

(1 John #17) New Birth: New Behaviour

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the profound love of God that grants us our identity as His children and the implications of this identity on our behavior and hope for the future.

Duration: 43:37

Scripture: John 3:1

Topics: "New Birth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the unique quality of God's love. He describes how the apostle John, even in his old age, is still amazed by the love of God for sinners. The speaker encourages the audience to imagine and behold the love of God with the imagination of their souls. He quotes John Cotton, a Puritan, who suggests that Christians often have a distorted view of God's grace and need to see it clearly. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of living in accordance with the nature of God and working out one's salvation with fear and trembling. He concludes by reminding the audience that there will come a time when Jesus will be revealed and every eye will see him.

Transcript

Will you turn with me to 1 John chapter 3 and we are going to read verses 1 to 3 this morning as the basis of our meditation. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not.

Beloved now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure. For the benefit of visitors may I say that we are continuing our studies in the first epistle of John and we have just concluded the first round of tests that John applies to those who are professing to be Christian but who probably are not.

John is particularly concerned with those who have turned out to be heretical, who have left the fellowship, who have abandoned the Christian church and its membership and who have organized a kind of counter movement not all that far away it would appear. John insists that you may recognize a Christian. You may test a man's profession of faith.

There are three tests that he has already applied once each. There is the test of obedience, then there is the test of love of other Christian people and then there is the test of belief. A genuine Christian says John

will always be known in this way.

He will obey the will and the word of God. Oh he may fall occasionally but his goal is and his general habit of life is one of obedience. He will also love the Christian fellowship.

He may find it difficult to get on with some people from time to time but because he is a forgiven man, because he is a child of God he will forgive and he will get as only a child of God can do. And then this a genuine Christian will always believe that Jesus is the son of God and everything that is consistent with that. Here then are the three tests.

Now John has applied them once and he's going to apply them again and then again but there's a difference. To those of you who are studying this epistle very carefully you will notice that in applying the test the first time, John's base as it were, the base from which he worked was this. He made a major statement in chapter one verse five saying this.

This is the message. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Now he says if you say that you have fellowship with God who is light you yourself will be a person who walks in the light and walking in the light of God's nature and of God's will means this.

It means obedience to his word, it means love for his people, it means faith in his son. Now when we come to the section that really began with verse 28 in chapter two and goes on to verse 10 of chapter four which deals with the second round of applying the same test, John starts off from a slightly different base. It's related but some people say that he's moving higher in the scale of importance.

I'm not sure about that. But this is how he starts now. This is the base.

It is this. God is righteous and if you are a child of a God who is righteous you will act righteously. You'll do the right thing.

The right thing in relation to God is to obey him. The right thing in relation to God's people is to love them. The right thing in relation to God's son is to trust him.

Now this morning we are concerned only with that base. The presupposition which is this, that we are the children of God and therefore fundamentally this morning I'm looking only at the first two though we have read the first three verses in 1 John chapter 3. Come then with me and let's look and see what is involved here basically which should make us righteous. Righteous in the sense that we do what is right in relation to God, in relation to his people and in relation to his son.

Now if we were doing the whole three verses there are three main thoughts here. I'll give them to you but the last we shall have to leave over and we'll take up the thread again. Three main thoughts woven together here are these.

The love of the Father and our present identity. That's the first. Behold says John, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.

The love of the Father and our present identity. The second is this, the appearing of the Son and our ultimate glory. Beloved he says now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.

For we shall see him as he is. The love of the Father and our present identity. The appearing of the Son and our ultimate glory and then thirdly and you see this is the base, this is working it out, this is applying it.

The child nature and the child's hope and our consequent beauty and every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure. If I'm a child of God says John, this is the application in principle. If I'm a child of God, born of him and I have the hope of being transformed to his glory then I just sit down and do nothing, not on your life.

If I have all this he says then I purify myself and the passage going from verse four to verse ten expounds what that means in the first place and on to the tenth verse of chapter four it continues the same theme. Now then let's look at the first two of these three main thoughts that are woven into our text. The love of the Father and our present identity.

I hope you can all say with John this morning, say it from the heart. I hope there is no one here who is outside of this this morning. See says John what love the Father has given us that we should be called the children of God and so we are.

