

Children of God

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[0 : 0 0] Alright, so we're reading from 1 John chapter 2 starting at verse 28 through to 310. 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.

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. 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 what 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.

[1 : 1 4] 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. But 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. Well good morning everyone.

Why don't we pray and ask God to help us as we meditate on his word this morning. Heavenly Father please prepare our hearts to receive your word this morning. Remove every distraction from our minds.

[2 : 1 6] And please give us true thoughts. Thoughts that will encourage and strengthen us in our faith. In Jesus name. Amen. Well in the last couple of years my wife Jen has gone into gardening in a big way.

Some of you know this because she probably talks to you about her garden constantly. And in fact the owner of an online business last year told Jen that she, this is a business selling seeds and tubers and the like.

Last year told Jen that she is her best customer. I mean I don't know, I probably should feel a bit worried about that. But our backyard is slowly being transformed.

So garden beds have gone in and lawn is disappearing. The clothesline is under siege. Like it is being besieged by garden beds and there are threats that it needs to be moved to a shadier part of the yard.

Because apparently flowers need sun more than laundry does. I don't really get it. For now there's sort of a line of demarcation at the 17th parallel. Where you know the gardens, sort of a truce has been established, a temporary truce.

[3 : 3 1] Garden beds are to the north and lawn to the south. But I think the garden beds will start making incursions across that boundary soon. It's, I mean, you look at our backyard and actually over summer there's been sort of splashes of colour everywhere from flowers.

But probably more green than other colours. I think it's been a bad season apparently. So she tells me. But anyway, in any case, you look at our backyard and it tells a story, right?

The transformation of our backyard tells a story. A gardener lives here. Likewise, the transformation that takes place in the life of a Christian tells a story.

God lives here. For any who are here this morning who are undecided about whether or not you want to be a Christian, I hope you see in this passage some reasons why it's good.

And for those here today, many of us who are Christians already, who are believers, well, you probably already know in theory that God's spirit is transforming you.

[4 : 42] But sometimes we forget that, don't we? Sometimes the change is so slow. Sometimes it's punctuated by so many reversals that we begin to despair.

Is God really transforming me? Well, this passage is given to encourage us. In God's word today, we see three realities that utterly transform those who trust in Jesus.

Three realities that utterly transform those who trust in Jesus. The reality of who you are, the reality of what you will be, and the reality of what Christ has done.

And we find those three realities in chapter 3, verses 1 to 6. And that's where we're going to start.

And then afterwards, we're going to look just before and after those verses, the frame, which kind of tells us why John was teaching us these things.

But first, we're going to occupy our minds with chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, and those three life-transforming realities. Now, I just want to say to the young people who are here today, so if you're at school, young people here today, if you can work out what these three things are and remember them, come and tell me afterwards and I'll give you...

[6 : 05] Well, actually, I won't give you a lolly because that's Don's... I don't want to sort of tread on Don's territory. I'll give you a high five, right? So these are the three things to look out for.

Who are you? What will you one day be? And what has Christ done? They're the three things I'm trying to remember, okay? All right, first, the reality of who you are.

Look at chapter 2, verse 29. Chapter 2, verse 29. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

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. Here, the word of God invites us to marvel at the highest privilege of the Christian.

[7 : 13] You know, think of what we might have been called. We might have been called God's enemies. Indeed, Romans chapter 5, verse 10 says that we were God's enemies.

But no longer. It's not God's pleasure or will that we should be called his enemies. We might be called God's creatures and we are his creatures.

He's the maker. We're his handiwork. He's the potter. We're the clay. But it's not God's desire that we should only be called his creatures. We might be called God's servants and we are.

He is the Lord. It's his to command. It's ours to obey. It's his to lead. It's ours to follow. But it wasn't God's delight that we should only be called his servants. We might be called God's people and we are.

Indeed, the Old Testament rarely reaches higher than that. It's the goal of the promise to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It's the goal of the covenant established with Abraham and established at Sinai, the Old Covenant, that he should be our God and we should be his people.

[8 : 30] But even that wasn't sufficient for the joy of God. God's will and pleasure and delight and joy is that we should be called his children and that we might call him our father.

And when God calls us his children, it's no mere label awkwardly placed where it doesn't really belong. So verse 1 says, see what kind of love the father has given us that we should be called children of God and so we are.

