

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 5: Children of God -- 1 John 2:28-3:10

Stop and let one sentence land on you the way John meant it to: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." John can hardly get the words out without exclaiming. He is not stating a doctrine so much as marveling at a gift. The God who flung the galaxies into being, the Holy One in whom there is no darkness at all, has stooped down and called us His own children. And it is not flattery or a figure of speech. So we are.

Think of what that name carries. A child shares the family likeness. A child has an inheritance. A child belongs, is wanted, is named. John says the world does not understand us, and no wonder, for it did not understand the Father either. We are misfits here because we belong to Another. And the best is still ahead: "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." The family resemblance is still developing. One day it will be complete.

But John will not let this stay sentimental. The same passage that overflows with the love of the Father turns and presses a searching question: if we are God's children, why would we go on living like children of the devil? He draws a sharp line. Those born of God do not make a practice of sin; those who keep on practicing sin show whose family they really belong to. Family likeness is not just a feeling; it shows up in how we live.

So this passage holds two things we must never pull apart. On one side, the breathtaking love that names us God's children even now, and the hope of being made like Christ. On the other, the call to purity that such love and such hope awaken: "everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Beloved children, becoming like their Father. That is the vision. The question for each of us is whether the family likeness is actually growing.

Group Discussion: John marvels that we are called children of God, and then immediately connects that identity to how we live. Why do you think it is so easy to celebrate God's love for us while quietly disconnecting it from the way we actually behave?

Personal Reflection: John says the hope of one day being like Christ leads us to purify ourselves now. Is there an area of your life where the hope of seeing Jesus face to face would change what you are doing today if you really took it to heart?

Read 1 John 2:28-3:10

Study Questions

1. John urges us to “abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming” (2:28). What does this teach us about how we should live now in light of Christ’s return, and what is the difference between confidence and shame at His coming?
2. John speaks of having “confidence and not shrink[ing] from him in shame at his coming” (2:28). When you honestly imagine standing before Jesus, do you lean toward confidence or toward dread, and what is that telling you about your walk with Him right now?
3. John exclaims, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (3:1). What does it mean to be a child of God, and how does this identity differ from the common idea that everyone is automatically a child of God?
4. John says the world does not know us because it did not know Christ (3:1). Where do you feel out of step with the world because you belong to God, and are you tempted to blur that difference in order to fit in?
5. John says, “what we will be has not yet appeared,” but “when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (3:2). What does this teach about the Christian’s hope and final destiny, and how is this different from a vague hope of merely going somewhere nice when we die?
6. John says everyone who has this hope “purifies himself as he is pure” (3:3). What does it look like, practically, for the hope of being like Christ to be actively purifying your daily choices, rather than being a comfort you only think about at funerals?
7. John writes that the Son of God “appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin” (3:5), and “to destroy the works of the devil” (3:8). What does this teach about why Jesus came, and how do His sinlessness and His mission shape the way we understand salvation?
8. John says that everyone who abides in Christ does not keep on sinning (3:6). Where in your life have you quietly made peace with a sin, treating it as just how you are, rather than as something Christ came to take away?
9. John draws a sharp line: those “born of God” do not “make a practice of sinning,” while those who do are “of the devil” (3:8–10). How do we rightly understand this, as describing the direction and practice of a transformed life, without turning it into either a claim of sinless perfection or a license to sin because we are forgiven?
10. Look back across this passage, from the love that names us God’s children, to the hope of being like Christ, to the call to purity. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this passage, into a child who more and more bears the family likeness of the Father.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 1:12–13, the right to become children of God to those who receive Him; Romans 8:14–17, the Spirit of adoption and our inheritance as children and heirs; 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1, God’s promise to be our Father and the call to cleanse ourselves; Titus

2:11–14, grace that trains us to renounce ungodliness while we await His appearing; 1 John 3:1–3 alongside Colossians 3:1–4, our life hidden with Christ and revealed at His appearing.