our coming to Him, **we shall be like Him**.

The Bible speaks of God's great plan for our lives like this: *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren* (Romans 8:29). God's ultimate goal in our lives is to make us like Jesus, and here, John speaks of the fulfillment of that purpose.

This does not mean that we cease to be ourselves, full of the distinct personality and character God has given us. Heaven will not be like the Nirvana of Eastern mysticism, where all personality is dissolved into God like a drop into the ocean. We will still be ourselves, but our character and nature will be perfected into the image of Jesus' perfection. We will not be “clones” of Jesus in heaven!

The Christian should long to be like Jesus, yet remember that God will never force a person to be like Jesus if he doesn't want to. And that is what hell is for: people who don't want to be like Jesus. The sobering, eternal truth is this: God gives man what he really wants. If you really want to be like Jesus, it will show in your life now, and it will be a fact in eternity. If you don't really want to be like Jesus, it will also show in your life now, and it will also be a fact in eternity.

We shall be like Him: This reminds us that even though we grow into the image of Jesus now, we still have a long way to go. None of us will be finished until we see Jesus, and only then truly **we shall be like Him**.

We shall see Him as He is: Perhaps this is the greatest glory of heaven: not to be personally glorified, but to be in the unhindered, unrestricted, presence of our Lord.

Paul said of our present walk, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known* (1 Corinthians 13:12). Today, when we look in a good mirror, the image is clear. But in the ancient world, mirrors were made out of polished metal, and the image was always unclear and

somewhat distorted. We see Jesus now only in a dim, unclear way, but one day we will see Him with perfect clarity.

Heaven is precious to us for many reasons. We long to be with loved ones who have passed before us and whom we miss so dearly. We long to be with the great men and women of God who have passed before us in centuries past. We want to walk the streets of gold, see the pearly gates, and see the angels around the throne of God worshipping Him day and night. However, none of those things, precious as they are, make heaven really “heaven.” What makes heaven, heaven, is the unhindered, unrestricted, presence of our Lord, and to **see Him as He is** will be the greatest experience of our eternal existence.

What will we see when we see Jesus? Revelation 1:13-16 describes a vision of Jesus in heaven: *He was dressed in a long robe with a golden (breastplate); His head and His hair were white as snow-white wool, His eyes blazed like fire, and His feet shone as the finest bronze glows in the furnace. His voice had the sound of a great waterfall, and I saw that in His right hand He held seven stars. A sharp two-edged sword came out of His mouth, and His face was ablaze like the sun at its height.* (J.B. Phillips translation)

At the same time, we know that in heaven, Jesus will still bear the scars of His suffering on this earth. After Jesus rose from the dead in His glorified body, His body uniquely retained the nail prints in His hands and the scar on his side (John 20:24-29).

In Zechariah 12:10, Jesus speaks prophetically of the day when the Jewish people, turned to Him, see Him in glory: *then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.* Zechariah 13:6 continues the thought: *And one will say to him, “What are these wounds between your arms?” Then he will answer, “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”*

We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is: John made the connection between seeing **Him as He is** and our transformation to be like Jesus. We can say that the same principle is at work right now. To the extent that you see Jesus **as He is**, to that same extent, you are like Him in your life.

We can say that this happens by *reflection*. “When a man looks into a bright mirror, it makes him also bright, for it throws its own light upon his face; and, in a much more wonderful fashion, when we look at Christ, who is all brightness, he throws some of his brightness upon us.” (Spurgeon)

Sin is lawlessness: John defines sin at its most basic root. It is a disregard for the law of God, which is inherently a disregard for the law *Maker*, God Himself.

We often fail in the battle against sin because we won’t call it for what it is: lawlessness, an offense against the Great Law Maker, God. Instead, we say things like “If I’ve done anything wrong...” or “Mistakes were made...” and so forth. Call it for what it is: sin and lawlessness. “The first step towards holy living is to recognize the true nature and wickedness of sin.” (Stott)

You know that He was manifested to take away our sins: John here defined the mission of Jesus Christ at its most basic root – **to take away our sins**. The angel Gabriel promised Joseph regarding the ministry of Jesus: *you shall call His name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sin* (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus takes away our sin in the sense of taking the *penalty* of our sin. This is immediately accomplished when one comes by faith to Jesus.

Jesus takes away our sin in the sense of taking the *power* of sin away. This is an ongoing work in the lives of those who walk after Jesus.

Jesus takes away our sin in the sense of taking the *presence* of sin away. This is a work that will be completed when we pass into eternity and are glorified with Jesus.

He was manifested to take away our sins: This is the work of Jesus in our life. It is a work we must respond to, but it is *His* work in us.