The so we are there doesn't mean so we are called his children. It means so we are his children. God calls us his children because we are his children.

Now this most profound and wondrous truth about you is something the world can't perceive and can't comprehend. See, the world does not know us, verse 1 says.

It can only be perceived by those who know God. Because the world doesn't know God, it doesn't recognise us. It can't recognise us as God's children because it doesn't recognise who God is.

[9 : 53] But we know it because God promises it to us in the word. For us, this honour, for us, this place of security and privilege privilege and intimate access, we are God's children.

There's a famous series of photographs of John F. Kennedy when he's American president and he's in the Oval Office working at the desk, the resolute desk.

Apparently that's what the president's desk is called. That's a good name for a desk. But he's in the Oval Office at the president's desk and there, playing at his feet, hiding under the desk, is his son, John Jr.

You know, such is God the Father. Such we are, rather, to God the Father. We are scions of the great king. We are the cherished toddlers of the emperor of heaven and earth.

What love is this? What grace beyond measure? May we never tire of hearing it. Bilquis Sheath was a prominent Pakistani Muslim woman who became a Christian on Christmas Eve 1966 and she went on to be an evangelist.

[11 : 14] And she wrote a book sharing her testimony of how she became a Christian, an autobiography, and she called that book, the title she gave it is, I Dared to Call Him Father.

It's a privilege she had never previously known. Now, in some other parts of the New Testament, for example, Paul's epistles, we are God's children by adoption.

He adopts us as his children. Here, however, in 1 John, we are God's children by birth, by new birth. We are, verse 28, born of him.

Sorry, verse 29, we are born of him. And this new birth is for all who belong to Jesus. As it says in John chapter 1, John's Gospel, that is, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God.

For all who believe in Jesus, this is the reality of who you are. You are a child of God. And the further point God's word makes here is that this is a reality which transforms you.

[12 : 43] Look at verse 29 again. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

See, there's a family likeness which cannot but pass down from the father to his children. By nature and by nurture, by genetics and by unconscious imitation, children come to resemble their parents. You know, we see that in our earthly children. I see it in my children. Sometimes I wish I didn't. But there's nothing to be regretted in the family likeness that passes from God the father to the children who are born of him.

For that family likeness is his righteousness. If we know he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

Once we're born again as God's children, it is inevitable that we will come to resemble our father. If he's righteous, then we shall learn to do what's right.

[14 : 01] You see that same idea in chapter 3 verse 9. Chapter 3 verse 9. 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.

Now on an initial reading, I find that unsettling. If I take just chapter 3 verse 9 out of context, it doesn't comfort me, it alarms me, it terrifies me.

For I still do sin. So does that mean I'm not a child of God? Does even a single sin post-conversion disqualify me as one of God's children?

If that's the case, then I would live in a state of constant anxiety and insecurity and despair. But in the context of John's epistle here, that can't be what it means because back in chapter 1 verses 8 and 10, and you can look at those with me if you like, chapter 1 verse 8 and 10, John writes, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

[15 : 18] So those verses in chapter 1 say both that all of us have both a principle of sin dwelling in us still, as well as specific sins. sins of which we're guilty.

So none of us are sinless and perfect yet. So if here in chapter 3 John isn't claiming that the Christian is already sinless, then what is he saying? He's talking about what is the defining reality of your life, the defining quality of your life, your central and controlling disposition.

And if you're a child of God, and you are, if you believe in Jesus, if you're a child of God, then sin will not define you.

Those God makes his children in name, he must also make his children in nature. He cannot and will not leave you as you are.

He takes us from the house of sin and we are born again into the house of his righteousness with the stamp of our Father's nature upon us.

[16:30] This then is the first reality that utterly transforms us. us. The reality of who we are. We are children of a righteous Father. The second reality that transforms all who trust in Jesus is the reality of what you will be.

The reality of what you will be. Look at chapter 3 verses 2 and 3. Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears we will be like him because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

In verse 2 you'll see there's a shift. There's a shift from talking about what we already are now we are God's children what we already are to talking about what we will one day be.

What we will be has not yet appeared it says. That is what we will be has not yet been made manifest. It's not yet been revealed. It's not yet been made known. Now certainly it's not yet been made known to the world.

