

“How Great Is the Love of the Father”

1 John 3:1-24

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Chris Tomlin, an American contemporary Christian singer and songwriter wrote these worshipful lyrics:

“Nobody loves me like You love me, Jesus
I stand in awe of Your amazing ways
I’ll worship you as long as I am breathing
God You are faithful and true
Nobody loves me like you.”

This song really speaks to how great is the love of our Heavenly Father. Because of 1 John Chapter 3, I am more in awe of His amazing ways than ever.

You will recall that we have learned about the light of God in chapters 1 and 2 of 1 John. Chapter 3 challenges believers to live out their faith by demonstrating the love of God in their lives, striving for righteousness and overcoming sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's a breakdown of key themes from 1 John 3 that we will cover in this message:

- The Greatness of God's Love (Verses 1-3)
- The Importance of Righteousness and Overcoming Sin (Verses 4-10)
- Live Like Christ, Not Like Cain! (Verses 11-24)

The Greatness of God's Love

In His Gospel, John tells us, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13). Here, in 1 John 3, John continues this same theme.

The very first verse is an amazing statement of our status with God, “Behold what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

John wants us to believe and embrace the full measure of God's love. God had already declared and proven His love in John 3:16 in the giving of Jesus for the sins of the world, but this did not make all of humanity the children of God in the sense that John means here. Our Heavenly Father went far beyond that.

Here are some issues to consider as we try to wrap our minds around the fact that God loved us enough to adopt us as His children. First, there is a sense in which this is a totally unnecessary blessing that God gives in the course of salvation. Would you agree with me that we can relate to helping or saving someone, but not going so far as to make them a part of our family? But this is what God has done for us.

Second, we gain something in Jesus Christ greater than Adam ever possessed. We never once read of Adam being called a child of God.

In the *Enduring Word* commentary, David Guzik explains:

“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 a man could be saved from hell. But God went far beyond that, to call us the children of God.”

As a follower of Christ for over 60 years, I continue to be overwhelmed by God’s love and the unimaginable blessing and privilege that God gives us as believers. I am stunned that the more we study His Word, the more He draws us into relationship with Him and He never lets us go even when we disappoint him.

Paul further develops this idea of sonship which has come to be known as the “doctrine of adoption” in his letter to the Romans. Paul stated,

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” – Romans 8:15-17

Jon Courson sheds light on our position as children of God as he shares the Greek word for adoption - “*Huiiothesia*” which comes from “*huios*,” or “son,” and “*thesis*,” or “position.” The notion here is that, Jesus Christ took our position on the cross in order that we might take the position of the Son in heaven. He who was rich became poor for our sakes that we might enjoy the riches of God (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Pastor Courson shares a story about two brothers who wanted to play in Little League. As they signed up, the registrar was puzzled when, according to their papers he noticed their birthdates were only six months apart.

“You’re brothers?” he asked.

“Yep,” they answered.

“But your birthdays are only six months apart,” the puzzled official countered.

“Well, one of us was adopted,” said one of the boys.

“Which one?” asked the registrar.

“We ask our dad all the time,” said the boys, “but he says he can’t remember.”

We know our heavenly Father knows us intimately well and remembers everything. But like the dad of the aspiring baseball players, He never differentiates in His love for His children.

In full disclosure, I have studied this book before, but I admit that I have never received the blessings that I have this time. I have a deeper grasp of God’s tender mercies, and I

recognize that He has an incredible capacity to love the unlovely. How do I know that? He knows every ugly part of my soul and of my life, yet He loves me. I revisited a verse that we studied in February because it left an indelible impression on me then, and now I know why.

I never fully grasped the level of love that is reflected in John's Gospel 17:23 as this is part of Jesus' prayer to His Father for unity for future believers. It reads: "I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me."

This verse raises God's love for us to a higher level than I have ever imagined. Not only does this verse refer to the spiritual DNA that we share with our God and Savior, but the word "as" means "to the same degree." In other words, Jesus says that the Father loves us, His adopted children, to the same degree that He loves Jesus, His only begotten Son and that is amazing!

There is a sobering side to this: Just as the world does not know Christ, so the world does not know us as we really are (1 John 3:1). Inevitably, there will be discord between the world and the family of believers. But we can take heart because we know this is temporary and that everything will change when Christ returns.

This leads us to embrace a glorious promise that is related to Jesus' Second Coming. Although we do not know the details about the future life after the return of Christ, we do know this: "When He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

I believe that only a miraculous transformation will allow us to see Him "as He is." Paul describes our transformation in this way: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The more I learn about Jesus, the more I am impressed with Him. In every other case, the better you know people, the more disillusioned you become as you begin to see their cracks and flaws. Not so with Jesus. The longer you walk with Him and the more you learn about Him, the more you will be impressed by Him, and the more you will long to see Him. Even though now we only see Him through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12), I like what I see!

