

Behold the Love of God

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and turn to the book of 1 John, that little book at the end of our Bibles in front of Jude and Revelation, the first book of John, the third chapter.

And I'll be reading the first ten verses of 1 John chapter 3. How great is the 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. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.

But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law.

[1 : 17] In fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins, and in Him is no sin.

No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous.

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him.

[2 : 22] He cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God. Neither is anyone who does not love his brother.

May God bless the reading and preaching of His Word. See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God.

If I were to choose a favorite verse of this epistle, this would be it. The King James Version says, Charles Spurgeon's commentary implores us to pry into this secret.

Horeo is the word that's used. That is, behold, or study, what kind of love the Father has given us. John seems to express his wonder at God's love for sinners.

[3 : 43] His love is so boundless that Paul describes it as love that surpasses knowledge. We can only begin to comprehend it or measure it.

Even so, the command here is to ponder God's love anyhow. No, we can't fully comprehend its breadth and its length and its depth and its height. But try.

Just try. Try. Try. Consider how God created us for a perfect existence on a perfect earth in perfect unity with Him.

And then consider how He watched as we turned our back on Him. Consider how He chose, despite our betrayal, to redeem us from the consequence of our sin by offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

Consider that He not only redeemed us by His blood, but He also brings us into His family, calling us His children.

[4 : 48] Most of us would refuse to pick up a hitchhiker on the side of the road because of the mere prospect of what He might do to us. But God brings His proven enemies into His home.

He invites us to sit at His table. He doesn't ask, how often will these people sin against me and I forgive them seven times? No, He says, I will forgive them 77 times through Jesus Christ my Son.

An infinite number of times, as Paul writes to the church in Ephesus. In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He

lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven, and things on earth.

In the ancient Greek world, people would get very excited when they would see a foreign ship approaching the local harbor. They'd stop what they were doing, and they would gather to watch it arrive.

You know, they'd study the configuration of the sails from a distance and try to determine where it came from. Of what country, they'd ask. What new things will they bring us?

[6 : 18] Of course, they didn't have the television or the internet to dull their sense and eagerness for learning and having new experiences, so the sight of a new ship was exciting.

Behold, they'd say. Well, John uses that same language here. It's a little bit more subtle in the NIV, I realize, but he says, See, behold what kind of love the Father has given us.

Study it closely with urgency and with astonishment. Marvel at God's love the way the disciples marveled at Christ when He calmed the sea.

You know, with their jaws on the floor, they asked, What sort of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey Him? Well, what sort of God is this that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life?

And as you meditate on the astonishing love of God towards sinners, you should also consider what it accomplishes. See what kind of love the Father has given us.

[7 : 34] John writes, that we should be called children of God. And so we are. You know, in the Bible, salvation is described using many different expressions, different analogies, that sometimes Scripture portrays God as redeeming slaves from their former master.

Sometimes salvation is compared to a marriage between a husband and his wife. Sometimes we read of God legally adopting sons from Adam's fallen family. And sometimes people are born all over again into an altogether new life where God Himself is their Father.

And I think you'll agree there's something special about the designation here. Children of God. When we think of God as our master, for instance, we probably think of Him as an authority figure. Perhaps we think of the way He provides for us and He protects us as a good master does. And maybe we think of Him at times as our bridegroom and then the relationship seems a little bit more intimate.

But when we think of Him as our Father, that seems to combine the best characteristics of both, doesn't it? He's our authority. He's our provider.

[8 : 58] He's our protector. While we also enjoy a very sweet, personal relationship with Him as His children. The Bible describes how we became children of God in two ways.

Adoption and birth. Evidently, John prefers the birth analogy. He uses the expression born of God or born of Him at least six times in this epistle.

To my knowledge, he refers to adoption only once in all of his writings. And even then, it's kind of funny, he can't help himself but to mix his metaphors and sort of combine adoption and birth into the same analogy, same sentence.

