

God's love for his children

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- [0 : 0 0] See what kind of love the Father has given 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.
- Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared. But what we know, that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.
- And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure. 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, and no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him.
- Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.
- [1 : 0 6] The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in Him, and He cannot keep sinning, because He has been born of God.
- By this it is evident who are the children of God. 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.
- Let's pray. Lord, we enter into Your presence. Thankful for Your Word, we ask that You might use it to remind us of the great and glorious good news of the gospel.
- We ask that You would quiet our hearts and confirm in us our need of Jesus, and that we would see Him as more glorious.
- And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Some might argue that this week is the hardest week of the year, because people are confronted with the perennial question where there's no end of debate.
- [2 : 1 7] And it is, and I won't ask for a show of hands, but how long, or do you still have your Christmas tree up? How long is it going to go? Or what Christmas tree, right?
- You might be grouchy and saying, I don't even care about Christmas trees. But, of course, some people might be saying, of course, like, why is this even a question?
- I have it up, you know, I might take it down tomorrow. I might take it down on Epiphany, you know, somewhere mid-January, February. But some of us are ready for the new year with all of its challenges, anticipations, projects, and resolutions.
- You know, we're filled with hope and a can-do attitude. And the best way to usher that in is to get that thing out the door with all of its dry needles and burning.
- If you're like me, I can't wait to burn my Christmas tree in January, which apparently is not a good thing. But, or you might be thinking about, I'm going to get that Christmas tree out because it represents all the things that Christmas wasn't.

[3 : 33] And then I wanted it to be. Fights with family members, failures, difficulties of the last year, dissatisfactions, all those things.

And as we take that Christmas tree out, all those things are going to go with it. But this week is more than the question of, should we leave the lights up?

Should we leave the Christmas tree up? Should we take down the decorations and put it in the attic? It's also more than anticipation of looking to a new year.

Anticipation over changing your life. Changing what has gone on. Changing your weight.

Being more thrifty. Even Bible reading. Those are all good things. But inevitably, whenever a new year turns over or we're savoring this time of Christmas, it should cause us to reflect on Christmas's past or this year past or even years.

[4 : 37] And it brings up questions of, am I the same person that I was last Christmas or in years past? Maybe I'm not.

And that frustrates me. In fact, I find myself right smack in the same place as last year. I thought my commitments of 2022 would actually change 2023.

But they haven't. I thought I would be more active. I thought I would be more patient. More connected with family. More organized. I would have maximized my time.

Read more books. Be more disciplined. I thought I would be more stable. I thought I would have more money. I mean, that's what I was promised when I ate all those collards on New Year's Day last year.

But what about your spiritual life? I thought I would love God more. I thought I would be more holy. I thought I wouldn't struggle with that sin anymore.

[5 : 41] And here I find myself again. I thought I would grow. But here I am. I thought I would change. Lord, you've promised me that you would make me more like Christ.

But here I am. Even if the holidays or a new year and all of its resolutions and hope don't cause you to reflect like that or think about those things.

But for most of us, they do. There will be a point this year when you think about that and you reflect back on years past. And we'll need John's words here.

For those times. We need John's words to either confront us in our enthusiasm about planning and work ethic and new strategies.

Or we'll need John's words to comfort us as we struggle because nothing has changed or it doesn't feel like anything has changed. We'll need John's words to shake us in our complacency.

[6 : 48] But not of finances or honey-do-less or quality time with family or fitness. But something that's eminently more important. And that's our faith. Our growth in Christ.

John, you see, is writing to Christians that were struggling with challenges. Both in the world around them. But the situations that had arisen are also causing them questions in their hearts and minds.

And they're saying, if what they're saying is true, then surely I cannot be a Christian. He wants them to have confidence. Not in themselves, but confidence in Christ.

And those situations are causing them to question that. To think, is he really good?

Is what he said really true? Is it true in me? And those are all questions that can resonate with us. But he's calling them to trust in Christ above all else.

