

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

God Is Our Father
September 20th, 2020
1 John 3:1-3
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John 3:1.

Not for nothing was the Apostle John known as “THE Theologian” by the Eastern Orthodox Fathers. We sometimes think of John as the old softy among the writing Apostles of Jesus. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved – he never did get over that. And as we talked about last week, when he was an old man he used to deliver one sentence sermons from his bedside in his final days. “Little children”, he would say, “love one another”.

So he was an old softie – but he was also THE THEOLOGIAN extraordinaire. There is no essential conflict between being BRILLIANT and being LOVING. In fact, that is kind of what you would expect from anyone who had spent considerable amounts of time with Jesus.

John was AN ORTHODOX THEOLOGIAN. The word orthodox just means “straight” or “correct”. You go to the ORTHO-DENTIST because you want STRAIGHT TEETH. So ORTHODOXY is about the STRAIGHT PATH. It is about walking the right way and we remember that these people were in distress because a large number of folks had left them and had wandered off into formal schism. We read about that last week, John said:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19 ESV)

They left!! They left the straight path. They left the real Gospel. They left the life-giving Word. And they left, John says, because they were never really Christians in the first place. Real Christians walk on the straight path all the way home to glory. And you are on that path. I've written these things to you, John says, that you may know that you are on that path.

This whole letter is about helping these people recognize the straight path and to be assured that they are in fact, walking upon it.

So to help them identify the path John develops TWO very important theological markers. These are the pylons that we have to steer between if we want to be on the right path. This is the RED BUOY and the GREEN BUOY. The first marker is the principle of TRANSCENDENCE and the second marker is the principle of NEARNESS.

Transcendence simply means "that which is HIGH and ABOVE and HOLY." That's what we were talking about last week. John said that GOD IS LIGHT! That's a CLASSIC description of transcendence. Do you remember the Old Testament passages we looked at? In Ezekiel 1 the prophet saw God and it looked like he was on FIRE. He said:

I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around... I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. (Ezekiel 1:27–28 ESV)

FIRE! RADIANCE! LIGHT! These are the only words the prophet can think of that even come close to describing the HOLINESS and AWESOMENESS of the Lord!

That's transcendence.

Now, let's be honest, when you read a description like that you aren't thinking: "I'd really like to give that God a hug! I just want to go up and wrap my arms around that flaming, transcendent entity."

No!

That's not how people respond to an encounter with that God. When people come face to face with the TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD they fall on the ground as though dead and they say like the prophet Isaiah said:

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5 ESV)

When you see that God, when you step into that LIGHT you immediately see your sin and you sense the wild inappropriateness – the deadly WRONGNESS of having brought your sin into such a glorious and transcendent Presence.

We talked about that last week. John said, "If you SAY you are walking in the LIGHT and yet you are not concerned with your sin, you are a liar. Because that is just not a thing. In the light, you see your sin and you know either it has to go or you have to go. Because you cannot bring that into the light."

God is LIGHT.

That's theological marker #1.

And now here in the second section of John's letter which runs all the way from 3:1-5:13 John unpacks the second theological marker. The principle of nearness. The idea that GOD is with us and for us and loves us. That's what John is talking about here. In the second half of the letter he is unpacking this idea that GOD IS OUR FATHER.

The same God who is LIGHT – is also a loving Father to all who have faith in Christ.

That is the path of orthodoxy!

OUR FATHER – WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME.

Do you see those two markers?

God is HOLY and he is NEAR. He is LIGHT and he is FATHER.

If you lose hold of EITHER of those two markers you are going to end up on the rocks. Here is the path, brothers and sisters – walk ye in it!

Now, as I mentioned, last week we did 1 full trip around the pole. This letter you will recall is laid out like a spiral staircase. We go twice around the pole with the second rotation being slightly more expansive than the first. Each rotation is built around one of the 2 simple truths that John lays out – along with several logical and associated implications. Last week we did a whole rotation because I wanted you to see the overall flow of the argument. This week we are going to slow down and we are going to begin going step by step through the second go round. We are going to camp out today on John's SECOND theological marker:

God is our Father

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

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.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.³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:1–3 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now 9 times out of 10 the ESV is more helpful and accessible than the old KJV but this is the exception that proves the rule. The passage in the Greek begins with an aorist imperative – a command! John is telling us to BEHOLD! To stop, see and consider a very important theological marker. That’s why the old KJV had this as:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us (1 John 3:1 KJV)

We’re not just supposed to SEE this – we are supposed to DEVOTE our attention to this incredibly important principle.

GOD loves us!

The same God who is light – the same God who is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY – has chosen us in Christ to be his beloved children.

Let that settle on you.

Fix your eyes on that marker.

God is not JUST the Creator of the Universe, he is not JUST FIRE, BRIGHTNESS and LIGHT – he IS those things – don’t lose the other marker – but he is also the GOD who calls us and LOVES us as a Father.

You need to see that too – it’s not Christianity if you don’t see that too.