Actually, briefly, let's turn over to John's account of the Gospel. Look at John 1. John 1, starting at verse 12.

John writes, To all who did receive Christ, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[10 : 13] Though he doesn't use the word adoption here, his language depicts a legal process of becoming children of God. To all who did believe, who received Christ, He gave the right, that is the authority, He gave the license to become children of God.

In other words, we are not inherently members of God's family. We are not His children by default. He adopts us out of Adam's family into His own.

Now, I'll also point out that this adoption takes place at a very particular moment in time. I've known some people to claim that, or to think at least, that God adopted us before the foundation of the world.

No, He chose to adopt us before the foundation of the world, but our official adoption occurs at a very specific moment when we receive Christ and we believe in His name.

According to John, that is when God gives us the right to become His children. Until then, we're not qualified to be members of the family of God because we first need the imputed righteousness of God which comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 37] Now, does it really matter that we understand the timing of our adoption? I believe it does. God's adoption of us is not some abstract idea.

It is very real and it is very personal. When we come to Christ in faith, we come as one who is inherently unlovable.

We have nothing to offer. We are full of shame. We are dejected. But God, in that moment, wraps His loving arms around us and says, not anymore. You belong to me.

You are a member of my family. I love you and I will always love you. And we shouldn't take this very real experience and throw it into eternity past as though it's not something we can truly experience.

I should also mention that our adoption is a process. According to Romans 8, believers have received the spirit of adoption as sons, but we eagerly wait for adoption as sons.

[12 : 46] That is, the redemption of our bodies. Just as our salvation will not be complete until Christ's second coming and our bodies are glorified, our adoption will not be complete.

Which makes a lot of sense when you think about it. How could our adoption be complete if we're not yet living with our new father? Adoption is one of the most beautiful betrayals of salvation in Scripture.

It makes me think of all of those kids in this world that lack a loving home. To bring one of those children into your family, to raise them as your own flesh and blood has to be one of the most admirable, selfless acts of kindness there is.

It is certainly nothing short of godly because God himself has given us the example. Even so, we can't ignore the significance of also being God's children by birth, not natural birth.

We are born, John says, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. God is not only willing to bring sinners into his family, but he also considers us his own as though he gave birth to us himself, which he did by giving us new life.

[14 : 20] When we were dead in our trespasses and sin, he made us alive together with Christ. In C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, where, you know, a seasoned demon is teaching a younger demon how to steal people away from God, *Screwtape*, at one point, tells his apprentice, the enemy, that is God, has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into sons.

You know, I read of a converted Hindu man who attempted to translate 1 John into his native language, and here's how he translated 1 John 3.1.

See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be allowed to kiss His feet. When asked why he strayed so far from what the text actually says, he replied, children of God?

That's too much. Too high. Couldn't bring himself to write it. But it's not too much.

It's not too high. Because it is the reality of all of God's redeemed people. We are born of Him. He has made us alive together with Christ. He makes all these disgusting little human vermin into actual sons.

[15 : 49] the Christian has more than enough reason to rejoice over what God has done by graciously adopting us into His family, but there's even more for which to praise Him.

He also gives birth to us. He calls us His legitimate children. The implication is that we inherit His traits and His nature. We are like our Father. As the book of Ephesians says, we are created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

With that, let's return to 1 John 3. To understand what John says next, we need to know the circumstances which prompted him to write this letter in the first place.

The early church was devastated by the emergence of false teachers and insincere believers. And unfortunately, these people did not leave quietly. In chapter 2, John said, I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

They came in, they first embedded themselves in the church, and then it would seem they attempted to tear it apart from the inside out by speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

[17 : 13] And though they surely knew that they couldn't deceive everyone, they tried to take as many with them as possible. We often use the word heresy to describe false doctrines.

Literally, the word refers to a choice or a faction. And the reason we apply this term to unorthodox teachings is because whenever someone denies the truth and embraces a lie, he inevitably creates a faction by his choice.

