

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part eleven
Sunday, March 14th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2084
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THE DAY WHEN THERE WILL BE NO GREENER GRASS

1 John 3:1-3 - "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. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

This is truly a marvelous portion of scripture. It feels like holy ground. It's interesting to guess just what it was that gave birth to these thoughts as the Holy Spirit worked in the mind and heart of the apostle John.

He has just written of the righteousness that must flow from the believer's life because, after all, the believer is "***born of him***" - **2:29** - "If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." John will expand on this subject later on in this letter, especially in **3:4-10**.

But it's almost as though he has one of those moments with the Lord - a kind of Spirit driven insight, where a thought that started out being more to the side of the argument is placed right at the center. Suddenly that phrase "***born of Him***"(29b) catches John's eye and heart. And even though John is now very, very old, it's as though he sees something fresh and new - "**See what kind of love the Father has given to us** ['Behold!' in the KJV], **that we should be called children of God; and so we are....**"
(1 John 3:1)

Sheer old age will soon rob John of his earthly life. He's preached and taught and encouraged Christians for more than half a century. Yet one more time, as he writes these words, his soul is flooded with passion and emotion as he stops to ponder the love of the Father - that we are actually "***born of Him!***" And he specifically tells the people to **wonder** at this. He calls us all to consider this subject again. You think you have heard it before. You think you already know it. But look at it again. That's John's heart.

You can't help get the idea as John writes this wonderful letter, so full of doctrine and practical instruction, that right in the middle of it he's trying to say that the way we think of our identity as

Christians can flatten out. It gets too small. John seems concerned that the foundational understanding we have of what our lives are now all about must be big enough to support the structures of kingdom life God wants to put up.

Late one night I was studying the words of one of this centuries great Bible teachers on this very text. Listen to these words from the heart of **Martyn Lloyd-Jones**:

"One of the central problems of the church today is the failure to fully realize what a Christian is. This is the central truth to know and apply. We are full of complaints and unhappiness. They arise partly from our own faults, partly from what others do to us, and partly from what the whole world does to us. But all our unhappiness is ultimately to be traced back to this - that we are looking at things that are happening to us instead of looking at the vision held up before us in these marvelous verses. It is because we do not see ourselves as the children of God. We do not go through this life and world in the way that this text indicates. That is why our trials get us down. We do not relate the parts to the whole. We do not put them into this context. We live too much with the things that are immediately in front of us instead of putting everything into the context of our standing and of our destiny as children of God."

I think John would agree whole heartedly with those words. And so did Paul. No wonder he prays **"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might"(Ephesians 1:17-19).**

Why are both John and Paul so moved and anxious that this prayer be answered in our understanding? Because there is something our heavenly Father wants to do in our hearts with this old truth of being **"born of God."** *That's* what we want to examine today.

1) **JOHN DEFINES THE NATURE OF TRUE CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE**

He places the same idea three times in three verses - **"born of Him"(2:29), "children of God"(3:1), and "children of God" again in (3:3).**

Now, I've heard all of those terms for most of my life. So have many of you. A person is **"born again."** He or she becomes a **"child of God."** And it's so right and fitting we use those terms because the Scripture is packed with such usage.

But it's so easy to use those terms - **"child of God,"** or **"children of God,"** or **"born of God"** - and become so familiar with them I think of them as being **labels** rather than **descriptions**. In other words, I constantly need to remind myself one is not a **"child of God"** in the same way one is a **"Conservative"** or a **"Liberal."**

John is saying, "No. That's not it. I'm not talking about some **tag** stuck on to the convert's life. That's why the Scriptures - with no feeling of exaggeration whatsoever - speak of God's **seed** - literally **"sperma"** - getting into His children with the life of God Himself. It's not a matter of external religious observance or certain doctrines memorized, cataloged, and filed away in the mind."

For example, you can take all the women in this church, stand them across the front of the sanctuary and hang a tag around their necks - **"Pregnant!"** But that won't make them pregnant. You can take all the women who are pregnant, stand them across the front of this church and hang a sign around their necks - **"Not pregnant!"** But that won't make them not pregnant if they are. It's the **life inside** that makes the difference. Not the **label on the outside**.

1 John 3:1 - **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."**

Look at **verse 2** - **"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."**

See how John works this truth in. **"We are called the children of God. That is exactly what we are! That is exactly what we are right now!"** Later on John will write about some wonderful changes that will take place in our beings when Jesus Christ comes again.

But here's one thing that will never change. ***I will never be any more God's child than I am***

right now. I will experience many deeper changes in my body and mind and affections, to be sure. But I will never **belong** to God more than I do right now.

No wonder, when John starts to talk about this truth, he says all you can do is stop with your mouth open and "**behold**" its beauty and power. But now we need to see how John presses this truth more **practically** than we sometimes think through.

2) HOW SEEING AND LOVING JESUS IS RELATED TO GROWING IN HOLINESS NOW AND ETERNALLY

1 John 3:1b-2 - "...The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

Here is what I see in these words.

