

1 John 2:28-3:8      “Abiding in Him: Righteousness and Sin”      February 20, 2011

read 2:15-3:10

Last time we heard that Antichrist is coming – and now is.

John said this to encourage a church  
that had endured a painful division over false teaching.

Tonight we hear about the coming of Christ –  
and particularly the *appearing* of Christ.

Each of our three sections tonight uses the word “phanerow” – or “appearing”  
(2:28, 3:2 (twice), 3:5, 3:8).

John uses the word 9 times in his epistle –

twice in 1:2 “the life was made manifest [or appeared],  
and we have seen it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life,  
which was with the Father and was manifest [or appeared] to us.”

Once in 2:19 – the antichrists went out from us  
“that it might become plain [appear] that they all are not of us.”

And once in 4:9,  
“In this the love of God was made manifest [appeared] among us...”

In other words, at the beginning and the end of John’s epistle  
he speaks of the “appearing” of Christ in the flesh –  
in the incarnation of the Son of God.

But here, in the middle of John’s epistle,  
he speaks of the “appearing” of Christ in terms of his future coming.

### **1. Knowing Him: Abiding in Him Means Practicing Righteousness (2:28-29)**

<sup>28</sup>*And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

John wants them to have confidence in the day of his coming.

The Greek word for confidence is ‘parresia’ –  
the Greek word for coming is ‘parousia.’  
Parresia (confidence, fearlessness) is contrasted with “shame.”

The one who abides in Christ may have confidence at the coming of Christ  
The one who does not abide in Christ will shrink from him in shame.

We tend not to like to talk about “shame” these days –  
but we need to acknowledge that there will be dishonor at the final day  
for those who incur God’s displeasure.

What does John mean by this?

Verse 29 helps us understand that abiding in him means practicing righteousness.

<sup>29</sup>*If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

This is the first of three uses of the word “righteousness” in John –  
all three come in the passage we read tonight  
(2:29, 3:7, 3:10)

In 3:7 we are told “whoever practices righteousness is righteous,  
as he is righteous.”

And in 3:10 we are told “whoever does not practice righteousness  
is not of God.”

Doing righteousness is at the heart of what it means to abide in Christ.

Note – John does not say that doing righteousness is a prerequisite  
to being born of him;  
rather, he says that practicing righteousness is *evidence*  
that you have been born of him.

John assumes that you know what righteousness is:  
it means that you do what is right!

You act in a manner that is consistent with God’s righteous character.

After all, the idea here is that you are a child of God.  
You have been *born of him*.  
And a son looks like his father.

Therefore doing what is right *includes* both loving God and neighbor.

No unbeliever can be righteous in this respect.

If you worship something other than the living and true God,  
then you are an idolater –

and no idolater can be said to “practice righteousness.”

But everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

Scripture uses two different sorts of “sonship” language:

adoption (e.g., Romans 8)  
and new birth (here).

And there are reasons why both are important:

the theme of adoption is important because it highlights the fact  
that we were at one time *not* part of the family,  
but God has adopted us in Jesus Christ,  
and so now we *are* part of the family.

But the theme of the new birth is important because it highlights  
how thoroughly we are made part of the family.

An adopted son is legally part of the family,  
but an adopted son will always resemble his biological parents.

John says that the one who practices righteousness has been “born of him” –  
because the children of God now resemble him.

You are not just a son of the devil who has been given legal standing in the family of God  
You are not an alien with residency papers in the city of God.  
You have been (1 Peter 1:3-4) “born again to a living hope  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,  
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”

The sonship theme comes out even more prominently in chapter 3.

## **2. Seeing Him: the Purifying Hope of God’s Children (3:1-3)**

<sup>1</sup>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 did not know him. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us”

John is pre-eminently the apostle of love.

The gospel of John uses agape and agapao (the noun and the verb)  
twice as often than any other book of the NT.

And 1 John, which is less than ¼ the length of John’s gospel,  
uses this language of love *more often* than John’s gospel!

There are 46 uses of agape and agapao in 1 John.

Only 6 appear in the first two chapters.

That means there are 40 uses coming up in the last three chapters!

But John introduces this theme in chapter three by saying

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us...”

It could also be translated “how great a love” –  
so it is very definitely a very good kind of love!

Which you immediately see in the way he describes it:

“that we should be called children of God” –  
and not just “called” children of God,  
but *we are* children of God.

Of course, it would be easy to say, “children of God indeed!”

God sent his own son to die –

and Jesus’ message is that his disciples also will be persecuted –  
so why would anyone want to be “children of God”!?