So if a group of people believe the sky is blue, for example, and someone says, no, I think the sky is green, a faction is made, right? One group believes the sky is blue, the other believes it's green.

The latter, the green group, has committed heresy. Not only because he believes something contrary to the truth, but also because he has caused division.

And we sense the conflict present in John's day when he writes, the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

[18 : 26] J.B. Phillips paraphrases the text this way. I think it's a great paraphrase. Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called children of God.

and that is not just what we are called, but what we are. Our heredity on the Godward side is no mere figure of speech, which explains why the world will no more recognize us than it recognized Christ.

So the church, they watched fellow Christians turn their back on the truth of Jesus Christ and consequently, the church itself.

And you can imagine bewildered believers asking themselves, what is happening here? Our brothers and sisters, they've abandoned us suddenly, they treat us with contempt, even though we're not the ones who departed from the faith.

The defectors turned their back on the church because they turned their back on Christ. You know, having claimed the sky is green, they couldn't tolerate those who insist it's not green, it's blue.

[19 : 42] The denial of apostolic doctrine is what created the schism. In other words, those who remain steadfast in the truth, they weren't the problem.

And furthermore, the division was not the result of mere conflict or a mere conflict of personalities. The world does not know us because it does not know Him.

That is Christ. As children of God, we have an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father, a relationship the unbeliever does not have.

We know Him in a very profound sense because we share His nature, we have been born of Him. We have been created after His likeness and true righteousness and holiness.

The world, on the other hand, can't say the same. They do not know Him and so they do not know us. Children of God are very different people than children of the devil, as John refers to them here.

[20 : 48] Our priorities are different. Our allegiance is different. Again, our nature is different. We are cats and dogs. Better yet, we are goats and sheep. The tension is not merely superficial.

We are not both baseball fans arguing over which is the better team. One group loves God and shares His nature while the other group hates God and shares the devil's nature.

There can be no reconciliation between us apart from the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Paul says in Ephesians, Now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two so making peace.

But as God once said of Israel, all day long I have held out my hands to a contrary and disobedient people.

[22 : 10] the real tragedy is not that false believers sometimes join themselves to the church as they did in John's day. The real tragedy is that they remain so blinded by the God of this world that they never see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

God mercifully holds out His hands to them saying let the one who is thirsty come let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Needless to say when unbelievers refuse to come the dividing wall of hostility remains in place. Tension between them and the church continues.

They may feign peace for a while pretending to be Christians maybe even deceiving themselves for a while but it can't last as 1 John makes evident. Heresy becomes inevitable.

They don't believe the truth so factions exist which eventually become manifest and in the end the two sides are at odds with one another. That's what's happening here.

[23 : 22] So in light of uncertainty and confusion caused by those who claim to be Christian but eventually denied the faith John offers what I interpret to be a word of encouragement as well as some clarification on what's happening.

Beloved he writes 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. Now the dilemma we face at this moment is that our divine transformation takes place on the inside. You know you stand the child of God next to a child of the devil and you won't see a tangible difference just looking at them.

In turn believers may find themselves asking how can I be confident of my salvation? It seems the evidence that I'm a child of God isn't readily apparent.

Well John answers this kind of hypothetical question by affirming that God's children are his children now though we are not yet completely transformed.

[24 : 39] In other words our nature has changed. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old is passed away behold the new has come. Yet we are still living in corrupt flesh on a corrupt planet.

We groan right along with all of creation as we eagerly wait for the adoption as sons that is the redemption the resurrection the glorification of our bodies.

Ultimately when Christ appears at the end of time we shall be like him. We shall be perfectly conformed to his image.

There won't be any confusion on that day. The difference between God's people and everyone else will finally be tangible.

It will be abundantly clear for all to see. In the meantime we hang on to hope that Christ is coming again.

[25 : 43] Verse three and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. The Christian's life is characterized by his or her unyielding desire to see Christ and to be like him.

