

Lesson 10, Beloved, Confident Children of God, 1 John 2:28-3:10

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. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

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.

² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; 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 keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 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. 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. 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 week's lesson we are once again tackling a larger swath of scripture. There is much to learn here, but it all adds up to one great theme: *Because Christ, the Righteous One, has appeared to take away sins and to make us righteous, we must practice righteousness now, so that we may look forward to his return with confidence.* In this week's passage we will find the Doctrine of the return of Christ, as well as the beginning of the second cycle of John's tests of assurance, featuring the moral, or, obedience test: "Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous" (3:7). This iteration of the moral test is closely tied to the past and future appearances of Christ, focusing on the righteous conduct of believers in light of his appearances, contrasted with the lawless conduct of unbelievers in spite of his appearances.

The manner in which John writes of the return of Christ suggests that it was not a controversial teaching among the early church, but a future event which all true believers expected without doubt. The controversy, or rather, the confusion, was centered on the conduct of those who called themselves Christians, and whether it mattered that they pursued righteousness and purity. The heretics who were troubling the flock had set themselves above the standard of righteousness to which Christ calls us and lived impure and unrighteous lives (2:4). John is reminding his readers to practice righteousness, as living proof that they are indeed children of God (3:10).

Christ's Future Appearing, Looking Ahead (2:28-3:3)

- 1.) In 1 John 2:28 we see a transition from the exhortation to abide in Christ as a refuge from false teaching, to abiding in him because we anticipate his return. According to this verse, what two responses will people have upon Christ's return?

- 2.) Why will the righteous not shrink from him? 3:2, 4:17-18

- 3.) Verse 29 gives us another clue to this confidence. Why do the righteous practice righteousness?

- 4.) If we don't want to be ashamed (not *lost*—ashamed), what is to be our response *now* to this promise of our Lord's return? 3:3; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Rev. 22:12-14

The Astonishing Love of God

John's rigorous teaching has been hard and fast, and you can almost see him punctuating each truth with a blow to his desk. Yet, as he mentions at the end of verse 29 that those who practice righteousness have been born of God, it's as if the glory of the thought captures him and he bursts forth in an exclamation of awe-struck wonder: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!" (3:1). The Greek word he uses which is translated 'what kind of' originally meant 'of what country.' Commenting on this word choice, John Stott writes, "It is as if the Father's love is so unearthly, so foreign to this world, that John wonders from what country it may come."¹ This word was always used to express astonishment, and as he contemplates our new birth John cannot hold back his outburst of wonder at the otherworldly love of God for us—his children!

- 5.) In 3:1 John writes that we are "called children of God." How does he then reassure us that this is not merely a title, but a fact? [see also John 1:12-13 & 1 Peter 1:3]

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, first pub. 1964, reprinted 2009), 122.

6.) In 3:2 John gives us three things that we can know for certain and one thing which we cannot yet know; what are they?

Here John confesses that the exact state and condition of the redeemed in heaven had not been revealed to him... Indeed, it is implied, it will appear only when he will appear. . . . It is enough for us to know that on the last day and through eternity we shall be both with Christ and like Christ; for the fuller revelation of what we are going to be we are content to wait.²

7.) What is the Christian's hope as we look for his appearing?

1 Cor. 15:49, 53-55; Phil. 3:20-21

2 Cor. 4:17-18; 1 Peter 1:3-6

John 14:3; Phil. 1:23; Col. 3:4

8.) This hope spurs us to action. What is the call to action we find in 3:3?

9.) We recall that only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from our sin and guilt (1:7), so to what kind of purification is John calling us? [2 Cor. 7:1; James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22]

I am not to strive and sweat and pray in order that at the end I may enter heaven. No; I start rather from the standpoint that I have been made a child of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am destined for heaven; I have an assurance that I have been called to go there and that God is going to take me there, and it is because I know this that I am preparing now. I must never regard that as contingent and uncertain in order that I may make it certain. It is exactly the other way round: *it is because I know I am going to meet God that I must prepare to meet Him.*³

² Stott, 122-123

³ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John*, (Wheaton, IL: 2002), 299. Italics mine.

