
The Epistles of John

“Hi, Kids”

1 John 2:28-3:10

One of the things I've noticed over the years is that often there is no distinction between the way children behave towards their parents and how we behave as adults with God. John calls us children, and when he does, it is a positive, but it also carries his concern for us. We find this same concern expressed throughout the New Testament.

Consider Christ's words. He calls us to be childlike in our faith, but not childish. And in that context He also expresses God's general concern for children.

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:1-5).

This morning we will see the world is full of children, but the question is, who is the father or is that Father?

I Introduction

II The Righteous Walk

Verses 28-29

III The Righteous Child

Verses 1- 3

IV The Righteous Practice

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V Whose Child Are You?

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VI Conclusion

I Introduction: In a number of churches, claiming to be Christian, the concept of sin is not welcome. “After all,” some would say, “God is love. God is not judgmental, but accepts us for who we are.” Within these churches, sin is redefined. People are allowed to accept their sin as alternate lifestyles. It no longer matters how people live. After all, “we wouldn’t want to be seen as fundamentalists. We want to be seen as progressive.” Consider what Burklo, on “The Center for Progressive Christianity” website states:

“ Progressive Christianity empties itself, over and over, of any suggestion that our religion is better than others. Other spiritual or secular paths to the Divine may be as right for other people as ours appears to be for us. Humble religion doesn't focus on its walls, but rather on its openings. Progressive Christians try to keep our doors and windows open to inspirations that enter from beyond our communities of

faith. Mystical spirituality keeps us open to progressive revelation, which strains our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hands to serve.”¹

So why can't we all just get along? Scripture is twisted to support both aberrant theology and sinful lives. And, from this passage, one can assume this same problem existed in the early church. John was confronting this false teaching and its promoters.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who hold that Christians can no longer sin. “Because we are new creations, we don't sin.” Of course we've already addressed this unscriptural teaching in earlier sessions.

Both positions represent extreme views. Most believers recognize that they do continue to sin. Unfortunately, with this understanding can come an attitude of acceptance. It becomes easy to believe that since sin is simply part of the human condition, it is not really that serious. Even when we understand its seriousness, we still, for practical purposes, minimize it.

We drive our cars by grace, not by law, as we speed down the freeway. We accept too much change in the grocery store. We don't lie, but “stretch” the truth. We don't act as if we realize sin is sin. Sometimes, we don't take it as seriously as we should. Consequently, we may be slow to recognize the sins of those who claim to speak for Christ. After all,

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matthew 7:1).

John addresses the problem in this section of his first epistle. He wants to make sure believers don't fall into the trap of accepting the teachings of false prophets just because they claim to speak for the Lord. How we live DOES MATTER. Works may not be the basis of salvation, but they are its fruit.

As we saw last time, John warned that the false prophets came in the spirit of antichrist. Now he discusses the distinctions between being children of God and children of the Devil.

II The Righteous Walk: Baker introduces this new section by noting:

“ This verse makes the transition from concern about false teachers to concern for the children of God. It joins the admonition developed in the previous paragraph (“remain in him”) to the confidence and unashamedness that should be the possession of the children of God when Christ appears.”²

John starts by showing the foundation of our hope is our relationship with the Lord. He again addresses the recipients of the letter as “dear children.” These are believers, so his call to continue in Christ therefore isn't related to salvation. He notes, that for believers to stand confidently before the Lord, they must walk faithfully with Him. To “continue,” is the same concept as “abiding,” and focuses on our walk with the Lord.

John had warned about the teachings of the false prophets. They had claimed the basis of relationship with God was some type of esoteric knowledge. To them, lifestyle was not an is-

¹ Burklo, Jim, “What is Progressive Christianity?” www.tcpc.org/library/article.cfm?library_id=327

² Baker, Glen W., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, “1 John,” Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.

sue when it came to salvation. Along with the Gnostic heretics, they taught how one lived here on earth did not affect one's salvation.

John taught exactly the opposite. As believers abide in Christ, they live to serve Him. The quality of our walk IS relevant. James said:

“But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:18).

If these believers lived a righteous life, they would have an expectation of standing confidently before the Lord. One day they would hear the words,

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!” (Matthew 25:21).

III The Righteous Child: What a blessing it is to be a believer. John is amazed at the great love of God. This love is shown not only through the gift of salvation, but by believers being His children. For a Jew, as John was, the concept of being a child of God was overwhelming. Previously, there had been no personal relationship between God and the individual Hebrew. But through the work of Christ on the cross, God has become our Father. Jesus referred to this when he said:

“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matthew 6:9).

The child of God has direct access to the Father through prayer. It means we are no longer slaves to sin. In dependency on the Holy Spirit, we can choose to be obedient. And finally, we can look forward to an eternity in the presence of God.

However, there are struggles in the life of the believer. Some come from living in a fallen world. Because the world hates God, it will hate His children. As Jesus put it:

“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20).

Nevertheless, God's love is great. We have never fully experienced that love. However, someday we will be like Him. John doesn't understand all the implications of this and neither do we. Some suggest correctly that we can look at the resurrected Christ. This will give us a clue (see Luke 24). Like Christ seen in His resurrected body, one day we will be perfect. This truth should cause all believers to say,

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

The quality of our daily walk does make a difference. In response to the marvelous love of God, we are to live a pure life. We should desire to live worthily of Him. Those who are truly God's children respond to Him in love. Love of God is obedience.

