

Children of God? Or of the Devil?

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[0 : 0 0] I know because, as I said, I listened to these sermons. I know that Matt gave us some really good context. I know that Chris gave us some really good context for this book. But it's so important.

If you want to understand God's Word, if you want to understand what John is talking about in this letter, you need to know the context that he was writing in.

And perhaps you're here for the first night or you were not listening in the last couple of weeks, and I'm going to tell you now, just to refresh your memory. The context that we're coming into now as we pick up 1 John is this.

John, the Apostle John, a disciple of Jesus, one of Jesus' three best friends. Think about your own three best friends, how close you are to them.

He was one of those three best friends of Jesus. He saw Jesus in his earthly ministry. He saw him die on the cross for the sins of the world. He saw him resurrected and ascending into heaven.

[1 : 0 0] And then he went out and he did what everyone does when they are captivated by the love of God in Christ. They want to go out and they want to tell people about Jesus.

And so he started some churches and those churches planted churches. And so he's writing here probably to a collection of churches, including his own kind of community. Unfortunately, what has happened, what happened then and what happens today and what's happened all throughout history is that enemies of God, false teachers, instruments of Satan, in this passage they're called children of the devil.

These false teachers have come into his church and come into these other churches that he's responsible for and they have started teaching falsehoods. And so John is writing to them to say, don't listen to these false teachers.

Remember the truth that I've told you. There's probably a lot of things that these false teachers were trying to convince these Christians of, but some of the big ones were this.

First of all, they were telling these Christians terrible truth, terrible untruth, terrible travesty of the truth.

[2 : 2 1] And that is, they were saying that Jesus was not really who John claimed he was. Jesus did not really die on the cross for the sins of the world.

Jesus was not really the son of God. blaspheming against Jesus by saying that he was deluded or a liar.

They believed in God. They said they believed in God, the God of the Old Testament, but they did not believe that Jesus was the savior of the world.

Another thing that they were really known for, and you can sort of imply this from what John talks about in these letters, they were going around saying, well, you know how John's always on about love in action?

He was. That's what John was known for. There's some really interesting early church sources, and I don't know if this is true or not, but it's a story that John, even in his old age, even when he was on his deathbed, he used to be carried around the city and he would just say, brothers, sisters, love one another.

[3 : 31] Just repeat that over and over again. Brothers and sisters, love one another. That's his big idea. That's his big idea in the Gospel of John. That's his big idea in the letters that he writes.

Brothers and sisters, love one another. We're going to see tonight that what he meant by that was love one another in words, but all the more in action.

You don't love one another unless you act it out. You don't love God unless you act out your love for him. So what these teachers were doing, remember we're talking about the false teachers, they were coming into his church and saying, you know how John's always on about love in action?

Don't worry about that. You know how John's always on about backing up what you believe with action, with living out your faith? Don't worry about that. We don't believe in that.

You can just say what you like. You can say you love God. You can say you're devoted to God. You can say you love your brothers and sisters, but you don't have to back it up with anything. There's no works. It's this easy ride.

[4 : 30] We just came up with it. It's really cool. You don't have to do anything. They said a bunch of other things that were really terrible. They were the two big things. Jesus isn't really the saviour, and you don't have to do anything to be right with God.

You can just say it. So John writes to them, and he pleads with them.

You look at the language of this book, and he's just begging them, don't go with them. Don't believe what they're telling you. Remember what I said. Remember what I've taught you. I knew Jesus.

Remember when Matt was speaking to us from chapter 1. He says, John says, I saw him. I touched him. I heard him. I was there with him. I know who he is.

He's the son of God. He died for the sins of the whole world. It's an exhortation. It's a warning. Don't listen to the false teachers.

[5 : 31] And that's where we find ourselves tonight. And in this passage, John particularly wants to talk about what it means to act out what you believe.

to practice what you preach. In fact, that's the theme for the next couple of talks that I'm going to be talking about. So you're going to hear some repetition.

But it's something we need to hear. It's so easy to say we love God, to say we love one another, and never do anything to back it up. Talk is cheap.