- We cannot **take away** the *penalty* of our own sin. It is impossible to cleanse ourselves in this way. We must instead receive the work of Jesus in taking away our sin.
- We cannot **take away** the *power* of sin in our lives. This is His work in us, and we respond to that work. Someone who comes to Jesus does not have to clean himself up first, but he must be willing to have Him **take away** his sin.
- We cannot **take away** the *presence* of sin in our lives. This is His work in us, ultimately accomplished when we will be glorified with Him.

In Him there is no sin: Jesus had no sin to take away; therefore, He could take away our sin, taking it upon Himself.

Whoever abides in Him does not sin: Since *sin is lawlessness*, a disregard for God (1 John 3:4), and since Jesus came *to take away our sins* (1 John 3:5), and since in Jesus *there is no sin* (1 John 3:5), then to **abide in Him** means to **not sin**.

It is very important to understand what the Bible means – and what it does not mean – when it says **does not sin**. According to the verb tense John uses, **does not sin** means *does not live a life style of habitual sin*. John has already told us in 1 John 1:8 *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. In 1 John 1:8, the grammar indicates John is speaking about occasional acts of sin. The grammar of 1 John 3:6 indicates that John is speaking of a settled, continued lifestyle of sin. John is not teaching here the possibility of sinless perfection.

“The present tense in the Greek verb implied habit, continuity, unbroken sequence” (Stott); the NIV has the right idea when it translates these verbs with phrases such as *keeps on sinning, continues to sin, and he cannot go on sinning*.

Whoever abides in Him does not sin: John's message is plain and consistent with the rest of the Scriptures. It tells us that a lifestyle of habitual sin is inconsistent with a life of abiding in Jesus Christ. A true Christian can only be *temporarily* in a lifestyle of sin.

Paul's teaching in Romans 6 is a great example of this principle. He shows us that when a person comes to Jesus, when his sins are forgiven and God's grace is extended to him, he is radically changed – the old man is dead, and the new man lives. So it is utterly incompatible for a new creation in Christ to be comfortable in habitual sin; such a place can only be temporary for the Christian.

In some ways, the question is not "Do you sin or not?" We each sin. The question is, "How do you react when you sin? Do you give in to the pattern of sin, and let it dominate your lifestyle? Or do you humbly confess your sin, and do battle against it with the power Jesus can give?"

This is why it is so grieving to see Christians make excuses for their sin, and not humbly confess them. Unless the sin is dealt with squarely, it will contribute to a pattern of sin that may soon become their lifestyle – perhaps a secret lifestyle, but a lifestyle nonetheless.

What is important is that we never sign a "peace treaty" with sin. We never wink at its presence or excuse it by saying, "Everybody has his own sinful areas, and this is mine. Jesus understands." This completely goes against everything we are in Jesus, and the work He has done in our life.

Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him: To live a lifestyle of habitual sin is to demonstrate that you have not **seen Him** (in a present sense of the ultimate "seeing Him" mentioned in 1 John 3:2), and that you have not **known Him**. There are some people so great and so wonderful that seeing them or knowing them will change your life forever. Jesus is that kind of person.

II. The Great Pretenders (1 John 3:7-10)

Let no one deceive you: This tells us that John wrote against a deception threatening the Christians of his day.

He who practices righteousness is righteous: John did not allow us to separate a *religious* righteousness from a life of righteousness. If we are made righteous by our faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22), it will be seen by our righteous lives.

The most important thing a person can ever do is make sure he is **righteous** before God. This simply means he is held in *right standing* before God. It's more than saying, "not guilty." It is more like saying, "Not guilty and in right standing." It speaks of the presence of good, not just the absence of evil.

John is *not* saying that we are made righteous before God by our own righteous acts – the Bible clearly teaches that we are made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ – yet that righteousness in Jesus will be evident in our lives.

Apparently, there were those who taught that you could be righteous before God with no evidence of righteousness in your life – John is rebuking this idea. Charles Spurgeon said it well: “The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.”

Just as He is righteous: We can live lives characterized by **righteousness**, not sin, because we have been given the righteousness of Jesus, and **He is righteous**. We have the resource we need to live righteously!

He who sins is of the devil: People who are settled in habitual sin are not the children of God – they are **of the devil**, and Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and free us from our bondage to the devil.

“Well, labor under no mistake, sir. ‘He that committeth sin is of the devil.’ It is no use making excuses and apologies; if you are a lover of sin, you shall go where sinners go. If you, who live after this fashion, say that you have believed in the precious blood of Christ, I do not believe you, sir. If you had true faith in that precious blood, you would hate sin. If you dare to say you are trusting in the atonement while you live in sin, you lie, sir; you do not trust in the atonement; for where there is a real faith in the atoning sacrifice, it purifies the man, and makes him hate the sin which shed the Redeemer’s blood.” (Spurgeon)

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil: John gave us one reason why Jesus came in [1 John 3:5](#) (*He was manifested to take away our sins*). Now, John gives us another reason: **that He might destroy the works of the devil**.