A) FIRST, THE WORLD AROUND US CAN'T MAKE SENSE OF THE WAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES

When John says the "**world does not know us**"(1b) he doesn't mean your neighbor doesn't know your name or what you do for a living. He means the world **can't figure you out**. What you live for and long for is worlds apart from their motivations and aspirations.

B) SECOND, THE REASON THE WORLD DOESN'T KNOW US IS THEY DON'T KNOW GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

This is what John clearly states - "**...The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him**"(1b).

If they **knew** Jesus our lives would make perfect sense to them. Remember this point because it will become central to John's argument in a few seconds.

The **third** point from these verses is perhaps the most important of all. What makes us **different** from the world - so different, in fact, the world can't even **recognize** us – is:

C) WE HAVE SEEN THE BEAUTY AND WONDER OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

This is implied in John's words in verse 2 - "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

We will **become more** like Jesus when we **see** Him fully. That's a very important point. It explains a great deal about present pursuit of holiness. We don't **see** Jesus **completely** right now. Our vision is dimmed. Because of this, our **likeness** to Jesus is **partial**, not **complete**. But when we **do** see Jesus **completely** we will be **completely** like Him in desire and in sinlessness.

So the important question for us right now is obvious. **How** is the vision of Jesus Christ related to our personal holiness right here in this world? And we've already had a hint at the answer to that when we looked at John's description of how **unholiness** (sin) gains its power in this world:

1 John 2:15-17 - "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

As these earthly, material things **capture our attention** - our **vision** - they draw our lives into ghastly, distorted infatuations. These desires **hollow us out** because we **become** what we give our **attention** to. All sin is birthed in **desire** before **action**. And we **desire** what we set our **gaze** upon. This is John's description of the **obstetrics** of all sin.

In today's text John tells us the same process works **in reverse** to produce holiness in our lives in this world as well. Only the object of our attention is changed from the **desires of the flesh** and the **desires of the eyes** and the **pride in possessions** to the **beauty and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**.

We still fall into sin because we don't yet **see** Jesus perfectly. But we **do** see Him **increasingly**

as we give our minds over to His Spirit and His Word. And as we do, here's what happens. As we see Jesus the ***desires of the flesh***, the ***desires of the eyes***, and the ***pride in possessions*** look **more and more ridiculous**. The fleeting pleasures of sin look ***pitiful*** and ***pathetic***. The vision of Jesus gradually removes our ***gullibility***.

This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us to ***“fix our eyes on Jesus....”*** (Hebrews 12:2). This is what Paul was talking about when he said ***“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”*** (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This vision of Christ is crucial for holiness. John is saying the only thing keeping us from perfect holiness in this present age is ***an impaired perception of the greatness and beauty of Jesus***. Once we see Him fully we will be drawn to Him with a greater intensity than we presently are to the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride in possessions. When we see Jesus face to face we will be shocked as how we could possibly have been distracted by other desires - how we could have imagined any of these silly things could have been satisfying.

John's final point is related to all we've been studying:

3) **THE TRANSFORMATION MUST BEGIN NOW**

1 John 3:3 - ***“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”***

Are these not strange words? I thought it was the blood of Jesus that made us pure. Whence these words - ***“...purifies himself?”*** Actually, this verse will be misinterpreted unless we read it as it is ***threaded*** with the verse preceding:

1 John 3:2-3 - ***“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”***

Please look carefully at John's argument. It's different from what most people assume. The hope John describes ***isn't*** just the hope of going to heaven and being reunited with loved ones and seeing Jesus. The specific hope John mentions ***twice*** is the hope of ***being just like Jesus at***

the time we see Him.

I will no longer have to live with my pathetic spiritual weaknesses and compromises. I will no longer be drawn to the ***desires of the flesh***, the ***desires of the eyes***, and the ***pride in possessions***. That will all be done with. I will live for ***bigger, more glorious interests***.

And I will finally be, at long last, completely, gloriously happy and fulfilled. This will be the day when there will be ***no more greener pastures***. Imagine your life, with ***none*** of the tainted affections you now possess and ***none*** of the cash you now have in the bank. And yet, you will look back on these trinkets as though they were nothing but sand and sawdust.

“Very well,” says John. “Prepare for that time ***now***. It is pure hypocrisy to say you want to be like Jesus ***then***, but you have no interest in being like Jesus ***now***. Set your life in the direction of Christlikeness ***now*** with growing anticipation. Learn from that vision of the gloriously happy, fulfilled, most exuberantly satisfied Life ever lived ***right now***.”

Learn from the limited vision of Jesus you now have. ***Purify*** your life with what you see in Jesus. Let it ***wean*** your heart from the downdraft of the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of possessions. The fountain of His life is fresher than the drain of this world. Fix your gaze, not only on a better ***world***, but, by the power of the purifying face to face presence of Jesus, a better ***you***.