This is why John immediately points out that  
“the world does not know us...because it did not know him.”  
The world will treat us the way the world treated Jesus.  
The reason why the world is hostile is because they hated Jesus.  
The world does not acknowledge the Father –  
and they have demonstrated this in their rejection of the Son,  
and in their rejection of those who belong to the Son.  
This is why people will reject you and treat you like dirt!

That may not sound very encouraging at first!  
But remember that the cross is not the end of the story:  
The athlete knows that the pain and discipline of training  
will result in glory at the end.  
Even so, John points us beyond the pain and suffering of this life  
to the appearing of Jesus.

Notice here that the “appearing” of Christ will also result in *our* appearing!  
This is very similar to Paul’s language in Romans 8 –  
the revelation of the sons of God there  
and the manifestation (appearing) of the children of God here.  
The fundamental point that John makes  
is the basic similarity between the believer and Christ.  
We are like Jesus now:  
“the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”  
Jesus said that the servant is not greater than his master.  
Do not be surprised when the world hates you.  
And we will be like Jesus “when he appears.”  
In other words, *now* we share in his sufferings; *then* we will share in his glory.  
When Christ – who is your life – appears,  
you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4)  
*But* what we will be has not yet appeared –  
because Jesus has not yet appeared!

But when he appears  
we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

There’s that language of “seeing” again.

We saw a couple weeks ago that John warned against  
the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.  
I suggested then that the lust of the eyes has to do with spiritual vision –  
what are you looking for?  
What are you curious about?

Here in 1 John 3:1-3, we see another example of how John thinks about “seeing.”  
We will be like him because we will see him as he is.

That's an interesting way of saying it!

Plainly, "seeing" means more than what you see with your eyes.

After all, everyone will "see" him.

Every eye will see, every ear will hear, every tongue will confess...

But we will see him *as he is*.

This is a spiritual vision that sees things as they really are.

If you love the world and the things in the world;

if the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life

is what drives you,

then you will not see Him.

This spiritual vision is called "hope" in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup>*And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

In other words, what we have in this life is hope.

We do not have glory in this life (at least, not very much!).

Martin Luther contrasted the theology of glory with the theology of the cross.

He argued that the church in his day had lost sight of the cross.

As Robert Kolb puts it,

"medieval systems of theology all sought to present a God

whose glory consisted in fulfilling what in fact

are fallen human standards for divine success:

a God who could make his might known,

could knock heads and straighten people out

when they got out of line,

even, perhaps especially, at human expense." (Kolb, p4)

In other words, they wanted a God in the tough, no-nonsense

image of the medieval kings.

This also resulted in a God who expected his people to be like him.

Human performance thus becomes a central focus in a theology of glory.

Today, the terms have changed, but the problem is the same.

We have a "theology of glory" –

we expect that life should be good,

and that God should make it so!

We have a therapeutic God who exists to make us feel better –

and so therefore the church is to look like its God,

and so we are here to make other people feel better!

In contrast, Luther offered the theology of the cross –

*not* an insistence on the importance of suffering

(that, after all, can be a particularly ironic sort of theology of glory:  
“Because I suffered, I am now worthy!”  
but an all-consuming focus on *the cross of Christ!*

“In the cross God has rendered his verdict upon sin:  
it is evil, and it must be destroyed” (Kolb, 12)

The theology of the cross redirects us from our obsession with our own situations,  
and directs our gaze to the cross –  
where God dealt once for all with sin and death,

God is not a medieval potentate who rewards his devoted servants with land and plunder!  
But neither is he the modern therapist who only wants us to feel good.

As Luther put it,

“God can be found only in suffering and the cross...  
the cross is good and works are evil,  
for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam,  
who is especially edified by works, is crucified.  
It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works  
unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil  
until he knows that he is worthless  
and that his works are not his but God’s.” (Hberg Disputation, 21)

The cross strikes at the heart of all our self-centeredness,  
because in the cross we see how awful our sin is!  
In the cross we see that the only way that God could bring us into fellowship with himself  
was through the death – the shameful death – of his Son.

The cross reveals that *the true God* is not at all  
the sort of God we would like him to be!

[You do realize, don’t you, that you have no say in who God is?]

I sat at Fiddler’s Hearth one day and listened to a group of pastors  
as they went through various parts of the scriptures  
insisting that God could not have inspired such hateful things,  
and that therefore whole chunks of scripture could be disregarded  
as culturally irrelevant to our enlightened age.

Not surprisingly, their whole conversation revolved around  
what the church should be doing in dealing with social problems.  
There was no discussion of sin, salvation, or the cross.

But if you have this hope –  
this confidence that when he appears – you also will appear with him –  
then, as John puts it,

“everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

This eschatological hope serves as a catalyst for ethical behavior now.