[17:50] Now as you walk down the street or go to Stockland, Glendale or Westfield, Qatar or whatever it is you shop and walk through the shopping centre through Woolies, you know people aren't they don't stop and marvel at you as you walk by and go wow this person is an everlasting splendour to borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis.

I mean people it's not yet revealed what you will be right to the world but it's not even yet fully revealed to us.

It's not even yet fully made known to us what we will be. Do you know you who are mortal what it will be like when you're clothed in immortality?

Do you know you with your perishable body what it will be like when you are raised imperishable? Do you sown in dishonour?

No what it will be when you are raised in glory? There's a song by Mercy Me I Can Only Imagine. Do you know the song?

[19:10] It starts like this I can only imagine what it will be like and so it is. Now we can imagine it but we don't fully see it yet.

but one thing we do know we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

Is he full of compassion? Then so too will we be. Is he gentle? Then all harshness will flee from us. Is he kind? Then we will outshine Mother Teresa. When we see Jesus as he truly is that vision of his infinite glory and goodness will change us in an instant.

Because we humans we're worshipping creatures. We can't help but find things to worship. We're driven by delight. We lock on to things we perceive as good and we pursue them.

[20:27] In the garden Satan deceived Eve to sin or rather Satan enticed Eve to sin by deceiving her.

By deceiving her such that she came to see the world in a different place. she came to desire the fruit that God had forbidden to perceive as good what in reality was evil.

That's the same with us. When we sin it's because we've been seduced by some counterfeit vision of what is good. So you tell a lie.

Why do you tell a lie? Because you desire to preserve your reputation. You want to avoid embarrassment. So you lie about something. In that moment you can't see that a good name is not a good name if it's false.

And your disordered desire leads you to sin. Or you're greedy. You know at a shared meal you take too much for yourself disregarding those who are to follow.

[21:37] In that moment you can't see that serving others is better than serving yourself. That a full heart is better than a full belly. Your disordered desire leads you to sin.

But when we see Jesus as he is, when we behold Christ in all his perfection, when our senses are filled with his supreme goodness, all those little deceptions to which we're prone in the present, they'll all be exposed.

His light will drive out every shadow. when we drink from the fountain, we'll never return to the stagnant pools. When we behold his beauty, we'll never again desire what is hideous.

When we delight in the sun, we will never again find pleasure in an idol. There'll come a time when you will never have to hold your tongue because there'll never be anything that provokes you to anger or to speak harshly.

There'll come a time when you'll never again have to look away because there'll never be anything to tempt you to impurity. Everything you see will be infused with Christ.

[22 : 59] And even just knowing that we shall be like him, that has an effect on us now. That future reaches back into the present and awakens better desires within us.

See verse three again? And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. We don't yet have that full unhindered sight of Christ and what we will be.

How will we like him? But we do have his promise. We do have this hope. We might not see his form but we hear his voice.

We might not have the vision before our eyes but we at least have one for our minds, our imagination and we're drawn towards it. We're drawn onwards. We long to be now what we will be then.

And so even now that future reaches back and transforms the present. Everyone who hopes thus purifies himself as he is pure. the more we contemplate Christ and the reality of what we will be the more we become like him even now.

[24 : 13] This then is the second reality that transforms us. The reality of what we will be. We shall be like him or we shall see him as he is. The third reality that transforms us is the reality of what Christ has done.

What Christ has done. Look at three verses four to six. everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

You know that he appeared 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.

Verse four gives us a definition of sin as John is using the word in this passage. Sin is lawlessness John says. Now John is not just talking about particular sins, individual sins, he's talking about the root of sin.

Sin is lawlessness. It's living as an outlaw. It's disregarding the rule of God's kingdom. It's disregarding the commands of our Lord.

[25 : 31] heart. It's the heart that says I'll do it my way. I don't care what God says. I don't care what anyone says. I'll pay no attention to him. Sin is lawlessness. It's living as a rebel.

Verse five tells us that Christ appeared in order to take away our sins. Christ's coming, Christ's perfect life, in him there was no sin, Christ's atoning death, Christ's resurrection to new life, all of that is with the goal and the outcome that he might take away our sins.