[7 : 48] So John, 1 John is this kind of like letter, right? That has one central theme. And he's going to return to it again and again. And it's this. It comes later on in chapter 5. He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of Son of God.

That you may know that you have eternal life. So this morning, we're going to examine that idea. Confidence in Christ in a couple parts. Confidence in a couple parts. Abiding in Christ.

Adoption, which we saw in our confession. And assurance. So abiding in Christ. Adoption and assurance. That first part.

Abiding in Christ. Look with me back at verse 28. He starts like this. And now little children, abide in him. So that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back from him in shame at his coming.

If John was a preacher, and he is, to both them and us, he has one great and glorious point. But we'll get to that in a minute. But the application, he front loads.

[8 : 53] He says, I want you to do this, and then I'm going to explain to you why. Normally, you explain, and then you apply. But he's saying, do this because of what I'm about to tell you.

And he's saying, do this. Abide in Christ. Some have called 1 John and even John himself as a one-point sermon with so many overlapping and underlying subpoints and sections that he returns again to this one point.

And that one point is being confident in Christ. And applying that is living in him and abiding in him. And it's not because John is crazy or he forgets.

It's because that one point is so important. And the application of that point is to abide in him. See, underlying this question of confidence in Christ is this kind of like subpoint of how do we deal with sin?

Does sin shake our confidence in Christ? Because it should shake our confidence in ourselves. But how do we work through that when we're called to be righteous?

[10 : 03] That's what we're talking about this morning. John is writing to a group of people that had two problems going on. One is saying sin doesn't matter at all. In fact, it's not even important anymore.

And then the other issue is some people were saying if you're a Christian, you don't sin any longer anymore. Yeah, that's pretty funny. Because John, he thought that was funny.

And in the first chapter, he goes straight at it. And he says this, that if you think you're a perfect Christian and you don't struggle with sin anymore, in fact, you might not be a Christian at all.

So he's setting the stage for what we see here. That you do still struggle with sin. In fact, you're not a super perfect Christian at some level that no longer struggle.

We see the issue with that. Or that sin isn't a big deal anymore. In fact, it never was. We see the issue with that. John's answer to both of those problems is one.

[11 : 04] And it's abiding in Christ. Remaining in Christ is the answer to bad theology and bad living, bad ethics. Because both of those undermine the message of the gospel.

Because they attack the thing that's most important in the gospel. The role that Christ has played. That Christ and his death on the cross is central to the message of the gospel.

And it's central to the life of the Christian. And when we remove him from the equation, it makes it about us.

Whether we're morphing the gospel and, hey, I can just try harder and root out all my sin. There's effort involved. But it's not effort on your own. Or when we simply disregard sin, then that makes Christ's sacrifice unimportant, boring, uninteresting.

But if we keep the cross of Christ as central to that continuing struggle, we're abiding in him. Now, abiding does two things. And we're going to spend a lot more time this morning on the first two sections.

[12 : 18] And a little bit less time on the third. It does two things. First, it produces confidence. We see that in the text. We trust or have confidence because of Christ.

Because I can't trust in myself. I can trust in the one who's sure. Who he is and what he has done. Now, misplaced confidence in ourselves might seem like it's an issue of our day.

Where we minimize sin and do all those things. But that's not an issue just for our day. It was an issue in John's day as well. When we look to ourselves, we should be struck in realizing, I have no reason to put confidence in myself.

I must put my confidence in Christ. And yet, we still struggle with sin. And it's still there.

But I know my dependence is upon him and not myself. And that confidence might seem kind of foolish, especially on the heels of Christmas.

[13 : 25] Confidence in something that looks so fragile. God was revealed, unveiled in a baby. Confidence in that seems kind of silly.

But it's confidence as we see the gospel unfolding throughout Revelation. From the beginning to the end.

We see confidence in something that looks really silly. Like God coming in human form as a baby. And that confidence causes us not to shrink back.

