

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Life in the family of God: Children in the family

As you have heard, we are considering children in the family of God today. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-1875) wrote these verses as a child of God in the nineteenth century:

*“Father, we Thy children bless Thee
For Thy love on us bestowed;
As our Father we address Thee,
Called to be the sons of God.
Wondrous was Thy love in giving
Jesus for our sins to die;
Wondrous was His grace in leaving
For our sakes, the heavens on high.*

*Now the sprinkled blood has freed us,
Hast'ning onward to our rest,
Through the desert Thou dost lead us,
With Thy constant favour blest;
By Thy truth and Spirit guiding,
Earnest He of what's to come,
And, with daily strength providing,
Thou dost lead Thy children home.*

*Though our pilgrimage be dreary,
This is not our resting place;
Shall we of the way be weary
When we see our Master's face?
No: e'en now anticipating,
In this hope our souls rejoice,
And His promised advent waiting,
Soon shall hear His welcome voice.”*

Such is the wonder of being in the family of God.

In our talk today, we will explore 1 John 3 where we find:

- The privileges and responsibilities of the family in 1 John 3:1-9;
- Righteousness and love in 1 John 3:10-18; and
- Obedience and grace in 1 John 3:10-24.

The Apostle John has previously revealed to us the different stages of growth in the Christian life and outlined the privileges and responsibilities of eternal life which is itself characterised by righteousness and love as seen perfectly in Christ (see 1 John 2:12-29).

This chapter begins by stating: *“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”* (1 John 3:1). The verse calls upon us to consider the greatness of the gift of the Father's love:

- The love through which we have become *“children of God”*;
- The love that gave His only begotten Son to die on account of our sin;
- The love that sent His Spirit into our hearts to lead, guide and keep us;
- The love that brought us into His family;
- The love that prompts us to trust our Father implicitly;
- The love which sends every good and perfect gift from above.

Indeed, since we are children of God, then we share His nature. We are born again spiritually and, as a result, we are partakers of the divine nature. The Apostle shows us that the nature of those who are born of God:

- Believes that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1);
- Overcomes the world by faith (1 John 5:4);
- Cannot sin and does not sin (1 John 3:9 and 1 John 5:18);
- Does righteousness (1 John 2:29); and
- Loves, in the true sense of the word (1 John 4:7).

Such is the new nature as described by these scriptures. However, there is within a Christian a battle raging between the new and the old natures. The latter is sinful. Hence, the same Apostle states: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8-9). So, even the best of Christians sin and need to be open with God about this. But God is faithful and just to forgive their sins because Christ has borne the punishment for them on the cross.

The world does not know the Father. It does not recognise the relationship that He desires to have with men. The world rejects the thought of God, let alone knowing Him as Father. While here upon earth, the Lord Jesus said: *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (John 1:18). While speaking to His disciple, Philip, He also said: *"...He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"* (John 14:9). The Lord Jesus declared the Father by His words and manifested the Father in His walk and work.

1 John 3:2 emphasises that we are the children of God now! This is something we can know! It is not presumptuous for believers to say that we are children of God. The scripture reveals that in a future day, when He appears to this world, we shall not only see Him in all His majesty; but we shall be like Him. What a remarkable thought! The Apostle Paul speaks of this event in Titus 2:13: *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."*

1 John 3:3 shows us that there is a responsibility linked to this hope, namely, the Christian ought to be purifying himself in a practical way. This means that he is to shun the sin that so readily attacks him and practise righteousness instead. The measure of that purity is high. It is that of Christ Himself who, speaking to His Father, could say, *"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4).

In 1 John 3:4, the Apostle then contrasts the lawlessness of the old nature with the righteousness of the new nature. As he does so, we conclude that every one who practises sin practises lawlessness also - sin being lawlessness. "Lawlessness" is doing one's own will apart from any law at all. It is a denial of authority - especially God's.

In contrast to this, 1 John 3:5 shows that Christ is the perfect example of one who practised righteousness because there was no sin in Him. We read: *"And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."* Christ was entirely subject to the will of the Father. Entering the world He could say, *"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"* (Hebrews 10:9). Passing through the world, He could say, *"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me"* (John 5:30). When leaving the world, He could say, *"Not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). It is because He was sinless that He could bear the punishment of death for our sins upon Calvary's cross. In Hebrews 9:26 we read: *"...Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."* This is also seen in 1 Peter 3:18: *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit..."*

Hence, partaking of this new nature we read in 1 John 3:6: *"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."* One has written: "To abide in Christ is to see Him by faith, know Him by experience, and walk under His influence" (Hamilton Smith: *The Epistles of John*). Therefore, if we are abiding in Christ then we will not practise sin. On the other hand, those who are not abiding in Him have neither seen Him by faith, nor known the wonder His Person as the Son of God.

So, since true Christians are those who abide in Christ, they are partakers of His life. They are seen by God according to the perfection of Christ and not according to any merit of their own. As His life is channelled through them then the Apostle states in 1 John 3:7: *"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."* The worth of Christ is the measure of our acceptance before God. We are part of God's family.

