

*I want to begin by telling you this true story about the oregano plant, the Large Blue butterfly, and the red ants. I think most of us have containers of oregano in our kitchens, especially if you like cooking Italian or Mexican food, and as you may know, oregano has a warm pungent smell – a smell that some people really like, but in nature, that same smell given off by the plant serves as an insecticide which is supposed to keep insects from munching on it. Like most insects, the red ants don't like the repulsive fumes given off by the oregano plant, but taking advantage of it, they will build their nests close by the plant for protection and to avoid competition from other rival insects. So, those are some smart ants.*

*Well, sensing the red ants are nearby, and don't ask me how, the oregano plant increases its output of fumes, which just so happens to attract the adult Large Blue butterfly. It lays its eggs on the plant, and eventually a caterpillar larva emerges, and by mimicking the ant larvae and by chemically cloaking itself in the scent that seems like an ant, it fools the ants into thinking it's one of their own that has wandered away from the nest. So, the ants pick it up and put it in their nursery to care for it.*

*Once in the nursery, the caterpillar starts clucking — a sound that imitates the queen ant, which ensures the ants will leave the caterpillar alone while it grows up to become a beautiful Large Blue butterfly.*

*That sounds like a sweet nature story, maybe something from a Disney movie – these ants are saving and caring for this poor little caterpillar – it touches the heart, but what these ants don't realize is that while the caterpillar has made itself at home in their nursery, it's gorging on the surrounding ant larvae.*

For several weeks now, we have been studying a letter from the Apostle John to the early church where he has been confronting the Gnostics. Like the caterpillar brought into the ants' nest – these false preachers and teachers and missionaries crept inside the church. They seemed like Christians, they talked like Christians, they rubbed elbows with Christians but they subtly spread a deceptive and dangerous gospel, which really wasn't a gospel at all for they rejected the truth of *who* Jesus is and *what* He had done, they offered a distorted view of sin, and they created confusion and doubt about salvation and the hope of eternal life to those who believe. It was a problem back then and it's a problem today, and therefore, we must be very careful of *who* and *what* we allow into our lives, for before we know it – damage is being had from the inside out.

This morning we are continuing with this letter from the Apostle John, so if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 3** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

**<sup>1</sup>See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

Last week I ended with a summary of what John was telling the church,

*“Listen my children, because we are born of God, because we know the gospel truth, because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, because Jesus is coming for us – abide in Him, be at home with Him and live your lives in such a way that people can see the family resemblance to your heavenly Father, and when Jesus appears – you will be approaching Him in confidence.”*

Those were some encouraging words from John, and now he shares the basis for these words by explaining *who we are, what we will be, and what we should be*.

John begins by saying, *“check this out – how great a love the Father has bestowed on us.”*

Those words **“how great,”** and in other versions it may read “what manner” come from a single word in the Greek translated “*potapos*” which literally means “*from what country*” and it speaks to something that is foreign and wonderful to us. In this context, John speaks of a love that’s above us – it’s beyond us – it’s unlike anything we know.

It’s a love that is out of this world, so to speak – it’s a sacrificial love, it’s an unconditional love, it’s an unrestricted love, it’s a love poured out on us, and it’s a love that God proved beyond any shadow of doubt in the Person and in the finished work of Jesus Christ – and not only that, God took His love a step further – He chose us, He brought us as close as we could possibly get, and He adopted us as His very own. He calls us – **children of God**, and therefore, we are invited to call Him **Father**.

In spite of who we used to be, God loves us because He wants to love us – His love is given to those who do not deserve it – it can’t be earned, and on the basis of that love – we are His children. That’s *who we are* – we have His name, we are to reflect His character and nature, and as a result, **the world** – referring to this sinful

human-centered system in which we live, **does not know us because it does not know Him.** Those who are of this world are at odds with God and the same goes for His children.

As children of God, we should not expect the world to understand or appreciate our relationship with God because the world does not know Him. It can't understand why we seek to be different – it can't understand why we don't enjoy what they enjoy – it can't understand why we turn away from the activities they openly embrace – it can't understand why we seek to honor and please God.

*A group of teenagers were enjoying a party, and someone suggested that they go to a certain club for a good time, but Jan said to her date, "I'd rather you took me home, my parents don't approve of that place."*

*"Afraid your father will hurt you?" one of the teenagers asked.*

*"No," Jan replied, "I'm not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him."*

Sure, she felt like an odd ball, but because of her love relationship to her father, she had no desire to betray that love. In like manner, because of the great love of God for us, because we are children of God, because He is our heavenly Father, we don't want to sin against Him and betray the love He has poured out on us.

So, if you seem like an odd ball, if you feel like stranger in this world, if you don't seem popular in the company of this world, if you feel uneasy around the godless activity the world flaunts in your face – then praise God, that's how it should be.

In **verse 1**, John told us *who we are* – we are children of God, now in **verse 2**, John tells us *what we will be*. He says,

**Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.**

God's love for us does not stop with the new birth. It continues throughout our lives and takes us right up to the Lord's return. One day when Jesus appears, all true believers will see Him and **will be like Him** – in that we will be transformed and given new glorified bodies which are suited for heaven.

The Apostle Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 15**, beginning with **verse 49**,

*<sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. <sup>50</sup> Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. <sup>55</sup> **O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**” <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We have a promised hope that one day we will see Jesus face to face and be transformed into His likeness. Now, this transformation process has already begun as we walk with Him and take on His character and nature, but it will finally be complete when we see Him. No, we will not be *equal* to Jesus, and we will not be *identical* to Jesus, but we will be **like** Jesus in glorified bodies – without the limitations of these physical bodies, and our personal character will be perfected in Christlikeness.

