

First John (10) - God's Children

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Please, for a short time this evening, to 1 John chapter 3, and we're going to look at verses 1 to 3 of this chapter.

Chapter 3 of 1 John, verses 1 to 3. 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. Now, as we continue with our studies in 1 John, we've been looking at how John is countering the false teaching that surrounds them.

And indeed has made its way out of the church. Those who left, having taken up this false teaching, they've gone out from us, as we saw recently.

[1 : 05] And the teaching he continues to give is really against the kind of doctrinal errors and the behavioral errors that he knows characterizes the false teachers who have gone and are still challenging his teaching and the teaching of the gospel in the church that he's writing to.

And as you see at the beginning of the chapter here, the first word, see, is a very important word there in the context, because what John is doing by using that word see is just saying immediately to those that he's writing to, look, this is so important.

You know what it's like when you're in a place with a stage, a theater or wherever it is you are that has a stage in front of you, and for a time until the show begins or until whatever happens begins, the lights are actually on, and then you'll find very often the lights will be dimmed and go down, and a spotlight will come very often and highlight something on the stage.

That's really the kind of thing that John is doing here verbally using this word see. It's a spotlight. What he's really saying is this is the spotlight I'm giving you. I'm highlighting something for you that's really so eminently important.

And what he's highlighting especially is the love of God the Father for his children. John is saying this is something really worthy of being noticed, worthy of really giving attention to.

[2 : 31] So I'm spotlighting it. I'm turning the light on it for you. See. That means tonight we're caught up in the strength of that word, in that exclamation, in that imperative.

Here's the spotlight. Here's the topic. Here's what he's highlighting. What kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God.

And he goes on to speak about the children of God being what they are. They are now the children of God. He's saying he's wanting to emphasize that for their encouragement. They're facing all of this false teaching.

They're facing false teaching that suggests that perhaps they've got it wrong. And they should follow the false teachers themselves. They should follow the new style of teaching. The new style of truth, if you like, as it's called, by the false teachers.

It's something that you're currently aware of in our own particular generation as well. But he's saying, I want to encourage you that you already are the children of God now. You don't have to progress any further to become the children of God.

[3 : 38] The love that God has shown to you. The love that God has exercised in making you his children. And that's something that's not going to be undone. You don't need to go beyond that.

You don't need something extra to that. We are now God's children. But then he goes on to say, but we know that while that is the case, what we will be has not yet appeared.

Not yet been revealed. In other words, he's looking forward to the future. Looking forward to the end of this world. The end of life in this world. The end of all things as we know it.

And looking forward to the coming of Christ. Looking forward to that final age, if you like. Where all of the present things will be done away with. And God will establish his eternal kingdom.

We don't know, he said, yet. It's not yet appeared. It's not made obvious yet. It will yet be. But it hasn't happened yet. But we know that when he appears, we'll see when we come to it.

[4 : 40] That you could translate that when it does appear. We shall be like him. Because we shall see him as he is. And there's an impact from that. When you look forward to what God says his people will be at the coming of Christ.

And in their final state. It doesn't make you lazy in this present life. It doesn't actually make you think, well, that's okay then. I can relax. I don't need to worry any further about whether I make any spiritual progress or not.

Or my relationship with God. No, he says, everyone who has this hope in him. What does he do? In the meantime, he purifies himself and herself. Even as he is pure.

They follow a holy life. They seek to be holy. They seek to be more holy daily than they are as they go on in life. That's the pattern. That's the outline of the passage.

Now, we're not going to be able to pick up absolutely every detail. But I want to divide it into two. First of all, the way that it speaks of the Father's love. And then the way it speaks of the Father's likeness.

[5 : 46] The Father's love and the Father's likeness. He's talking about God the Father. And of course, that means we're into the whole issue of God being triune.

God being three persons but one God. I'm not going to go into that at all. But you have to take it with you when you come across an emphasis on the Father or on the Son or on the Spirit.

He is here emphasizing the Father and the Father's relationship to his children. And you can follow that out. Now, many people will say to you, well, there's no text in the Bible that actually says God is a trinity of persons.

That God is triune. Of course there isn't. We know that. But so many of the important features of biblical teaching and doctrinal orthodoxy, you come to not just by going to one text and finding what you're looking for there.

You have to take the whole of the Bible's witness and the whole of the Bible's testimony to who God is and what God is like. And the fact that God is three persons fits into that sort of study of the Bible.

[6 : 54] You take an accumulation of all its teaching on the topic of God. And as you do that, you come to the conclusion truly, very clearly, that God is three persons.

