

THE EPISTLES OF 1, 2, & 3 JOHN  
RWANDAN PASTOR'S CONFERENCE  
SESSION III  
THE PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
OF GOD'S CHILDREN  
1 JOHN 2:28-3:24

It's time now to move into our third lesson on 1 John. In this session we are going to cover 2:28-4:6. We are going to do this by breaking this body of verses into three sections:

1. Living Like Children of God – 2:28-3:10
2. The Marks (or identifiers) of God's Children – 3:11-18
3. Living in Confidence – 3:19-24

In these first two sections the Apostle is going to continue to focus on the theme of love that he has previously developed. Additionally, he is going to introduce the term “*born*” when speaking of Christians. He will use this term 10 times from this point until the end of the text. He will be making specific reference to believers who are “*born of God*” are people who exercise faith toward God, and love toward one another.

**What does that last sentence remind you of?**

Again, recall how Jesus answered the Pharisees when they asked him which is the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:34-40. He answered them from Deuteronomy 6, and Leviticus 19. His answer followed exactly with John's theme here: Love for God and love for one another is the greatest commandment of all who follow Him.

Let's dig in:

LIVING LIKE CHILDREN OF GOD – 2:28-3:10

**V. 2:28-3:3:**

Let's start out with some general thoughts on this passage. **Generally speaking, what do you think John is communicating to the Christians here??**

One of the things that just jumped out to me was how John was so passionately reassuring the believers that they can have great confidence in the relationship they have with Jesus. Human beings have a need to “*belong*” to a group. Perhaps this is akin to the herding

instinct of most animals, I'm not sure. But I do know we all have a need to "*belong*". Buried in this passage, and others to come is a message of assurance that those who are ***born of God*** are secure in their one on one relationship with the Creator God of the universe!!

Let's examine this passage in more detail. In 2:28-29 we see the Apostle is opening a new line of thought. He begins the section with "*And now,,*". John has just concluded the section where he has called upon the believers to persevere in their walk with Christ. He has already introduced the concept of believers "*abiding*" in their relationship with Jesus. Here he begins to develop that thought even further. Here we see the practical components of our walk with Christ,, confidence. When believers truly "*abide*" in Christ, that is when they live a lifestyle with Jesus at the very center of their lives, they grow confident in their relationship and the promises of eternal life that Christ has given us.

The opening verse of chapter three is amazing. There are three things that I want us to focus on. Much of this comes from an examination of the words in the original language, so I am going to try to give you that in a way that you can see how strongly the Apostle's message is coming through: First, John opens with the word "*See*" or "*Behold*". John is not making a casual statement here. He is using a form of the verb "see" to say "*You see!!*" or "*You pay very close attention to this!!*"

**Secondly, what is it that John is asking them to "see"??**

He wants them to recognize the "*greatness*" or "*how great*" the love of God is toward mankind. The word John uses here is *παταπήν* (*patapen*). This word is used only seven times in the New Testament. In every use it conveys or implies ***great astonishment***. **Why would we be astonished by God's love toward man?**

Finally, I want you to understand that John also uses a type of word that we are going to come across several more times in this epistle. It is what is referred to as a ***perfect tense*** verb. I realize that most of you have had little or no training in Greek. But I do want you to understand that in this language, this type of verb has a special place. They convey the idea of "***something that has occurred already, but whose effects carry forward into the future***". Think of it like losing a leg. I may have done something that caused me to lose one of my legs. The event happened in the past, but the effects of this event remain with me to this day. In this case, what has happened here is that God "*has lavished*" His love upon us. Even though His love "*was*

*lavished*” upon us when we accepted Christ, He continues to “*lavish*” it upon us to this day!! What a joy we have when we come to Christ and see the great love that God has lavished and continues to lavish upon us, despite our sinful state. That is the point behind the great amazement John speaks of here.

**v. 4-10:**

In the opening verses we see John’s familiar contrasting style in v.4 & 6. **Tell me what you see is John’s basic message here?? Is the Apostle trying to tell us that true followers of Christ will never sin??**

We all know that even Christians sin. John is not trying to say here that once a person comes to Jesus, they will never sin again. A key to understanding this passage is to know that John has been developing this theme of “*abiding*” or “*walking closely*” with God. Recall the three themes of the text: faith, obedience, and love. When we walk closely with God because of our faith and obedience, we love Him and truly desire to follow Him, then the continuous, habitual sins that once plagued us, fall away. Once again, the power of the Greek language rings out in v.4 and 6 because the Apostle uses the type of verb form that indicates a “*continuous*” element in relation to “*the one who*” or “*everyone who*” in his references in v.4 and 6.

**Why do you think John put v.5 in between 4 and 6?**

We have to realize that it is Christ who changes hearts. It is the work of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection that truly takes away sin. That was His purpose in coming to this world. John is keeping us focused on the fact that it is not our efforts, or our obedience that produces our state of salvation. It is the work of Jesus Christ!! Remember the Apostle Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8-10.

