

Reflecting Our Father

1 John 2:28-3:10

September 12, 2010

John's purpose in writing is to encourage his readers to hold the true faith and not go running off after false prophets and teachers. False teachers say things we want to hear and do not hold to the truth of God's word. We need to hold fast to the truth that has been handed down to us and the anointing we have from the Holy Spirit. So, John continues by telling his readers (again calling us, "dear children") to continue in Christ.

The reason John wants us to continue in Jesus is so that when Jesus comes back we will be confident and not be ashamed. We should not be ashamed of our behavior or that we denied Jesus by following a lie.

Our behavior, especially, should be proper. God is righteous. People whose lives reflect a constancy in doing the right thing belong to Him. This is a mark of the new birth He has given us. It is one of the evidences that we belong to Jesus and not to the world.

This morning in the New Members' class we talked about the Baptist distinctive of Regenerate Church Membership. This is one of the teachings in scripture that drives that belief. John clearly expects that those who are in the **church** will live differently from those who are outside. In this text it is the very difference in the way that followers of Christ live that marks whether or not they have a part in Christ. It is not our behavior that saves us—we are only saved by the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf—but the world and the church will be able to tell if we are saved because God's saving work in us will change the way we live our lives. Right

behavior is an outflow of the righteousness God gives us through Jesus Christ.

Because our righteousness is a gift from God, not something we have without Him, the mere fact that we can even be called His children is a result of the love He has lavished upon us. Paul put it this way, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8) The Righteous died for the unrighteous so that we might come to God and become the righteousness of God in Him.

This righteousness is not something the world can understand. The world cannot truly know us because it does not know the One into whose likeness we are being transformed. If God is foreign to those around us, we can expect that as we grow in His likeness and character that the world will have an increasingly hard time understanding us. We think in different ways. Our priorities go in the opposite direction. We act differently. For those who do not know God, the only explanations can be that we are either crazy or foolish. Of course, we know the truth is neither of those. We are just reflecting our Father and living in the new kingdom into which He has placed us.

John has been referring to the readers as "children" for the entire letter. Now, he identified all of us, himself included, as children of God. We are not only John's children in faith because we have come to know God through his ministry and teaching, we are also children of God, adopted into His people through the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. Where this adoption will take us is yet to be revealed. This is what John

meant when he said, “. . . *what we will be has not yet been made known.*” (v.3:2) We do not yet know what our glorified human bodies will be like. All this talk about flying around heaven and visiting the distant places of the universe, of being in other places with a thought or on a whim, are pleasant enough, but the truth is that we don't know. We don't know if we will be able to fly or walk through walls or do any of the other things we imagine. We do know we will have bodies. We do know we will always be human. And we do know we will have direct access to the presence of God.

We also know that, when Jesus comes back, we will be like Him. Our glorified bodies will be the same sort of body He has in the Father's throne room now. There will be no taint of sin. There will be no death. There will be no sickness or disease. Our eyes will be holy even as our spirits have been made holy in this life by the Holy Spirit. With those new eyes, freed from the veil of sin, we will see Him as He is. We will see Jesus and the Father in all their splendor, glory, majesty, might, holiness, love, grace, and mercy. We will see Him and not die, but for the first time see the source of life. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “*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.*” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

John followed this statement of seeing God as He is with another way of speaking about the righteousness that is ours in Christ. He wrote, “*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*” (v.3) Because we will have that kind of access to God through Jesus, and God is holy and pure, we, too, need to be holy

and pure. This is the teaching of scripture, and it is knowledge the Holy Spirit gives to our hearts. Our consciences are renewed and awoken within us and we desire to be pure and holy when, before we came to Christ, we may have been trying to do the exact opposite. We seek, we want, to be **pure** even as Jesus is pure, and we change our behavior accordingly. Jesus gave this same command in His Sermon on the Mount: “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” (Matthew 5:48) If nothing in our behavior is different because we are in Christ, it means we aren't in Christ. If we are in Christ, then we will be actively purifying ourselves.

The negative, or flip-side, of that is that everyone who sins breaks the law. John even offers breaking the law as a definition for sin. We know, however, that Jesus came to take away our sins (and thus bring us into compliance with the law). Jesus does not sin. It has no power over Him. It has no place in His presence. Therefore, if we are in Him, we should not be in sin's presence, it has no power over us and we should not sin.