“Whoever has my (Jesus’) commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21).

IV The Righteous Practice: John now presents a very important concept. First, to sin is to break God’s Law. The law encompasses at least all of the five books of Moses. But John is probably referring to Christ’s summary of the Law: love God, and love one another. The punishment for violating the law is death.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Followers of Christ have no reason to fear God’s judgment. Christ came to take away sin.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

We know that Christ is without sin. John says that no one who lives in Christ continues to sin. In fact, the presence of sin proves there is relationship with God. Does John mean then that Christians never sin? Remember what John said back in chapter 2:1.

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,”

Since obviously John says Christians do sin, what does he mean by saying we don’t? Paul explains it he wrote in the book of Romans. The unrighteous are slaves to sin.

“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? “ (Romans 6:16).

While in specific situations they may not sin, their lives are typified by sinful behavior. Paul continues,

“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted” (Romans 6:17).

The believer may sin, but his life is no longer typified by sin. We can choose not to sin. We will sin, but we are not slaves to sin, so for us sinning is a choice. For the unrighteous, sinning is not a choice. John refers to this distinction when he says we no longer sin.

John also uses this argument to show the fallacy of the claim that how one lives doesn’t matter. Believers are to walk righteously before the Lord, enjoy the blessings of God, and choose obedience to Him.

V Whose Child Are You?: John didn’t want the believers to be misled by persuasive false teachings. The false prophets claimed to speak for God. They claimed knowledge and rela-

tionship. “But wait,” says John, “their lives don’t confirm their statements.” Their message of self-fulfillment and self-centeredness is contrary to the truth of God’s word. This is sin. This is evil.

Individuals who practice evil are not of God. They are of Satan. As Jesus said to those who rejected God’s truth during His ministry:

“ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Anyone who claims to speak for Christ, as the false prophets did, and teaches falsely, is of the spirit of antichrist. They ignore the fact Christ came to overthrow the work of Satan. John wants to make sure these believers understand what is actually at stake when they listen to the honeyed words of the devil’s children.

Again, John reminds us the difference between the righteous and unrighteous is whether one is a slave to sin or righteousness. The fruit of the believers’ life testifies whom they serve. The behavior of the false prophets was the evidence that they carrying out the work of Satan.

VI Conclusion: On the other hand, we are blessed because we are believers. Too often, we take our salvation for granted. John had to interrupt himself with an exclamation of joy for the many blessings of God. We too must not forget these blessings, and express proper gratitude for them in our daily prayers.

We have received the gift of salvation. Therefore, we can expect to spend eternity in God’s presence. We look forward to the day Christ returns. We will no longer be beaten down by the suffering that comes with living in a fallen world.

“ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17).

We can go to God our Father in prayer, as we saw in Matthew 6:9. He loves us and desires to meet our needs. (Remember that His primary concern is for our spiritual wellbeing, not our personal comfort.)

The believer, recognizing all God has done for him, should then in turn respond to God. We worship Him because of all He has given us. More than that, we desire to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Our lives are acts of worship. The only question we must ask is: what kind of worship are we giving? We please God by obeying Him and keeping His word.

The walk of the believer is to be one of separation unto God. Although we are in the world, we are not to be part of the world. Jesus prayed,

“ My prayer is not that you take them (His followers) out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

We are God's representatives in this world. As such, our lives are to be different. So, not only are we to live righteously, we must also be careful to examine the lifestyles of those who claim to be fellow believers. In the coming studies, we will note John's concern that we not only love God and each other, but also take a personal, firm stand for God's truth. We must be willing to identify sin and call it such. We must be willing to recognize evil as evil, even when it comes in the disguise of righteousness.

Finally, as with Paul, John is talking about how believers, described here as little children are to function within a community. He is presuming no one is acting as a "Lone Ranger" Christian. The theological attacks that concern John come from those who have left the community. The distinction between the believing community and the groups led by these false teachers, it the believing community is typified by love, how we care for, minister to and encourage one another. So, let us always look for ways to minister to one another, to love one another. In doing so we love and worship God.

*I love you Love,
and I lift my voice
to worship You,
O my soul rejoice.
Take joy, my King
in what You hear,
May it be a sweet,
sweet sound in Your ear.* ³

³ Klein, Laurie, Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, "I Love You, Lord," Maranatha! Music, Laguna Hills, CA, #21.

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I Introduction
(Matthew 18:1-5, 7:1)

II The Righteous Walk:
(James 2:18; Matthew 25:21)

III The Righteous Child:
(Matthew 6:9; John 15:20; Revelation 22:20; John 14:21)

IV The Righteous Practice:

(Romans 6:23; Galatians 3:13; Romans 6:16; Romans 6:17)

V Whose Child Are You?:

(John 8:44).

VI Conclusion:

(Revelation 7:17; John 17:18)

Personal Application: Let us always look for ways to minister to one another, to love one another. Is there someone you can care for this week.

Prayer for the Week: Lord, fill me with love for Your children and help me to treat them with Your compassion and gentleness. Amen.