I'm quoting now from the revised standard version. Look first of all at the unique quality of God's love. God stresses that.

The King James Version rendering serves to bring out John's continued amazement as he contemplates love for sinners. I rather like that. Behold he says and you know it's the word of a discoverer.

You're looking for something, you're on a treasure hunt and one person says to the here it is, behold here it is. Now John has known the love of God in Christ for over 60 years. He's an old man.

But the thrill of it, the wonder of it, the marvels of it, the mystery of it, the length and breadth and depth and height of it never ceases to move him. And when he thinks about it, he's been talking about other things. But when he thinks about this, he says here it is again.

And the old man's excited. You see, he's living in it. The only people who don't get excited about the love of God are the people that don't live in it.

Behold he says what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. Now the Greek word translated what manner is the key here. Originally it meant of what country.

You may wonder how this fits in here. Behold love of what country is it that we should be called the sons of God. Now what John is saying you see is this.

He is wanting to impress upon his readers that the love that has constituted us the sons of God so that we can be called his children is not the kind or quality of love that is produced by any single nation. It is not a kind of love that has been generated or produced or expressed by any people others. It doesn't come from any man or any group of men or any nation of men.

This love is not to be generated among men in the first place. It can only come into the human heart if it is imported from a realm beyond men. Behold what manner of love, love of what country.

It's from outside. It didn't originate with man. It has originated beyond man.

It's the love of God himself. The apostle Paul puts it very beautifully when he says in Romans 5.8 God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, while we were yet sinners, lost, guilty, condemned, vile, wretched, alienated from God, his enemies. God gave his son to die for us.

That Christ died for us then. That's the love of God. God commends his love towards us on that score that when we were in that condition Christ his son, Christ his anointed one died for us.

Not just came to teach us. He didn't simply come and talk to us. That would be wonderful.

He came and died for us. The unique quality of the love of God, you don't find anything like this love anywhere on earth unless God has produced it in the hearts of men. The unique quality of the love of God, the unique benefits of the love of God, it is expressed here, says John, very especially in that we should be called the children of God and so we are.

Now can I stress the three statements that are involved there. A children of God. What does it mean to be a child of God? Now if you're studying the New Testament as you ought to, you will know that there are two main words used in the New Testament for this.

Two main words. There are others but two main ones. And it's very important for an understanding of the whole biblical doctrine and teaching to know the meaning of the two.

Speaking generally, not exclusively, but speaking generally, the Apostle Paul uses one and again speaking generally, the Apostle John uses another. And they compliment one another. Now because the Apostle Paul speaks so much about the doctrine of adoption, the term that he uses for becoming a child of God, children of God, is a term which refers to the objective status that is involved in adoption.

When a child is adopted, it really becomes a member of the family. And when Paul speaks of a child, the word for child means especially or has special reference to that status of the child. He's received in, he's one of us from now on.

He really is a member of the family. He has the child status. Now when the Apostle John, and I'm speaking generally, when the Apostle John refers to us being children of God, he uses a different word and the emphasis is different.

The emphasis now is not so much upon the objective status, but upon the subjective capacity to be a child of God. That we have the child nature, that we have the mind of a child of God, and the disposition of a child of God, and the will of a child of God, and the concerns of a child of God. And that's what we have here.

Oh, we should behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called not just His adopted children, but children who have His own nature. Children who can live the life of the family. Children who can be like our Father by His grace.

Now these two terms, of course, have to be brought together. Adoption is a very beautiful thing. I never cease to wonder at it.

I'm sure you don't. And the child belonging, you don't know quite to whom, is received with open arms into a family. And a couple say to this little mite, now from now on you belong to us.

And they put their arms around it and they offer their love to it and they say, we mean to nurse you and to bring you up your hours. God does that. And I hope every one of us knows what it is today to be clasped within the arms of God from having been children of Satan and of wrath, being brought within the family and the household of God and made His.

But now God does something else that no adopting parents can do in this world. God is God. When God adopts a child, He breathes His own spirit into him.

He imparts His own nature to the child that's coming into the family. So that every incoming child is capable by the new birth, by the spirit that is given him or her, to live the life of the home. There are no misfits in God's home.