So I'm going to pray for us now, all right? I'm going to pray for us that God would just affect in us a change tonight so that when we walk out of here, we live for him.

The big idea tonight is this. Know the love that God has for you and then live for him.

[6 : 35] Know the love, the amazing love that God has for you and then live, live, live for him. Know the love that God has for you and then live, live every day for him.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your grace to us in giving us your word where you speak to us so powerfully about the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection and the expectation you have of us to live in response to that, to love you and love one another in action.

I pray that we wouldn't just believe in you. we wouldn't just think about you, that we wouldn't just speak of you, but that we would live for you.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's pick it up at the first verse in this reading. It's verse 28, alright?

So, look on with me and we're going to read it. Verse 28 of chapter 2. John writes this. He says, Now, little children, I love the way that he speaks to his church.

[8 : 07] He just loves them so much. It's not patronizing, it's not mocking, he just loves these people with all of his heart and so he calls them his little children. Like he gave birth to them himself, he just loves them that much.

Now, little children, abide in him, remain in him, live for him. It would be another translation. It's a continuous living for Jesus.

Now, little children, abide in him, remain in him, live for him, so that when he is revealed, when he returns, we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

I wonder if you've ever been ashamed. I bet you don't have to think too hard, right? All of us have been ashamed at some point.

I've been ashamed many times in my life, done many shameful things, but one really springs to mind. And this happened when I was a little kid.

[9 : 14] And when we were little kids, particularly my two brothers and I, used to spend a lot of time at my grandparents' house. Just down the road they helped raise us and my grandfather was a very accomplished electrical and mechanical engineer and just very good with his hands, very much a craftsman and into all kinds of craft, but particularly woodworking.

And under his house, just about the whole of the underneath of his house, was a workshop. It was like Santa's workshop, only way better. Less snow than reindeer, right?

But it was like that. It was like that to us. It was like just heaven on earth. He could go in there and he just had tools that he'd amassed over the years. There was wood everywhere. There was the smell of sawdust in the air.

It was just dusty and dirty and a beautiful thing. And I remember distinctly the first time that I was allowed to be in the workshop by myself, or that is without an adult.

I was there with my older brother, Benjamin, and my grandfather said to us that he was going to give us an amount of time, I don't know, a couple of hours. He was going to leave with us all of his tools.

[10 : 23] He was going to leave with us all the wood that we needed. He was going to leave paint, lacquer, sealant, everything that we needed and he had a project for us to do. And each one of us had half of a project to do.

And when we were finished, it would make a hole and it was going to be amazing. And so he said, listen, we've got to do some stuff up in my den, up in my study and we're going to come back in a certain amount of time and I'll see how you've done.

We'll see if the project has come together. And so we were just out of control, excited about this. Tools, wood, are you with me?

No one's nodding. All right. It was amazing. All right. And so we got to work on this project and both my brother and I, my brother's a very conscientious person even to this day, both he and I started very conscientiously, very quickly, very excited.

Then about 15 minutes later, I started to get a little bit distracted. Still happens today. I got a little bit distracted and I don't know, I saw a lizard or something so I went off chasing that.

[11 : 32] I love catching stuff and so on. And then I got catching other things and then I started to think about the milk bar that was just over the road and the fish and chip shop and then before you knew it, I was over there getting two dollars of chips and a big bottle of coke and some chocolate mates or something to eat and then before you knew it, the time was up.

I made my way back to the workshop and I walked in and my brother had this fantastic project that he'd finished. He'd stuck to it. Right throughout the time he just stayed focused, he got the job done and there was my rubbish effort.

Some tools and a couple of bits of wood, no work. And I remember my grandfather, the shadow of him walking through the door and just feeling utterly, utterly, utterly ashamed.

He'd come back and my brother's half was done and mine was a shambles and I felt so ashamed because I respected him so much and he had given us this massive privilege and I'd just thrown it away.

I hadn't seen it through. Do you know that Jesus is coming back? Jesus is coming back.

[13 : 02] He's coming back from heaven. He's coming back to roll up history. The end of the age. He's going to finish it all and start it all new in heaven for eternity with no more crying, no more tears, no more pain.