Again, John immediately states the negative. If we do sin, we have neither seen nor known Jesus. This is a harsh statement. John is not talking about the periodic slip to which we all fall prone. He is talking about systematic, habitual sin in our lives. If we are still under the control of sin and things that are opposed to God's will in our lives, this means we are not under the control of the **Holy Spirit**. If we are not seeking perfection as part of seeking God, then we are not obeying Jesus.

We have heard recently in our number about a leader in this church who has recently been freed from the power of alcohol over his life. We rejoice with him. We celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit working in him. We also remember what finally got him to put the bottle down. He was told that God had already freed him, he just needed to step into the freedom God had provided.

God has already worked miracles in our lives. He has already changed us dramatically. Too often, however, we are so stuck in our old ways and mired in the habits and leftovers from our lives outside of Christ that we have not yet stepped into the changes God has made in us. This is true of most of us in one area of life or another. I know there are places in my life where it is true of me. To the extent that we continue in our **sins** and old ways we are denying the work the Holy Spirit has done in us and the One through whom that Holy Spirit has been supplied. As John wrote, *“No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”* (v.6)

Again, calling us his dear children, John tells us to not let anyone lead us astray. He wants us to hold true and fast to the things he has taught and the way he is setting before us. The person who does what is right is righteous. He or she looks like Jesus. The one who is righteous lives a life in keeping with the character and priorities of God.

The negative is that the one who continues in sin is of the devil. The devil has sinned from the beginning. In a sense, just as Jesus is the author of life and faith, the devil is the author of sin and death. From the beginning

of the world, the devil has been opposed to what God is doing in creation. He is the father of lies. He is doing everything he can to undo what God has done, especially in God’s people. It goes too far to say that everything that we perceive as bad is the devil’s fault. People are too ready to claim the devil’s influence in their lives to explain the bad choices they make. Listen carefully, if you are in Christ, then the **devil** can’t make you do anything. He has no power over the children of God. If you do something wrong, something against the leading of the Holy Spirit in your heart and life, it’s your own foolishness and stupidity. You can’t blame it on anyone or anything else. Too often we continue to listen to his voice when we should be listening to God’s, or we continue in the bad habits we picked up when we were subject to his influence. Let’s set aside this foolishness.

Another way of saying Jesus came to take away our sin is to say that He came to destroy the devil’s work. Just as the devil is seeking to undo what God is doing, Jesus has already undone the devil’s work in those to belong to Him. Jesus frees us from the dominion of evil. Jesus breaks the power of the old habits in our lives. It is up to us to set the old habits aside and not give them new power.

No one born of God will continue to sin. John makes the statement even more strongly. It’s not just that we don’t. It’s that we can’t. If we are born of God, if the seed of the gospel is within us, being fed on the Holy Spirit and watered with the word, then we cannot continue in lives of sin. God will break us of **sin**, or He will break us.

This is how we know which side we and those around us are on, whether we are children of God or of the devil: anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is a stark and strong statement. There are only **two** kinds of people. John does not leave any wiggle room, nor did he intend to. This, again, is why the doctrine of Regenerate Church Membership is so important to Baptists. The life of the church, then and now, depends on our understanding and acceptance of this. If we are to be guided and directed by the Holy Spirit, if we are to say that we are in Christ, then there ought to be evidence that we have been renewed by God and we are under His control. The church is called to live differently than the world around us. Without that evidence we are showing ourselves to be liars. We must live holy lives and we must look to one another's benefit and needs above our own.

As we close I want to issue a warning. This passage is in the midst of John's teaching about loving God and each other. It follows his confident declaration that we have overcome evil because the word of God lives in us, and next week we will see that it precedes his command that we love one another. This is not a call to judgementalism or **legalism**. We are not saved by being righteous or by making those around us act in righteous ways that are foreign to them. The church is to judge the behavior and righteousness of her members, but only in order to lovingly and with great care and patience help that righteousness grow and the relationships among the members and with Christ deepen and mature. Only in extreme cases, and with the goal of bringing a person to

Christ, should a church act as a body to censure or remove a member of that body. The body of Christ is not a police force that exists to ensure righteousness in her members. The Holy Spirit ensures that righteousness. The church, as the body of Christ, is to provide an environment of help, support, encouragement, faith, and trust in God's faithfulness in which the righteousness of her **members** can flourish. We are to call ourselves and one another to ever increasing obedience to God, always more mindful of our own sin and failings than we are of those around us, and exercising a patient and loving care and watchfulness over the body as a whole. In short, we are to love and treat each other as God has loved and treated us. This includes calling each other to obedience. It also includes giving of ourselves to help each other along the way. In this way, we will reflect our Father.