

# The True Children of God – Part 5

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The true children of God are known by their righteousness, both inherent and practiced
2. aim – To cause us think and act like the children of a holy God, expressing his love for us in holiness
3. passage – 1 John 3:1-10

### b. outline

1. The Nature of the Children of God (1 John 3:1-2)
2. The Pursuits of the Children of God (1 John 3:3-9)
3. The Identification of the Children of God (1 John 3:10)

### c. opening

1. the **identity** significant at this point in the letter
  - a. the issue of *identity* is key to the argument of **1 John 3:1-10**
    1. **e.g.** although the idea of “identity” in W culture is deeply *perverted*, it is (nonetheless) an important concept: the world “understands” the idea of **living an “authentic” life**
    2. **i.e.** so, why is it *hard* for Christians to *identify* themselves in the world as *what they are* – or, why is it that many Christians *would never be singled out as such amongst everyone else*?
2. the **nature** of the children of God (**v. 1a**)
  - a. the Father has loved his own, made them his children, and embodied them as family in his Son
  - b. this love of the Father makes the elect something *far greater* than they can fully grasp *now*
    1. **i.e.** we only “*see in a mirror dimly*” what we will *eventually* be (**1 Cor. 13:12**) – God has declared it to be so, but we don’t fully grasp it *since we are not yet fully experiencing its completion*
3. (**now**) the **pursuits** of the children of God (**vv. 3-9**)
  - a. **the true child of God is identified by his pursuit of purity** – the child of God, waiting for the day of glory, purifies himself of all that is contrary to his true nature as one loved by the Father
    1. **v. 3 transitions** from the “theory” of glorification (future) to the “pursuit” of purity (present) ...
  - b. John describes this pursuit in **vv. 4-9**, starting with **three (3) immutable truths**:
    1. the (habitual) practice of sinning is lawlessness: reprobation against God’s nature and law
      - a. **i.e.** the reprobate person is *characterized* (identified) by his rebellion against God
    2. Christ came into the world to “*take away*” sin; to free his people from the *power* of sin
      - a. **i.e.** Jesus doesn’t just *forgive* our sin, he comes to break the *power* of sin over his own
    3. thus, the truly *born-again* man (in Christ) possesses a desire to keep the *law of God*
      - a. **i.e.** the *difference* between the reprobate and the regenerate is that the regenerate man *hates his sin*, and possesses a *natural* (innate) desire to cast it out (from his heart)
    4. **note: v. 6** can be *wrongly* interpreted to imply that the Christian should never sin, or that any person continuing to sin (habitually) is not a Christian – I addressed this on **Wednesday night**:
      - a. pithy: any experience of anxiety from this verse can only be true of the regenerate man
      - b. short: John is using *hyperbole* (exaggeration) to make his point *connect* (**see below**)
      - c. long: to see this *against the rest of the NT* (**see Romans**) as the imbalance of antinomianism or perfectionism is to *misunderstand the connection of sanctification to justification*
      - d. excellent: **1 John 1:8-9** – we who walk in the light know we still sin, but God is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness as we confess our sins before him
      - e. **IOW**: the *specific* concern is a tangent, but it provoked a good opportunity ...
- c. John completes the thought (**from v. 3**) in **vv. 7-9**, what it means to *purify oneself* ...

## II. The Pursuits of the Children of God (1 John 3:3-9)

### Content

#### b. the pursuits of the child of God *contrasted* (vv. 7-9)

1. John brings the subject *back to his audience* – **i.e.** he *applies it directly and concretely* (**v. 7a**)
  - a. “*little children*” = his audience; a term of endearment reflecting his *love* and *concern* for those to whom he is writing (**i.e.** not a “talking down” to them or treating them as *immature*)
    1. **note**: the term “*children*” now carries a whole new connotation – his audience is certainly *his* spiritual “descendants”, but they are *much more*, as the true children of God