Verse 3 tells us "All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure." This is to say that living in the constant awareness that the Lord's coming is at hand has a definite effect on the way one lives. In other words, knowing our eternal destiny and living in this hope will purify our lives. Of course, none of us will be finished until we see Jesus, and only then will we truly be like Him.

Sin or Discerning the Works of the Devil

As we move to the second portion of our study in verses 4 – 10, John makes reference to "everyone who practices sin." Dr. Charles Swindoll stresses the importance of understanding

this phrase correctly as “it will make the difference between good theology and bad theology, right application and wrong application.”

Dr. Swindoll articulates the meanings of the relevant Greek terms. He stated, “The Greek term translated ‘practices’ *poion* (from *poieo*) is a present active participle. John has in mind a person who commits sin continually, persistently, habitually – a lifestyle, not an occasional sin; a lifestyle characterized by sinfulness.”

We know the person who habitually sins also practices lawlessness and no one who lives in Christ, and in turn, has the indwelling Holy Spirit in Him will keep on sinning because they have been born of God! (1 John 3:4-6). It is here that John encourages his readers by reminding them that Jesus came to earth to take away our sins. (verse 5).

Let me emphasize the fact that John is not referring to the true child of God who struggles against sin as part of their lifelong process of sanctification which is to say becoming holy. Keep in mind 1 John 1:9 which informs us: “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Don’t miss John’s plea in verse 7 as he addresses his readers compassionately as “little children.” He warns against false teachers in what I perceive to be a stern, yet loving tone. A person who is truly righteous by virtue of their positional relationship with Christ will practice righteousness. However, the one who practices sin is “of the devil.”

We live in a culture that makes little of sin and often relabels sin as progress or something to celebrate. Even within the church people are questioning and attempting to overturn timeless moral and theological truths from God’s Word. John also passionately reminds his early readers, as well as his future readers, that practicing sin as a way of life is incongruent with being born of God and knowing him. The two simply cannot go together (vv. 6, 8).

Because it is easy to get lost in John’s style, I thought it might help to separate phrases of the next seven verses into two groups: the *negative warnings of sin* and the *positive declarations of righteousness*.

Let’s first take a look at the Negative Warnings:

- No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or knows Him. (verse 6)
- The one who does what is sinful is of the devil. (verse 8)
- You can’t be born of God and sin habitually, as a way of life. (verse 9)
- Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child. (verse 10)

Positive Declarations follow:

- The one who does what is right is righteous just as Jesus Christ was righteous. (verse 7)
- The Son of God appeared to destroy the devil’s work. (verse 8)
- No one who is born of God will continue to sin. (verse 9)
- God’s seed will remain in those who are born of God. (verse 9)

Alas, John throws in one last critical warning and may I say a game changer in verse 10 when he says, “Anyone who does not love their brother and sister is not God’s child.”

A few weeks ago, Dan so eloquently shared that it is not possible for believers to be without sin. According to John 1:8-10: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” So, we can take living a *perfectly sinless life* off the table. But because we have an Advocate in Jesus who is faithful to forgive and cleanse us, we can leave *astounding forgiveness* because of Jesus’ love on the table.

Christian author, speaker, worship leader and missionary Kelly Minter directs us to remember the context of John’s day: “People who claimed to be followers of Jesus were not living according to His ways. In fact, an entire group in the church had packed their bags, denying the truth of Jesus. John wanted to protect his people from the secessionists.”

John’s way of discerning between who was truly a child of God and who was not was straightforward: You simply can’t be born of God and continue a lifestyle contrary to who God is.

As we examine the passage containing verses 4 - 10, we need to remember its anchor in verses 1-3 that we are the very children of God and we should live as such! Those born of God will reflect righteousness because that is Christ’s nature and we are in Christ.

I’ve included the overarching ideas from Chapter 3 in a quick quiz. I have 3 questions to pose to you and I am asking for audience participation. Please share your answers aloud:

- 1) Being a child of God is directly connected to the Father’s lavish (____) for us. (verse 3)
- 2) Being a child of God means He sent His Son Jesus to take away our (____). (verse 5)
- 3) True or False - Being a child of God means we have been born of God. (verse 9)

To wrap up this section, I will share these words from Jon Courson:
“In the lives of those who are born again, there is not only absence of something negative but also the presence of something positive. That is, there is not only an absence of habitual, constant sin, but there is the presence of love.”

More on Love and Hatred

As we move to the last section of our Scripture, John reminds us of the message that we heard from the beginning: “We should love one another” (vs. 11). Then he turns our focus to the story of Cain and Abel to illustrate that Cain murdered Abel because He was from the Evil One (verse 12).

We know that Cain’s attack on Abel was a violent, premeditated murder which begs the question, why did Cain act this way? John does not mince words as he tells us Cain killed Abel, “because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:12).

The Bible does not say why God rejected Cain's sacrifice. Perhaps Cain's attitude was improper, or perhaps his offering was not up to God's standards. We do know the rest of the story. Cain became angry, and He didn't hide it (Gen. 4:5-6). God Himself confronted Cain with a choice at that pivotal moment in his life: "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7-8). Instead of heeding God's plea for repentance, Cain slaughtered his brother in the field.