You know what? Some Christians are going to get to that day when Jesus comes back. Some Christians are going to get to that day and they're going to be ashamed.

I truly believe that some Christians will get to that day and they're going to stand before Jesus and they're going to be ashamed. They're going to be so disappointed. They're going to have eternal joy in heaven to be enjoyed with Jesus.

their saviour and their brothers and sisters but they're going to be ashamed on that day because they're going to find out in the blink of an eye that everything, that all of life, that every day, that every waking minute, that all of creation, that all of eternity, that all of the new creation, that every second that they lived, that every sunrise was about Jesus.

It's all about Jesus and they've spent their entire lives and even their Christian lives so worried about themselves, so introspective, so narcissistic in their pursuit of their own goals and their own gods, that they'll find themselves in heaven with the only thing that matters and wish that they had lived every day for Jesus.

[14 : 38] They've been metaphorically going to the fish and chip shop, chasing lizards, mucking around, instead of being about the business that their father has given them to live every day for Jesus.

sins. You don't want to be ashamed on that day. Live for God every day.

We're going to talk about a big key, how to do that right at the end. And that's why I'm going to skip over the next few verses, all right? You'll notice that the start of chapter 3, verses 1 through 3, is a bit of a parenthesis.

I don't want you to read it now. I know some of you are really tempted. You've got to know what it is now. Just don't do that. Stop reading. Skip ahead. Verse 4, all right? We're going to read verse 4 right through the end. We're going to come back to that most important point.

So, read with me verse 4. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins.

[15 : 50] That's Jesus. He was revealed, he came to earth to take away sins. He's reminding them of that truth. Remember that teachers are telling him that it's not true. He didn't come to remove sins.

Well, he's saying, no, no, you know. He was revealed to take away sins. And in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him, no one who remains in him, no one who lives for him sins.

No one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Those who have been born of God do not sin because God's seed abides in them, it lives in them. sin. They cannot sin because they have been born of God.

[16 : 54] The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way. This is the way that you can tell whether you're a child of God or a child of the devil. All who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

It's a big chunk of text. The whole sermon there, right? Let's just talk about it real quick. Let's talk about what he's not saying. Though it appears that he is saying this, if you want to read it really literally, and this is why it's so important to know the context of the Bible.

This is why it's so important to be in a community group so that you can talk more about the context of the Bible. What he's not saying is this. If you sin, you're not a Christian.

And if you're a Christian, then you don't sin. Some people have taken that teaching and they've come up with this kind of Christian perfectionism that all Christians should be perfect, they should never sin.

But you will remember, if you were here a couple of weeks ago, in chapter 1, of the same letter, John says this. If you say you're without sin, you deceive yourself and you make God a liar.

[18 : 15] If you're sitting here today and you think you're perfect and you don't sin, well, you're sinning by thinking that because you're calling God a liar, which is a sin. There's no way around it.

So, he's not saying that. He's not saying that Christians should be perfect, that Christians never sin. The context gives us the answer to what he's talking about. The context is that these false teachers are coming in and saying that you can believe in God and not live that way.

That's the sin. That you can say you love God, that you can say you love your brothers and sisters, you can say you love Holy Trinity Boncaster, but you don't have to act that way.

That's the sin. That's the sin that's first and foremost in his mind. You can see, the key is right there at the end. This is the way he concludes.

Remember, he says, the children of God, how can you tell the difference? How do you know if you're a sinner or a believer? The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way.

[19 : 20] This is the test. All who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters. All who do not back up their beliefs with action are not from God.

They're deceiving themselves. They're the people who take, yeah, I'm an Anglican on the census, but they've never darkened the door of the church. They believe in God. They say they believe in God, but there's no action.

There's no worship. There's no love. There's no justice. There's no moral living. There's no obedience to God's word. Those kind of people cannot do the right thing.

They cannot live the way that God wants them to live because they're not saved. God wants them to live the world. There's no love. There's no love. There's no love. There's no love. There's no hope. There's no love. There's no love. There's no love. There's no love.