Notice again that John does not say

that ethical behavior results in eschatological hope –

but the other way around.

The cross stands at the heart of the Christian life.

Because my hope is Jesus – the crucified and resurrected Son of God –  
therefore I purify myself.

(I should point out that this word is used in John’s gospel and Acts  
to refer to the ceremonial purifications in the temple.

It was often used in the LXX to refer to the purification or consecration  
of the people, the Levites, or the priests.

It is also used in 1 Peter 1:22 and James 4:8

to refer to how Christians should purify themselves from sin.

And this sets up John’s central concern in this section:

### **3. Abiding in Him: Why Sinning Is Inconsistent with Abiding in Him (3:4-8)**

*<sup>4</sup>Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.*

(Do you see how John again connects seeing and knowing?

The one who keeps on sinning lacks spiritual vision)

But the point in verses 4-6 is relentless!

Christ appeared to take away sin – and in him there is no sin.

Therefore sin is utterly inconsistent for the one who abides in him!

But the point is also rather disturbing:

Verse 6 literally reads,

“Every one who abides in him sins not;

everyone who sins has not seen him or known him.”

By translating it “keeps on sinning” the ESV tries to communicate  
the ongoing aspect of the present tense;

but this is something of an overstatement.

The translators want you to understand that John is not saying

that if you commit *one sin*

then you do not know Christ.

The key, however, to understand what John is saying  
is found in his identification of sin as lawlessness.  
The Psalms regularly use this word “lawlessness” (anomia)  
to refer to those who are implacably opposed to God.  
Anomia is the word Ezekiel uses to describe the wickedness of Jerusalem.  
Indeed, the LXX uses it to translate the Hebrew word for “abominations”  
six times in Ezekiel 8, and seven times in Ezekiel 16.

John says that the one who practices sin practices lawlessness.  
And this is utterly inconsistent with what it means to abide in him.

You know that he appeared to take away sins, right?  
Christ’s appearing – his coming in the flesh –  
was so that he might destroy the works of the devil.  
And in him there is no sin.  
Therefore, if you abide in him – if you are in him –  
there should be no sin in you!

*No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or knows him.*

My quibble with the ESV translation is that it takes away the shock value.  
If you abide in him, you won’t sin.  
If you sin, you don’t know him!

That may sound shocking –  
but it’s nothing less than the truth!

Insofar as you are sinning, you are not abiding in him!  
After all, there is no darkness in him –  
so if there is darkness in you,  
then in that degree, you are not in him!  
And insofar as you are sinning, you do not know him.  
If you really knew him – if you really saw him with that spiritual vision  
that John contrasts with the “lusts of the eyes” –  
then you would not sin.

And then John drives it home in verses 7-8:

*<sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

There is no place for sin in the Christian life.  
Every time you sin you are denying that you know him.  
Every time you sin you are claiming to be a slave of the devil!

Now, the ESV is on to something here.

You may have noticed that the ESV uses the word “practice” a lot.  
This is the Greek word “poieo” –  
to make, to do, to work...

John wants to distinguish between “the one who sins” (e.g. 2:1)  
and “the one who practices sin” (e.g. 3:4, 3:8, 3:9).

John recognizes that Christians sin.

Indeed, he even recognizes that Christians “have” sin (1:8) –  
in other words, that sin is a condition that afflicts us.

In John’s gospel, every time John speaks of demonic affliction  
he says that they “have” demons.

In a similar way, John says, Christians “have” sin.

But the Christian cannot *practice* sin.

Rather, the Christian *practices* righteousness –  
and therefore is righteous as he is righteous.

Because Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus is the sinless one.

He is the righteous one.

And because Jesus came in the flesh,

because Jesus came as the atoning sacrifice –

the propitiation for the sins of the world –

because he has destroyed the works of the devil,

therefore the one who is “in him”

the one who has been born of him,

acts like him as well!

As he says in verse 9

*<sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup>By this it is evident who are the children of God, and 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.*

We’ll come back to this next week,

but the central point that John makes in these verses

is that the one who abides in God

practices righteousness – and not sin.

The point I want to conclude on

is that John seems to think that this will encourage his hearers!

They have just endured a nasty division in the church.

These false teachers (antichrists, in John's view)  
have gone out from them.

And John says, look – it's obvious who are the children of God  
and who are the children of the devil:

whoever practices righteousness is of God;

whoever does not practice righteousness is of the devil!

If your response to that is to say, "I'm not sure where I stand" –  
then repent!

And the first thing you need to do

is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

who came to destroy the works of the devil

and to bring everlasting righteousness

through his atoning sacrifice on the cross.