Sometimes it's emphasizing us here, the Father. But let's not go into that any further. But the Father here is emphasized. It's the love of the Father. It's the love of the Father for his children.

It is what he is to them. It is what he has done for them. And then what the children then are themselves as children of this Father. So what is he saying? He's saying, see, here's the spotlight. What kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God. There's a sense of wonder in the apostle's mind as he writes this.

He's not writing this just in a kind of cold, formal way as if he's just writing an essay with nothing whatsoever to touch himself inwardly or those that he's writing to.

[7 : 51] No, he wants really to stir them up. He wants them to feel the weight of this. He wants them to really know and appreciate the kind of love that the Father has given to them. This is why he's saying this.

He's not just saying, see, the Father has loved us. He's not just saying the fact that the Father has loved us is an amazing thing. It is. But what he wants to say is the kind of love it is, the caliber of love it is, the quality of the love that the Father has shown, that's what he's spotlighting.

Not just the fact that God has loved his people, that God has loved his children and goes on loving them. But what kind of love is it? What quality of love is it?

What manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God? And that word we is also emphatic in the text.

It's really saying this is something that makes us wonder that we should have been so loved by God the Father. That people like we are, sinners of the caliber that we are, should have been loved with the caliber of love that God loves with.

[9 : 05] That's why, you see, the spotlight is on it. It's such an amazing thing. It's such a wonderful thing. It's such a source of worship. Such a source of adoration for the apostle.

And he wants them to be caught up in this. Let's never, or at least let's try, never to read about the Father's love. The love of God the Father for his children.

And not have our hearts really moved by it and stirred by it. Because that's what it's in the Bible for. And that's what we experience in the love of God. When God's love is poured out upon us.

When God's love has gone to such length as to give his own son to the death of the cross. Well, he says, that's what we want to actually focus on. That's what you need to actually build your life upon. And stir up your mind upon. Because that's an amazing thing. The manner of that love. And you can see that when you take account of the kind of people we are that God has loved.

[10 : 10] Because when you go through the Bible, it's very obvious. I know you know this already. But it's again something that we perhaps don't stop over and take the time over that we should. The kind of people we are by nature.

The kind of person a sinner is. Every sinner is. To be loved by this God. In the way that he loves. In the manner of love with which he loves.

And you can see one of the things that's obvious from this. Is that God takes such an intense and personal interest in his people. Here were the heretics.

They were. It appears that they were an early kind of Gnosticism. A heresy that developed as time went on. After the time of the apostles.

But even already it's showing itself in the time of the apostles. And Gnosticism said you can't have God close to any human being. God doesn't get close to human beings. God can't touch human beings.

[11 : 08] God can't have that close relationship with human beings. Because they're sinful and he's holy. And there has to be that distance. And you have to have a whole series of steps. Through angels and all sorts of things.

Before you can actually think about reaching God. And John is saying. Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us. You see he's not impersonal and distant.

He is actually close. Personal. Caring. For every individual that he loves.

John is setting out against the heretics. And he's saying to these children of God. As he writes to them. Don't be mistaken about God. Don't be mistaken about who God is.

And what he's like. Don't be taken in by the heresy that says. Ah you can't really approach God. You know without going through. A whole lot of spiritual machinery. And a whole lot of kind of.

[12 : 10] Spiritual gymnastics. By which you have to perform. Certain rituals and all the rest of it. And then. If you're fortunate. You might get somewhere close to God. John is saying. He's already come close to you.

His love has fallen upon you. He's come to you in Jesus Christ. He's come to you through his spirit. His love is known to you. He has picked you out.

And singled each one of you out. All of you who know him. All of you who are his children. It isn't just in a general fashion. That he's come to love them as a people.

And everyone here tonight. Who knows the love of God. For themselves. Who know Christ as their savior. Who have come to appreciate something. Of that love of God. Well it's precious to you.

Isn't it? That God has thought about you. That God hasn't passed you by. In his interest for other people. That God's love has come to you personally.

[13 : 11] That God's love has cared for you. And continues to care for you. And that God's interest is still. In you as a human being. As an individual human being. In all your concerns.

In all your circumstances. In all your daily life. From day to day. What manner of love. What kind of love. What personal love.

He has shown to us. And who are we? Well of course. Who are we? That's a huge question. When the Bible answers in different ways. What is a sinner like?

How does God see us. In our sinfulness. What is our sinfulness. In God's estimation. Well let me take you back to Ezekiel. Ezekiel wrote.

To the people of Israel. And in chapter 16. He reminded the people of Israel. As to how God found them. What they were like. When God found them as a people.

[14 : 10] You were he says. Like an abandoned infant. Newborn child. That had just been cast out. And uncared for. No I pitied you.