No one will be cast out of the New Jerusalem because not that defileth shall ever enter in. God endows His children with His own nature. Oh, says John, I can't think of it without getting excited.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God in this rich sense. We've been redeemed out from bondage and tyranny and death. We've been invited into the family and installed as such and given the objective status.

And we have the Father's spirit in our hearts, that we should be called the sons of God. The question is, by whom? Who calls us sons of God? I've never asked myself this question until comparatively recent times. But what is John referring to? You see, the world never calls a Christian a child of God.

Have you noticed that? Whatever the man of the world called you and called me, they'll never refer to us as children of God. That's a very elevated title. They may call you Christians.

Perhaps they'll call you Presbyterians or Baptists or what have you. But very rarely, if ever, will the man of the world call a Christian a child of God. No, no, no.

They don't know God and they don't know anything about this kind of status that is given to us. Who then calls us children of God? That we should be called the children of God. By whom? I believe there's only one ultimate answer to that.

That is this, by God Himself. By God Himself. You remember what happens, according to the Apostle Paul, when we become Christian? Galatians 4, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit of Sonship in us enables us to cry to God, Father, Father. Now, I believe that what John is referring to is the response of the Father to the child cry that the Spirit generates in us. When we cry, Father, out of the experience of the new birth and of redemption, He says to us, My child.

You know that? I think that this is what the Apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8, 15 and 16 when he says, When we cry, Abba, Father, it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. My child. That we should be called by God His children.

And then, says John, you don't have this in the King James Version, by the way, as some of you will have noticed. But there are words that are included in the Revised Standard Version and later translations. And so we are.

Now, the reason why they're introduced into these later translations is that since the King James Version was brought into existence, we have new manuscripts which are older. They go back beyond the manuscripts that were available when the King James Version was brought into existence. And in the oldest manuscripts to extent today, we have these words, And so we are.

And I would thank God for the archaeological spade if it were only for these three words, four words. And so we are. This is no vain title for a Christian.

That we should be called the sons of God. You say, well, there isn't much to that, is there, Ralph? We are called the children of God by God because we are the children of God. The world may not recognize us, says John.

Well, as a matter of fact, he says, the world didn't even recognize God incarnate in His Son. So don't be surprised, he says, if the world doesn't recognize you. The world will never recognize you unless the Holy Spirit reveals you to the world.

And then the world ceases to be the world. The world as such will never recognize you as a child of God. The world didn't recognize Him.

But the fact remains, and so we are. Take a good look at this imponderably wonderful love, says John. Behold it.

Behold it. Men and women, come with me this morning. I trust in a spirit of worship.

Sit where you are and look away from this congregation. And see the God of grace with the imagination of your soul. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.

That we, that you, that I, should be called His children. And so we are. The old New England Puritan John Cotton, you know.

Old Puritans had some quint sayings. And he says here, there's a quote, here's a quote from him. The apostle, he says, desireth to correct our squint.

Now you good doctors, I don't know what you make of this, but he says, generally speaking, we Christians squint. We don't see things clearly and we don't see things straight ahead of us. What the apostle wants to do is to get us to look straight into His wonderful face.

See the grace of God without a squint. And I suggest to you, if you and I do nothing else today than this, it will serve us in good stead in days that are to come. Behold, behold what manner of love it is that God has bestowed upon us.

That we should be called His children. And so we are. The love of God and our present identity.

Now the second main thread here. The appearing of God's Son and our ultimate glory as the children of God. Beloved, we are God's children now.

It does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him. For we shall see Him as He is.

Having reiterated the certified assurance of our present status as God's children, John now proceeds to speak of our future destiny in terms of what we do not know and of what we do. There's an intermingling here, says John, of certainty and uncertainty. Now first of all, there's a measure of uncertainty about the Christian's future.

It does not yet appear what we shall be. Mark, he doesn't say it does not yet appear who we shall be. We're the sons of God now.

And because we're the sons of God already, we shall always be the sons of God. Neither does John say that there is any doubt as to where we shall be. Jesus said, I will come and receive you to be with myself.

There's no question about that. But there is a doubt here. It doesn't yet appear as just what we shall be.

Now what's he getting at? Well, there's the same kind of mystery about the Christian's future as there is between the present and the future of a flower in the bud and its ultimate development into full bloom. We've had some lovely flowers given us in the home this last week, many of them in the bud. They're very beautiful in the bud.

