

# 1 John 2:28-3:10

## Introduction

What will keep you obeying Jesus?

John's writing to Christians who were under attack.

False teachers were seeking to draw them away from Christ. They were denying the teaching of the apostles and promoting a sinful lifestyle. And John's warning them not to be led astray. He wants them to keep living in obedience to Christ.

How would they do that? How will we do that? What will keep us obeying Jesus when the world is pulling us away from him?

Well, John focuses our attention on two great events of history.

Events define our lives. A wedding day. The birth of a child. A career choice. And so on.

And the lives of Christians are defined, above all else, by these two great events in history.

They are the future appearing of Christ and the past appearing of Christ.

And John points us first to the future appearing of Christ.

That's our first heading.

## The future appearing of Christ

Please look with me at the first half of the passage.

Firstly, verse 28.

**And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.**

John has already said that this world is passing away. We're living in the last hour. It's the last period of history before Jesus returns to wrap it all up. We don't know when, but Jesus *will* return. On that day, he will usher in a new creation: a new heaven and a new earth. And people will have one of two responses.

There will be those who will stand before Jesus with confidence and great joy, because of the cross. And there will be those who will be ashamed because they have ignored Jesus and rejected the one way of salvation.

The invitation of the gospel is to put your faith in Jesus before that day comes and to receive the promise of eternal life, which he alone can give.

And John wants those of us who know Jesus already to prepare for the day he appears by continuing in him.

He wants us to remember that when we put our faith in Jesus, we were made members of God's family. And he wants us to live in the light of that wonderful truth day by day.

And that means living a certain way.

Look at verse 29.

**If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.**

If we belong to Jesus, we have been adopted into God's family. And that will be evident in our lifestyle. Increasingly, our lives will display the character of our heavenly Father.

Little children take on the character and mannerisms of their parents. A little girl says something and it's as though her Mum's speaking. A little boy does something, and it's as though you're watching his Dad.

And it's the same with us, as children of our heavenly Father.

He is righteous, John says. He always does what is good and right. And if we belong to him, then gradually, over time, we will learn to do the same.

That means striving to become more and more like his Son as we wait for his appearing.

Look at verses 1 to 3 of the next chapter.

**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.**

John can't help but marvel at the love that God has lavished on us. He's saying, "Stop and think and be amazed at what God has done for us!"

And it *is* breath-taking.

The Creator and Sustainer of all that exists has made us his children. The God and Ruler of all is pleased to call himself our Father.

Imagine how a child must feel when they're told they're being adopted. I guess it's impossible to know exactly how it feels unless you've been through that yourself. But imagine how it must feel to know that you're going to be cared for by people who love you

unconditionally... people you can call Mummy and Daddy... people whose home will be your own, where you will safe and secure and loved.

And that's what the God of the universe has done for *us*.

Though at one time we lived as sinners and rebels, he has given us all the rights and privileges of belonging to his family, through faith in his Son. He has given us the right to pray to him and call him 'Abba,' 'Father,' 'Daddy'. He's made his heavenly home our own, where we'll be safe and secure and loved in his presence forever. It's stunning. John's saying, what kind of love is this that gives so lavishly to those who don't deserve it! He's writing this towards the end of his earthly life. He's had years to dwell on it. Yet it's as though he still can't quite take it all in. Look at verse 1 again.

**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**

This is the status we possess *now*, today, through faith in Jesus. We are his children. We don't have to earn that status. And we never could. Nor do we need to strive continually to win God's love, because he has already lavished it on us. We are God's loved and precious children now, today.

Have you grasped how loved you are? Stop and think and be amazed at what God has done for you. He has made you his child.

Of course, the world doesn't recognise us as such because the world doesn't know God. The people around us may know who we are. They may know details about our lives - who we are, where we live, the job we do... that kind of thing. But they have no idea of the relationship we have with our heavenly Father. How could they? It's impossible... because they don't know our heavenly Father. We don't even know fully ourselves what means it means to be his children, because, John says, **what we will be has not yet been made known.**

We don't know what's in store for us in the new creation or the glory that awaits us.

We don't know what it will be like to have our resurrection bodies.

We don't know what life will be like in the perfection of heaven.

But that's okay. We don't need to know... not yet.

But what we do know is that Jesus is coming. One day he will return.

When he appears, we will see him as he truly is.

And, John says, we will be made like him.

On that day, the work that God is doing in us now will be completed.

Occasionally friends take on big projects. They start building an extension, or landscaping a garden, or producing a piece of art. And there's always a degree of pleasure in seeing progress being made. But, of course, the real pleasure comes from seeing the finished thing.

And one day, we will be the finished thing.

The work that God has started in us will be completed. The work he is doing in each of us today, through his Word and Spirit, will finally be brought to completion.

We will each be pure as Jesus is pure.

