

Living as God's Children (1 John 2:28 - 3:9)

The boy scout motto: *be prepared*. It's what we are taught from our youth isn't it? Be prepared for whatever life throws at you. And that's sensible. Preparing for life - exams. Good preparation is important - preparing for holidays. Many of you who are retired will know the importance of having pension provision because we all need to prepare for our future.

And for those of us who are Christians are also encouraged to think about our future:
28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

Being confident and unashamed at His coming. Jesus is coming again. Ref to funerals - the dead in Christ shall rise when Jesus comes again - the grave is not the end - Jesus conquered the grave and to prove He has that absolute victory over death He is going to return and the dead will rise. How can that happen. Well Jesus is Lord of the Impossible - it can happen - it will happen because Jesus has victory over death.

I can remember that years ago there was much more talk about it than now. The establishment of the state of Israel and the Cold War gave people a feel that something was going to happen. It's not so popular to speak of the second coming now. I guess some of the speculative stuff in the sixties and seventies put people off when it didn't happen. Just because things don't happen when we expect them doesn't mean that they can't or won't. The truth of the NT is that the same Jesus that ascended into heaven will some day return. Whether we are dead when He returns or whether we are still alive, we are going to have a part in that coming.

1 Thess 4: 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever

What brought me to Christ in the first place was the expectation of His return - was I ready? As believers we can say in one sense we are ready. We have accepted Jesus as our Saviour and Lord - *he appeared so that he might take away our sins.*

John is not talking here in chapter 3 about being ready in terms of our eternal security, but in terms of our walk. He's coming - how should we then be living. We should be living like who we are: *3:1 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!*

We are the children of God - we're special. We have a special status. Let's read on: *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.*

What does it mean to be a child of God? Sounds an easy one to answer as we can look at one another and that's what a child of God looks like. But what will we be like for all eternity? That's what John is referring to here and we understand that it hasn't yet been made known because we understand little about heaven. But we know this - we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

Being a child of God for all eternity means being like Jesus. Now if we are going to be like Him in eternity, then shouldn't we desire to be like Him now. Likeness isn't looks, it's behaviour. Here's what this is about. This is what this letter is about: *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

We are *going* to be like Him, but we should *start* being like Him now. We have the hope, so let's make preparation. Just as we have the hope of our holidays as summer approaches, we should be prepared. Although we have not entered our eternal rest, we are still the children of God and we need to be preparing for His coming so that we will be confident and unashamed.

We have considered this fact that we are children of God before when we looked at some aspects of

Romans 8 a couple of years back, or for that matter when we examined the lavishness of God's grace when I first started my ministry here five years ago.

It's just amazing. It's awe inspiring. It's profound. We are the *children* of God - His sons (even if we're female!) . Do you have problems getting your head around that? I do. Children of God. I'm sure our hearts well up in worship as we read those words *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* John's letter as we will see all the way through is one that sees actions and not sentiment being our response to God's grace. *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

So you have the hope in you? Then let's get away from cheap sentiment of enjoying singing hymns and doing religious devotion like attending services and the rest. He is pure and our desire should be purity too. As we understand just how amazing God is and what has been achieved by His love. As we look at that cross again with the broken body and shed blood of Christ, then our desire surely is to be pure as He is pure.

So what does this purity entail? John intimates this here:

- We do not desire to keep sinning:

10 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; nor is anyone who does not love his brother

We are the people of God, so sin is not our way. You'll find it a theme in this particular letter. The reason not to sin was given in chapter 1 as the fact that we walk in the light so we need to live like that. In chapter 2 we do not sin and walk in obedience because we have relationship with Him.

So what is sin? One good definition of sin is "missing the mark". We have a goal and we miss it. Or another way to look at it is messing up. Harm that we caused because of something we did or didn't do. Sin is also part of our culture ... racism is the most obvious example. But John gives us some definitions of what sin is here to help us understand that we do not tolerate it in our lives.

Why is so much being made of this. Because the society of the first century was much like today's. We are being asked to entertain those things which the Bible has always said is wrong, but which society says is OK.

And it's easy for God's people to be involved in the values of the world. We think it's OK not to listen to the voice of God because we are individuals and have a mind of our own, because that's the way of the world.

On one hand we'll uphold spiritual values, but on the other, be quite happy to dishonour God when it suits us to

- So we never condone homosexuality but we tolerate watching foul stuff on our TV because it entertains us.
- We do not condone living together before marriage but we think that gossiping is fine because it is our right to have an opinion, however ill informed.
- We never condone drug-taking but we are happy to hold grudges against our brother or sister in Christ because we should always look after number one.