If you try and imagine what the full bloom is going to be like, you just can't do it because every flower is different. It's the same and yet different. You cannot foretell anything that will develop as the bud becomes the flower in full bloom.

Nor can you foresee and foretell what a true child of God will eventually become when the flower of grace has come to full bloom. The ultimate reality will far surpass our most mature guesses, even though such guesses are based on what we really know. Who of us can imagine what we shall be by the grace of God, the grace already manifested in making us His children? But there's an abiding certainty, says John.

There is one certainty and this gives birth to many other certainties. But here it is, we know this, he says, that when He appears, not if He appears, we know that He's going to appear. When He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Now, there are three related thoughts here to which I want to refer. And I'll give them in the logical order. First of all, He shall appear.

There's no doubt it's all about this, says John. This is one of the certainties, He shall appear, He will appear. This describes the point of reference upon which everything else in the statement hinges.

John anticipates a day when there will be a great unveiling, that is one of the big New Testament words about the future as it relates to Jesus Christ, the apocalypse. There's a mighty apocalyptic moment coming when the curtain of blue that has hidden the face of the ascended Lord for nearly 2,000 years, that curtain of blue will be torn aside and He shall be revealed. But then, says John, and this is the word that he uses here, He shall be manifested.

We shall see Him as He is, and every eye shall see Him. And they also which pierced Him. And the saints will dance at His glory, and sinners will cringe before Him.

He shall appear. My friend, today in our evangelistic endeavors, we ask, what will you do with Jesus Christ? Then the question will be, what will He do with me, with you? When He comes in His unrivaled glory and is manifested. The second main statement here is this, we shall see Him as He is.

We shall see Him. Now, this presupposes much for many of us. We shall have died and we shall have been buried, and this presupposes the resurrection.

The trumpet shall sound and the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible. But we shall see Him, says John, as He is. And yet the emphasis here in this statement does not fall upon the fact that we shall see Him, but rather upon the fact that we shall see Him as He is.

As He is. Now, there's a subtlety there. When Jesus Christ returns, we shall not see Him as He was, but we shall see Him as He is.

The view that we shall have of Him is not of the carpenter's son in poverty, lonely, despised and forsaken. The view that we shall have of Him is not as astounded or cursed upon a tree. No, no.

The view that we shall have of Him is of Him as He is now, not as He was then. Now, Jesus Christ as He was, was glorious. You know, I want to sing this morning.

You forgive me. I won't. It's all right.

But I want to say hallelujah. Jesus Christ as He was, was glorious, my good people, says John, the very writer of this epistle, and we beheld His glory, the glorious of the only begotten of the Father, as if all the glory of the Godhead was canalized into one child, not shared with anyone else, the glorious of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and full of truth. We saw that, he says.

Says Peter, we can't forget that we were with Him on the holy mountain. We saw His excellency, His majesty. As for a moment, the veil of flesh was torn away, as it were, and the glory of His inner being shone out through the flesh.

We can't forget that. He was glorious in the days of His flesh, glorious in His teaching, glorious in His example, glorious in His life, glorious in His suffering, glorious in His resurrection. But, my friend, all that pales into insignificance alongside of the glory that is His now.

Praise incorruptible, set at the Father's right hand, crowned with glory and honor and dominion, above every name that is named in this world and the world to come, the King of glory and of grace. We shall see Him, says John, as He is, not as He was. As He is, as He is, in His regal majesty and excellent deity.

Thou art coming, O my Savior. Thou art coming, O my King, in Thy beauty all resplendent. Well, may we rejoice and sing.

Now, the last thought. Have you got them? He shall appear. We shall see Him as He is.

We shall be like Him because that's the cause of it. We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. O imponderable glory, like Him.

Yes, and still more wonderful, we shall be like Him, not as He was, but as He is. You take that in. Now, fundamentally, this is a spiritual resemblance whereby the work of grace that has begun to blossom in our hearts by Christ's indwelling shall come to full bloom.

That's the image we used earlier on, and I'll use it now again. You see, what happens when a man becomes a Christian is this. There's a new fruit that is brought forth in his heart.