From that day that you were born. Your cord was not cut. Nor were you washed with water. To cleanse you. Nor rubbed with salt. Nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No I pitied you. To do any of those things to you. Out of compassion for you. But you were cast out. In the open field. For you were appalled. On the day that you were born. And when I passed by you. And saw you wallowing in your blood. I said to you in your blood. Live. I said to you. He repeats it. I said to you in your blood.

Live. And I made you flourish. Like a plant of the field. And you grew up. And you became tall. And arrived at full adornment.

[15:08] And when I passed by you again. And saw you. Behold you were at the age of love. I spread the corner of my garment upon you. And covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you.

And entered into covenant with you. And you became mine. And your beauty. Became a thing of renown. To the nations. See what God does.

He begins with us. In the ugliness of our sinfulness. He looks upon us. In the ugliness of our guilt. And of our defilement. Because that's really what sin is.

It's our defilement. It's our guilt. It's that abhorrent thing. That God cannot look upon. Without it being offensive to him. That's you. And that's I. Get away from the idea.

That somehow or other. You can produce some dignity for yourself. In the presence of God. For him then to be persuaded. To accept you. It's not on. It's not on. We are all the children of wrath.

[16:05] Just like others. And the Bible emphasizes. Our sinfulness to us. And the grotesqueness. Of our sinfulness. Not so that we will lose hope. Not so that we will say.

Well. I don't accept that. Who's going to actually. Believe or trust in that God. No. God is actually saying this to us. So that we will turn to him. So that he will make us beautiful.

That he will deliver us out of that. Ugliness of our sin. And make us like himself. With his beauty. That's how he finds us.

That's what he does. That's what his love is like. He's not turned away. From the sight of us. And our sinfulness.

His love towards his people. comes to fall upon them. As described there in Ezekiel. You know. Ezekiel was appealing to people.

[17:06] Who had gone away from the Lord. Who had turned their back upon the Lord. And that's a very important point. In that passage. Because Ezekiel goes on to speak about.

How these people. Backslid and abandoned. Their relationship with God. What he's really doing is. Showing what God had done for them.

And really pretty much. Saying to them. With such love directed to you. With such love. Having actually come to settle upon you. How could you do this? That your relationship with God.

You? Maybe tonight. You know in your heart. That you're not as you should be. That your relationship with God. Has become cold. That you've put a distance between him.

And yourself. That you've lost that sense of. Warmth of his fatherliness. that that gap has grown.

[18:11] Tonight you don't know for yourself as you used to the warmth of fellowship with him. And you'd love to have that back. Wouldn't you?

What's he reminding you of? He's reminding you of the quality of his love. He's reminding you of what his love is like. What it's done for you. Behold, look, see what kind of love the Father has given to us.

Can we turn away from this love? Can we neglect this love? Can we go and find some other love in its place? Of course not.

How can we? How could we? Behold, what kind of love the Father has given to us. So take encouragement if your heart has grown cold from the fact that God has not forgotten you.

If God has loved you once, he keeps on loving you. And even if you've never known that love personally for yourself by coming to him and giving your life to him, you can do it now.

[19:26] You can do it here and now as you're sitting in that pew. You can look at the love of God and Jesus Christ and say, I don't want to ignore that any longer. I don't want to know that to live without knowing that further.

I want more of that for myself. That's where I must be. That's what God means to me. I want to know him more as my Father, as my loving Father, as my caring Father.

Friend, there is nothing in the Bible at all that will suggest to you that you stay away from him, that you not come near him.

It's the very opposite, isn't it? When you think of the kind of love that God the Father has for his children. We spent a bit more on that than we anticipated. But let's move on.

He's saying here, the Father's love is also that we should be called the children of God and such we are. You see, this love has made them his children. And behind this, there's not just the idea of being adopted into God's family.

[20 : 33] That's a very wonderful and important biblical doctrine. The doctrine of adoption, that God adopts us into his family. Which sits alongside our justification and our sanctification.

But what's behind this and often in the writings of John you'll find it is rebirth. We're born again. The Father gives birth to us. He begets us so that we come to be born again spiritually by the Holy Spirit.

And this is from the love of God. Behold, see what kind of love that we should be called, that we who are undeserving of it, that we who are so ugly in our sinfulness, should actually become and be made the children of God.

What a precious thing that is. That you should actually come to be born spiritually spiritually into this family of God. And he says, such we are now.

This indeed is what we are. We brought up in a church tradition that sometimes we feel maybe at some times that we are reluctant to actually be a hundred percent positive about what we are in the Lord.

