

Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John
Lesson Four – Be Transformed
1 John 3

Once again John is pressing in on the claims of Christ. One who has met Him on His terms of repentance and faith (Acts 20:21) will experience radical changes. Ezekiel 36:26 says, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” At conversion, the Spirit of God comes to indwell us and our stoney heart is replaced with a heart of flesh so it follows that a changed heart produces a transformed life. As we read in our lesson this week:

1 John 3 forces us to take a hard look at our fruit - the overflow in our lives of what is happening in our hearts. This chapter serves as a sort of salvation assessment. John’s desire is not to cast doubt, but he does call us to examine our lives - to see for ourselves if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) or if we have aligned with a false version of the gospel (*Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 116).

Do you know Jesus? Does the words you say and the life you live give evidence to a genuine conversion?

I. Preparing for the Second Coming of Christ (1 John 3:1-3)

John explodes on the page with, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are” (1 John 3:1). It sounds as if John is gushing with excitement as he ponders the love of God for us! John MacArthur writes:

God loves believers with a love that is impossible to articulate in any human language and that is utterly foreign to normal human understanding and experience. This is *agapē* love, God’s volitional love that He, of His own free and uninfluenced choice, has bestowed on all whom He has called to savingly believe in Jesus Christ (John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 115).

Our status as God-followers has set us at odds with the world which operates largely under Satan’s authority. John encourages his readers, “Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). In other words, suffering of any kind is relegated to our earthy pilgrimage. When Christ returns to gather His people home there will be no more suffering, no more sorrowing, and no more separation. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Early in my Christian experience I came across a passage in Ephesians that revolutionized my life. Paul writes, “He made us accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6, NKJV) I was struggling with a low self-image, brought on largely because of the lifestyle I was engaged in prior to my conversion. But then God spoke to me through His Word! There it was in black print on white paper, “Accepted in the Beloved.” This life changing truth grabbed my heart so tightly that my erroneous thinking was shaken free, replaced by His holy Word. God had made me, not just acceptable, but ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED. That earth-quaking, mind-rattling, soul-shaking truth altered my thinking and re-defined my understanding of who I am in Christ and who He is in me. “Beloved, now we are children of God” (1 John 3:2). Accepted. Adopted. Blessed. Chosen before the foundation of the world. Forgiven. Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:3-14).

The holy expectation of the return of Christ should be the transformative driving force behind our relentless and aggressive pursuit of practical righteousness and personal holiness. Chuck Swindoll writes:

By setting our hearts and minds on His imminent and certain return, a purification occurs that cleanses us from the things that would otherwise drag us down. We’re saved from the power of sin over our lives and empowered to live a life pleasing to Him (Chuck Swindoll, *Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, p. 77).

II. Practicing the Presence of Christ (1 John 3:4-10)

Without apology, John emphatically writes that the child of God will live a life that validates his/her genuine conversion. “The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7). Righteousness will be pursued and practiced through the progressive work of sanctification as we are being transformed into the image of Christ. John Stott expounds, “Unrighteous conduct is unthinkable in the Christian who has grasped the purpose of the two appearing of Christ. The fact of His first appearing and the hope of His second are both strong incentives to holiness” (John Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 120).

By contrast, “the one who practices sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Those who deliberately, knowingly, habitually engage in sinful activities belong to the devil, having never repented in order to activate faith in Jesus Christ. While they may show regret and/or remorse over their sin, they come up short of genuine repentance leading to salvation. Continual flagrant sinning reveals that one does not know Christ and does not belong to Him.

John writes, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). In His Incarnation, the Lord Jesus destroyed (literally “to breakdown” or “to render ineffective”) the work of Satan at Calvary. The “already and not yet” principle also applies to the destruction of evil. Satan has been defeated, but he is still active in the world until the full consummation of the Kingdom of God described

in the book of Revelation. The devil will be “thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

John confronts the false teaching being generated and spread among the churches in Asia Minor. These false teachers maintain that God-followers can sin with impunity. Those who have been overtaken by this theological error are being played by a false religion that appeals to the flesh!

John’s letter emphatically states that we who know Jesus will maintain lives marked by righteousness. Sin is no longer the character or conduct of our lives. Christians may stumble into sin, but we are aligning our belief system with the Word of God and activating our behavior through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because we are a new creation in Christ, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) in spite of the fact that we still sin after our conversion. However, sin is no longer the practice of our lives, and we are committed to gaining victory over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

John pens, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). At first blush one might come to the conclusion that John is promoting the idea of sinless perfection. Nothing could be further from the truth. Stott explains,

The new birth involves the acquisition of a new nature through the implanting within us of the very seed or life-giving power of God. Birth of God is a deep, radical, inward transformation. Moreover, the new nature received at the new birth remains. It exerts a strong internal pressure towards holiness. It is the abiding influence of God’s seed within everyone who is born of God, which enables John to affirm without fear of contradiction that he cannot go on sinning (John Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 130).

John had witnessed Jesus confronting the Pharisees, who claimed to know God but had lives that contradicted such claims. Jesus said to them, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Those who refuse to do what is right and refuse to love others demonstrate they belong to the devil, having never experienced the new birth.

Genuine believers are not sinless, but as the process of transformation takes place, we will certainly sin less and less because a changed heart will produce a transformed life.

III. Possessing the Power of Christ (1 John 3:11-24)

Christians make themselves known as children of God by doing what is right and by loving their brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are not able to do this in our own

power, but God has given us the Holy Spirit. He enables us to love like Jesus. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

John uses the example of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) to illustrate the distinction between those who belong to God and those who are of the devil. After Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, Eve gave birth to Cain and then Abel. Abel was "a keeper of flocks" while Cain was "tiller of the ground" (Genesis 4:2). Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Genesis 4:4) as an offering to the Lord but Cain "brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3). The Lord was pleased with Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. In anger, "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (Genesis 4:8). Adam and Eve would have taught their boys about blood sacrifice having witnessed the first such offering when God killed an innocent animal to cover their guilt (Genesis 3:21). The boys would have helped their father prepare sacrifices to God. One son believed God and obeyed His holy standard, and one son did not. Abel understood that "without shedding blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Sadly, Cain believed he could find favor with God by bringing the work of his hands rather than offering a blood sacrifice. When God rejected Cain's offering, he became so angry that he killed his brother.

Beloved, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Lord has placed His love in our hearts which allows us to express it. We may have difficulty loving some Christians who make it hard to love them, but a fundamental desire to show them love will be evident. Christ, our supreme example, laid down His life for us. Paul writes, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Since Christ died for us, surely we can live for Him!

Talk is cheap. John presses the need to demonstrate our genuine conversion by obeying God's commandments and loving our brothers and sisters in the faith. Six times in this chapter John uses the word *abide* to remind us that the secret to a transformed life is to abide in Christ. "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24). Our conversion to Christ is demonstrated not just in our beliefs, but also in our behavior.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing
of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is,
that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Beloved, be Transformed!