It's the fruit of faith and repentance, and the fruits of the Spirit, a new life, the life of God in the soul of a man, and he's born again. But now, that fruit, that flower, if we may so speak of it, will one day come to full bloom. And just as certain flowers only open fully to the sun in all the fullness of its glory, so will the fruit of the Spirit, the flower of the Spirit in our hearts, only mature and come to full bloom when we see Him in His glory.

As He is. It's no wonder that the saints of God sing. Now, insofar as faith sees Him there now, and faith sees the unseen.

Paul says that, 2 Corinthians 4. We look not, he says, at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen. Faith sees Him there now. This is the difference between a man of the world and the Christian.

The Christian, with the eye of faith, sees Jesus crowned. We do not yet see everything under His feet, but we see Jesus crowned, says the writer to the Hebrews. We see Him crowned with the eye of faith.

Now, insofar as we do, there's a great change going on in our hearts today. Where faith is real, listen to Paul. We all, he says, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, this is by faith, of course, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.

It's going on now, says Paul. As you concentrate upon the Christ of the Scriptures and the Christ of the throne, the Christ who is Lord of lords and King of kings, as your eyes are taken away from the trivialities of earth and you center upon the centralities of heaven, which is Christ the Lamb slain, risen again, there's a change going on inside. We are being changed, says Paul.

From one degree of glory to another, it's going on, this metamorphosis of the Spirit. Men are being changed from what they were, and they're becoming more like Him. He says it again in Romans 8. This is the thrust of Romans 8. All things are working together, not will work together, nor have worked together.

They have and they will, but they do so now, says Paul, that we should be conformed to His image. Now, that process that is already proceeding, if we have faith that looks to Him now and sees Him there now, that process will culminate one day. The process of our present progressive sanctification will culminate in the crisis of our eventual glorification.

But now there's something more to add to that. Not only will the soul be thus glorified, as it again bears the image of its Creator, but the flower of our glorified spirits will indwell our equally glorified bodies. I find this, I can't take it in.

It's too much, it's too big, it's too large. We, says Paul, write into the Philippians, await the Lord Jesus Christ who will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power which enables Him even to subdue all things to Himself. So then, there will be the complete transformation of the soul within and of the body without.

There will be the glory embossed upon the soul within and the new body. We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. You know how I feel trying to think of the caterpillar as caterpillar, trying to imagine poor caterpillar, what it will be like when it emerges from the chrysalis and becomes a butterfly and flies freely with hues of glory and magnificence that as a caterpillar it's never seen yet.

In the new world, poor caterpillar, what can it foresee? As what John says, it does not yet appear what we shall be. It's too big, he says, it's too great. I cannot say what it's going to be like because it's beyond me.

There are certainties that we know about. But oh, he says, one thing is enough. When we shall see Him, we shall be like unto Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Which, crystallized in the popular words of a hymn means this, when by His grace I shall look at His face, that will be glory, be glory for me. The love of the Father and our present identity, the appearance of the Son and our future glory, and I'm through, save only to say this. Now, because we are children of God now and have the nature that corresponds to that status, and because of the dignity that awaits us, there are certain practical consequences.

He that has this hope in him goes about purifying himself. How? Acting righteously in every respect. Godward, obeying Him.

In relation to the saints, loving them. In relation to the truth, believing it. Men and women, we cannot say that we are the children of God and live as we please.

If you've got the nature of God this morning because you're born again of His Spirit, man, woman of God, I tell you, you've got to be bound to God. Oh, may His Spirit win us over afresh and enable us to see the line of duty that awaits us. Just because we are what we are and who we are, and because we are the heirs of so great salvation.

No, no, the corollary is not sit down and do nothing. Rather, as Paul puts it to the Philippians, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work within you. Because of what God is doing and has done, you become co-workers with God and finish the work, exercising your child nature and your child will until the day when He appears.

May God bless you. May this week see us about our Father's business. You sure you know what God wants for you this week? Be about it like a child of God.

Let us pray. Oh, Heavenly Father, we are oftentimes speechless before Thee as Thou knowest. But never more so than when we contemplate the kind of subject that is ours in Thy Word today.

Teach us what it means and apply it to each of us for no two of us are quite the same and neither are our circumstances exactly the same. Oh, Lord, by the Spirit perfect in us what concerns Thyself today and lead us on. And may we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Savior until that day when we shall see Him.

As He is. Amen.

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