The implication for John's readers is clear: We know there are many people in the world who are "of the evil one" just like Cain. Even when confronted with the truth, they will continue down the path of wickedness. In fact, John reminds believers: "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13).

John further explains that a person who hates the brethren "abides in death" because they do not truly possess eternal life by grace through faith (1 John 3:15). This person is also a murderer because murder is the ultimate end of unchecked hatred (Matt. 5:21-22; 15:19).

Instead of behaving like Cain, children of God ought to follow Christ's extreme example of self-sacrificial love (1 John 3:16). Just as Christ laid down His life for us because of His love, we should love our brothers and sisters in the faith by laying down our lives for them.

I've always considered Jesus' death on the cross as the meaning of His laying down His life for us. It never occurred to me that Jesus laid His life down for us well before the cross; "For thirty-three years Jesus laid down His life to do the will of His Father. I agree with Oswald Chambers who declared, "It is much easier to die than to lay down your life day in and day out with the sense of the high calling of God."

As we end this most powerful chapter, how glorious the reminder that we are born of God. How empowering to realize we have been set apart with an anointing from Jesus Himself. We don't have to be bound up in jealousy and hate like Cain. Instead, we are free to lay our lives down for one another. And this comes with great reward.

Application

This chapter is so rich in lessons for us and how we should LOVE as Jesus Christ LOVED! We are challenged to focus on: improving our relationships with God and sisters and brothers in God's family, and being examples to unbelievers as the Holy Spirit helps us to navigate through the sanctification process.

Our Relationship with God

I believe it is important to fully embrace and acknowledge the truth that we are God's children. So often I have tried to fight my own battles and rely on my own strength, when all the while I needed to do was to rely on the love that God gives us as His children. When I want to please Him more than myself, I can grow in that relationship and continue through the process of sanctification by becoming increasingly more like Jesus.

When we embrace His lavish love as our Heavenly Father, we understand that Jesus actually chose us – that He doesn't just tolerate us. Then we will realize that we want to please our Father by our actions and find victory over sin!

Here are 3 steps to find victory over prevailing sin:

- 1) As you pray, seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word.
- 2) Stay away from tempting situations.
- 3) Seek the help of the body of Christ and be open to those who are willing to hold you accountable and to pray for you; which is what we do in our small groups here in People of the Word. (NIV Commentary, page 2119)

Our Relationship with Others

Jesus directs us to demonstrate our love for others by laying down our lives for them. Hopefully, we will never physically have to do that, but "the times, they are a changin."

1 John 3:16-18 gives us a definition of what that love entails: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? John tells us, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

We are warned against harboring hatred in our heart for anyone, especially toward a brother or sister in Christ as well as the connection between the emotions of hate and murder. Cain took his hatred to its extreme conclusion. Remember John's point that we're to love one another. He wanted to make sure none of his readers was harboring hatred toward a brother or sister in Christ.

The Holy Spirit may have already brought someone to your mind - someone you're jealous of, hold anger or bitterness towards - someone you still want to see repaid. Maybe it's even taking the subtler form of gossip. Do you feel jealousy as did Cain? Love is bound to Jesus' death, but hate can lead to murder. Is it time for you to take some time to confess this jealousy before the Lord so you can be free to love?

You may be experiencing the opposite problem. Someone may hate you for the same reason Cain hated Abel. Cain's actions were evil; Abel's actions were righteous. How is God asking you to lay your life down for another?

Let's talk about the importance of **friendship**. I recently shared my tearful moments of joy and gratitude as I was thinking about God's generosity with my friend. I never once thought that she would perceive me as being weak or silly or prideful because of my growing relationship with our Lord. Let me share her written reaction to my emotional moments:

" Oh, that you cried because in your mind and heart, you know and feel our Father's love....I completely understand. His love brings us to our knees with tear-

filled eyes. There is nothing more beautiful, real, pure, true than His Love for us, His children.

There was no greater love than for Him to give us His Son, our Jesus. I am so humbled and thankful. I know you are too, Dearest Friend. I thank God for giving us the eyes to see."

I hope that you have a friend like that. She always touches my heart with her love and words of encouragement. That's what we need to do for others.

Finally, we need to share Jesus' love with those who do not know Jesus as their Savior. If we are truly living in the "last days," as I believe we are, we should naturally have the desire within us to continually strive to live in a godly manner and pursue God's holiness. John reminds us that when believers exhibit the character of God by following Jesus' example, the world will recognize us as God's children. They might even like what they see and desire to know about our Heavenly Father.

As I close this message about love, let us never forget its definition in Jesus: "The word love needs a dictionary and for Christians the dictionary is Jesus Christ. He took that chameleon of a word and gave it a fast color so that ever since it has lustered with his life and teaching – dyed in the crimson of Calvary and shot through with the glories of Easter morning."

--Robert Welch