Now that Christ takes away our sins means in the first instance that it means that he takes away the penalty of our sins. We are truly and completely forgiven.

But it also means that he takes away our sins themselves. so long as any sin remains in us, as it does in the present, but so long as any sin remains in us, there is an aspect of the achievement of the cross that has not yet been fully realised.

Verse six, no one who abides in him keeps on sinning. It's impossible to live in, to abide in, the one who appeared to take away sins and not have your sins taken away.

[26 : 56] If he came to take away sins and were in him, then he will take away our sins. Verse eight says, the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

It's impossible to be united with the one who destroys the works of the devil and not have the devil's works destroyed in our lives. What Christ has already done when he first appeared must have its full outworking.

It must have its full effect. The achievement of the cross cannot be reversed. What Christ has done cannot be undone. Like a domino chain, if the first domino has fallen, then the rest must follow.

If Christ has taken away your sin, then he will take away your sin. Anything else is unthinkable.

Jesus didn't suffer so that sin might be ignored.

He suffered so that sin might be destroyed. He didn't die and rise again so that sin might be tolerated. He died and rose so that sin might be uprooted. And if that's what Christ has done, then the power of sin must be shattered in the life of the believer.

[28 : 15] power. Here then are three realities that utterly transform all who believe in Jesus. The reality of who we are.

We are children of God. The reality of what you will be, we will be, we will be like him. And the reality of what Christ has done. He appeared to take away sin, to destroy the devil's work.

And the reason John reminds his readers of these three realities is given in the surrounding frame. So 2 verse 28, 3 verses 7 to 10. We're going to look at that briefly.

Look at chapter 2 verse 28. And now little children, abide in him, remain in him, continue in him, and now little children, abide in him so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back from him in shame at his coming.

You could summarise verse 28 in this way. Be Christ now that you might be Christ then.

[29 : 30] Be Christ now that you might be Christ then. See, this is nothing less than the chief goal of the Christian. If Christ is the highest treasure, and he is, then the goal of the non-Christian is to find Christ, and the goal of the Christian is to keep Christ.

If you have Christ, then you have all that belongs to Christ, and since all belongs to Christ, if you have Christ, you have all. Whatever else happens in life is trivial compared to this, that you are found in Christ when he comes.

And the way to be found in Christ when he comes is to remain in Christ while you wait. For a short time, for a short time many years ago, I was attending a congregation of the Chinese Christian Church in Milsons Point in Sydney.

It was kind of between pastors, and they're sort of working out what to do as an English-speaking congregation, and at the time they had David Cook coming and sort of looking after the congregation and preaching, and David Cook was the principal of Sydney Missionary Bible College at the time.

So I was going along, David Cook was there, and I remember a conversation that took place after the church service, and David Cook was chatting with a few people, and he was talking about how he'd been trying to come up with a catchphrase, like a summary for the New Testament, or really for the Bible.

[31 : 00] I think for the New Testament I think it was, a catchphrase for the New Testament, so like a slogan, just a few words, a meme or something if you like we might say that captures the message of the New Testament in as few words as possible.

And so we said, look, what have you come up with? And he said this was his proposal, this is like the New Testament's version of just do it for Nike or something like that, right?

What is it for the New Testament? This is David Cook's thought. Come, stay. That's the message of the New Testament.

Come, stay. Abide in him. Continue in him.

If you want to get to Italy, you must get on an airplane and you must remain in the airplane until it lands in Rome. There's no point exiting the plane mid-flight.

[32 : 08] That will do you no good. Likewise, Christian, to arrive at your destination, abide in him. Remain in him.

The reason this message was so urgent for the believers to whom John wrote is that there were many who had not continued in him.

Many who had not remained. Look at chapter 2 verse 19. Chapter 2 verse 19 where John talks about some of these.

2 verse 19, 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.

See, there were those who hadn't continued, who hadn't remained, and what's more, those who had departed in John's time, those who had departed were influencing those who remained.

[33 : 15] Those who remained were having doubts. Maybe they're right. Maybe I should leave too. The same is true today.

I've been a Christian for almost 35 years. But in the last few years, more than any time I can remember, there has been a chorus of those who have departed attempting to influence those who remain.

Last year, I was listening to a podcast. I won't tell you the exact name of the podcast, but let's call the podcast Leaving Church. That's close to its name, Leaving Church.