Moving on to v.7-10 we see a very similar message being repeated by the Apostle. The outflow of a person’s life tells much about the inner heart of that person. The message rings very close to that of Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:15-20. There Jesus spoke of good trees producing good fruit and bad trees producing bad fruit. Matthew recorded that passage by opening with an action word of command, just as John has done here in our text. John continues his pattern of using action words that demonstrate *continuing actions* of those who are living righteous (v.7) and those who are living in sin (v.8) is not a momentary thing, it is *a continuous pattern* within

their lives. Notice also that John takes the comparisons one step further in these verses by comparing the righteous person to Christ's righteousness, and the sinful person to the devil.

Concluding this section in v.9-10, John returns to his references of believers as being "*born of God*". Once again, the English translation does very little in drawing out what John is really saying. In English we have no real way of conveying the true intent of a *perfect tense* verb.

**Look in your notes back to 3:1 and tell me what we said the message of the perfect tense is?? Now apply that to v.9 if I told you that the verb "born" was written in the perfect tense.**

Just like in 3:1, here in v.9 the Apostle uses the perfect tense in relation to the term "*born*". The effect of this carries the meaning that the believer is one who was "born" of God at some point in the past, but the effects of that new birth carry forward into the present. This is exactly the message of John here, which the true believer cannot continue in a life of sin because God has changed that person's life. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. The Apostle Paul testifies to the change God brings into our lives when we come to Christ in faith.

#### THE MARKS OF GOD'S CHILDREN – 3:11-18

##### **v.11-18:**

John opens this new section by linking it to the previous using the words "*For this reason*". Some translations may say "*Because of this*". Either is fine because they both convey the message that what John is about to say is based upon what he has just said. First, that the message to live a lifestyle of love toward others is a message that extends back to the dawn of time. Christ echoed this when he cited the essence of Leviticus 19:9-18 as the second greatest commandment. But next, in v.12, John brings in an example we are not to follow, the example of Cain, who murdered his own brother.

**Why did Cain kill his brother??**

Evil grew in Cain's heart. He was jealous, and envious of Abel. The evil that was within Cain burst forth in hatred for his brother and this hatred was made real when he took Abel's life.

**What act could be more hateful than taking a person's life??**

In John's analogy here, Cain represents "*the world*". The term "world" is used here just like it was in 2:15, to represent the evil demonic forces of Satan in opposition to God. Here the Apostle is once again emphatically telling the believers to not be surprised when the world hates them, just like Cain hated Abel.

**What are some examples of the world hating Christians that you see??**

From my perspective as an American, we are seeing a global surge of instances of other religions, particularly portions of Islam, who hate Christians and are persecuting and killing them. In my own country, we have taken for granted the great blessings God has bestowed upon our land. We are seeing people take our commitment to religious liberty and use it to tell Christians to get back into their churches and "keep quiet". They have taken our positions of freedom *of* religion and are changing it to freedom *from* religion. They are tolerant of any belief system except Christianity.

In v.14 John again helps us understand how we can have assurance of our position in Christ. He notes that we have crossed over from death to life and we can know this because of the lifestyle of love that we live.

**Is John saying that it is this brotherly love that has saved us??**

Certainly not!! It is the blood of Christ that has redeemed us, but once we have been redeemed, once we have accepted Christ by faith, we are changed, and we become people who love one another. This outward sign or lifestyle shines as a beacon or as evidence that we can know we have truly crossed over. Notice also that the opposite rings true in v.15. John has not changed his message. He continues to develop it, and deepen it for his readers. Yet his overall theme of faith, obedience, and love remain consistently in focus.

We turn now to v.16-18. I want us to re-read these verses, then we will treat them in one unit.

**What is the basic message of John in these verses??**

We have a saying in my country that goes like this: "*Actions speak louder than words.*" This little saying captures the heart of John's message here. Look at the opening verse, (v.16). John is bringing out the most supreme example of "*action*" in all of human history, the action of Christ dying on the cross for our sins. Once again he employs that perfect tense form of the word

“*know*” which demonstrates that this knowledge is not simply a faint portion of a memory in our minds. No!! it is a knowledge that continues to impact us every day!!

**Notice the final portion of v.16. What is John suggesting here??**

Christ’s actions on the cross were to atone for our sins. Yet, John is by no means suggestion that we can do likewise. He is simply drawing attention to the fact that Jesus didn’t stop with talking to people about love. He **DEMONSTRATED** love by willingly going to the cross.

John draws us back to the more comparable example in v.17 where he gives the example of someone who has worldly possessions, yet refuses to help a brother in need. Notice how he asks the question at the close of that verse. This is what we refer to as a ***rhetorical question***. It’s really not a question, but a statement posed to his readers. Then in v.18 John returns to the sincere address to his people, affectionately referring to them as “*Little children*”. This is followed by the axiom that our love is best demonstrated via our deeds and our truth, than by our words or speech.

