

SEE HOW MUCH LOVE: BEYOND FELLOWSHIP

Listen to how the Living Bible translates **1 John 3:1**

See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children--think of it--and we really are! But since most people don't know God, naturally they don't understand that we are his children.

We are in the First Letter of John, now in chapter three, and I want you to see how he is building on the theme of relationship. (Just one of many themes.)

In chapter one, he stuns most of the world with the idea that a person can actually have a relationship with God. He spoke of the heart and mind of God in that word "Logos." But he goes on to say they actually saw, heard, and touched this "Logos", who is of course, Christ. "The Word (logos) was with God and the Word was God." -A loaded statement.

In chapter two, we go beyond simple relationship. There are some foundational Greek words every Christian should know. "Logos" is one. In the morning last week, we learned another one, "gnosis" meaning to KNOW. To know God goes beyond what you can reason, or what you may have experienced; to know God is to have a divine being who is beyond our reason and experience, REVEAL Himself to us. God IN us and us in God.

In the evening sermon/discussion we learned another foundational Greek word, "hisasmos." What Christ did on the Cross cannot be covered by one English term. It involves three, of which the average Christian, including myself, are way too hazy. Those three words are "expiation", "atonement", and "propitiation"; in straightforward terms: appeasement from wrath; repair of a damaged relationship; purification so the relationship may continue.

Fellowship, know, reconcile; what could possibly come next?! ...Hey, did I tell you about how the Living Bible translates the opening of the next chapter?

See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children--think of it--and we really are! But since most people don't know God, naturally they don't understand that we are his children.

It is something to be an acquaintance of God; it is mind-blowing to think you could actually be a friend of God; it is inconceivable, but we can actually be in the "bloodline" of God!

Many a scholar who has pondered this came to this conclusion: Every person is a "creature" of God, but very few... very blessed few are actually a "child" of God. John claims, those in this living relationship with God are "born of God", that "His [God's] seed remains in him [the believer]." -We in a very real sense; carry God's DNA!

THE FLIPSIDE: SIN

What an amazing reality! Yet John consistently points out that there are two sides to every reality. We can have this relationship with God, but on the flipside, there is an obstacle that is always standing in the way, it is called "sin."

"Sin" is one of those over-used words that almost makes me wince when I hear it, because people could mean almost anything. I have a feeling that John must have felt that way as well, because he goes to a lot of effort to qualify the term in this chapter. Here's a quick list of what John says in this chapter:

- To NOT be in this relationship is to be in sin. Sin, in essence, is to NOT be like God.
- Sin is devoid of the natural laws of goodness (As God defines goodness)

- Sin is to undo the works of Christ
- Sin is to be in friendship with the devil; sharing his nature.
- Sin is to do, or value the opposite of God's prime commandments which as John explains them:
 - 1) Belief in Christ as the Christ; the opposite of that is to not believe, or to believe in some alternate way.
 - 2) To love one another; the opposite being "hate." Keep in mind, the Hebrew and Biblical Greek idea of the term isn't to simply detest, it simply be, "to love less." As John says it, to "shut up one's heart" to a brother.

On one side of spiritual truth, John claims verse 9:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

What John is pointing out is the nature of transformation God brings when He lives inside us; it's not simply a case of *religious duty*. *I don't do bad things because I'm not supposed to!!*

There is a change in what we actually desire. New values and pleasures taking root. There are now things in life that make me feel more whole than the self-centered things I used to do and covet. We could go into all the things that the world goes to in our day, but it is amazing how John summed it all up in three timeless terms in the previous chapter: For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world. (1 John 2:16)

Isn't that the truth? Do a mental inventory on actions and thoughts that have stood between you and God. In some way, they fall in one of these three categories, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or the pride of life.

But doesn't this verse, all by itself discourage you? It does me! -Because I know I continue to do things that qualify as sin. Even though what John is saying makes perfect sense, the reality is, I still carry out actions, attitudes, and responses in my life that qualify as sin. I'm not perfect, I wish I was, but I'm not! ...So since sin still happens, does that mean God doesn't live in me? Am I doomed!