John has 3 things he wants us to BEHOLD in this marvellous little paragraph. The first thing he wants us to understand is this:

1. We Are God’s Children Now

Look at verse 1 again:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; **and so we are**. (1 John 3:1 ESV)

God's CALL immediately changes who we are. Nobody says this better than F.F. Bruce. He says:

“When God calls, His call is effectual; people and things *are* what He calls them.”¹

Isn't that amazing?

The moment God CALLS you – you ARE what he calls you.

Meaning that you aren't what you DID yesterday. You aren't what you SAID this morning. You are what God CALLED you in eternity past.

Let that truth settle on you!

You see, since God's will cannot be thwarted and God's plans can never be frustrated then the second God called you – you became what he intended to make you. God called you and God had a plan in Christ to save you and restore you. And everything this wicked world DOES to try and interfere with that, is only turned by God toward our salvation.

John already taught them this.

In his Gospel, John 11:49-53, he told them about how all the Jewish leaders got together and tried to OPPOSE the purpose of God in Christ. They decided – that they would have to put Jesus to death – not knowing, that in fact, this was all part of God's plan to MAKE US A NEW FAMILY IN CHRIST. Do you remember that?

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all.⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,⁵² and not for the nation only, but also **to gather into one the children of**

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 85.

God who are scattered abroad.⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death. (John 11:49–53 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

The High Priest said, “You guys don’t even understand that it would be BETTER for us to kill this one righteous man than for the whole country to be divided and taken over the Romans. So let’s just kill this guy and nip this whole Christianity thing in the bud.”

That was the plan.

But in the Providence of God it actually fulfilled HIS PLAN – his plan to gather into one the children of God.

God makes us his children by washing us in the blood of the Lamb. It is the cross of Jesus Christ that MAKES US who we are.

And since God knew that his plan could never be thwarted or impeded in any way – the second he called you – in eternity past – you became who you are.

That’s what John is saying here.

He is reminding them of their tremendous dignity and remarkable privileges. You are the children of God. He made this universe for you. He made all those planets out there for you. He made this nursery – this beautiful planet earth here - for you.

You are royalty.

You are the apple of his eye.

You are his precious sons and daughters.

That's who you are – but of course, John anticipates a bit of pushback, because after all, it doesn't FEEL right now, like we are anything special. In fact, all too often it feels like we are the scum of the earth. The world hates us. The world certainly doesn't treat us as if we were the children of God.

But of course, Jesus told his disciples that it would be this way. He said, in Gospel of John 15:18-20:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:18–20 ESV)

That's what exactly what John is saying here in verse 1:

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1 ESV)

Stephen Smalley hits the nail on the head here. He says:

“The truth that Christians belong to God's family is attested by the “hatred” of the world.”²

You want to know you are on the right path, John says, look for the hatred of the world. If you are on the straight path, if you are truly following Jesus, then sooner or later you will be hated – you will be persecuted. The people in the dark did that to Jesus so you can bet your bottom dollar, they're going to do that to you.

You are God's children NOW – with all the privileges and persecutions there implied.

The second thing John says is this – we are God's children now AND we are God's children FOREVER.

² Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 143.

2. We Are God's Children Forever

You can hear that transition 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. (1 John 3:2 ESV)

So – it is an amazing privilege to be God's children now – but the absolute BEST blessings for the children of God are still to come.

The first thing he says is that we're going to be LIKE JESUS. That is the end goal; the Apostle Paul talked about that too; he said:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29 ESV)

Remember, God CALLED you from before the foundation of the world. He FORE-KNEW you – he knew you before he even created you. And Paul says, the whole time, the plan was always for you to be like JESUS – for you to be conformed to the image of his Son. And that process gets started down here on earth. You know this verse if you go to this church. Paul says:

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NRSV)

So this process starts here – it progresses, slowly, but surely, by one degree of glory to the next – as we BEHOLD JESUS. The Bible says, people become what they worship. People start to look like that which they look at. So as you look at Jesus, you begin to look like Jesus. But of course, in this life, our vision of Jesus is imperfect. We behold the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror – or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:

“we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV)

So, because we SEE imperfectly, we CHANGE imperceptibly. But one day, that will all change. We will see the LORD PERFECTLY and we will be changed ENTIRELY. F.F. Bruce again is fabulous here, he says:

“If progressive assimilation to the likeness of their Lord results from their present beholding of Him through a glass darkly, to behold Him face to face, to ‘see him even as he is’, will result in their being perfectly like Him.”³

That’s what the text says – listen again. John says:

“we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2 ESV)

That’s almost blasphemous, isn’t it? I mean one commentator says:

“The expression grazes the edge of deification, but stops short of it.”⁴

John is almost saying that we become gods! No he stops just short of that – but still, what he says is unbelievable. We are going to be LIKE JESUS. That is one of the greatest themes in all of Christendom – we used to sing about that, do you remember?

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power, till all the ransomed church of God be (what?)

Do you remember?

SAVED TO SIN NO MORE!⁵

That’s what is waiting for you in heaven, John says. A perfectly renewed human nature. You are going to be like Jesus. All your desires are going to point God-ward. All your instincts are going

³ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 87.

⁴ Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51*, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 146.