#### LIVING IN CONFIDENCE – 3:19-24

##### **v.19-20:**

In this section the Apostle is going to offer assurances that will arise in the heart of the genuine child of God. Some scholars would note that v.19a governs this entire section:<sup>1</sup> “*By this we shall know that we are of the truth*”.

**I want to begin with a question. John says “*by this,,,*”. What is he referencing with the word “*this*”??**

Recall that he has just completed a section in v.11-18 where he focused on the marks of God’s children being that they live lifestyles which demonstrate genuine love and obedience. That is exactly what John is referring to in this opening verse. He is now moving forward and building upon that by telling the believers that a lifestyle of genuine love and obedience toward God and those around them is a manifestation that allows them “*to know that we are of the truth*”. This knowledge leads to the reassurance that John speaks of here in v.19a. Notice also one small word that speaks volumes here. John is not speaking of the believers belonging to “*a*” truth, he is speaking of them belonging to “*the*” truth which is revealed in His Son Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

John moves into the latter portion of v.19, and into v.20 with a passage that can be a bit difficult to interpret in some English translations.

**When the Apostle says “*and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us*”. What do you think that he is saying??**

Keep in mind that he is building upon v.11-18. In particular, he has just concluded v.17-18 where he focused on the concept of actions speaking louder than words. John knows that all believers will face moments in their lives when it is very difficult to act in love or to share scarce resources with another. Whatever the situation, we are all familiar with the conviction our hearts receive when we fail to live or behave as we know God would have for us to. John is simply saying that when we face these difficult situations, when our hearts tug on us and convict us of wrong actions or motivations, God is greater than our hearts and able to guide us.

#### **v.21-22:**

The first thing I would call your attention to is to notice the recurring pattern of John to illustrate contrasting positions. Unfortunately, I broke the text here in the midst of such an example. But notice that v.20 represents the negative example. It is the example of a heart that is convicting the believer of the sin in their life, a conviction that calls us to return to God. Here in v.21 we see the positive side of that same story. Here the Apostle is demonstrating how the believer who is walking with Christ in that theme of faith, obedience, and love, is the person who is content at heart with the Lord. I think we can all identify period of our lives when we were walking in each of these paths, hopefully more so in the path of v.21 than v.20. Nonetheless as followers of Christ we know that when we walk astray, our hearts are convicted. The Holy Spirit is crying out to us that this is not the lifestyle He intends us to live. Likewise, when we walk closely with the Lord and conduct our lives as He would have us to. These are times when we have great joy and peace in our hearts. John is telling us that when we are living in this manner, we enjoy great confidence before God.

V.22 can get a little sticky. Some preachers from the edges of Christianity in America make great abuse of verses like this one. There is a movement in America right now known as the “*health and wealth gospel*” movement. Preachers of this movement teach a self-centered message that God only wants to make our lives “happy and wealthy”. They look at verses like v.22 and claim this is proof.

**So, I will ask you: What is John saying here?? Is he making the claim that believers who live the right kind of lifestyle are going to be blessed with God granting them everything they ask for??**

Absolutely not! Such a thought or teaching is to twist what the Apostle is truly saying here. Let's look at a few things: First of all, this is John's first mention of prayer in the letter. Secondly, we have to remember, John is continuing to develop this theme of a life that is wholly characterized by faith, obedience, and love. Always think of our model – Jesus Christ. When Jesus walked this earth, he exemplified exactly what John is teaching. Since he is God, he obviously exemplified this lifestyle perfectly. When we look at Scripture, and look to the prayers of Christ, we see they were all fulfilled. They were all fulfilled because his petitions were perfectly in line with the will of God, because he was perfectly in line with the will of God. There is no doubt that we will never reach this same level while here on the earth. Yet, John is teaching us here that when our lives are structured in such a close-knit relationship with God, then our prayers and requests are most likely to be in line with the will of the Father. And our strongest motivations will be to do His will, and keep His commands.

**v.23:**

I doubt that anyone has any difficulty with this verse. John cuts to the very heart of the gospel message. John makes it outwardly clear; the command is to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. Notice how this continues to tie into Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:34-40 regarding the greatest commandment. Jesus responded that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord with all your heart and soul. John rightly makes the connection that there is no way for a person to do that without putting their faith in His Son Jesus Christ!!

**v.24:**

Again we see a very straight-forward verse from the Apostle. John is affirming or summarizing all that he has just said. The one who does what he has just said in v.23 (put their faith in Jesus Christ), this person abides in God, and God abides with him. Then John closes by telling us what we know of our salvation and our daily walk (as he was referencing in v.20-21). It is the Holy Spirit that informs our heart. We know our spiritual condition because the Spirit of God is constantly comforting or convicting our heart as we walk through this life.

ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Akin. *The New American Commentary: vol. 38 1,2,3 John*. Edited by Richard R. Melick Jr., Paige Patterson, Curtis Vaughan. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001. 162.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.163.