In stark contrast, we find that the devil has a family also. In 1 John 3:8 we read: *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."* Here we see that the person who practises sin has morally the same nature as the devil. The devil

has a nature that is rebellious towards God. It is sinful. Those who share the same nature and continuously commit sins are his children.

Sadly, at times, the Christian may fall into sin and repent; but the unbeliever will not only sin, but delight in doing so. There is no repentance. So, the believer in the Lord Jesus may sin at times, but the one that lives in sin shows clearly that he has the same nature as the devil who, through pride, sinned soon after the beginning of his history. The Son of God was manifested to undo the works of the devil in order that believers, with the new nature, might come under the sway of Christ, and, abiding in Him, act in righteousness, even as He is righteous.

1 John 3:9 emphasises that a child of God does not live in sin because the holy seed of God is in him. He cannot sin, in that sense because he is born of God. The divine nature is within him! This is revealed in that he acts in righteousness **and** love (1 John 3:10). Later, we read the words: *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”*

In 1 John 3:12, we find the hatred of Cain leading to the murder of his brother, Abel (See Genesis 4:1-15). He hated him because Abel acted righteously in bringing an offering to God as had been designated. The offering was accepted (Genesis 4:4). Cain brought an offering that had not been ordained by God. He brought an offering of fruits that had come from the ground which God had cursed (see Genesis 3:17). It was not accepted. Abel obeyed God. Cain disobeyed God. These are the marks of the two natures, one that seeks to do the will of God and the other that denies His will. In 1 John 3:13, this truth leads to the world which under the influence of Satan, always seeks its own way, hating all those who would please God and act righteously.

This leads straight into 1 John 3:14 where we are told that as children of God we have passed from death unto life. Eternal life at that! What’s the practical proof of this? We love the brethren! That is to say, we love all those to whom we are related in the family of faith. If any professing believer hates true Christians, it is questionable as to whether they have been born again at all. They remain as those ruled by the old nature and dwell under the sentence of death.

1 John 3:15 contains a really convicting statement. It reads: *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”* On the other hand, we see in 1 John 3:16 the perfect expression of God’s love in the fact that Christ laid down His life for us. A person’s continued hatred of a child of God classes him as a murderer. His hatred is a proof that he has not received (and does not live in) the eternal life that God gives. The opposite is true of the real believer. His love proves His faith. Just as the love of God is proved in the sacrifice of Christ, so the sacrificial love of a Christian for other believers proves that he is a child of God. His conduct is determined by the new nature that expresses the character of life that is eternal.

The same principles of love and life are seen at work in making provision for the needy in the family of God. Therefore, 1 John 3:18 exhorts: *“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”* Christians, let’s put our means where our mouth is! Only then will our deeds show that our words are true.

Turning to 1 John 3:19-21, we see that it is by this practical love that we know we are in the truth. That is to say, we live in the truth of the Christian faith. Therefore, our hearts are confirmed and assured before God. If our consciences are clear, we have confidence in the presence of the God who knows all things. When we are walking in love then we have an intimate and happy association with God. The child that is conscious of disobeying his father’s wishes cannot be secure in his father’s presence. If our consciences condemn us, we are responsible to confess and judge our sins before our heavenly Father so that a healthy communion is restored.

1 John 3:22 shows that the obedience that is central to this fellowship is rewarded because our prayers are answered by God in a positive way. If we please God, then we will ask according to His will. As a result, He is pleased to bless us. Also, there are two commandments that we must keep.

- The first is to believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ;
- The second is for us, as Christians, to love one another recognising that love is the nature which always seeks the best for the good of its object.

1 John 3:24 further reveals that our obedience proves that God dwells in us by His Spirit. This Spirit is not to be quenched by disobedience. He is to have full control of our lives. Also, this Holy Spirit is grieved if we do anything that is not pure. He ever seeks to sanctify us practically. In other words, He empowers us to live holy lives. The same obedience also shows that we dwell in God, inasmuch as we delight to know and do His will. We, as Christians, have the privilege of resting on the bosom of God Himself. Here we can appreciate divine affections and enjoy sweet fellowship with the Father and also with the Son. Love is the motivating force in all this. It has been well said that obedience is the measure of love. FB Hole put it this way: *“If we abide in Him we necessarily draw from Him all the fresh springs of our spiritual life, and as our practical life is thus drawn from His, it is His life.”* (*Hebrews to Revelation* [FB Hole, ISBN: 9780901860453, 9780901860491]).

We conclude this meditation with a few verses that the subject inspired:

*Oh, the love that gave Thy Son!
Oh, the love of salvation!
Oh, the love the Spirit spread!
Oh, the love of Christ our Head!*

*By that love, we're born again,
Free from sin with all its pain.
By that love, we're righteous made.
Oh, the love by Thee displayed.*

*In commands, Thy love is found!
In obedience, love is crowned.
Love casts out all doubt and fear;
'Tis by love we now draw near.*

*Love is proof that we are Thine!
Love's a nature pure, divine.
Thy love, Father, leads us on
To the place where Christ has gone.*

*Father, help me love like Thee!
Let Thy Son be seen in me!
Let Thy Spirit rule my soul,
For 'tis love that made me whole.*

GE Stevens

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