And these two things have a direct connection to one another. Glance for a moment back at chapter two. In the previous passage John shows us the connection between practicing righteousness and having confidence at his coming.

He tells us that everyone who anticipates his coming everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as Christ is pure.

We are currently striving to become like him though we won't be completely like him until he appears and we will be like him because we shall see him as he is.

In other words we shall see him rather than shrinking from him in shame as the previous chapter tells us.

[26 : 58] When the brightness of Christ appears God's children those born of him those who practice righteousness and purified themselves will see him and will have confidence while everyone else turns away from him in shame.

They'll hide their eyes while God's children behold their Lord and Savior as he thoroughly completes our transformation into his image.

As the parable of the wheat and the weeds teaches us in Matthew 13 we have to admit the business of discerning the children of God from the world isn't always easy.

It should be. As John makes clear in this letter goats sometimes look like sheep. And personal experience probably tells us all that our hearts are prone to wonder as we sang and that sometimes on occasion sheep look an awful lot like a goat.

John's purpose however is not to give us the ability to judge one another as only God can. Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart.

[28 : 18] Our discernment is severely limited by comparison. But that's not to say we completely lack the ability to know people's true identity but more importantly the Bible gives us practical tests by which we can examine ourselves.

And the test one test is this. Do you make a practice of sinning or do you practice righteousness? Verse 4. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. The Jews by the way considered lawlessness to be a more severe condition than mere sin or sinning.

In their minds to sin was to miss the mark. To commit lawlessness is to be utterly void of all godliness. Well according to John there is no difference.

[29 : 41] Sin is lawlessness. Now if you ask me the ESV provides a very helpful translation of this text. Many Bibles say everyone who sins.

As though it's possible that a single translation or single transgression excuse me proves you're a child of the devil. You cannot be a child of God. That's not what the other translations of the Bible intended but that's how a reader may interpret it.

John uses a word that means to continually do this thing. To continually do something. He's describing a habit. He's talking about an ongoing lifestyle.

Right? Verse 7. Little children let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as Christ is righteous.

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.

[30 : 49] 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.

Again, there's a difference between one who commits sin and one who makes a practice of sinning. In John's day, the proto-Gnostics who had adopted aspects of Christianity essentially claimed sin doesn't matter because what one does with his flesh doesn't matter.

They said flesh is inherently corrupt because it's material, not spiritual. Spiritual good, material evil. And while their doctrine may sound close to the truth, they took it to this ungodly extreme.

Yes, our flesh is corrupt but not merely because it's material. Our flesh is corrupt because we have sinned. And just because we live in sinful flesh does not mean our sin is excused.

Today, we can easily find people in the church who find their own ways of excusing sin. For some, for example, we're saved by grace, they say.

[32 : 07] we can supposedly sin all we want to. And there can be, will be, no eternal consequences. I have actually sat in a church pew and I have heard a Christian pastor go as far as to say the Islamic terrorist who believes God has called him to destroy Christians may very well be born again.

as strange as it may sound, in his mind he was defending the sovereign grace of God. Rather than think God could save the radical Muslim, he believed God may have already saved him, he's just not displaying the full fruits yet.

Do you see the power of God? He can save a man who is not even a Christian. More commonly, you may hear a pastor give assurance of salvation to someone living in sin because one day, possibly many years ago, he made a profession of faith.

He said he believed. Perhaps he prayed the sinner's prayer or something along those lines. And the pastor will say, see, you have nothing to worry about. You were saved back then and once saved always saved.

But that man has no biblical authority to give that person assurance of salvation because of a one-time prayer or a simple profession at a single moment in his or her life.

[33 : 39] As for the radical Muslim who makes it his life's mission to murder Christians, he utterly fails all three of John's test of eternal assurance in this letter. Read the entirety of 1 John.