I don't have to tell you that thinking the sin is just as bad as doing it as Jesus so well told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. It's one thing to accept the words of Christ but another to purify ourselves as He is pure. And as we allow ourselves to go on in our self-righteousness, with all our grudges and bad thoughts we think they don't matter. They don't hurt anyone do they? They hurt us and they poison our relationships.

No sin is insignificant either. When God looks at sins, He doesn't see big sins and small sins - He just sees sins. We do a little exercise in Sharing Jesus. We count the number of sins in our lifetime based on only three (!) a day. It comes out to over 70,000 minimum! And it only takes one to offend the living God!

Let's remind us of the awfulness of sin again if we *need any reminding at all. John defines sin three ways. Here sin is seen in black and white terms. Sin is a fact of life - John says this in chapter 1 - if we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1:8).* But we need to recognise that allowing sin to occur in our lives is an awful thing and these verses spell it out without compromise.

- Sin is lawlessness



Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness

When we sin we are in lawless rebellion against God. Or perhaps a better way of putting it may be that we are acting like rebellious teenagers to their Father. We know what the house rules are but we hope He won't notice. He notices everything. And it's not just a matter of keeping written law. Many Christians are like the Pharisees. They kept law faithfully. They did the commandments. They did religious law. They just never stopped to listen what God was saying because they only thought about themselves.

Being a child of God is about relationship. We are children and have a heavenly Father. Being a church is about relationship which is why John goes on so much about loving our brothers.

And so often we leave God out of the equation. We act without asking. We operate without the wisdom of our Father. We just do things and we don't pray and seek God's will until we've made our plans. Even in Church meetings we make decisions by debating and a vote. Is God's will the will of the majority or even of the consensus? Of course not.

As a father myself, one thing I really find annoying is if the children do something without asking. I may not mind, but in my home and in our family, children have a responsibility to the parent. It's the same in our own lives and in our church lives. Too often we don't wait and listen to the voice of God. As we approach the end of this year and the start of the next, we are going to spend time listening to God's voice. Why? So that we obey and not act in disobedience, either wilfully or through neglect to listen to Him. Because if we are not listening to Him and obeying, it's just as lawless as those "Christians" who we identify as being in open rebellion towards God.

- Habitual sin brings forth questions about a person's faith

No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

As I often say - and it gets worse. Habitual sin should be something that is just no part of a Christian. In fact if someone is going around claiming to be a Christian yet habitually sins then you've got to question whether that person is a Christian at all. If sin is lawlessness- wilful disobedience - then what should we make of a wilfully disobedient "Christian"? A bit strong? Sin is an awful thing to God and if we don't take sin seriously then we haven't understood salvation at all. This was designed to jolt these believers out of their complacency - and us too. But it gets even worse.

- Habitual sin is a mark of the devil

But to John things are black and white. If a person is habitually sinful - that is they do the same sin all the time, they can't possibly be a child of God:

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 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. 9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Habitual sin can be anything. Nothing is too insignificant to be habitual. If you are a gossip - it's habitual. If you bear a grudge - that's habitual. If you tell white lies - that's habitual.

Why is scripture so dogmatic here. We all sin don't we? Yes we do but we have to realise what an abhorrence sin is to God. It should not be something we entertain. We repent when we know we have sinned because God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Remember that those were the words of chapter 1:9 that I love to quote at communion. But this is referring to habitual sin - continuing in sin. And it's this sin that must have no part of our lives because habitual sin is a mark of the devil. No messing, no arguing.

Where does that leave us. We are children of God. That's something we need to praise God for. It's something we need to be proud of. It's something we should live to. We are the children of God - we can't live as children of the devil. But is God pointing out to us some habitual sin in our lives today.

He may be putting the spotlight on some area of disobedience in our lives. The sins that damage our relationship with a holy Father are rarely big and public. They are our private thoughts and feelings - our dislikes and prejudices about people, our own selfishness, our disobedience of God, our failure to listen to what He is saying to us.

But they are an abhorrence before God. We may stand and make judgements about the appointment of gay bishops, or about politicians, or about church leaders. But we may have disobedience and rebellion in our own lives that needs to be repented of - that only we and God know about.

But don't think that just because only God knows because it's hidden. Our sin always shows in our attitudes and actions whether we like it or not: *Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*

Our actions towards one another say something about us. But do they tell whose child we are? Or are they giving the wrong signal. Let's come in repentance this morning and ask the Holy Spirit to purify us anew and give us the strength to live as who we are, the children of God.

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Scripture Quotes NIV*