I've got to go there. It's in chapter 3, verse 18. This sums it all up for us. He says, again, little children, my lovely little children that I love so much, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

[20 : 30] Little children, Holy Trinity Doncaster, the 6pm service, let us love, not in word or speech.

That's not even that important, unless you love in truth and action. Truth and action. Practice what you preach.

Otherwise, you're going to find out one of two things. Jesus is going to come back and you're going to be ashamed. Saved, but ashamed.

Or Jesus is going to come back and you're going to be judged and condemned to hell forever because you deceived yourself. You were never a Christian. You were never trusting in Jesus.

Your actions didn't back it up. Now listen, this is my final point. It would be really, really, really easy and tempting for me to do something right now.

[21 : 34] And you've heard me say this before and I just need to, I think I really do just need to repent publicly of doing this too often. The tempting thing for a pastor to do is to wrap up a sermon like this and say, here's what you need to do.

Here's a list. Get your pen out. Get your paper ready. This is the list of the things that you need to do to live for God. If this sermon is all about loving God, knowing the love of God and living for God, then here's the list.

Number one, read your Bible. Read your Bible. Why aren't you reading your Bible? Every morning.

Every night. Middle of the day. Read your Bible. What's number two? Pray. You're not praying enough.

Morons. Read your Bible. Pray. Walk with Jesus. Spend time with God. Love other people. Do justice. Love mercy.

[22 : 41] Look after orphans and widows and people in their distress. Do this. Do this list. It's so tempting to say that and I've said it before.

No doubt I'll say it again. But here is the better way. No, no, no. Hang on. Here is the only primary way. John tells us.

In those verses we skipped over. This is the key. You want to live for God? You want to live a pure life? You're struggling with sin and you don't know what to do about it? Forget the list for just a second.

You can get to that. They're all important things. But first and foremost, verse one. See what? What? Love. Love. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.

That is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that they do not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now. What we will be has not been yet revealed.

[23 : 56] What we do know is this. When He, when Jesus is revealed, when He returns, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. And all who have this hope in Him, purify themselves, just as He is pure.

Many of you have come to speak to me. You've had an issue that you've been dealing with, a sin that you can't overcome, some kind of depressing spiritual ailment that you can't seem to get over.

And you've come to me and we've sat down and we've chatted about it and we've tried to get to the bottom of what really is going on there and then we've prayed together and then at some point during our meeting, I would have said, how much are you reading your Bible?

How much time are you spending in prayer? Are you involved, church? Are you serving? What I should have said first, all that is secondary.

What I should have said first is this. Verse 1, See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.

[25 : 12] See what love the Father has for us that we should be called children of God. God loves you so much.

It's an astonishing love. It's an unconditional love. It's an endless love. It's a boundless love. It's a costly love and a risky love. Expensive love.

Cost him his son. And he loves you with that kind of love that you should be called an enemy of God. A child of God.

Formerly an enemy of God, but now a child of God. Let me tell you, I don't think I really, really, to be honest, I don't think I've ever understood the fatherly love of God until five weeks ago.

And I became a father. I know this is dangerous because all of us have had bad experiences or many of us have had bad experience of earthly fathers, but to understand the love that a father can have for a child and to understand that in God that love is perfected.

[26 : 35] Let me just open my heart up to you. Tell you a story. Every morning, it'll happen tomorrow morning. If you're up this early, you can think about me. Every morning before work, I get daddy time.

I get daddy time with India. And it's the best time of the day because she's just had a feed and she's just sitting there, lying there, all alert and lovely and calm and beautiful.

And I just get to play with her. We go outside, we have adventures, we catch bugs, we pick flowers, or we just read or we just spend a lot of time just looking at each other.

She's checking me out and I'm checking her out and I'm just head over heels in love. I've experienced deep, deep, inexpressible love and intimacy with Renee, with my wife, okay?

But this is fatherly love. This is the love that John is talking about, that we should be called children of our heavenly father. And I never, ever, ever, ever knew that I could experience that level of love, of tenderness.