We can just imagine the heart of God grieving over the destruction the devil has wrought over this earth, and grieving that man has allowed the devil to do it all. Jesus came to put a stop to all that by overcoming the devil completely by His life, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection.

Note the purpose of Jesus: to **destroy the works of the devil**. Not to neutralize them, not to alleviate them, or not to limit them. Jesus wants to **destroy** the works of the devil!

Many people are unnecessarily afraid of the devil, fearing what he could do against them. If they only knew that as we walk in Jesus, the devil is afraid of us! As we walk in Jesus, we help in seeing Him **destroy the works of the devil!**

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him: The change from being **of the devil** to being **children of God** comes as we are **born of God**; when this happens, our old nature, patterned after the instinctive rebellion of Adam, dies – and we are given a new nature, patterned after the instinctive obedience of Jesus Christ.

John here is simply emphasizing what it means to be *born again*. It means that a *change* comes into our lives – it is a change that will be worked out into every area of our lives as we grow in Christ, but it is a real, observable change.

ii. It is the same message Paul preached, saying that as believers we are to *put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*, and that we are to *put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness* (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

Does not sin... he cannot sin: **Does not sin** and **cannot sin** each has the same verb tense as *does not sin* in 1 John 3:6, meaning a continual practice of habitual sin. John tells us that when we are born again – born into the family of God – there is a real change in our relation to sin.

The children of God and the children of the devil: John has already introduced the idea of being a child of God (1 John 3:1), *that we should be called the children of God* and 1 John 3:9, *born of God*). He has already written of some being *of the devil* (1 John 3:8). But here, he makes it plain: some are **children of God** and some are **children of the devil**.

John doesn't spend time trying to prove or explain the existence of the devil. He knows the reality of the devil is a Biblical fact. Some today lack John's wisdom and either deny the devil's existence or they are obsessed with the devil.

Some might think John is far too harsh in saying some are **children of the devil**, supposing perhaps that John did not love people as Jesus did. But Jesus called people **children of the devil** also in John 8:41-45. In this passage, Jesus' point was important, establishing the principle that our spiritual parentage determines our nature and our destiny. If we are born again, and have God as our Father, it will show in our nature and destiny. But whether our father is Satan or Adam, it will also show in our nature and destiny – just as it showed in these adversaries of Jesus.

Are manifest: John gave a simple – though not easy – way to identify who the **children of God and the children of the devil** are. **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.**

Both of these are essential. Righteousness without love makes one a religious Pharisee, and love without righteousness makes one a partner in evil.

How do righteousness and love “balance”? They don't. We are never to love at the expense of righteousness and are never to be righteous at the expense of love. We aren't looking for a balance between the two, because they are not opposites. Real love is the greatest righteousness, and real righteousness is the greatest love.

Love and righteousness are each most perfectly displayed in the nature of Jesus. He was both righteous, and completely loving.

Lesson Summary

1 John 3:1-10 offers several profound lessons that are central to Christian theology and ethics. Here are some key takeaways:

1. God's Love and Our Identity (Verses 1-2)

- **God's Lavish Love:** The passage begins by highlighting the great love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. This emphasizes the transformative power of God's love and our new identity as His children.
- **Future Revelation:** It also speaks of the future hope that believers have, that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. This points to the ultimate glorification of believers.

2. The Call to Purity (Verse 3)

- **Hope and Purity:** Everyone who has this hope in Christ purifies themselves, just as He is pure. This emphasizes the ethical imperative for believers to strive for purity in their lives as a response to the hope they have in Christ.

3. The Nature of Sin (Verses 4-6)

- **Sin as Lawlessness:** The passage defines sin as lawlessness and highlights the incompatibility of sin with the life of a believer. It underscores that Jesus came to take away our sins and that in Him there is no sin.
- **Abiding in Christ:** Those who abide in Christ do not continue to sin, suggesting that a close relationship with Christ leads to a transformation that moves us away from sinful behavior.

4. Righteousness vs. Sinfulness (Verses 7-10)

- **Deception and Righteousness:** Believers are warned not to be led astray by those who practice sin. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Christ is righteous.
- **Devil and Sin:** The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. This stark contrast highlights the spiritual battle between good and evil.
- **Jesus' Mission:** The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil, reaffirming the purpose of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice.
- **Evidence of God's Children:** The passage concludes by stating that those who do not practice righteousness or do not love their brother or sister are not of God. This emphasizes the ethical and communal aspects of Christian identity.

This week's lesson teaches about the profound love of God that makes us His children, the hope of future transformation, the call to live a pure and righteous life, the incompatibility of sin with a life in Christ, and the clear distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil. It calls believers to reflect God's love and righteousness in their daily lives, reinforcing the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Christian faith.