

## Living with Assurance: John's Epistles

### Session 3: 1 John 2:29-5:21 and 2 & 3 John

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**1 John 2:28-29** - John expands on the test of how we live, demonstrating why we should live in the light instead of the darkness. The primary reason for this is we are children of God.

John's use of the term "children":

- 2:28 - τέκνιον – This is John's favorite word to use. Παιδίον is used only twice (2:14 and 2:18). The use of τέκνιον is interesting. This word stresses birth, origin, oneness of nature.
- While a term of endearment, this term also carries the theological nuance which John wants to communicate. This is summed up for us in v. 29.

#### 1. The children of God have a divine origin.<sup>1</sup>

He asserts two vital truths:

- **It is God who imparts spiritual life to His people. They have been *born of Him*.**  
We can speak of both God's paternity (giving existence) and fatherhood (growing relationship). In his Gospel, John addresses the experience of the new birth. In his epistle the emphasis is more on the evidences of the new birth.<sup>2</sup>
- **The practice of righteousness is the evidence of this birth from God.**  
Membership in the family of God is to be recognized by the family likeness – since the Father of the family is righteous, the children will practice righteousness.<sup>3</sup>
  - *Does what is right* translates a present tense in the Greek, indicating that the "doing" is habitual. But what is also interesting is John's word order (does what is right has been born). John speaks first of doing what is right which is the result of proper belief.
  - **v. 29** There are two different words for "know" in Greek:
    - οἶδα - speaks of a knowledge that is intuitive and absolute because of close acquaintance. *We know that God is righteous.*
    - γινώσκω - means "to come to know." It is a knowledge gained from experience and observation. *We know that everyone who does what is right is born of God.*

#### 2. The children of God have unique privileges. (3:1-3)

- **Children of God are recipients of the love of God (1a).** While Christians today sometimes take God's love for granted, "the ancient world found the wrath of God much easier to grasp than His love."<sup>4</sup>
- **Children of God are members of the divine family (1b).**  
You can get John's astonishment by rearranging the text a little bit and ending instead of beginning with v. 29: "*Born of God! Children of God! Think what an incredible love the Father has lavished on us!*"
- **Children of God are partakers of the divine glory (vv. 2-3).** "the privileges and dignity of sonship are already ours, but the full disclosure of the glory of our sonship is yet to be. The apostle's words suggest that the Christian's present status is unbelievably wonderful but that his future destiny is ever more so."<sup>5</sup>

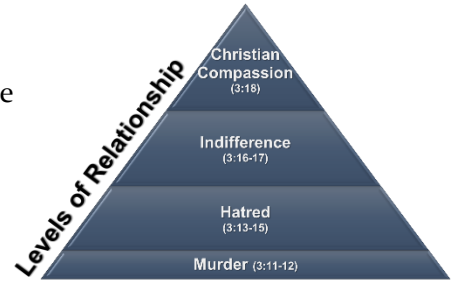
#### 3. The children of God have distinguishing marks of righteousness (vv. 4-10)

To help us understand what righteousness looks like, John causes us to consider three topics:

- A. The nature of sin (vv. 4,7,8)**
  - 1) Sin is disobedience (v. 4).
  - 2) Sin is deceptive (v. 7).
  - 3) Sin is of the devil (v. 8).
- B. The nature of Christ's life and work (v. 5-8)**  
Though sin is bad, the good news is Christ is good.
- C. The nature of Christian experience (v. 9)**

Verse 10 summarizes the previous verses and prepares the transition to the second test: How are you loving?

When it comes to this matter of love, there are four possible “levels of relationship,” so to speak, on which a person may live: murder (3:11-12), hatred (3:13-15), indifference (3:16-17), and Christian compassion (3:18). The first two are not Christian at all, the third is less than Christian, and only the last is compatible with true Christian love.



**MURDER (3:11-12)** - the lowest level on which one may live in relationship. It is the level on which Satan exists. He was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), but Christians have heard from the beginning of their experience that they are to love one another.

**HATRED (3:13-15)** - Even if you have not murdered someone, God replies, “Yes, but for a follower of mine, hatred is the same as murder.” The only difference between Level 1 and Level 2 is the outward act of taking life.

