



## Focus Points...*For 1 John 3*

### Listen...

- \* As John urged his readers to remain true to the faith. Calling them "Children of God," he called them to act the part by loving one another.

### Prayer:

Lord, as I prepare to continue my reading in I John 3, thank You for his simple teaching. Open my heart by Your Holy Spirit so that I can live as You have called me to live: as a child of God. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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### Commentary:

"How wonderful is the love which God has given us that we should be called the children of God!" (3:1 my translation)

John's exclamation is both an affirmation of grace and a call to faithfulness. Those who kept holding firmly to the hope of Jesus' return "purified" themselves. The Greek word for "purify" (*agnizo*) used in the original is commonly used for ceremonial purification. James (4:8) and Peter (I Peter 1:22) use this word to refer to the cleansing of the heart, soul and mind (cf. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*).

What's John's point? It's a simple message of grace. Old Testament believers became ceremonially clean by washing themselves as the Law proscribed. New Testament believers, John wrote, attain this cleansing by holding firmly to their faith in Jesus Christ and the hope of His return.

Mention of Jesus' return is often associated with faithfulness and, specifically, purity of life. John's call to avoid "breaking the law" (i.e. the Ten Commandments) in 3:4 follows this frequent pattern and follows his mention of Jesus' return (3:2).

Jesus' second coming is one motivation to avoid sinning. In 3:5ff. John offers one of the most remarkable reasons why Christians ought not continue in sin.

"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." (3:9)

Christians don't continue in sin. They do not succumb to temptation. Instead, they battle it and fight it. Why? Because they are born of God. Even more, the

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believer's attitude toward sin, John wrote, is one of the key ways one can identify a Christian.

"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 a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." (3:10)

Certainly believers aren't perfect. As long as we live in this world we are affected by the curse of original sin and the guilt of our own daily sins. Though sinners, those who are truly "children of God" struggle daily against sin and Satan's daily battle to overcome our will and turn us to evil. Adam and Eve's first son Cain, who killed his brother Abel, is a vivid example of a child of God who succumbed to evil.

"Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous." (3:12)

John's mention of Cain marks a transition. In 3:1-11, John encouraged his "children" to remain pure in life and faith. In 3:12ff., John reminded his children that those who are evil *will* hate them. John's call, "And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers' appears to indicate that some of them have been persecuted and killed for their faith. What should his hearers do? They should do what Jesus did: He laid down His life for them. That, John said, is what love really is! (3:16)

The remainder of this chapter, as so much of this letter, centers around Jesus' command.

"And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us." (3:23)

John urged them to help the brother in need and to forgive those who sinned against them. This simple teaching is found in Jesus' Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1ff.). Paul's teaching to the Romans sounds almost Johannine.

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9)

That is the bottom line of faithfulness, isn't it! Those who love Jesus, love their neighbors and hate sin.

"Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us." (3:24)

Do people know you are a child of God? Can they see it by your love? Do they see the Holy Spirit's work in you?

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**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, help me in my struggle against sin. As I have been reborn by water and Spirit (John 3:5), give me strength to love others as You have loved me. Since You have made me a child of God, give me strength to love my enemies and to provide for the needs of all around me—including those who hate me. Let me love others as You have loved me today...and until the day You come again to redeem the world. Amen.

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