10.) How do we prepare to meet him? [Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 3:1-2,3, 12-17]

And why? Again, from the good Doctor:

If I believe that I am a child of God and that I am really going to heaven and to glory, if I believe that this uncertain life of mine may suddenly come to an end at any moment and then I shall be with the Lord in all the glory and perfection, is it not surely common sense that I ought to be preparing myself for that?⁴

Christ's First Appearance, Looking back (3:4-10)

We come now to a passage of Scripture, tucked into John's epistle of assurance of faith for believers, which, when taken out of context, has been used to teach unbiblical doctrines, and, worse, to undermine the very confidence that John is seeking to strengthen. We must keep in view what John has already taught us, that we are saved only because of Christ's propitiation for us and that because of his advocacy on our behalf we have recourse to confession and forgiveness *when we do sin* (2:1-2, 1:9). John was addressing false teaching. "This passage (and indeed the whole letter) is ... directed against the heretics' arrogant assumption that they constituted an initiated élite set apart from the rank and file. John will admit no distinction."⁵

11.) What does John teach us in 3:4 about *the nature of sin* and in 3:8a about *the origin of sin*?

12.) In response to each of these declarations about the seriousness of sin we find two statements about the 1st appearance of Christ. According to 3:5 and 3:8b, why did Jesus appear?

13.) How did he take away our sins? [1 Peter 2:24; Heb. 9:28; Isaiah 53:11-12]

14.) How did he destroy the works of the devil? [Gen. 3:15; Col. 3:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15]

15.) What, then, are the logical conclusions which we must draw? [3:6 & 3:9]

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, 304.

⁵ Stott, 125.

If John is not teaching sinless perfectionism (1:8-10) what, then, is he teaching? All the commentaries which I am using give much careful exposition of this text, drawing out the meaning from the original Greek words and a lot of grammar which is above my pay grade. Let me boil it down for you, not to simplify it, but to cut to the heart of what has been a painful misreading for many Christians. When John uses the expressions “makes a practice of sinning” and “keeps on sinning,” he is talking about the settled character, the overarching tenor of one’s life and practice. These descriptions do not refer to individual acts of sin in the believer, but to “persistence in sin, ‘a character, a prevailing habit, and not primarily an act’ (Wescott).”⁶ “John is not setting before us a terrifying perfectionism; but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way but the abnormal moment of defeat.”⁷

16.) Why does “no one born of God make a practice of sinning”? [3:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11]

Sisters, we are children of a *holy* God, and as such we are called to live holy lives. Furthermore, we are children of a *loving* God who is for us and who longs to see us succeed in our battles against sin! He is not frowning down upon us, waiting for us to fall on our faces once again. No! He sends his Holy Spirit to help us (John 16:7-8), his Word to guide us (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and has placed us in a body—his church—to equip, encourage, and fight alongside us (Eph. 4:11-16). Jesus gave us a picture of the Father in the parable of the prodigal son who willfully wanders from his father’s home and pursues sin to the full. When he returns home, penitent, prepared to recite his confession and become a slave in his father’s house, His father races to embrace him and won’t even allow him to finish his rehearsed speech. He extends to his son lavish grace and mercy and throws a party to celebrate his return (Luke 15:11-24). “If you are a child of God who is now running with the wolves or supping with the swine, *get up and walk home*. . . . Repent. Return. Rejoice.”⁸ Remember the astonishing, otherworldly love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God... Beloved, we are God's children now, and ... we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (3:1-2).

One final encouragement

We all ought to have a positive desire to be like Him. We ought to be filled with a yearning and longing to live this glorious, wondrous life that Christ has made possible by His death and resurrection. Should we not all be animated by a desire to please Him if we really believe He came from heaven to earth? If we really believe that He suffered the agony of the cross and shed His holy blood that we might be redeemed and rescued, if we really believe that and love Him, should not our greatest desire be to please Him?⁹

⁶ Stott, 129.

⁷ O’Donnell, 97, quoting William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, Daily Bible Study Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 81.

⁸ O’Donnell, 100. Italics mine.

⁹ Lloyd-Jones, 304.