

1 John 3:1-10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 1 John chapter 3 verses 1 to 10 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.

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. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. 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. 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. 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. In the first half of 1 John chapter 3,

John explores the righteousness and avoidance of sin that will characterize the true children of God. We are the children of God on account of a remarkable love shown towards us by the Father. The love of God is astounding, not merely in its character and in its extent, but also for the conditions under which it is given. In Romans chapter 5 verses 7 to 8, For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

As Christians we are born again, becoming children of God, members of a new family. John chapter 3 verses 3 to 8 speak about this. Jesus answered him, The fact that we have been born again, that God is our Father, is an expression of the extent of God's love.

[2 : 58] John 3 verse 16 However, as children of God, there is hostility between the world and us, and also a fundamental failure on the world's part to recognize or understand us.

John chapter 15 verses 18 to 19 We are currently children of God, but we are awaiting in great anticipation to discover what this will mean in all of its fullness.

We are like very young children, imagining what it would be like to be grown-ups, except that we are considering something that is so much more of a far-reaching transformation. We do have some intimation, however, of what it will be like. We see this in Christ himself.

As children of God, we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, as we see in Romans chapter 8 verse 29. And when we see him, we will be like him.

The logic of this statement is that our transformation will occur through a transforming vision of his glory. Paul makes a similar claim in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18. For Paul, this transforming vision is already occurring as we witness the glory of Christ.

[4 : 31] However, our limited current vision will one day be greatly exceeded by a fuller revelation. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. The Christian tradition has spoken of the beatific vision, of what it will mean when we behold God.

This shouldn't be thought of as a sort of looking with material eyes, but as the opening up of our spiritual perception to God's goodness and beauty, so that flooded with the light of his glory, we finally enjoy true blessedness and joy in gazing upon him.

When people witness something truly beautiful, their faces can open up in awe and astonishment. A transfiguring beauty can wash over their countenance as their faces shine in response to what they have seen or heard.

Beauty and goodness can transform our physical appearances for a brief time, But seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will, according to John, produce a lasting change in us.

[5 : 36] We will never be the same again. Recognising this promise of seeing Jesus as he truly is, of having our eyes eternally open to the radiance of his glory, goodness and beauty, will change the way that we live now.

We will be longing for that sight and preparing ourselves for it. In the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 verse 8, our Lord assures his hearers, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Those who live according to this hope will seek to purify themselves. We are very much at the earliest beginnings of the reality of Christian experience. We are looking forward to something yet to be realised in its fullness.

The glory that belongs to us lies in the future, and the Christian life is in large measure animated by reflection upon the hope of this. It keeps us moving forward. And as a flip side of our awaiting this glorious transformation, there is the need to deal radically with sin.

The children of God and the children of the devil are distinguished by their patterns of behaviour.

The person who sins practices lawlessness. Lawlessness isn't synonymous with law-breaking.

[6 : 42] It is more fundamental than that. Lawlessness is a far more basic posture of rebelliousness. A refusal to recognise and resistance to God's authority. It produces law-breaking, but it lies far deeper than it.

John wants his hearers to be under no illusion. Sin at its root is not just isolated acts of naughtiness. It is a posture of rebellion towards the living God. It is something that cannot but be more comprehensive in its character.

A rebellious posture towards the living God is not the sort of thing that can be compartmentalised, as some people think of their sins. Not only is this the case, Christ undertook his work precisely in order to take away sins, not merely in their guilt, but also in their power and their practice.

He is the sinless one, the lamb without blemish. Sin has neither presence in nor purchase upon him. And this has direct implications for us as Christians. It is impossible to abide in Christ and also sin.

The one who sins betrays the fact that he has neither seen nor known Christ. The language here is taken by most commentators to refer to continuing in, or persisting in sin.

[7 : 52] Although John's language suggests something more absolute, which shall probably retain some of its force in our interpretation. John clearly teaches that genuine Christians can and do and will sin.

In chapter 1 verses 8-10, The idea that, provided that they don't make a practice of it, the Christian can have a little sin as a treat, is clearly antithetical to John's way of thinking, as would be the idea that a few slip-ups are to be expected, and shouldn't be taken that seriously.

No, sin is the polar opposite of all that Christ is and stands for, and the idea that sin and Christ can coexist, provided that the sin is in minimal doses, is quite mistaken.

To abide in Christ is to turn our backs on sin. To the extent that we sin, we are not abiding in Christ. Likewise, to the extent that we sin, we betray our falling short of the transforming vision that we await and long for, suggesting that we have a limited perception of who Christ is, if any at all.

Some people might think that people can be righteous while continuing in sin. God has justified me apart from my works, so my works are irrelevant. John makes plain that this cannot be the case.

[9 : 18] The people who are righteous are manifested to be so by their works. They produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which evidences his work in their lives, producing in them a character that conforms to the justifying judgment that God made concerning them in his free forgiveness of their sins.

No one should be under any illusion that there is any such thing as a righteousness before God that is not evidenced in transformed behaviour. John presses his point even further.

He has argued that sin is fundamentally rebelliousness. He has argued that it is incompatible with and the polar opposite of Christ, and now he makes the logical next step in the argument.

The person who sins is of the devil himself. They share his character. Jesus makes a similar point concerning his opponents in John 8, verse 44. The reason why the Son of God came was to

destroy the works of the devil.

This is how intense the opposition is. The children of God are demonstrated by their behaviour. I. Howard Marshall observes, John makes his statement in absolute terms.

[10 : 39] The way in which he can interchange subjects and predicates indicates that there is a one-to-one correspondence between those who are born of God and those who do right, love one another, believe in Jesus, overcome the world, and refrain from sin.

There are no shades of grey here. It is a case of belonging to the light or the darkness, to God or the devil, to righteousness and love, or to sin. The cause of the righteous person's manner of life is found in the fact that he has been born of God.

God's seed, the word of God operating by the spirit of God, abides in the righteous person, just as they abide in Christ. And sin and God's seed cannot coexist.

Either sin is doomed to extinction in us by God's presence and work in our lives, or our continuing in sin manifests that we are not his at all. John sums up his essential message.

The distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil is plain. The person who does not produce the fruit of righteousness in their lives is evidently not of God.

[11 : 43] Likewise, the person who does not love his brother. A question to consider. What more might we learn about the beatific vision in this passage and in the rest of Scripture?