Because we know he's acted in the past. And we've seen it unfold. And we know that he will work in the future. We will have hope.

Not if Christ will return. But when. We'll have confidence. Even if we're unsure of when. Confidence that he will return and make things right.

[14 : 26] And that view of the future changes how they're, and we, are confident now. That we won't shrink back on that final day. But we'll boldly approach the throne.

Charles Wesley writes this in his hymn, Abide With Me. He describes the confidence as, even though I approach the eternal throne, I will claim the crown through Christ my own.

That's bold confidence in claiming a crown. But not based on who we are. But based on who Christ is. That's the confidence that abiding produces.

But what, okay, so if that's the effect of abiding, what is abiding? It's kind of squishy. It's a nebulous term. I don't, I don't really like that. I like math. And I like logic and progression.

But abiding doesn't really neatly fit in that category. Abiding is having confidence in Christ and remaining in him.

[15 : 27] It also looks like this. In my family, at Christmastime, we love the drink glu vine or mulled wine. It's wine that's combined with sugar and cloves and cinnamon and citrus.

And it's got a lot of sugar in there. And it's mixed all together. And the wine becomes indistinguishable from the sugar or the orange or the cloves or the cinnamon.

It's all combined into one. And it cooks all day. And the ingredients cease to become their individual things. And they're all fused together. They're so identified with each other.

They've been transformed into this new thing. Just like a Christian who's united to Christ. By his Holy Spirit, we are identified with him.

We remain in him and abide in him. So all that was ceases to be. And we are now seen as Christians.

[16 : 34] There's no separation of who we are in our faith. It's one together. And that we're made into something new that's inseparable. That can't but delight in the good news.

That's how abiding gives us confidence. That's what it looks like. But also, abiding looks like this. It looks like righteousness.

How do we know, though, if it's true of us? If I can't see it, I can't feel it? John says, examine yourselves.

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

The second outworking of abiding in Christ is righteousness. His people will be marked by righteousness because Christ is righteous. What's righteousness?

[17 : 35] Simply doing what is right. We have a couple models, right? We have God's law, his moral law in the Ten Commandments. The idea of loving God and loving your neighbor that we see repeated throughout Scripture.

We have even the fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Honoring Christ is holy living. And living holy is evidence of having confidence in Christ. And we have confidence now because of what will happen in the future.

Your life should be changed is what he's saying. You should reflect different priorities than people that don't have faith in Christ. Do you do it perfectly?

No. We'll talk about that in a minute. But it should look like being generous with our time, compassionate, willing to make a meal for a neighbor or offer them to borrow the snowblower or the tool or whatever for the hundredth time, even though you know you might not get it back until you ask.

[18 : 44] Willing to invite people into our home and being gracious with them, being concerned for those things that the world sees as unlovable, but God's Word says are really important.

It's having a different set of priorities or concerns. It's ruthless for the truth. It's speech that's marked by temperance.

It's not going along with the crowd or in class. Not getting concerned who the line leader is for the day when you come back from Christmas break.

It's comfort for those who need help. It's mirroring the conduct of God in yourself, in your life.

That's what righteousness looks like. Abiding in Christ is marked by confidence and righteousness. But why is John calling them to abide in Christ?

[19 : 49] It's living out of this thing that's called adoption. When we talk about righteousness or holy living, it can be a tricky thing, right? Abiding in Christ is what he's called us to.

John's not saying this right living, though, is the source of confidence. It's simply an outworking of abiding. It's an outworking of what appears in chapter three, verse one.

Read with me. 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 does not know him.

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, and because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. This idea of adoption, of being made sons and daughters, brought into God's family, comes not from righteous living, but comes from what?

[20 : 58] The text tells us from love. All these former things, abiding, confidence, righteous living, flow from being, well, becoming children of God.

And we're made children by God's love, not by our righteous living. God's love has been given to the Christian. It flows and forms us and transforms us.