2. thus ... the use of the term *here* means: **John is about to get very real** – he speaks to his audience using *very strong language*, even getting “close” to being **offensive**
- b. “let no one deceive you” = **(the whirlwind effect; see 2:26)**
  1. **(again)** John insists that the “pressure” coming against us (as believers) is a **deception**
  2. **reality: the father of lies (see below) is not terribly concerned about what you do – his work is to claw at what you understand yourself to be so that your actions become inconsistent with your nature**
    - a. **i.e.** he is not “the father of sin” – he is the father of *lies* – his primary method is a **message**
    - b. **ITC:** his *pressure* is tempt us to “forget” what we truly are (**i.e.** the children of God) and to believe the *lie* that continuing sin in us (**i.e.** a “*practice of sinning*”) is **unimportant**; that our salvation is “only” about our *eternal destiny*, not about the life we live *now*
  3. **John insists that we must abide in the truth, that we have been “anointed” by the Father as his children, and that, as his children, we must seek to always do his will**
2. John *combines* the various truths from **vv. 2-6** as a summary (**v. 7b**)
  - a. righteousness flows from the nature of *being* righteous, just as Christ himself *was* righteous
  - b. or, those who are righteous *ontologically* (by virtue of justification) act according to *their* nature, just as *Jesus* acted according to *his* nature (the child of God is to *live out what he is by nature*)
    1. **remember:** when we are *converted*, God *imputes* to us the righteousness of Christ (which he *earned* by living sinlessly), thus God *sees us as fully righteous in Christ (justification)*
    2. **remember (as from v. 2):** we don’t see that righteousness fully in ourselves because we continue to live *in the flesh* (**i.e.** under the temptations of a fallen world in a polluted *physical* nature) – our *full righteousness* will not be fully visible until the resurrection (**glorification**)
    3. however, the point here is *in-between*: if we are *inwardly* righteous by the blood of Christ, then we must (by implication) *outwardly* conform ourselves to that *inward nature* (**sanctification**)
  - c. **the causal link:** making the connection between justification and glorification
    1. **IMO:** the vast majority of “Christians” (by whatever definition) do not make the causal link: it has been the *bane* of the church (down through time) that so many “believers” *skip over* the intermediate step of sanctification in thinking about their spiritual lives vs. their material ones
      - a. **e.g.** the “goal” of much “gospel preaching” is just to “get people saved” (**i.e.** into heaven), with little to no call to a life of being *sanctified* to greater and greater holiness (**discipleship**)
      - b. **i.e.** when you fail to teach *justification by faith alone* at the heart of your gospel, the *possibility* of people “getting it” is virtually non-existent – that gospel is a *synergism* of human decision alongside God’s acts to produce a *false sense of assurance*
      - c. which is why *doubt* is always creeping in: **a failure to recognize who you really are**
    2. **for me:** the goal of preaching is to inculcate a *long-term* change in the “arc” of your *thinking* – to get you to see the link between *orthodoxy* (truth) and *orthopraxy* (practice)
      - a. it certainly was for John ... this letter is **Exhibit A**
3. John *contrasts* the nature of the children of God against the reality of the reprobate (**vv. 8-9**)
  - a. John *channels* his “inner-Jesus” – his role as an *eyewitness* to the teachings of Jesus in the face of people **who claimed to be the children of God (read John 8:39-44)**
    1. the Jews (religious leaders) believed that *they* were the “true” children of God, having been born as Israelites – **i.e.** they claimed *adoption* as a birthright, and that Yahweh was their father
    2. however, Jesus *denies* their claim, on the grounds that their *actions* demonstrate *who their real father is* (**i.e.** the devil) – their *ethnic* claim is *disregarded* on the basis of their *actions*
      - a. specifically, their teachings don’t lead people to *holiness* as children of the Holy One
      - b. rather, their teachings *enslave* people to *acts of unrighteousness* (**Matthew 23:13-15**)  
“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte [convert to Judaism], and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”
      - c. **IOW:** their religion doesn’t lead people to *faith in the promises of God (like Abraham!)*, but only to *enslavement to religious rules* that don’t create *any* justification before God
    3. **question:** does this *offend* you (**as in Matt. 15:12; John 6:61**)? does it *shock* you that John suggests that some “claiming” to be children of God are *actually* children of the devil?
      - a. **it’s supposed to ... the goal is to shock you out of your lethargy (like Matt. 7:21ff)...**
      - b. John is using *hyperbole* (in a sense!) **to make sure we get the point ...**
  - b. so, John applies this shock (hyperbole) to those who claim (falsely?) to be a child of God by **repeating the truths** he laid out above:
    1. **truth #1 (v. 8a):** the *characteristic (identity)* of the reprobate is one who makes a “*practice of sinning*” – the reprobate *cares not* for righteousness or holiness or the nature of God in the law

- a. rather, the reprobate is “of the devil,” for his nature is consistent with Satan’s = he acts out of a nature that despises God and tramples upon his holy law
- 2. **truth #2 (v. 8b):** the Son of God came to destroy these works – to replace them (in his own people) with works of righteousness flowing out of *his righteousness imputed to them*
  - a. the “last Adam” gave to his “seed” the power to resist the devil, just as *he* possessed a nature capable of resisting him (**1 Peter 5:8f; James 4:7f**)
 

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world ... Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”
- 3. **truth #3 (v. 9):** those born “of God” (i.e. regenerated by the Spirit) possess a *heart desire* not to sin – they *desire*, from the “seed” that abides in them, to pursue holiness
  - a. the most *significant* mark of the Christian is his *hatred* of the sin that still exists in his fleshly nature (**Romans 7:15-20; Paul’s personal reality of sanctification**)
 

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

    - 1. the greatest Christian of all time *struggled with sin* – he understood the *reality* that his fleshly nature still fell to temptation, **but he was identified by his hatred of it**
    - b. the presence of the Spirit within us (i.e. “God’s seed”) is the instrument of holiness (as Paul will outline *in the next chapter of Romans*) – it is *he* that leads his own to greater and greater holiness through the mortification of the flesh and its desires

### III. The Identification of the Children of God (1 John 3:10)

#### Content

##### a. the identity of the child of God

- 1. **IMO:** this is a summary verse of all of the above *and* a transition to what is to come
  - a. firstly: the conclusion: those who are the children of the devil, well ... they just continue on in their rebellion against God, oblivious to their own destruction, wallowing in their sin – *that* is what distinguishes the reprobate from the regenerate
  - b. finally: that the *primary* sin to be overcome in us is a *lack of love for others* (i.e. selfishness)
- 2. **from above:** the modern W man is conditioned by this culture to seek an *identity* and to make that identity *visible* to the world (i.e. our culture *deifies* those who “live their authentic self”)
  - a. and ... the identity of the *typical* man is *utterly self-focused and narcissistic* – a nature that *outwardly portrays* the vileness of his rebellious heart, that “shows off” his full *depravity*
    - 1. i.e. an identity that is *rebellious in every conceivable way*
  - b. however ... the identity of the *Christian* must be *utterly Christ-centered and humble* – a nature that *outwardly portrays* the “seed” of Christ within him
    - 1. i.e. an identity that “overshadows” us **so that the world sees Christ when they look at us**
    - 2. e.g. our minds filled with him and his ways, our speech constant with discussions about him, every decision in line with his will, experiencing how he would feel in every situation, etc.
  - 3. **we are the true children of God, and we must act as such (Philippians 3:10)**

“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”