Because we are children of God and we will be like Jesus when He appears, John tells us *what we should be* now. He says in **verse 3**,

**And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

In this verse John explains that our *future* hope in Christ should have an influence on our *present life*, or said in another way, the Lord’s promised return for us should keep us on our toes. While we wait, while we hope, we are to start acting like who we truly are now.

*When I was a teenager living under my parents’ roof, occasionally my father would tell me before I went out, “Remember whose name you carry.” **What did he mean by that?** My last name is not a royal name, it’s not a name for the history books, there’s nothing special about it as far as I can tell, but what my father was saying was that I represented someone other than myself – I represented him. I carried his family name, and what I said and what I did would be a reflection on him – on his character and on his reputation. In essence, my father was saying “Remember whose child you are.”*

As Christians, we represent our Savior and Lord, and while we wait for Him, we are to be mindful of who we truly are – children of God.

Now, we come to a section that has prompted a lot of discussion and debate amongst Bible scholars, so, if you have a difficult time understanding this section, don't fret – you're in good company. Beginning with **verse 4**, John says,

**<sup>4</sup>Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.**

This is one of those passages that will cause you to swallow your chewing gum if you're not careful. At first glance, it's troubling because John says, "*No one who abides in Christ sins.*" It's troubling because we know we sin – we wrestle with it, that's the stark reality for each of us, in fact, John already told us back in the first chapter that we sin – actually going so far to explain that if we say we have not sinned, we are deceiving ourselves and even calling God a liar because He said – for all have sinned.

So, if Christians do sin, if that is our starting point, **then what in the world is John telling us here?** Well, to understand this passage, we first need to understand a word in this passage – a word used several times – and it's the word "**practice.**"

In the Greek, the word "**practice**" is translated "*poieó*" and it speaks of a willful habitual action – and when referring to sin, John is talking about a person's normal way of life which is characterized by deliberate and persistent and continual sinfulness. Yes, a Christian will commit sin, but they will not practice it, they will not live in it. Here's a way to picture it:

*A pig and a sheep may fall into the same dirty mud hole, but there is a difference. The pig will love it and wallow in it, because that's its nature. The sheep will want to get out and avoid that mud hole the next time, because it has a different nature.*

*If God abides in you – if you are a child of God, you don't want to wallow in the mud, but if you like it in the mud and don't want to get out of it, then you can claim to be a sheep all day – but John would say you might be a pig.*

Now in **verse 4**, John explains that the practice of sin is the practice of **lawlessness**, and lawlessness is best described as the flagrant disregard of God's law – His moral standards – which in the end boils down to a disregard of the Law

Giver – God Himself. Remember, sin is ultimately against God and to knowingly live in sin is to live in open rebellion against Him, and what makes that even more startling is the fact that in His great love, God sent His own Son to a cross to **take away** our sin. That’s how serious sin is – no matter how the world wants to minimize it – to live in sin is to rebel against God and to betray His great love for us.

So, here’s the bottom line – if we are truly children of God, we cannot live as we once did, we cannot live a lifestyle of willful and deliberate and habitual sin – for if we do, John is absolutely clear – there is a need for some serious soul searching because it appears you do not know God and salvation never took place in your life. Charles Spurgeon summed it up best when He said, “*The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.*” Well said.

Now, John is not done and he makes a very serious contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. He points out that there are only two kinds of children in this world – those who belong to God and those who belong to Satan – meaning it’s either/or – there’s not a third group for those who just want to ride the fence, because there is no fence to ride. John says beginning with **verse 7**,

**<sup>7</sup>Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup>the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup>No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. <sup>10</sup>By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.**

One of the aims of these false preachers and teachers and missionaries in the early church was to convince people that a life of righteousness really wasn’t that important. They pushed their deceptive claim that one’s lifestyle was not a true reflection of their spiritual condition, but here John pushes back even harder.

He explains that if you are a child of God, then it should be evident in the way you live your life, but if you habitually live like the devil, it doesn’t matter what you say – you are a child of the devil.

For John, our *behavior* reveals *who* we are or better yet, it reveals *whose* we are – something that Jesus taught. He said in **Luke 6**, beginning with **verse 43**,

*<sup>43</sup> For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. <sup>44</sup> For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. <sup>45</sup> The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.*

If you are abiding in Christ and His word is abiding in you – it will be evident in your life as good fruit. Again, our lives show *who* we are and they show *whose* we are.

As children of God, we are to bear a family resemblance to our heavenly Father and it should be evident in our lives, but for those who practice sin, they show they are not born of God – they are children of the devil. You cannot be a child of God and yet willfully and consistently live like the devil. That’s what these deceptive teachers were claiming, and for John, that’s an impossibility.

Now just as a reminder, John is not teaching that we must be sinless in order to be Christian. He’s already talked about that in the first chapter. Christians will not be sinlessly perfect. We sin – period, but what John is talking about are those who claim to be Christian, but their normal manner of lives is characterized by willful and deliberate and habitual sin. In essence, they live their lives as if God does not matter, and John would say – *“It’s no wonder, for they have another father.”*

For the Christian, John says God’s **seed** abides in them. The seed may be the Spirit of God or the Word of God or the divine nature of God – or it could be all three, but whatever the case, this seed – in time and with cultivation takes root – in time and with cultivation it sprouts – and in time and with cultivation fruit is produced. This speaks of life – the direction of life of a true child of God, and if God has imparted new life to you, so that you have become His child, you cannot continue living in sin. The truth is, anybody can sin who *wants* to sin, but if you are a child of God, you will have new *wants* and it will show.

If God’s seed abides in you, you cannot wallow in the mud, and if you like it in the mud and don’t want to get out it, you need to ask who’s your daddy.

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