

August 6, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 1 John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from 1 John 2:28-3:3.

1. What is “abiding in Christ” supposed to look like in a Christian’s life?
2. How amazed are you that God calls you His child?
(Key: How often do you think about it?)
3. In what ways does the world indicate they do not know Christ?
4. Explain why there are various levels of toleration or resistance that we experience in our relationships with the world.
5. What are the results of the purifying process for God’s children?

LIVE FOCUSED ON THE ETERNAL
1 John 2:28-3:3

Some people are procrastinators. According to the dictionary these people delay, put off doing something, postpone action, defer action, or are just plain dilatory. To some extent, we all procrastinate in those duties that we detest. The procrastinator is often the fellow who boasts about what he will do tomorrow, but did the same thing yesterday and the day before that.

The Bible offers several examples urging us not to put off what we know we should do. Solomon urges us to be diligent like the ant and get the work done today that needs to be done today (Prov. 6:6).

He warns not to be like the lazy person who puts off work because there might be a lion outside (Prov. 22:13), or the sluggard who prefers a little sleep, a little slumber until poverty comes (Prov. 6:10). Jesus warned us to be diligent to walk in the light of the truth while we have it (John 12:35). The Bible teaches that the best time to do something worthwhile is between yesterday and tomorrow.

Thankfully, not everyone is a procrastinator. Some people truly believe what my highschool history teacher tried to hammer into our non-receptive brains. He regularly said, “The future belongs to those who prepare for it.” That simply means that we ought to look at the future, make plans to face it, and do the plans. Not to get busy with the plan is to end up like most conferences which are simply meetings where people sit around and talk about what they ought to be doing. Preparing for the future involves doing.

The best laid plans are still just plans until we get to work. I had another teacher, my shop teacher in highschool, who gave some very practical advice. He told us young bucks that if we would buy ten acres of land and plant it full of walnut trees, we could sell them when we turned 65 and would enjoy a comfortable retirement. It was not that I disagreed with old H.D.L. VanBockern. In fact, I agreed with the idea in principle. I just didn’t believe it enough to do it. Well, now I am approaching retirement and many are the times I have looked out the back window of the house at ten acres of land and thought, “I should have planted it with walnut trees.”

Sometimes if we get serious about the details of the plan, we will be more motivated to work the plan. Here are the details on the walnut trees idea. Pat and I bought our land in 1985 which was thirty-two years ago. If we would have planted just six acres with 2,000 walnut trees, it would have required an investment back then of about \$6,000. By the time we retire at age 70, those trees would be mature and worth as much as \$2,000 each. Old H.D.L. was right. Four million dollars would provide a comfortable retirement. If only! It’s one thing to agree with an idea, but a very different matter to act in accord with what we say we believe.

Our text warns us to live now in light of future eternity. No doubt most people here would respond to that challenge by saying, “Oh, I’m ready for that. I became a Christian years ago.” Good. But let’s weigh the details. How have you invested your life up to this

point? Our text reminds us that we are God's children and as such we ought to live righteously like Christ is righteous. We ought to live like Christ because one day we are going to see Him. And when we see Him, we will suddenly be transformed into His perfection, and we can be pretty sure that perfect understanding is going to make the foolish stuff we wasted life on look really bad. John warned us that if we really believe that we are going to see Christ, be like Christ, and live with Christ forever, we ought to purifying ourselves now.

Abide in Christ (2:28-29).

Abide in Christ is good advice because abiding gives confidence. This is a command, not just a passing statement. *And now, little children, abide in him (v.28a)*. Notice that God gave the command through John to little children. This is the same word John used to describe Christians when he wrote earlier, *I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake (2:12)*. As we learned a few weeks ago, the recipients in Ephesus were precious like children in the eyes of Pastor John.

More important is that they were the little children of God, even as we are precious children of God. We are brought into God's family through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are brought into God's family through adoption—having been born into the enemy's family by nature. And because we are the children of God, we are not independent and self-sufficient. We are wholly dependent on our Heavenly Father for all things. And also, because we are children, we are always in need of maturing into spiritual adults.

Helping each of us mature into spiritual adults is the ministry of the church. God's plan is for the children to be taught truth, *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:13-14)*.

Also, because we are God's children, we are to be abiding in Him. The pronoun "*Him*" speaks of Jesus Christ. The command is for God's children to keep on abiding in or remaining in Jesus Christ. The word "abide" speaks of remaining in the most intimate kind of

relationship. In fact it is a critical, life-giving relationship. If a person does not remain in this relationship, he or she is not truly born again. This is what Jesus taught about the vine and the branches. He said, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."* (John 15:1-6).