It's hard to imagine what that will be like. At present, the whole of our existence is coloured by sin. Our thoughts, our speech, our behaviour - all of it - is all polluted by sin. But on that day, finally, we will be released from the power of sin. We will be released even from the presence of sin. Sin will no longer trouble us.

Don't you long for that day? We may not know what it will be like, exactly. But don't you long for it? I know I do.

Therefore, John says in verse 3: **All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.**

If we belong to Jesus, the future will determine how we live in the present. We will strive to do what is good and right and pleasing to our heavenly Father, just as he does.

Note that we will *all* do this if we belong to Jesus. Every one of us. None of us is the finished article yet. But one day we will be. One day we will be like Jesus. So, if we know Jesus, then we will make every effort to be as much like him as we can, today.

We'll strive to be pure as he is pure.

We need to ask ourselves: in what area of my life do I need to become more like Jesus? As I read about *his* life in the Bible, what in *my* life needs to change?

And that thought takes us from the future appearing of Christ to his past appearing.

So that's our second heading: the past appearing of Christ.

### **The past appearing of Christ**

Please look down with me again at verses 4 to 6.

**Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.**

John's saying that our conduct reveals which family we belong to.

No one who continues to sin deliberately and wilfully is a child of God.

We can be very quick to excuse our sin as nothing too significant. We might dismiss a lie as just a slight exaggeration. Perhaps we might excuse gossip as passing on news. We might pass off greed as just liking my food a bit too much.

But John says **everyone who sins breaks the law...**

**...in fact, he says, sin is lawlessness.**

To sin is to be lawless. It's to be a rebel against God. Sin is defiance of God's rule. In that sense, all sin is the same. All sin is rebellion against God, and it all brings us under God's judgement.

**But, John says, you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins.** Jesus came to win our forgiveness and reconcile us to his Father. He came to turn rebels into sons and daughters in God's family.

That's why John says, in the next sentence: **And in him is no sin.** That's the family likeness.

So, he says: **No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.**

Once again, John's saying the sign that someone has gone from being a rebel to being a son or daughter is that they begin to show the family likeness.

Occasionally you come across a family who all share the same passion. They all love horses and spend every spare minute in the stables. Or they all support the same football team or have the same addiction to jigsaw puzzles, or whatever it is.

Our God is a holy God. And those in his family are passionate about holiness. They won't keep sinning, John says.

He's not pretending that we'll live perfectly. We won't. But while not perfect, those who belong to God's family will make every effort to show the family likeness and do what is right.

We won't willingly follow a sinful lifestyle.

When we *do* sin, we won't be indifferent to it.

We'll grieve over our sin and confess it. And we'll do all we can, with God's help, to turn from it and bring it to an end.

That's what John means when he says that: **No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.**

If we do keep on sinning, deliberately and wilfully, then we show that we don't know Christ at all.

And what's more, we show who our true father is: not God but the devil.

Look at verses 7 to 10.

**Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.**

Here is the ultimate paternity test.

Who is your father?

Look at your conduct.

To sin is to side with the devil.

He's an old hand at it. He's been sinning from the beginning and his work is to get you and me to join him.

But Jesus came to defeat the devil and destroy his work. He came to release us from the devil's grasp.

So, if we belong to Jesus, how can we possibly carry on siding with the devil by continuing to sin?

It should be unthinkable.

In fact, it's impossible, John says. And that's because everyone who is born of God has his seed in them.

Verse 9.

**No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.**

A Christian has been born twice. He or she was born physically when they came out from their mother's womb. And they were born spiritually when God put his Holy Spirit in them and brought them to life.

Everyone who is born of God has his Spirit within them. And such a person cannot continue in wilful rebellion against God.

When we have God's power in our lives to defeat sin, we won't be content to continue in it. We'll confess it. We'll fight it with all the strength he supplies. And we'll strive to grow in godliness through Bible reading and prayer.

This, then, is what makes our conduct such an effective paternity test.

Verse 10.

**This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.**

This is how we can know whether we're truly a child of God. It's by examining our lifestyle.

When I'm at work, and at home with my family, and out with my friends, do I act as though I've got a heavenly Father or not?

We need to pay attention to what our lifestyle reveals.

And that's how we can avoid being led astray by those who aren't truly children of God. Remember that John's purpose in writing is warn his readers against being led astray by false teachers. And here he's giving us another test to identify them. We can spot false teachers by observing their lifestyle. Anyone who does not do what is right, he says, is not God's child.

A person's lifestyle reveals which family a person belongs to and whether their teaching can be trusted.

## Conclusion

What will keep us obeying Jesus?

It's our knowledge of these two great events in history.

He has appeared to free us from the devil's grasp and to make us members of his family.

And one day he will return. Then we will see him as he is, and we will be like him.

These two events define the Christian life.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please help us to keep living each day in the light of these two great events of history. Please help us to keep obeying Jesus as we put our trust in him. Please keep us from being led astray. And please see us safely home to heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.