[21 : 47] Isn't that the case? Somebody asks you, even if you have been following the Lord for years like myself, are you now a Christian? Do you know you are a Christian? Do you have the hope of the Christian that you will go to heaven?

Do you have God as your father? And very often we will say, well, I hope I have that. And here is John saying, of course you have that. Let's never be reluctant to say, I am a child of God.

You don't say that proudly in your own strength. You don't say that as if you had produced it yourself. You don't say that as if you had brought it about yourself by your own merit. But God has made you His child.

When God has made you His child, it's not right to deny that, to be reluctant to confess it. Maybe you are here and you know you are a child of God.

You know that God has changed your life. You know that God is your father. But you have never actually come positively to state that or to confess that or to take the next step in bringing that into the open by actually coming to the prayer meeting or by coming to sit at the Lord's table.

[23 : 01] All the things that we associate with moving on with our spiritual advancement and progress. This is for the child of God, you see. There's not the lights on the Lord's table and that's not so that a child of God can say, I'm not yet fit for that.

I'm not yet qualified for that. Are you a child of God? If you are, then you're qualified for it. It's for God's children. It's the table for the children. It's the children's table.

So by the time, God willing, the next communion comes around, you put it to yourself as one of God's children. I don't want not to be sitting at His table next time.

I don't like sitting outside His table. If the table is for the children, that means me. That includes me. Because He's loved me.

And He's loved me with this kind of love. How can I not respond by showing my love for Him? And so we are, He says. This is what we are now.

[24 : 04] So there's something about the Father's love. But let's move on quickly to the Father's likeness. And He's saying here, it does not yet appear what we shall be. What we shall be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Well, in verse 1, you see, He's saying here, the world does not know us. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him or does not know Him. You see, there's a very considerable distance and difference between the children of God and what John often calls the world.

The people outside of that group of God's people or God's children. People are often in opposition to God's children. And when you go to the Gospel of John, the likes of John 17, where you find John dealing with this very much in the same way as here.

You remember that prayer of Jesus before He went out to face the cross finally. He prayed for His church. He prayed for His disciples then and for those who would believe in Him afterwards.

And this is what He said amongst many other things. He says in verse 14 there, I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.

[25 : 25] I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. You know, sometimes we kind of act surprised and we're perhaps are a bit surprised that the world doesn't love us.

That the world sometimes hates us and hates what we stand for. Why should that be a surprise? The world is a total contrast to what the children of God are and to what God Himself is.

And while we seek to present the gospel to the world, let's never imagine that that's going to be palatable to the world while they continue to be the world.

We want them to be saved. We want to show the love of God to them. We want to show Christian love to them. We want in every way to present the gospel to them tactfully and lovingly and patiently. But let's never imagine that we're going to bridge the gap between what the world is and what the Christian is.

because there's that incompatibility. They're two different entities altogether. God has changed us when we were the world and belonged to the world.

[26 : 32] All of us who are God's people and saved tonight. We've been born again. We've been taken out of the world. They are not of the world, Jesus said. And here is John also saying here, the reason the world does not know us or want to know us is that it does not know him.

What happened in the case of Jesus will be the case for his people. If they have kept my word, they will keep your words. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you.

Now, we shouldn't say that in a matter-of-fact way, but it is a fact nonetheless. It's not something that you can actually cure. It's just two different outlooks altogether.

Two different ways of life to opposing ways of life. That's just how it is. And so we're unlike the world, God, as Jesus is saying, John is saying.

But that means we are like the Father. We are not yet what we shall be. It hasn't yet appeared. It's not going to appear until Jesus returns.

[27 : 44] But we know this, that when it is revealed, revealed, and I think we should probably take it rather than just when he appears, you may, in your margin, you might have another translation possible, when it appears, which also fits the context very well.

And what he's saying is, it has not yet been made clear, it has not yet appeared what we shall be, but we know that when it will appear, when that is revealed, then we shall be like him.

We shall be like God. We will bear his image perfectly through being born again and redeemed and glorified with Christ. You know what it's like when you have a Christmas parcel and you have the parcel where you take the Christmas gifts and they're all nicely wrapped up.

And for the children especially, you maybe have asked for something particular for Christmas. And then when Christmas Day arrives, go down and see your gifts, they're lying there, they're all packaged up.

And you look at them and perhaps, for a wee while, at least you might feel and see, I wonder what this is, did I get what I asked for and so on. Well, you won't know until it's revealed, will you? Until you take the wrapping off and then you can see what's inside it.

[29 : 00] That's what John is really saying here. We won't know our final state until it comes to be, until it is revealed. But he says, I know this, when it is revealed, we shall be like him.

