

## Week 5 – 1 John 2:28-3:10

### Children of God or Children of the Devil?

***“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:10, ESV)***

John has pointed out the contrasts between light and darkness ([1 John 1:1–2:6](#)), love and hatred ([1 John 2:7–17](#)), and truth and error ([1 John 2:18–27](#)). Now John turns from the ideal view of the believer to the practice of obedience. He now focuses his message on sonship. The believer must live in close fellowship with Jesus so that he may be ready for our uncertain future.

- **1 John 2:28** – *“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”*

John returns to this term (little children) of loving affection, rather than derision, for the new believers.

The command to abide in Him shows the importance of obedience. Jesus made the word "abide" so rich in splendid possibilities that once we realize what it is to abide in Him, the word is never commonplace again. "Abiding" in Jesus will give us a single eye, holy discretion, a burning zeal, to enable us to seize all opportunities to glorify Him. Jesus promises us that abiding in Him will be a fruitful, God-glorifying life. His life flows into us as the sap flows into the vine ([John 15:4-5](#)).

Abiding in Jesus is not a passive thing; it is an active thing. We must give ourselves, mentally and spiritually, to living in Jesus ([Mark 12:30](#)). Not only are we called to abide in Him, but we also know that He abides in us. It is a two-way relationship ([John 10:27-29](#)). “

When this relationship is established, we have no shame if he returns during our time on earth. We will not share the shame of Adam and Eve in the garden when they broke covenant with God and tried to hide from him ([Genesis 3:8-10](#))

- **1 John 2:29** – *“If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”*

John notes the conflict between believers and the pseudo-Christian heretics. He identifies the distinguishing marks of a true believer. He points out the practice of righteousness as the mark of the new birth, asserts the reality and the dynamic nature of the new life ([1 John 3:1–2](#)), and notes the practice of the believer’s self-purification as prompted by the hope of the future ([1 John 3:3](#)).

John is saying that everyone who is a true believer will practice the right behavior. No exceptions. He is not speaking of perfection but of the habitual practice of what is right – the general direction of one's life. This is an aspirational statement.

To be clear, this righteousness is evidence of the new birth, not a means of the new birth. It is the fruit of the new birth, not the root.

- **1 John 3:1-3** - *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

*And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”*

Every Christian should always live with these three thoughts:

- 1) Who we are: God’s children ([1John 3:1](#));
- 2) What we shall be: Conformed to the image of Christ ([1John 3:2](#));
- 3) Who we should be: People who pursue pure lives ([1John 3:3](#)).

“*Children of God*” is not simply a high-sounding name we bear; it is a reality! We are God’s children! Do not expect the world to understand this thrilling relationship, because it does not even understand God. Only a person who knows God through Christ can fully appreciate what it means to be called a child of God.

John calls all believers to wonder at the remarkable, singular, uncommon, unique, special, exceptional, "peculiar" kind of love God has given them. We need to take time and contemplate this love and allow its reality to sink down into the depths of our soul ([Ephesians 3:14-19](#)).

The Father’s great love for us is the experience that should grow stronger and stronger over the years until it totally dominates every aspect of our lives. It should consume our thoughts and control our behavior ([2 Corinthians 5:14](#)). It should motivate us to serve God and to live holy lives. It should comfort us in all our trials. It should fill us with the eager hope of being with Him in heaven. It should fill us with awe and worship, that He, the holy sovereign of the universe, would set His love on a sinful, self-willed rebel like me! Don’t let yourself ever think of the Father’s great love as “Ho hum!” It ought always to amaze you.

As members of God’s family through the new birth, believers find that their new life has a deep present and future significance.

Understanding your true position as a child of God and allow it to shape who you are. When The temptation to engage in some sin or to join the world in some degrading form of entertainment, you think, ‘I can’t do that because I’m a child of God and it would disgrace the name of my heavenly Father.’ Or, you’re reading the Bible and it convicts you that some of your behavior is not godly. It may be lustful thoughts or a grumbling, ungrateful or selfish attitude, or words that put others down. Perhaps you frequently bend the truth to cover up your own misdeeds. But when Scripture confronts you, you think, ‘I’m now a child of God. I can’t do that as a member of His family.’ Your new identity motivates you to grow in holiness.

