

# Behold What Manner Of Love

*1 John 3:1-3*

*With Study Questions*

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## **Preface: Those Born of God Practice Righteousness**

We had previously discussed John's desire for those under his care to have peace and assurance at the prospect of facing the Lord; that we should not be ashamed but have confidence (1 John 2:28). This confidence comes when we find ourselves remaining in His truth. John also points out that remaining in God's truth should, and in fact will, produce righteousness. Those born of God, John states in 2:29, practice righteousness. In short, genuine faith in Christ as Savior will produce a genuine disposition toward Christ as Lord. Anything short of both is simply not the Christian faith and comes as a result of being seduced by false teachers (verse 26). It is in this setting that John begins his next thought.

## **I. Behold!**

### **Children Of God**

**“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1a)!**

The word ‘behold’ *oida* here is often translated ‘know’. Although I don't want to be accused of harping on this one word, I must point out that John is calling us to marvel at something that the vast majority of Christendom takes for granted. It is also something the vast majority of the world claims for themselves by simple virtue of their humanity—speaking specifically of being called a child of God.

### **A Right**

The biblical fact is not all people are children of God. All people are God's creatures. All people live, move and have their being in God as the creator and one who sustains them and all that is. But being a child of God is a different matter altogether. It is this which John calls us to behold. Being a child of God is a right granted by Christ.

**“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12,13).**

## **Between Lamb And Judge, Not Human Will**

Being a child of God is a right granted to those who receive Christ, to those who believe in His name. The word 'right' may seem a bit aggressive for a mere mortal to use when addressing an interaction between himself and the Creator-Judge, but it is the word in the passage. It is a fitting word, however, because strictly speaking the interaction is not between us and the Judge but between the Lamb (who is Christ) and the Judge.

Clearly, the passage above teaches us that it was not the efforts of the person saved (that is, his bloodline or human will) that gives him this right of son-ship, but it is the efforts of the Savior Himself that grants this right, or as the KJV puts it, "power". The idea that men can claim this right or power of son-ship through their own merits is staggeringly arrogant. Christ can claim it for us because there has been a price paid in full by Him. He, in every respect, has a right to claim us as His before His Father.

## **An Insufficient Message!?**

I must say that it is nothing less than an embarrassment to the church that this message has become somehow insufficient (perhaps because it is taken for granted.) I must also say that it grieves my heart to see such in our culture a free, prosperous, yet unhappy church. The western church is not hungry, not oppressed, not under persecution, yet there is such a vacuum when it comes to visceral fulfillment! The exceeding joy Peter writes of is almost theoretical.

And pastors I know are bending over backwards, having heart-attacks and getting ulcers trying to figure out ways to keep their congregations content. Their focus is on strengthening marriages, raising children, on personal growth, goal-setting, physical fitness, social programs and interaction, etc. None of these things are necessarily bad, in fact they all have value. But when they supplant the message, God is dishonored and men become miserable.

## **First Things First**

It is an offense to God and of great detriment to men when we fail to keep first things first when it comes to our faith. No matter how important we think our mission is, we must recognize that God has a greater mission. Bending over backwards to meet felt needs, and even real needs (whatever these terms mean), may be honorable, sacrificial and even godly. But we must never forget what the scriptures have determined to be critical.

## **Moses Losing Focus**

One of the most important and dramatic missions in scripture was the exodus. Moses was receiving his marching orders for this grand and glorious journey when we read of a snag in his behavior.

**“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.’<sup>22</sup> ‘Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’<sup>23</sup> ‘So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.’<sup>24</sup> And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him.’<sup>25</sup> Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast *it* at Moses’ feet, and said, ‘Surely you *are* a husband of blood to me!’<sup>26</sup> So He let him go. Then she said, ‘*You are a husband of blood!*’—because of the circumcision” (Exodus 4:21-26).**

I guess Moses could have argued that he was a bit busy to be concerning himself with something so insignificant as a simple sacrament. Maybe he hadn’t circumcised his son, but there were millions of people who had a felt need. They felt the need to get out of a captivity they had been in for 400 years. Surely the temporary omission of a mere sacrament would be of little consequence. Yet the Lord met him and sought to kill him.

Like Uzzah who touched the ark and was immediately struck by God and died there by the ark (2 Samuel 6:7), Moses was taking the first step toward impiety. His lack of willingness to make this sacrament a priority demonstrated that he was developing his own agenda and his own sense of priorities. This was God’s way of saying, **‘don’t forget the covenant I have made with Abraham and verily the human race, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent and I will draw all men to myself by the blood of Christ. I will be their God and they will be my people.’** In short, remember the price paid for men and women to be reconciled to God and become His children—Behold!

## **II. Behold The Love**

More specifically it is not even being a child which John tells us to behold, but the love which procures it. We must be careful not to think that Jesus loves us but Father despises us. The Father loves so much that He sent His Son. The trinity are in unity on the plan of salvation.

### **Pure Monergism**

The love we are to behold is unlike any love. It is purely gratuitous. It has no assignable cause save the nature of the one who grants it. He loved us while we were yet sinners and his hostile enemies. As Calvin states, “...**it is from mere bounty and benevolence that God makes us his children.**”<sup>1</sup> Let’s make no mistake about it. Though the applied love of God will yield significant changes in those who receive it, it is pure monergism (energy from one source) which secures our son-ship. We are to look to nothing else to secure it and we are to thank no one else (including ourselves) for having obtained it. The love of God is the primary cause our adoption in Christ. It is a boundless love which secures our souls forever.

