

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

The Children of God

1 John 2:28-3:3

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

The Apostle John wrote his first letter to correct the false teaching that was being taught by false teachers. He set out three tests to evaluate whether one has a relationship with God: the test of obedience (in 1 John 2:3-6), the test of love (in 1 John 2:7-11), and the test of doctrine (in 1 John 2:18-27).

John now once again set out three tests by expanding upon them. He set out the test of obedience (in 1 John 2:28-3:10), the test of love (in 1 John 3:11-18), and the test of doctrine (in 1 John 4:1-6).

Today, we are going to begin examining the test of obedience. In John's expansion on this test, he addressed his beloved flock as the children of God. He shows that God's children are obedient because of the hope that they have.

Let's read about the children of God in 1 John 2:28-3:3:

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

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. 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. (1 John 2:28-3:3)

Introduction

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines *hope* as “a feeling of expectation and desire.”¹ So, for example, we may say, “I *hope* that the weather will be good tomorrow so we can go to the beach.” Or the single person may say, “I *hope* one day to meet the person of my dreams.” Or the parent may say, “I *hope* my children will grow up and be productive citizens.” Or the retiree may say, “I *hope* I don’t outlive my retirement income.” Each of these statements expresses expectation or desire.

The biblical definition of *hope* is entirely different than the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* definition of *hope*. Biblical *hope*, according to John MacArthur, “is not a wish but an absolute future reality guaranteed by the Lord.”² So, for example, the Apostle Paul talks about “the hope of salvation” (in 1 Thessalonians 5:8) by which he means “the certainty of salvation.” Biblical hope is something that is certain, sure, and guaranteed.

Lesson

First John 2:28-3:3 teaches us about the hope of the children of God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. They Abide in Him (2:28)
2. They Practice Righteousness (2:29)
3. They Have a New Identity (3:1)
4. They Will Be Transformed (3:2)
5. They Purify Themselves (3:3)

¹ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

² John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 106.

I. They Abide in Him (2:28)

First, the children of God have hope because they abide in him.

John writes in verse 28, **“And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”** John once again refers to his beloved flock as **“little children.”** It is his term of endearment for the believers under his care. He urges them to **“abide in him,”** that is, to remain and rest in Jesus. They are not to look for new experiences in false teaching. When Jesus returns, believers will have confidence because they have remained steadfast in Jesus. John knows that believers are those whose lives have been radically transformed by the new birth. Their obedience to God is evidence of the new life that they have in Jesus.

We don't have the false teaching of Gnostic heresy today. In our day, however, some people are caught up in the prosperity gospel. People are promised healing or they are promised wealth. Generally, to reap the benefit of healing or wealth, people are asked to “sow a seed by faith.” This is a monetary “seed” that goes to the preacher. If by chance, healing or a financial windfall occurs, that is touted as proof for the claim of sowing a seed will produce results. But that is manipulative hogwash. We are to grow in our relationship with Jesus by abiding in him. We abide in Jesus by reading his word and applying his word to our lives. And that is how we grow in him.

II. They Practice Righteousness (2:29)

Second, the children of God have hope because they

practice righteousness.

John writes in verse 29, **“If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”** John is talking about the righteousness of Jesus. He is encouraging his flock in the truth about the righteousness of Jesus, whom they know and profess. Because they believe that Jesus is righteous and because they themselves practice righteousness, they may be encouraged by the truth that they have been born of him. John is asserting once again that obedience flows from new life rather than new life has been given because of obedience.

One of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century was the recovery of the truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There was a rejection of faith plus works giving one salvation. However, the Reformers did not reject works. They did not believe that works were necessary to earn or receive salvation. However, works were necessary as an *evidence* of salvation, as John was asserting in verse 29. Works, or righteousness, give evidence that one has **“been born of him.”**

The actress Sophia Loren was reported in the *USA Today* as saying, “I’m not a practican, but I pray. I read the Bible. It’s the most beautiful book ever written. I should go to heaven; otherwise it’s not nice. I haven’t done anything wrong. My conscience is very clean. My soul is as white as those orchids over there, and I should go straight, straight to heaven.”³ Sophia Loren says that she should go to heaven because she hasn’t done anything wrong and her conscience is clean. Moreover, she prays and reads her Bible, even though she acknowledges that she is not a “practican.” Well, John insists that those who

³ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/june/12503.html>.

have been born of God will practice righteousness. That is, they will conform their lives to Jesus. They will look more and more like Jesus each day. Those who do so have hope because they practice righteousness.

III. They Have a New Identity (3:1)

Third, the children of God have hope because they have a new identity.

John has been writing about being born again. He gets excited to contemplate the amazing relationship that now exists between believers and God. So he writes in verse 1a, **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** Believers are called **“children of God”**! That is an astonishing reality! There was a time when believers were at enmity with God, when they were strangers to the covenant, when they were hostile to God. But, when God set his love on a countless multitude, their relationship with God changed and they became his children! What an amazing turnaround.

Every person who has been born of God is now a child of God. I remember when I was a young child that I would hear other children fight with each other about whose Dad was the best.

“My Dad is bigger and better than your Dad!” one child would say.

“Oh yes! Well, my Dad is smarter and richer than your Dad!” the other child would say.

In this world, there are only two spiritual fathers: Satan and God. Every person who is born into this world has Satan as a father. But then God set his love on a countless number of people and he became their father. So, believers can indeed

say that God is their Father. He has given them new life in his Son. He has adopted them into his family. He has made them co-heirs with his Son, Jesus. What amazing love is this that we should be called the children of God!

