

Who's Your Daddy?  
February 8, 2009  
1 John 2:28 – 3:10

As we approach today's text it's really important to remember that John was writing to believers. His letter is thought to be a circular letter sent to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, in a number of places but to no one and no place in particular. It was designed to correct false teachings that had been cropping up and to encourage and give hope to Christ's followers...Children of God.

"...continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed..." Jesus is coming. Be ready. John goes on, "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him." Then in verse 7 of the next chapter John continues with a similar thought, "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he, Jesus, is righteous."

Wait a second...Let's stop right here. Did that just say that everyone who does right is righteous? What about my friend Dave? He's a great guy, bit of a gruff exterior but a heart of gold. Bends over backwards for people all the time. Loving husband, doting father, he's a generous man. But as a devout atheist he steadfastly refuses to believe in a higher power much less seek a relationship with Jesus. He does right. Is he righteous?

As much as it pains me for Dave's sake the answer is no. Remember, John is writing to believers. Verse 29 says, "If you know that he, JESUS, is righteous." Who is it that knows Jesus is righteous? Believers. Followers of Christ.

You know, Peter gave me a bit of razing when I missed the cold weather while I was in Florida for training. But you know the text he left me to deal with while he is at his conference is no piece of cake. But let's tackle it...

Verse 4. "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." Verse 6 "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." And, verse 8 "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning." Aye, Aye, Aye. Is there no hope? Is all lost?

Look, I've been here almost four months. I think you are a great group of Christians. You are believers, followers of Christ, followers of the one true God. And, I'm getting to know you pretty well. So I know, you are a bunch of sinners! Yes, you! And me too! We all are...there's no getting away from it. John said it in verse 8 of the first chapter of this book and we repeated it in confession last week, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." We ARE all sinners. So, what about it? IS there no hope? IS all lost? John answers us in the following verse.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Still, in Chapter 3 John is so emphatic there seems to be more to it. Remember, he’s talking to believers. In verse 7 he says, “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray.” He’s trying to address some false teachings. One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. This unbiblical teaching brought about an ascetic form of Gnosticism...since the body is matter it is evil therefore it is to be treated harshly. This may be the root of self-flagellation practiced in some Christian sects even today.

Paradoxically, this same teaching also led to licentiousness. Since God is wholly Spirit and matter was evil only one’s own spirit and knowledge was important. So, one could do with their body entirely as one wished. Clearly this was not biblical teaching then anymore than it is today. What we do and how we behave is important.

John uses words in these verses that indicate continued unrepentant sinfulness. He says, “keeps on sinning”, “continues to sin”, and “sinning from the beginning.” When we are repentant, when we try to change our sinful behaviors and confess our sins God IS faithful and forgives us our sin. That’s why there IS hope and all is NOT lost.

Verse 9, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are.” John is saying the Children of God, followers of Christ, look like God, behave like Christ, follow Christ’s example.

Several years ago as I was sitting on my Mother-in-law’s couch I looked across the living room at a set of shelves filled with nick-knacks, books and framed pictures. I became aware of a photograph tucked behind one of the pictures. I couldn’t quite see the entire photo but I could see that the woman in it seemed familiar. As I looked at it from afar I became more and more bewildered. I asked myself, “Why on earth would Nellie have a picture of my mother on her shelf?” I almost asked her the question but decided to get up and have a closer look for myself. As I picked it up to see, a smile spread across my face and I chuckled. It was a photograph of me!

I look a lot like my mother. So do my sisters. Not infrequently tho’, Bert tells me we act like her too. That’s not always a compliment. Its precursor is often a deep sigh with rolling eyeballs followed by, “Oh you Hildenbrand women!” But overall I’m glad I’m like my mother. She is a sincere Christian woman of great faith. She set a wonderful example for me...not a perfect example but a really good one.

People often express the qualities and tendencies of their parents. It's the old "apple-doesn't-fall-far-from-the-tree" concept. We are the children of God. This implies that we — by nature — will express the qualities, tendencies of God!

We, sinners all, ARE children of God. We are Children of God whether we grew into faith from a young age or had an earth shaking conversion experience. Whether we're strong in our faith in Jesus or barely holding on to the mustard seed of faith that compels us to seek him out even if we're not sure we know him. In Mark 9 the father of the boy with an evil spirit said, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" And Jesus healed the boy.

Throughout this reading of John 3 John warns us of unrepentant, continuing sin. We are reassured not only that we are Children of God but also about our future. We SHALL see Jesus when he appears. We shall be like him. Yet, what we will BE has not yet been made know. We will be like him but we don't know what that will be like. 1

Corinthians 13:12 says, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

John is describing the ideal character of the Christian, ideal in the sense that this is the reality intended by God, even if we fall short of it while we live in this sinful world.

This section is a promise of what God intends us to be and we look forward to the time when we shall be like Christ at his appearing.

Let us pray...Abba, Daddy, Father – How great is the love you lavished on us that we should be called the Children of God. Thank you for your word that teaches us how we are to be. Thank you for your mercy when we fall short. Lord, help us to be worthy of your name. Help us do what is right and to love one another. In the name of your son, our brother, Jesus, we pray. Amen.