John offers three tests for assurance. If you want to know you are saved, here they are. Well, the radical Muslim fails the theological test because he refuses to believe the right things, namely, about Christ.

Second, he fails the moral test because he isn't doing the right things. And third, he fails the relational test because he hates God's people.

To suggest he could be born again, that is to pervert the grace of God. It is to say, yes, we can continue to sin that grace may abound.

Paul, of course, would emphatically, passionately respond by no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Verse 6, no one abides in him.

[34 : 49] No one abides in him. No one abides in Christ. No one who abides in Christ, excuse me, keeps on sinning. Verse 9, no one born of God makes a practice of sinning.

Why not? The very reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. He came to liberate us from our former master.

The book of Romans says, having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. And furthermore, as we're told here, God's seed abides in the one who is born of God, so he cannot keep on sinning.

He has a new life. His very nature has fundamentally changed. By this, John says, 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. God. While it is true that we cannot see the heart of others, the heart has a way of revealing itself through one's typical behavior.

[36 : 01] You will recognize them by their fruits, right? Whether I call myself a Christian or not, if my life is better characterized by habitual, unrepentant sin than a striving to do what is right in God's sight, my claim is meaningless.

If, on the other hand, my experience is like that of Paul, I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

The born-again Christian isn't sinless by any means, but he or she loves Christ, loves his word, and loves his disciples.

He or she will sin, but sin will be a struggle for him or her like it was for Paul. It's not easy anymore. I believe John's audience, both past and present, can find a great deal of comfort in this passage.

The people who abandon the faith, they're not children of God losing their salvation. Look at their life, John says. Their beliefs, their behavior do not reflect the divinely transformed heart of a child of God.

[37 : 32] They may have put on a great show for a while, but consider the whole. They were never saved in the first place. More importantly, more pertinent to us, we can examine ourselves, and we can discover God's seed abiding in us.

Your love for the truth of Christ is evidence of the new birth. Your desire to follow him better and better as many times as you may stumble is proof you are a child of God.

Your love for God's family is assurance of your salvation. And with all of that in mind, now we take a step back and once again behold what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.

Never stop studying his love. Never stop marveling at it. Pry into this secret daily. And as you do, your confidence will grow and you will know, as John says at the end of this letter, that you have eternal life.

And if you don't know God's love, if you feel yourself on the outside of everything I've said this morning, thinking to yourself, what is this love? I've never felt an intimate connection to the Heavenly Father.

[39 : 03] I will tell you two things. First, it isn't too late. The Spirit and the bride say, come. Let the one who is thirsty come.

Let the one who desires the water of life come. Take it freely, without price. By God's grace, it is free to you. And second, you will discover this love only through Christ.

Christ. There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Call upon Him while there is still time. Confess your sins. Turn your gaze toward heaven and cry out to Him, Lord, make me to know your love. Save me.

And I trust He will see what kind of love the Father has given to us. In closing, let's sing of His love.

[40 : 15] Here is love, vast as the heavens, countless as the stars above, are the souls that He has ransomed, precious daughters, treasured sons.

We are called to feast forever on a love beyond our time. Glorious Father, Son, and Spirit, now with man, are intertwined. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, it is so sweet, so wonderful to be able to address You in just that way. Heavenly Father, our Spirit, Your Spirit, confirms to our spirit that we are able to call out to You, Abba, Father, that we are able to turn to You in all times, times of plenty, times of lacking, times of prosperity, times of trouble.

And we know that You love us and that You care for us in every little thing that is going on in our lives. You are overseeing.

You are protecting us. You are providing for us. You are guiding us. And You are forever loving us. Help us, Lord, to marvel at this great love.

[41 : 31] This great love that not only chose us, adopting us into Your family, but securing that adoption through the death of Your own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Let us behold it.

New every single day. Let that be part of the mercies You give that we see that love and we marvel all over again. We thank You and praise You in Christ's name.

Amen. May we leave here with our hearts beholding the love of God and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.