THE BALANCED VIEW OF SIN

Thank God that John isn't simply "black and white", he is also balanced in his Biblical message. We can't understand chapter three properly without the balance of chapter two:

1 John 1:8- 1 John 2:1

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. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

If any realization other than our acute awareness of sin brings us to God; we have not really come to God yet. Little things mean a lot in foundational statements like this; note that it says "sin", we are not talking a list of actions, we are talking of the nature behind those actions. You and I are born with a fallen nature; a baby will show you that within the first year of life.

But even as we come to God with an awareness of our own sin nature, the sin issue doesn't stop there. Note the tense of the following sentence; if we "confess", that is ongoing. He will "forgive", that's ongoing. He will "cleanse", that is ongoing.

By the final sentence, John pulls it all into context, “that you may not sin.” Therein lies the real difference for the child of God. You don’t HAVE to sin. There is no mentality, attitude, habit, or slip up that you HAVE to give into. There is now something other than a routine of “non-God” to follow. He won’t force you, but He will empower you. He will forgive you, but there is a new nature growing that doesn’t want to do those things. If you are to be a child of God, you will feed that nature.

But John has been around the block. Habits, addictions, and just deeply entrenched routines are not easy to expunge! There is always the possibility of slipping up. That is where Christ remains your “Advocate” before the Father. God doesn’t follow a “three strike policy.” -You can slip up, but you don’t HAVE to. -And if you don’t care about slipping up. If you have no hunger to feed the new nature, your soul will be like a fetus with a strangled umbilical cord.

WHY WE DO NOT SIN

Word of advice: When you stumble, don’t try to pick yourself up and dust yourself off; because it wasn’t you who picked yourself up in the first place. The power is in the God who is in you; if you are His Child. “If we confess, HE is faithful.”

With our understanding balanced in this way, let’s go back to chapter three and look at reasons John tells us that the CHILD of God will not sin. In summary, we will not live in a nature of sin:

- Because we are God’s children and we will be like Him.
- Because Christ was manifested to take away our sins.
- Because we live IN God.
- Because sin is to be like, and with the devil.
- Because we practice what we really are; and we really are children of God.
- We are born of God, we carry His DNA.
- Because we have passed from death to life and we just don’t want to hang out in the graveyard anymore.

Christian teaching in a nutshell: The old self is sin, the new self is saved in Christ. That implies something; we are our own worst obstacle in our relationship with God.

With all the “solar eclipse mania” that had been going on it brought an illustration to mind. (And I confess, I’ve been guilty; I now have a solar eclipse of some kind on all my lock screens.)

Here’s the analogy; our nature, what it becomes is so much like the moon, if we think of Christ the SON as the SUN as Christ.

SIN AS A SOLAR ECLIPSE

On a solar eclipse, the moon stands between us and the sun. The result is darkness. We have a big black hole in the sky where there could and should be light. If you let your eyes linger there unprotected, it will quickly blind you.

On the other hand, we have the full moon, it doesn’t bring darkness, but light. A full moon on winter snow can be almost like daylight! It’s beautiful, let your eyes linger on it all you want.

-The first blocks light, the second reflects light.

-The first is dangerous to your long-term sight, the second is a beautiful view.

-It's the same big rock in the sky, the only difference is its position!

The dynamic of our sin is much like that. Our nature, the one we really live by; is much like the moon. We can allow our nature to become something that stands between us and God, or we can allow God to move us to a position where we reflect Him. Sin is when we get in our own way; we set up our own eclipse; and it's a dangerous place to linger. It's a dangerous place to set your eyes. It's so dangerous because it may not even feel bad at the moment, but even as you look there, it is blinding you.

Jesus Christ is an Advocate for life that lives to reflect, but in our imperfection, slips up now and then. But nothing can be an advocate for the life that insists on being a "total eclipse."

A rather involved analogy, I know, but let me reduce it to a simple question:

When you take an inventory of your schedule, your daily routines, where you go for R and R; how you respond; what inner nature you feed; what best describes you- A full moon, or a total eclipse?