**INDIFFERENCE (3:16-17)** - The test of Christian love is not simply failure to do evil to others. Love also involves doing them good. Christian love is both positive and negative (Isaiah 1:17-17).

To help a brother, you must meet three conditions: (1) you must have the means to meet his need, (2) you must know the need exists, (3) you must be loving enough to share. A believer who is too poor to help or who is ignorant of his brother’s need is not condemned. However, a believer who hardens his heart is condemned.

**CHRISTIAN LOVE (3:18)** - To love “in word” means simply to talk about a need, but to love “in deed” means to do something about meeting it. You may think, because you have discussed a need, or even prayed about it, that you have done your duty, but love involves more than words – it calls for sacrificial deeds.

#### 4:7-21

Love = ἀγάπη – agape is the most common word for love in the NT, but it was practically unknown in non-biblical Greek. It was the apostles who gave agape a beauty, a richness, and a depth of meaning all its own. Agape became not only an emotion which rises freely in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live.<sup>6</sup>

**Love comes from God:** Agape love has its origin and source in God.

- *Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.* This person has the love of God radiating through his life. But the opposite is also true. Whoever does not love does not know God.
  - The knowing here is a relationship. It is not a knowledge of facts.

**God is love:** Not only is God love’s source, but He is love itself. God defines love.

- We know that God is love *because of what he has done*. He has shown his love among us by sending *his one and only Son*. In Jesus God made his love visible to us.
- God showed His love among us so that we might *live* through him. We only truly live in this life when we know Christ. The only way we can live in the next life is if we know Christ in *this* life.
- It is unfathomable that a person who has experienced the love of God should not also show love to a fellow human. The true believer will show such love.

All humans have existence but not all humans have life. “Jesus gives a man an object for which to live; he gives him strength by which to live; and He gives him peace in which to live. Living with Christ turns their existence into fullness of life.”<sup>7</sup>

How can God living in us be fullness of life? (vv. 13-16)

- When God is living in us, we show love. When we show love, we show God’s love. Thus, we show God.
- We forget the great privilege we have of God abiding in us!

“God’s love is proclaimed in His Word; it was proved at the cross, but it is perfected in us!”<sup>8</sup> (vv. 17-18)

- We are the temples and tabernacles in which God dwells.
- When we have such love in life, we will have no fear of judgment at death.

3:19-4:6; 5:1-21

**vv. 19-20** – When our heart condemns us, we must set our hearts at rest in God’s presence. Why? Because God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.

**vv. 21-22** The result is a non-condemning heart. We gain confidence – not only confidence in approaching God, but also confidence that our prayers will be answered.

- **Receive from him anything we ask.** John’s statement is a claim that prayer will be answered in every instance for any Christian who will meet certain conditions. What are those conditions? 1) Obey His commands, and (2) Do what pleases Him.

**v. 23** – The supreme command of God

Believe = trust

Name = all that the person is

God’s Son = divine origin

Jesus = Human

Christ = Promised Messiah

**v. 24** – How are you living? When someone is obeying God and pleasing Him, it is evident that Christ lives in them. And we know that because the Spirit reveals it to us.

**4:1** A strong warning and a command. We do not know precisely what was happening in the church. We at least know that there was a schism in which those who professed to have greater spiritual knowledge withdrew from the original assembly. 1 John 4:1-6 is meant to help the church test the spirits.

#### Test the Spirits:

- **The command to test (v. 1)**
  - “Spirit” - speaking about false teachers/prophets. “Spirit” looks behind and beyond the individual prophet to the superhuman influence that inspires him.
  - The command? Do not believe every spirit/teacher/prophet. Test every spirit.
- **The Test to Administer (vv. 2-3)**
  - If the spirit acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh from God – it’s a true spirit. If it doesn’t, it is not from God. It is the spirit of the antichrist – the one opposed to God.
- **The Promise of Victory (vv. 4-6)**
  - The spirit that is behind and beyond Christians is the Holy Spirit. True believers are from God. Therefore, they can overcome the false teachers, no matter how strong and popular they may be, because the Spirit in us is stronger than the spirit in them.