We will not be unlike our Father. We will perfectly reflect our Father, our Father's image. Now, I'm saying our Father here because some commentators take it that it's Jesus that's meant when we shall see him as he is and we shall be like him.

And of course, the Bible does say that we shall indeed be like Jesus, that we come to be in the image of his Son, but in some parts of the writings of the New Testament.

Ephesians, for example, chapter 4, verse 24. It's the Father that's mentioned there. And what it says there is that you have, he says, you've been renewed, been renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

And you remember that Jesus said himself in John chapter 14 where he was addressing there, Philip, who asked that he would see the Father and that would be enough for them.

[30 : 20] Show us the Father and that will be sufficient for us. And in verse 9 of John 14, you remember how Jesus responded to that where he said, have I been so long with you, Philip, and you still do not know me?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. You see, what you see in Jesus is the likeness of the Father. And to say that you will ultimately be in the likeness of Jesus is pretty much the same as saying you'll be in the likeness of the Father.

You shall see him through Jesus, in Jesus, as he is. there is nothing of the Father unlike what you see in Jesus.

As we were one time taught by our systematics theology, Professor MacLeod, who I think had found it in somebody else's writing. I can't remember who it was just now.

But it was, he said, a great comment that he himself built into his lectures. in Jesus, he said, there is no God unlikeness to God in him.

[31 : 26] There is nothing unlike God. What God is like is what you see in Jesus. What the Father is like is what you see in Jesus. He has revealed himself there. It's his heart.

It's the exposure of the Father's heart. What a great privilege it is to know God. Know something of what God is like but what a great hope it is. What a great privilege to have the hope that one day you and I if we are in Christ and when we come to Christ's return well we shall see our Father in Christ.

We shall see him as he is. We shall see him in a way that's impossible in this life for us. And we shall be like him. We shall be like him.

There are many times when people in this world say of children they really like their father or maybe it's like their mother. Better balance it up. But in any case whatever it is they bear the likeness of that parent.

You can tell them on their parent father or mother. But here is here are the children of God. How do you know who their father is?

[32 : 40] Well you know it from their likeness to him. they are like him perfectly in glory and that begins here in this world.

And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure. What's our greatest incentive to be holy? is it that we ourselves will at last find that we are admitted to heaven?

Well of course that's part of it. Very important part of it. Without holiness no one shall see the Lord. But isn't there something even more than that? In your mind tonight as a Christian isn't there something more than just looking into yourself and saying this is what I want to be.

Aren't you also saying this is what I want my father to say about me that I am very like himself. That he is glorified in me as I bear his image.

And whoever has that hope in him purifies himself as he is pure. Seeks to follow holiness of life even through the course of this life too.

[34 : 02] The father's love then. What is there like knowing the love of God the father? The love of God the father that creates a family of children for himself.

The children that bear his image. That he takes from the ugliness of sin and changes into the beauty of his likeness. And the father's likeness what likeness is there?

to being like God. To being like God the father. To having that image. And to having glory given to God because of it.

As I said I think last time in conclusion so let me ask the question again of you tonight. Do you know God as your father? father? Do you treasure God as your father?

Is the fatherliness of God not truly precious to you? Are you still outwith that bond with God where you know him as your father?

[35 : 11] Are you not concerned daily to have the care of God your father above everything else? So that whatever else happens in this life and whoever is or is not taken from you you will continue to know the provision of a caring God a loving God to make you into his likeness.

May God bless these thoughts on his word to us. Now we're going to conclude by singing tonight from Psalm 31. Psalm 31 in the Scottish Psalter that's on page 243 from verse 21 to 24.

All praise and thanks be to the Lord for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified but from thine eyes cut off I am I in my haste hath said my voice yet heardst thou when to thee with cries my moan I made.

And you can see in verse 23 the response to the love of God in the love that he calls upon God's people to show in response O love the Lord all ye his sin so verses 21 to 24 Lord and conclusion all praise and thanks be to the Lord for he hath magnified his wondrous love to thee within a city fortified for from thine eyes the hope I am

I in my name have said said my voice yet turns the wind to thee with Christ thy hope I may O love the Lord for he is his saints because the Lord the Lord the God the faithful and he plen just thee from to earth the reward the Lord be of good courage and strength unto your heart shall send all he who's whole and confident who's hope and confident that the

[38 : 45] Lord he said I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Lord our gracious God, we give thanks for the provision that you make for our bodies, as well as that which is provided for our souls. We pray that you bless the food that we will receive at the fellowship. Bless us in our time together at the fellowship too. And help us there to know that your presence is also with us. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.