And so the difficult question to answer is: "If we must remain in our relationship with Christ, and if it is true that all true Christians will remain in Christ, why are we commanded to remain in Christ?" This question is especially difficult to answer if we remember Christ's promise about our eternal security. He promised, *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand"* (John 10:28-29). If we are saved and secure for eternity, why do we need to work at remaining in Christ? Because we live in a flesh that is responsive to sin in a world that encourages sin, it is easy for us to begin to look like we belong to the world. Our loving Heavenly Father desires for us to reflect His glory.

And also for our own benefit, John gave us a reason for the command. Stated positively, John wrote that we need to remain in Christ *so that when he appears we may have confidence (v.28b)*. God's children are absolutely certain that Jesus Christ is coming again. If we are abiding in Christ while we are waiting for His appearance, we will be taking on His traits. When Christ arrives, we will be very secure and confident about our relationship with Him if we are demonstrating His character.

On the other hand, it is possible to state the same issue negatively. It is necessary for us to remain in Christ so that we will *not shrink from him in shame at his coming (v.28c)*. We know that

Christ is coming, and we know that the Heavenly Father's intent is that we should be becoming more and more like Him. If we have missed the Father's intent, fallen short of His standard, we will be rightly ashamed at Christ's appearing.

This is very much like mother saying to the child, "Just wait until your father gets home." Most of the time that statement has a negative connotation. You might remember being the child who heard that warning. If you have been disobedient, stepped out of bounds, broken the rules, you look forward to Dad's return with fear because you know you are going to be punished.

However, it is entirely possible that the same statement sounds very positive. If Dad has made you a promise you look forward to (like going fishing, or he is bringing you a new bicycle), you feel like you can't wait until Dad gets home to fulfill his promise.

So with the Christian. We know that we are supposed to be remaining in Christ, drawing strength from Christ to do right, depending on Christ so that we illustrate Christlike character. If we are doing that, we will be delighted when He shows up. If we are living like the world, pleasing ourselves, and being shaped by our own desires and ambitions, we will be ashamed to see Christ.

Obviously, abiding in Christ is very important. How do I know if I am abiding? In the first place, we do know that Christ is righteous. *If you know that he is righteous (v.29a)*. We know that He is the perfect expression of the Triune Godhead. God the Father is the standard of "righteous." We only know what righteous means because God reveals it in His word and actions. We know what righteous living looks like because God the Son came to earth and demonstrated it. God the Holy Spirit teaches us what righteousness is from the Bible and convicts us when we fall short of the mark.

We know what constitutes righteousness. Now we learn that people who are of Christ's seed practice righteousness. Because we know that Christ is righteous, *you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him (v.29b)*. The practice of righteousness is so obvious in the contrast with a life of sin. People who lived out their sinful nature before they were born again demonstrate the difference between righteousness and sin quite obviously. Paul wrote to people like that, *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived:*

neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Therefore, the arguments of sinful religious people are proven to be lies. Professing Christians who are actually not born again have a strong desire to live just like the rest of sinners who have not been born again. They claim they have liberty to do so. Conversely, God declares that there is a clear and obvious difference between righteousness and sin, between past fleshly living and present sanctification for Christians. That is why we have the command to remain in Christ which will cause us to live like we are God's children.

Live Like God's Children (3:1-3).

Life is a mixed bag. On one hand God loves us immensely, but on the other hand the world doesn't. When John wrote, *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are (v.1a)*, it was a highly charged expression. It would be like us saying something like "What in the world!" Obviously, the extent of God's love for us is difficult for us to get our minds around. How could the Father love us so much? How much? That He would call us His children. John Newton expressed the wonder of this love well when he said, "If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: First, to meet some I had not thought to see there. Second, to miss some I had expected to be there. And third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there."

We should always be amazed that God has adopted us. Those who have sinned greatly, like John Newton, seem to sense the immensity of God's grace more keenly. But we forget that all of us are born as sinners, enemies of God. All sin is an offense to God and even the smallest sin of the disobedient child caused horrendous suffering for the Beloved Son. This is why I not only marvel, but become agitated in my soul, when Christians treat sin lightly. I often

hear professing Christians excuse their sin by saying, “Well, no one is perfect,” or “God understands that I am human.” Someone who has come to grips with the amazing love that drove God to adopt His enemy at the price of His Beloved Son’s suffering hates sin and truly desires to be rid of it.