And our identity as sons and daughters, as children of God, comes from God's love. Sports, whether you're like them or not, are used by schools all over the country, all over the world.

And oftentimes, they're programs that are instilled at a university or even a high school to form a sense of identity. This is us, and we can delight in this, whether we're participating or cheering them on, and that is them.

We do that way, we do that in a number of ways in our society. Think about the military. Transforms people to a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, by common training, a common experience.

[22 : 09] Same is true of fraternities or clubs. This common experience unites people together and gives them an identity. So whether it's the military or fraternities or civic organizations, identity is important.

And the identity of Christians is not one of sinners, but their identity is as children of God. And love makes them children.

J.I. Packer calls this the crowning blessing of the Christian life, adoption into God's family, where you receive all those things, inheritance, benefits, blessings.

And all of this is made to happen because of the work of the Holy Spirit regenerating you, making you new, being born again. We see Jesus talking to Nicodemus like that.

He can't be who he was before, but he is this new person. And that whole process of being included in God's family because of love is called adoption. Now that's a simple fact.

[23 : 15] We all know this from modern life, but we often overlook it. That our righteousness or our attempts at it don't make us lovely in God's sight.

God's love is the thing that makes us children. That's what makes us acceptable. And that's the basis of our transformation. Just as we've confessed this morning, love has brought us into the fold and given us all those privileges, inheritance, a name, confidence, an identity, a people, and hope, all because of God's marvelous love.

It's this grand theology that's summed up in this simple song. Jesus loves me. This I know. That is the basis for our standing as Christians is God's love towards us.

But what happens in this verse? Is it all sunshine and rainbows and unicorns now that we're loved and accepted as children of God? No.

In fact, the first thing that happens, even in verse one, the world does not know us and then it did not know Him.

[24 : 38] There's challenges immediately. The promises of trouble and toil, the world will give you trouble because you are loved, because of that love.

That doesn't mean the Father loves us any less. But trial, scorn, pain, it doesn't mean that the follower of Christ is cut off from God.

In fact, John says, it mirrors the life of Jesus Himself. Jesus promised that in the Gospels. These are His words. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as one of its own. Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Because you are hated by the world is not an indication that God doesn't love you. In fact, John says, it's a distinguishing mark of being a follower of Christ.

[25 : 40] Hard times does not mean God hates you. So adoption gives us persecution, but it also gives us future hope.

Their status as children has benefits now to their current situation. It promises persecution, but it also gives us confidence.

He reminds us of that in verse 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.

That is a great hope for the future. That when all these things, all these sadnesses of Christmas will be undone, that when we will see what no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor heart of man imagined, God has prepared that for us.

But in the midst of that hope, that future hope, we are also purified. We're made pure by Christ by our faith in Him. And that confidence might be shaken, but it's not undone.

[26 : 57] We might return again to sin, even though we're called righteous, even when we're called to live in righteousness.

But one day, it will be perfect. That's the story of the Christian life, is that what we experience right now and what we see right now is hard, and it's not perfect.

And we want it to be something that it's not. But one day, it will be perfect. perfect. We should have a sense of a holy wrestling.

We should feel a sense that it's incomplete. And that we should long for something more. We should long for heaven. Until then, and in that day, we must be reminded that we are made pure by God's love through faith in Christ.

Love has made us a child that we're no longer slaves, but children adopted into God's family. It's a good reminder of the work of adoption in the Christian church today.

[28 : 05] Whether you're adopted, there's difficulty in things in all of that. Whether you're moving through the process of adoption, we're reminded in that picture that that child brings nothing to the table, but receives status.

Receives a name even. Even though they might not look like them, even though they might not have the privileges, they might not have wealth to buy or skills to perform, anything that brings glory to that family.

But love is the thing that makes them a child. Love is the thing that makes a Christian a child of God. Abiding is what we do because we are loved and adopted in God's family.

But there's this lingering question. How do I know? How do I have assurance? Assurance is kind of synonymous of what we talked about.