John writes with astonishment that believers should be called **“children of God.”** We did nothing to earn or deserve adoption into God’s family. And yet we have been brought into a right relationship with him by his amazing grace. Then John writes in verse 1b, **“The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”** The unbelieving world does not know that believers have a new identity as adopted children of God. They don’t know that because they don’t have a relationship with God.

We should not be surprised that people around us don’t quite know what to make of us. They may see us as “Jesus freaks,” religious “nuts,” Bible believers, and so on. They don’t understand that we have been adopted out of Satan’s family and into God’s family. That is a precious truth. We are so grateful for the new identity and standing we have in the family of God. Now, we have the privilege and responsibility to share the good news with our unbelieving neighbors and friends so that they too may be adopted into God’s family.

The children of God have this amazing hope because they have a new identity. They are **“children of God.”**

IV. They Will Be Transformed (3:2)

Fourth, the children of God have hope because they will be transformed.

John writes 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.” John is astonished about our present identity: we are God’s children. God is our Father. However, that pales in comparison to what is yet to come. When Jesus returns, **“we shall be like him.”**

Perhaps you read recently that Prince William and his wife Kate Middleton told their oldest son Prince George around his seventh birthday that he would one day be the King of England. Apparently, they had held off discussing this with him so that he could have some normalcy in his early childhood.⁴ Can you imagine what must have gone through Prince George’s seven-year-old mind? “What! I am going to be a king?”

“Yes, George, first grandpa Charles is going to be king. Then Dad is going to be king. And then you are going to be king.”

Well, the children of God have something even more astonishing in the future. We are going to be like Jesus! Although we will never be identical to Jesus, there will be a similarity to Jesus in character, righteousness, purity, holiness, immortality, glory, and body. We are not able to conceive fully now what we will be like.

Believers have an anticipation of a glorious future. Yes, indeed, we do not want to die. We want to be with our loved ones for as long as God allows. But, our hope is for a future that is far more glorious than our present circumstance. I think our intermediate state will be far better than our present state. And our final state (when we live in the new earth with our glorified bodies) will be even better than the intermediate state. We look forward to a glorious future.

The children of God have hope because they will be

⁴ See <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-9721109/Kate-Middleton-Prince-William-told-George-hell-King-seventh-birthday-royal-author-claims.html>.

transformed. As the world shakes around us, God’s plan for us is unshakable.

In 1995, a devastating earthquake shook the city of Kobe, Japan. Thousands of people lost their lives and billions of dollars of damage was done to buildings and roads. It was reported that a Christian church in Kobe was also destroyed, but in its courtyard, a statue of Christ remained perfectly erect. Word of the statue’s survival spread all across Japan. As people came to examine it, the statue became a symbol of hope to a people whose world had fallen apart.

There is a very practical point in this story: no matter how shaky it gets here on earth, one day every believer shall be like Christ – incorruptible, never decaying, deteriorating, or dying. We will be transformed from brokenness to stability, from death to life, from sorrow to joy.

When your world gets shaky, remember that the children of God have hope because they will be transformed.⁵

V. They Purify Themselves (3:3)

And fifth, the children of God have hope because they purify themselves.

John has been telling his beloved flock that they are the “children of God” (1 John 3:1). Moreover, their future status is going to be far more glorious than their present status because when Jesus appears, they shall “be like him” (1 John 3:2). And then he concludes with these words in verse 3, **“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”** Because his beloved flock are the “children of God,”

⁵ Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *1 John*, The Teacher’s Outline & Study Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1994), 107.

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that has consequences for daily living. God's children are not spiritually complacent. God's children live lives of purity. They model their lives on their older brother, Jesus.

Being a Christian does not mean that we merely have a ticket to heaven. Every person who believes that there is an afterlife wants to go to the best place possible. A Christian is not one who simply affirms certain truths and then can have an assurance of an eternal destiny with God. No. Being a Christian means that one is transformed by the grace of God. A Christian has been born again by the Spirit of God. A Christian has a new nature. A Christian grows in holiness. Isaac Rankin shares this practical illustration:

Just out of reach from my window stretches a wire which carries a heavy current of electricity for light and power. It is carefully insulated at every pole that supports it, and it is carried well out of common reach.... Yet the doves light on it and take no harm.... The secret is that when they touch the full-powered wire they touch nothing else. They give themselves wholly to it.

My danger would be that while I touched the wire I should also be touching the earth through the walls of my house, and the current would turn my body into a channel for escape. But they [the doves] rest wholly on the wire and experience neither dread nor danger. They are one with it, and they are safe.

So would God have us seek our safety in complete self-surrender to his power and love. It is when we reach one hand to him, while yet we keep fast hold on some forbidden thing with the other, that we are in danger.⁶

⁶ Isaac Rankin, in *The Friend*. Walter B. Knight. *3,000 Illustrations for Christian Service*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 172.

The children of God have hope because they purify themselves.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the hope of the children of God in 1 John 2:28-3:3, let us live in joyful obedience to our God.

In the Middle Ages the sea route to India seemed an impossibility. It was often discussed in the great economic and political centers of Europe. They used to wonder whether there would be a route around the bottom tip of Africa to that rich land of the spices. Many had tried and all had failed. The tip of Africa had become known as the Cape of Storms.

Then an explorer called Vasco da Gama decided he was going to try again. He succeeded. Ever since he returned to Lisbon, it could never be doubted again that it could be done. He proved that to use that treacherous way wasn't inevitably disastrous. The Cape of Storms eventually became known as the Cape of Good Hope.⁷

Jesus has gone before us. He has opened the way for the children of God to know God personally and eternally. Because of Jesus, we can abide in him, practice righteousness, have a new identity, be transformed, and purify ourselves.

Let us then live in joyful obedience to God who has given us this hope. Amen.

⁷ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2021/april/vasco-da-gamma-and-cape-of-good-hope.html>.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org