How amazing that God would call us His children, *And we are!* The genuine child of God has this certainty. We do not think we are God’s child today and then wonder tomorrow if we still are. Allowing sin into our lives will prohibit us from declaring this confidence about our relationship to the Heavenly Father. When we are abiding in Christ, when we are practicing His righteousness, confidence wells up in our souls and shouts, “And we are!”

Here are two average looking Americans. One is frequently found in the bar, drinking and having a supposed great time with friends, some of whom he takes home to have sex with. The other person has no desire to live such a lifestyle. But this person does enjoy meeting with friends to worship Christ. He loves to hear music that reminds him of God’s love for him. He is aware of sin in his own life and hates it, and he confesses it and repents of it. Both of these kinds of people are well represented in Greenville. Both of these kinds of people freely confess to being Christians. But which of these kinds of people thinks, *Wow! What kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God? And so we are!* That is the real Christian. John was right, “They went out from us because they were not of us.”

God loves us so much He calls us His children. But the world does not understand us. *The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him (v.1b)*. Peer pressure did not evaporate when we graduated from highschool. The vast majority of people in our city, state, and nation are characterized by “world.” Again John does not use the term world to speak of the ball of dirt. He is not even speaking specifically of all the people on the ball of dirt. He refers to the system of thought or philosophy that characterizes the majority of people at any given point in human history. The world is the entire system under the influence of Satan as opposed to the children of God.

The people who live under the influence of sin and Satan do not understand God, often claim to know nothing about God, and

certainly do not abide in Christ. If they had known Christ, they would not have crucified Him. Therefore, if you and I are practicing the righteousness of Christ, the world will not know us any better than they knew Christ. They can talk about religion quite easily. They can even claim to believe that Jesus was a historical figure. But they cannot begin to practice the righteousness of Christ because they do not understand it.

Practically speaking, this means that the world cannot understand why you feel like you need to go to church all the time. They cannot understand why you are opposed to abortion, to homosexuality, to transvestitism, to cheating just a little, to a little white lie, to getting drunk once in awhile. They don’t understand why the passing things of this world are not the most important things to you.

Because the world does not know Christ, they will always look at us with questions, doubts, and even suspicion. The more a society rejects God, the deeper it slips into sin, and the result is always that a society deep in sin, knowing nothing of Christ and His people, desires to silence them and if possible eliminate them. And peer pressure might lead us to say, “Oh woe is me! Life is just a dirt sandwich – every day another bite.” Nope, the child of God doesn’t respond like that.

For us the future is full of hope. At the very least, we will be like Christ. *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 (v.2)*. We are confident that Christ is coming again. You and I have that great confidence because one verse in every twenty-five verses in the New Testament speak in some way of Christ’s return. His return is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. It is mentioned in every New Testament book except Galatians, and the short letters of 2, 3 John and Philemon.

Knowing that Christ is coming back, we remain in Christ and practice His righteousness but still do not know the full extent of it. We know that when we see Christ we will be just like Him. If we know nothing else, we know that Christ never sinned one time. That is enough for hope.

Hope is great. But if the child of God really has this hope, he or she will live in light of the hope God gives. *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (v.3)*. Hope causes us to stay in a purifying process. What does that process look like? Though we are God's children, we do commit sin. Sometimes this is an unexpected, unplanned fall into sin. Sometimes this is a case of out of the norm rebellion in the heart of the Christian. Sometimes even Christians become addicted to a particular sin. So how then are we different from sinners?

Because we are God's children, we hate sin. Because we are God's children, our hearts are broken when we sin. You and I should often find ourselves praying with David, *Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool!*" (Psalm 39:8). *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!* (Psalm 51:1-2). Because we are God's children, we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Because we are God's children, we pray a lot of forgiveness prayers. Jesus certainly anticipated this reality for His followers because He taught us to pray, *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"* (Matthew 6:12-13).

Religious people who are children of Satan don't hate their sins. They tend to excuse their sins. We who are God's children are in a purifying process because we look forward with hope to seeing Jesus. That is how we prepare for the future. What is in your future? If you are a child of God, you will see Jesus. What are you doing to prepare for the future? Have you been born again by faith in Jesus' sacrifice? Are you becoming more and more like Jesus? Jesus is coming and we will see Him. Will we be confident or ashamed?