Hope, confidence. confidence. Something for the present because of what will be in the future. John's focus has been on holy living and righteousness as a means for this change in status of a Christian's faith.

[29 : 23] And he's done this a couple times. He said, hey, if you're righteous, it means that you have faith in the righteous one. He's tied those two together. Or he'll state here at the end in the negative.

If you practice lawlessness, you're probably not a Christian. It's not because of your faith be righteous. Instead, it's you're not a Christian if you're marked by sin.

And the model for fleeing from sin, from lawlessness, is Christ. That's the person that we should emulate. Why? Because in him there is no sin.

Look at that last section, verses 8 through 10. He kind of turns that idea over and over again. Now in our day, just like in John's day, we don't like to speak of sin.

We don't like it. We don't want to talk about it. In fact, we want to minimize or downplay it. But this is a real battle. John reminds us of that. As far as the east is from the west, from dark to light, are Christ and the devil.

[30 : 31] And often, we're comfortable talking about our own sins or failings, but not the devil. But this has been from the beginning, from the garden, where the devil, and even Jesus confesses this himself in the gospel, he's come to defeat the devil.

The lines are clearly drawn and there is no gray. They're battle lines. And they fall along righteousness. The Christian's new reality as an adopted child gives us confidence in that battle.

And it should be marked by love for one another and righteousness. But here's the struggle. We know that we still have sin. So what do we do with that? Those words are hard to hear because they introduce this problem in our mind that I am called to be righteous, but I know that I'm not.

Am I on the wrong side of this battle? Am I on the wrong side of this war? What is John really saying? Is John saying that a Christian, a true Christian, must be sinlessly perfect?

Very clearly, no. Remember, he's writing to a church that said, hey, we don't sin anymore at all now that we're Christians. We know that's not true.

[31 : 58] And sin is not important. We know that's not true. He said this back in chapter one. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

A follower of Christ is sinful and we continue to sin, but we're called to righteousness. And that disconnect should drive us to the advocate, should drive us to the throne of grace, should drive us again and again to the gospel.

But John here is talking about righteousness as assurance, as a mark of our lives. If we're marked by unbridled sin, if that doesn't bother us, that's a problem.

That's what he's saying. If we have no concern for God's law, no concern for our brother, no love for him, that's a concern. But yet, we're still gonna struggle with sin.

We are not perfectly righteous because we are still marching onward towards heaven. Instead, a Christian's life looks like this, one that's pursuing what he wrote back in chapter one.

[33 : 06] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That is what John is calling them to.

And yet, we still struggle with sin. But we go to the advocate. We go to Christ's throne because he intercedes before the Father.

A Christian is adopted in God's family. He's abiding. He's pursuing righteousness. He is marked by some amount of righteousness. Not perfectly, but pursuing.

He's confessing his sin and returning again to the gospel message to know that my assurance is not in myself, but in what Christ has done.

The question is for us, is that true of us? Are we marked by those things? Or are we more apt to put it at bay, to keep it in that box and not turn it over and examine our own lives?

[34 : 16] Christian, this morning, abide in Christ. Savor the good news. Be confident in affliction. Be hopeful that this life is not as it should be, but one day it will be.

We should long for our eternal home. Love righteousness. Love God's word. Be thankful of his love towards you and bringing you into the fold and as we long for glory, be assured of Christ's love to you in the gospel.

Not our plans, not our programs, not our work, our schemes, our devices make this new year great, but resting and receiving as a child of God.

That transforms the wanting of this Christmas or Christmases in the past and gives us strength for a new year ahead. Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful this day for what you've given us, your word, your word that shows us who Christ truly is for the good news of Jesus.

May we live and savor that at Christmas and the days throughout the year. May we not be discouraged if we find ourselves in the same place with the same sin and the same struggles, but may we long for heaven as we pursue righteousness and be confident in Christ and him alone.

[35 : 53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.