[28 : 03] I never knew that it was possible to experience that level of connection with another human being, this little baby. She's done nothing to deserve my love.

She's done nothing for me at all at this stage. I'm trying to teach her how to make coffee and it's just not... She's not there yet, but my love for her is unconditional.

I tell her, I don't know if she can understand me, but I tell her, there is nothing you can ever do to make me love you more or make me love you less. That's fatherly love.

And that love that I have is so broken and so incomplete. I'm so selfish and I'm so broken. The love that God has for us, his fatherly love, is perfect.

John talks later on in chapter 4 about God's perfect love that drives out all fear. Remember in Ephesians chapter 3, Paul talks about the love of God like this.

[29 : 09] He says, chapter 3 verse 18, I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

That's the answer. That's the answer. If you want to live your life for God, don't go home and try and tick off the list of reading your Bible 15 hours a day and praying this much.

That'll always fail. You'll always be broken. You'll always be undisciplined. That'll only ever go to the level of your commitment for that day or week or month.

Start first with the love of God, the incomprehensible yet comprehensible love of God.

If you know the love that God has for you, you will live the kind of life that He wants you to live and it won't be an act of religious discipline so much as just an outpouring of your love back for Him.

[30 : 22] John says in this letter that we love God because He first loved us. If you want to love God well, then understand the love that He has for you. He says it right there at the end.

If you want to live a godly life, verse 3, and all who have this hope, all who understand this fatherly love, purify themselves just as He is pure.

So often we get it the wrong way round. I'll finish here, I promise. But so often we get it the wrong way round. So often in my life, I've got it the wrong way round. I have tried to purify myself so that I can love God.

I've tried to purify myself so that He might love me back. You tried that? I need to overcome this sin. I need to fight this sin. I need to read my Bible more.

I need to pray more. I need to love Christians more so that my love for God will increase, so that maybe His love for me will increase. I might merit some of this love that He says He has for me.

[31 : 21] But John says here, first you need to comprehend the love of God in Christ Jesus. First you need to understand that you are a child of God, that God's seed lives within you.

There He means God's Holy Spirit lives within you, dwells within you. First you need to understand the extent to which God loved you to die on the cross.

And everyone who has that hope, everyone who confidently walks to Jesus when He returns, everyone who has that kind of hope purifies themselves.

He wants you to be pure. And it's going to be a battle to stay pure. And you do need to read your Bible and you do need to pray and you do need to get around and love other Christians.

But first, know that God loves you. Next time you come to see me about an issue and I try and hammer you with a list of things, you say to me, can you remind me that God loves me first?

[32 : 33] Next time someone comes to you and says, you know a lot about God, can you help me with this thing that I'm struggling with? You need to say first, whether they're a Christian or not, God loves you.

God really loves you. Amen? Amen. It's what we need to hear tonight.

It's what we need to hear every day. If we're going to persevere, if we're going to abide in Him, if we're going to remain in Him, if we're going to live for Him, let's know the love of God that we should be called children of God.

I'm going to pray for us to finish, all right? Let's bow our heads. My Father, we thank You so much for Your grace to us, Your love for us.

We thank You so much that God so loved the world, even the world who rejected Him, even the world who were enemies of Him, even the world who spat on Him, even the world who wants nothing to do with Him.

[33 : 57] God so loved that world that He gave His only Son, Jesus, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may walk boldly into heaven on Jesus' return.

They might have confidence without shame because God has loved them and they have responded with godly living and action.

Our Father, please save us from the great, the great risk we run in this church to sing songs, to confess Jesus as Lord, to say prayers about how much we love You, to listen to sermons, to learn about the Bible and never act on those convictions.

Father, forgive us when we've been people who are all words and no action. Please help us to be people of the Word and people of action in living that love out.

Lord, would You please just anoint the rest of this sermon series so that every time we come in here and every time we podcast during the week and every time we meet in community groups or discussion groups or accountability groups and talk about 1 John, please, would You just be here to effect change in our hearts so that we'd be more loving people, greater lovers of God and greater lovers of our brothers and sisters.

[35 : 34] We pray all these things in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen. Amen. Please stand.