John begins with the foundation of our present position. There is a tension in our Christian experience often referred to as the “*already/not yet*” of Christian salvation. We are already, today, children of God. However, we do not yet realize or experience all the benefits that salvation promises for God’s children. We are still in process, a work under construction, a divine work of art that is not yet complete.

While our final destiny as the children of God has not yet been fully or openly revealed, John makes it clear that believers can be fully confident that this glorious promised manifestation will occur in the future when Christ appears. In other words, John does not say "we speculate we might be like Him," but that we know beyond any doubt we will be like Christ some day in the future.

Having just explained the doctrines regarding the believer’s privileged position as children of God and then elaborated on their prophetic hope of being like Christ, John now insists that all believers pursue purity in their life using as their example the perfect purity of their Lord.

➤ **1 John 3:4 – “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”**

Christians must know how to tell the true from the false, the genuine from the artificial, and true believers from false ones. John presents tests here and throughout this letter to

help determine the validity of anybody's claims to be a Christian. Although genuine Christians have a sin nature ([1 John 1:8](#)) and commit and need to confess sin ([1 John 1:9](#)), a genuinely born-again believer has a built-in check or guard against habitual sinning because of a new nature ([1 John 3:9](#)).

Our attitude to sin as Christians is of vital importance. Apparently, the false teachers John is combating were indifferent to sin. This is something that should never be true of a Christian. You can be no more indifferent to sin than you could be indifferent to a rattlesnake in your house.

A righteous life is a distinguishing mark of one who has truly been born of God. Because sin is serious and opposes the reasons Christ came, Christians do not and cannot live in sin.

➤ **1 John 3:5** – *“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”*

John appeals to the knowledge the readers already possessed. They knew the facts of Jesus' incarnation and crucifixion. Jesus' incarnational mission was to be the sacrifice for our sins ([John 1:29](#)). Jesus became a man to die a Redeemer, paying the price to set us free from the power of sin, Satan, and death ([1 Corinthians 15:55](#), [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)). He came into the world to destroy the power, pardon the guilt, and cleanse from the pollution of sin. This was the very design of his manifestation in the flesh. He was born, suffered, and died for this very purpose; and can it be supposed that he either cannot or will not accomplish the object of his own coming?

**1 John 3:6** – *“No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”*

John is saying that the one who abides in Christ is one who absolutely does not manifest a lifestyle of continual, habitual, unabated sin. If one continually lives a life of sin, they don't really know Jesus. Regardless of what they profess, they are not truly born again! They may cry "Lord, Lord," but they do not continually do the will of the Father in heaven ([Matthew 7:21-23](#)). Do not be deceived! Genuine salvation results in a new creation, a new lifestyle, a new direction. No, it is not *perfection*, but a new *direction*!

As alluded to above, the implication is that one who practices lawlessness scorns Christ's work on the Cross or supposes that he can sin with impunity and turn the grace of God into licentiousness ([Jude 1:4](#)). If one says they know Jesus and yet continue to practice sin (not occasional sins all believers commit, but a lifestyle dominated by sin), they don't really know Him. Their very lifestyle contradicts the reason for which He appeared!

➤ **1 John 3:7** – *“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.”*

This is the counter-point to verse [1 John 3:4](#), which addressed continual sinfulness, where this verse addresses continual righteousness.

What is the deception? The false teaching that you can profess faith in Jesus and spend the rest of your life living like the devil! John was probably referring to those who had left their assemblies ([1 John 2:19](#)) but were aggressively promulgating their false views, or to the anti-Christ ([1 John 2:18-27](#)). This calls on you to be constantly alert to the danger from false teachers.

John is abundantly clear that the one who “*practices righteousness is righteous*.” Note the condition “practices righteousness” is not perfection but habit.

Such a practice does not make one righteous but shows that one is in Christ Jesus, and His Spirit is in them, giving them the desire and power ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)) to accomplish

(supernatural) good works ([Ephesians 2:10](#), [Titus 2:14](#)). John is saying, when declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)), the righteous fruit of our lives will be seen. Remember, John is not speaking of perfection, but of direction.