John ends chapter 4 by saying, “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” Who is our brother?

- In 1 John we find that while the whole world is our neighbor, our fellow Christians are our closest neighbors. Don’t gush about loving God if you don’t love your fellow believers.

God’s commands are not burdensome. This does not mean that total obedience is easy to achieve, but John is demonstrating two things:

- The commandments of Christ are far different from those of the scribes and Pharisees.
- New life from God results in love.

**5:4-5** The child of God, who has the nature of God within him, will obey his commands and overcome the world.

**5:6-13** Jesus Christ is the ground of our assurance of salvation. Without Christ we have no assurance. Of course, without Christ, we have no salvation!

**vv. 6-8** - John speaks here of a triple witness.

- **Witness #1: Spirit**
  - The Spirit bears witness within the heart of a believer and through the Word.

- 1 Cor. 12:14 – “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
- **Witness #2: Water**
  - Christian baptism symbolizes the change Christ has brought in a person’s life.
  - Christian baptism was and is a witness to the continuing power of Jesus Christ.
- **Witness #3: Blood**
  - The death of Christ was the perfect sacrifice.
  - There is a continuing reminder of this in the church – the Lord’s Supper.

Why Three Witnesses?

- **Deut. 19:15** - “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
- Three human witnesses were enough to establish any fact – even in the case of a severe crime.
- God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God.

How do we know we have the true life? We have the birthmarks:

1 John 2:29

1John 3:14

1 John 5:4

1John 3:9

1 John 4:7

If you bear these birthmarks, you have the Son and have eternal life.

**vv.14-17** - John treats two subjects related to prayer: (1) our confidence before God in prayer and (2) our prayers for others. Each of these contains a promise followed by a qualification.

- **Our Confidence before God in prayer (vv. 14-15)**
  - When you know you have eternal life, you know you can have confidence in prayer because you have a relationship with your Father. He is a loving and wealthy Father who wants the best for his children. We know we are accepted by God, therefore, we know we can approach him.
  - The Promise: This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.
  - The Condition: We are to pray according to what our all-wise, infinite, and hold God desires.
    - Every time the scripture speaks confidently about God hearing and answering our prayer, there is a condition given.
    - Prayer is not changing God’s will; it is learning to think like Him and desire His desires.
- **Our Prayers for others (vv. 16-17)**
  - When speaking of prayer, John doesn’t think first of his own needs but of the needs of others.
  - The Promise: God will hear and ‘give ...life.
  - The Qualification: God loves to forgive sin, especially the sin of those who are His adopted children! But John hesitates a moment as he says this and mentions a sin that leads to death.

**5:18-21** Three affirmations to enjoy in life. They have to do with the three tests he’s given throughout the book!

## **2 & 3 John**

### **Purpose**

- 2 John warns against providing hospitality to false teachers.
- 3 John confronts a church dispute. John commends Gaius for helping the cause of Christ by showing hospitality and kindness to missionaries. But he denounces Diotrephes for hindering the cause of Christ by trying to control the church. He also commended Demetrius.

### **Recipients**

- 2 John to “the chosen lady and her children.” This could mean a specific, well-known, and prominent woman in whose home a church met. More likely it refers to a congregation and not a specific woman.
- Gaius is the recipient of 3 John. Many feel Gaius likely lived near Ephesus.

### **2 John<sup>9</sup>**

I. Introduction (v. 1-3)

II. The Purpose of the Letter (vv. 4-11)

A. Concern for the internal life of the congregation (vv. 4-6).

B. Concern for the external threat to the congregation (vv. 7-11).

III. Conclusion (vv. 12-13)

### **3 John<sup>10</sup>**

I. Commendation of Gaius (vv. 1-8)

II. Warning against Diotrephes (vv. 9-10)

III. Commendation of Demetrius (vv. 11-12)

IV. Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

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<sup>1</sup> I am tracking Vaughan very closely. Vaughan, 72ff.

<sup>2</sup> Akin, 131.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, 79.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Vaughan, 75.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Vaughan, 102-103.

<sup>7</sup> Barclay, 100.

<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe, 519.

<sup>9</sup> Outline from Lea, 571.

<sup>10</sup> Lea, 572.