⁵ *There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood* by William Cowper. #467 in *The Worshipping Church* hymnal.

to be purified. All your thoughts are going to be sanctified. You are only going to want and do and say what is RIGHT and GOOD and HOLY – for endless days.

Are you looking forward to that?

That's coming for you – that's coming for everyone who walks on this path – and that's not even the best thing. The best thing is that we're going to see Jesus!

That's the HOW and it's also the WHO. It is always seeing Jesus that purifies our nature – now and in eternity – so he's the HOW, but he's also the WHO. He is himself the OBJECT OF OUR PILGRIMAGE.

That's why we're going to heaven – to SEE JESUS! Jesus prayed for that in John 17:24. He said:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24 ESV)

You looking forward to that?

Me too. Those are the two best things about heaven. There is a lot I don't know about heaven, but I'm glad I know that. John Stott said:

“It is enough for us to know that on the last day and through eternity we shall be both with Christ and like Christ; for the fuller revelation of what we are going to be we are content to wait.”⁶

It almost doesn't matter does it? If we are going to be LIKE CHRIST and WITH CHRIST then it is hard to imagine how heaven could be any better.

That's where we're going brothers and sisters, therefore, John says, it's time to start living like who you are.

⁶John R. W. Stott, *The Letter of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 123.

3. Therefore live like who you are

One commentator puts it this way:

“While we shall never become completely like Jesus, until “we see him as he really is” (v 2b), that very certainty supplies a challenge for the believer to become like Christ now.”⁷

Do you understand that?

If you are a child of God – if you are brother or sister to Jesus Christ – and if you are on your way to the celestial city, then dearly beloved, it is time to begin behaving like who you are. You need to begin preparing for your ultimate identity and destination.

That’s what John says at the end of this paragraph, he says:

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:3 ESV)

In the Bible HOPE is slightly different than FAITH. Faith is about looking BACK upon what God has done in Christ for our salvation; whereas HOPE is about LOOKING FORWARD. Hope is about believing in where we are going and who we are becoming – and John says, everyone who has CHRISTIAN HOPE purifies himself just as he is pure. Everyone who knows that they are going to see Jesus, begins to prepare himself or herself for the experience of his presence.

If you know where you are going you pack accordingly.

A number of years ago we were setting out to go on vacation as a family. The kids were little – Noa wasn’t even born yet, and we told the kids we were going to Myrtle Beach, where we had been before. And they LOVED Myrtle Beach so they were super excited and several days before we left they began to pack their little bags for the car. But unbeknownst to them, our plans had changed. Shauna Lee was pregnant with Noa so our friend Corry Ticknor didn’t want her driving all the way to Myrtle Beach so she found an airplane vacation for us at the same price.

⁷ Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 148.

But we didn't tell the kids. We wanted to surprise them.

So on the morning of our vacation the kids all packed their little bags into the van thinking that we were driving to Myrtle Beach – but just before we left we told them that actually we were going on an airplane vacation!!! They were super excited, because other than Madison, our oldest, none of them had ever been on a plane before.

We drove to the airport and we went through security and each of the kids put their little travel bags up onto the security belt for inspection. That's always a nervous time – but by the grace of God – we all got through. And as I was reloading myself for the walk to the plane, Max who was 8 years old at the time, began to unpack his travel bag and right there at the top he took out his favourite toy at the time – a couple of black plastic cap guns.

And Shauna Lee and I just about had a heart attack.

How did you get that through security!

Who raised you?

What kind of lunatic tries to get 2 black cap guns through airport security in a post 9/11 world?

You don't take guns on a plane – that's like the most basic thing ever. Everybody knows that. Except Max didn't know he was going on a plane – although he probably would have tried to pack them even if he did.

But the point is, we taught him that day – we taught him good – that you can't pack a gun if you are going on a plane.

You've got to pack appropriate to the journey that you're going on - everybody in the Bible knows that. James, the brother of Jesus, knew that.

“Do you want to draw near to God? Do you want to walk into the presence of JESUS”, he asked his people? Well then:

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
(James 4:8 ESV)

You can't take that stuff into the presence of God. You've got to pack like you know where you're going.

Brothers and sisters, you're going to see Jesus. One day, when you die or he returns you are going to stand before Jesus and you are going to see him face to face.

Do you remember what his face looks like?

We talked about that last week. John described the face of Jesus in Revelation 1. He said:

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Revelation 1:14–16 ESV)

That's the face you're going to see the second you die. That's the face you are going to see on the Last Day – and every day after the Last Day if you are a Christian. So you need to be asking yourself right now – what do I want to have in my heart, in my mind and on my hands ON THAT DAY?

That's the question. And I think if you think it through – I think if you BEHOLD THIS FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL REALITY – then you are going to do what every real believer does – according to John. You are going to the FATHER'S HOUSE – you are going to be hanging out WITH JESUS – therefore you need to be PURIFYING YOURSELF just as he is pure.

Now how in the world are we going to do that? Well, we used to sing about that too – in the same old, Gospel song I referred to before. Do you remember?

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

That's just 1 John 1:9 put to music isn't it?

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

That's how you pack for eternity. That's how you get ready for the presence and appearance of the Lord! Thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.