- **1 John 3:8** – *“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”*

A life bent towards sin, a life characterized by the rejection of God’s word, a life refusing to seek after the holiness of God in Christ ([Hebrews 12:14](#)) – this life is a life which bears the mark of the devil. The practice of sin reveals family identity. Habitual sinners are under Satan’s control and are his children. Rather than being a “child of God” we become a “child of the devil.”

We still find many saying you can make a profession of faith and live like the devil the rest of your life and still have Jesus when you die! Some rightly refer to this false teaching as *[“cheap grace!”](#)*

The work of the devil is to tempt people to sin. Sinning accomplishes the devil’s work. So what the Son of God came to destroy is not just the guilt of sin, but actually sinning. The Son of God came to destroy sinning. He sets His people free from the power of sin and Satan so that they might live in this world to the praise of His glory.

By the blood of His Cross, Jesus paid for sin, made a way of escape from the arch enemy of men’s souls, defeated the purposes of the devil, and will finally bring about his complete downfall.

- **1 John 3:9** – *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”*

“Born of God” speaks of not only to a new relationship but also to a new life ([John 3:3](#)). The Greek expression, [γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν](#) translated here, literally means “born from above,” “born anew” or “born again.”

Note that John does not say “never sins,” but that they do not make it a practice of sinning. “Cannot keep on sinning” means that true believers do not carelessly or purposely continue to sin, nor do they become indifferent to God’s moral law. All believers still sin, but they are working consciously, through the help of the Holy Spirit ([1 Peter 1:23](#)), to gain victory over sin. New creations in Christ possess a new inner nature with a new indwelling source of power to motivate and enable them NOT to practice sin.

Practitioners of sin are not of God! As shown by their unholy lives, the Holy Spirit does not regenerate and indwell in their souls! They are not born from *above*, as shown by their pattern of living like those from *below*!

- **1 John 3:10** – *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*

In this verses John summarizes the conclusion from the previous nine verses.

Of whom are you a child? Or a more colloquial question would be, “Who’s your daddy?” Your habits, lifestyle, or character reveal this. You can determine in which family you belong by your practices.

Everyone who is born of God sees the qualities of the heavenly Father displayed in Jesus Christ and says, “Lord, that’s what I want to be like. I want to be like Him. Make me like your Son. Make me want to be like Your Son. Against all the temptations of the world and the flesh and the devil, cause this desire to grow.”

That's what John is urging us to do. John is telling us we should not only relish the forgiveness of sins that we have in Jesus Christ, but recognize that He came to make us like Himself.

*"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#), ESV)

*"... seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."* ([Colossians 3:9-10](#), ESV)

*"But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* ([Ephesians 4:20-24](#), ESV)

We want to think there are three classes of people: the children of the devil, the children of God, and a vast group in between who are morally neutral, neither devilish nor angelic. Many people, if pressed on the point, would classify themselves in the middle somewhere. But God says, "No!" Truth is truth, and error is error. We have seen this before. John says there is no fellowship between them ([Ephesians 5:11](#)), no blending. There are no gray areas of truth -- it is white or black. There are no shades or degrees of truth. So, it is in this matter of humanity -- we either belong to the children of God, or we are children of the devil, one or the other. There are not three classes....

## 1 John Commentary – Precept Austin

[https://www.preceptaustin.org/1john\\_228-29\\_commentary#2:28](https://www.preceptaustin.org/1john_228-29_commentary#2:28)

[https://www.preceptaustin.org/1john\\_31\\_commentary#3:1](https://www.preceptaustin.org/1john_31_commentary#3:1)

COMPARISON OF THOUGHT AND STYLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL AND FIRST EPISTLE		
First Epistle of John Chapters 2 & 3		Gospel of John
<a href="#">1 John 2:13-14</a>	Knowing God	<a href="#">John 17:3</a>
<a href="#">1 John 3:1</a>	Children of God	<a href="#">John 1:12</a>
<a href="#">1 John 3:2</a>	Seeing God	<a href="#">John 17:24</a>
<a href="#">1 John 3:8</a>	Satan's Deeds	<a href="#">John 8:44</a>