And it consists of interviews with people who have walked away from church and walked away from Jesus. And many of the stories are tragic.

In some cases, it's actually the sin and failings of Christians in the church that is largely to blame for people being disillusioned and leaving. It's easy to sympathise with those who've departed, to see things from their point of view.

[34 : 28] And they want others to depart too. Each of the episodes of that podcast, the host signs off in this way, keep leaving.

But God's word for first century believers and God's word for 21st century believers is abide in him. Continue in him.

And God said to them and he said to us, he says to us, verse seven, chapter three, verse seven, little children, let no one deceive you. Let no one deceive you.

And so God here in this passage invites us to compare and to consider these two groups, those who had departed and those who remained. And consider where do you see the power that produces godliness at work?

Chapter three, verse seven, 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.

[35 : 37] Three, verse ten, 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.

If you're tempted to follow those who abandon Jesus, well just consider where do you see the power that produces godliness at work? Is it in those who've departed?

Or is it in those who remain? Is it in those who turn their back on Christ? Or is it among those who cling to Jesus still?

You'll find perfection in neither place, that there are no perfect people this side of Jesus' return, but you will discern a different power, I believe, at work in each?

Where do you see malice and spite and vitriol? And where do you see those who, where do you find those who prize patience and gentleness?

[36 : 43] Where do you see reckless living and coarse language? And where soberness and wholesome speech? Think, where is the power that produces godliness at work?

You know, I look around the community of those who cling to Christ and I see the power that produces godliness at work. I can think back over the course of my 35 years as a Christian and one of the things that has drawn me on is in each church I've been, in each place I've been, to see those who are further along the path and to see how their lives have been transformed.

I think of when I was in high school, Ruth Howard, now Ruth Flanagan, who was a high school teacher. I was lost. She was full of kindness and the joy of the spirit, a life transformed.

I think when I was at Willoughby, Anglican Church, of Paul Bayliss, the minister, a humble man, a man of faith, a man who lived on his knees in prayer, and of Sheila Spencer, an evangelist who loved God's word with a heart for the lost, lives transformed.

At Erinner, I think of Margaret Dodd, a retired woman who we were meeting in a high school and she'd come in each morning and clean the high school toilets for the sake of the church.

[38 : 24] And Royce Warner, in his final years, who could hardly see anything before his eyes and yet he could see heaven. Lives transformed.

At Narenburn, I think of Reg Becker, faithful until the end, now with the Lord. When I've preached this message in other churches, the example I gave at this point was not from churches I've been at in the past, but from here.

You know, someone here, I won't name them because I think that would probably embarrass them, but you know, you can go and look it up online if you like. But just think, here among us, right, even here among us, consider those who have remained in Christ 50, 60 years, or even more, the senior brothers and sisters among us, who have something better to live for than the fleeting pleasures of this life, who have endured hardship and loss, who are sound in speech and upright in conduct, who serve with what strength God gives them as long as they can, and who wait in hope for Christ's return.

And just consider men and women, brothers and sisters, lives transformed by the reality of who they are, the reality of what they will be, and the reality of what Christ has done.

And all that is just the first fruits. All that is just the beginning of the splendour which Christ is working in us.

[40 : 09] So if you're disheartened about your progress in godliness, if you're discouraged at the slowness of your sanctification, continue in him.

For you will bear your father's likeness, and you will be like your Lord, and what Christ has done will have its full effect in you.

come, stay. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, what a tremendous privilege, even that, that we can call you our father, and that we are your children, born of you.

Lord, please do produce in us the likeness of your righteousness. We thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, for the testimony we have of him.

[41 : 21] And thank you that we don't only have testimony, but one day we will see him face to face. We will see him as he is, and in that moment, we will be transformed.

And so purify us, even now, make us more like our Lord. And we thank you for what Christ has done through his death and resurrection, that he came to take away sins.

Well, Father, please take away sin from our lives. As we are completely forgiven, so sanctify and transform us.

Help us to cling to Jesus throughout whatever ups and downs and hardships life may bring, and whatever temptations, whatever opposition, however often those who have departed will beckon to those who to remain, follow us.

Help us to cling to Christ, to abide in him, to remain in him, until he comes. We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.