### **III. Unknown By The World**

**“Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1b).**

#### **Not Acknowledging The Law-Giver**

Obviously the world does know us in a certain sense. Certainly the government knows you, your address and how much money you make per year. So in what respect does the world not know us? It does not know us (us being those who proclaim the kingdom of Christ) in the respect that the Christ’s Church is not regarded as legitimately carrying the message of the ultimate Law-giver, which blesses, and is binding in authority. When Christians proclaim the perspicuous teachings of scripture regarding the sins and crimes of abortion, homosexuality, socialism, etc. the world simply scoffs.

#### **Playing God, My Sheep Hear My Voice**

The Christian is accused of playing God when the he is merely agreeing with, and submitting to, God. But the world will not acknowledge that, because they do not know God. If they knew God—the God of the scriptures—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—they would know the message of God and would recognize the people of God. Not so much from the inherent goodness of Christians (even though that should be the case) but because of the message.

Jesus said, “**My sheep hear my voice.**” In other words, those who genuinely believe in God will hear the words of God (usually through the efforts of God’s people) and will recognize those words as true. But the world who doesn’t know God, certainly will not acknowledge God’s people, nor should we expect them to. To this issue Paul writes,

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume XXII*, (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 203.

**“For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? <sup>13</sup> But those who are outside God judges” (1 Corinthians 5:12,13).**

To some, this might sound very pious, that is, the idea of Christians associating themselves, and their views, with God while the world has this lesser view of things. But the piety (I am using this in a negative sense here) truly lies with those who consider their thoughts and opinions more righteous than the holy scriptures themselves.

#### **IV. Know Who You Are**

**“Beloved, now we are children of God” (1 John 2:2a).**

#### **You Are Children Of God**

Having called us to behold God’s love which procured our salvation, and having explained the world’s general disdain and lack of acknowledgment of that calling, John simply makes the statement, “**...now we are children of God.**” Having fixed our eyes upon the throne, having had our lips touched with a coal from the altar, we now examine who this makes us.

I must confess. I, often times, don’t feel like a child of God. I feel like more like dust. I feel tired, cranky, discouraged, full of aches and lament at the prospect of the terminal nature of my carnal condition. As Calvin states,

**“...we are also subject to (a) thousand miseries, and the soul is exposed to innumerable evils; so that we find always a hell within us.”<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Remember Who You Are**

John graciously reminds me of who I am, lest I forget and am tempted to despair. And in despair be tempted to behave in a manner inconsistent with the calling. As a squire might say to his Knight, when the Knight is tempted to compromise his dignity, “**Remember who you are.**” The world has little regard for your call, but don’t allow the world to be your influence. We must know who we are and we are required to rise above the sway of our fleshly constitutions.

#### **V. Know What You Will Be**

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume XXII*, (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 204.

**“...and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be” (1 John 2:2b).**

### **Not Yet Revealed**

John says, **“Beloved, now we are children of God.”** Then he tells us that **“it has not yet been revealed what we shall be.”** In other words, this fading life is far different from that life which will be revealed in eternity. But there is something John says we know.

### **We Shall Be Like Him**

**“...but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 2:2c).**

We shall see God as He is. Of course, God is spirit, so the seeing of God has nothing to do with the optical chemistry on the retina.<sup>3</sup> It is more the idea of fully knowing. **We will know as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).** This is not to say we will all be blind in heaven. Surely we will see Jesus and see each other, and angels as well. But the Father is Spirit.

I must also point that that when John says **“we shall be like Him”**, he doesn't mean we will be equal to Him. Being like something is far different than being equal to something. But it does mean that we will be so purified and glorified that we shall be able to stand in His presence. And finally, **“seeing Him as He is”**, is not the causal force that makes us like Him. Since the verse translates a bit odd.

Having clarified (or perhaps confused) things, I believe this verse is to be understood thus, **‘Even though, at times, you may not feel like it, you are children of God. And what you are now is merely a shadow of what you shall be. And what you shall be, will be so glorious that you will actually be able to see God for who He is, which is something that no man, saved or unsaved, prior to the eternal state, can do and live.’**

### **VI. Know What You Will Do**

**“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 2:3).**

This is in the present, active, indicative and not the imperative. In other words, John is not telling Christians what they should do. He is telling Christians what they will do. They will purify themselves. So much confusion about such a simple thing! This addresses the complaint leveled against

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon Clark, *First John, A Commentary*, (Trinity Foundation, 1980), p. 91.

Christianity from time immemorial. They say, **“Well you can just do whatever you want, and then confess, and God just forgives you.”** Sort of an easy-believism. The Christian faith teaches that those who truly believe will seek to purify themselves. And that this sort of get-out-of-jail-free mentality is a sign of hypocrisy and not saving faith.

### **In Summary**

We are to behold, and marvel at the manner of love God has bestowed on us to bring us into His family. We are not to fret when the world fails to acknowledge this. We are God’s children and the glory before us is something we can barely see, but one day will fully see. And it is the knowledge of these glorious things that must continually be the message of Christ’s Church. It is this message that brings faithful believers to purify themselves. To God be the glory.

## Questions for Study

1. Is every person on earth a child of God?
2. How does one become a child of God?
3. Why do you think this message seems insufficient in today's church?
4. What must the church avoid when it comes to its primary message?
5. Discuss Moses' experience.
6. Explain 'monergism' and why it is important?
7. In what respect does the world "*not know*" Christians?
8. How would you respond to the accusation, "You're playing God."
9. John makes the simple statement, "now we are children of God." Why do you suppose he writes this?
10. Why is it important to remember who you are?
11. Discuss the explanation of 1 John 2:2c on page 7.
12. What will those who have true hope in salvation do?
13. How would you respond to the get-out-of-jail-free mentality?