

# 1 JOHN

## 3:1-24

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 17th July 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** 1 John 3:1-24

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

#### Introduction

We're studying 1st John - one of the shorter books in the Bible at just 5 chapters and around 2500 words long, making it readable in as little as 10-15 minutes (that in itself is food for thought, right?!). The overall **theme** is given in 3 descriptions of God that the apostle John gives; that God is light, God is love, and God is life.

As for the purpose of the letter, John notes at least 5 **reasons** that he wrote it:

1. That you may have fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:3)
2. That your joy may be full (1 John 1:4)
3. That you may not sin (1 John 2:1)
4. That you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)
5. That you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13)

#### Overview of 1 John

As a quick reminder, the five chapters can be summarised as follows:

- Chapter 1 - A real Jesus and restored relationship with God who is light
- Chapter 2 - We know that we know Him, but should walk our talk, and avoid deceptions
- Chapter 3 - We are children of God, and should abide in Him, and love others that do
- Chapter 4 - Be careful what you listen to, and love one another for God is love
- Chapter 5 - Obedience to Christ should follow the certainty of what has been done for us

And we're going to dig into chapter 3 this evening.

## Overview of chapter three

As a quick summary of this chapter we start with an incredible opening, declaring the enormity of what God has done;

- v1-3: We are children of God!
- v4-9: Our vertical relationship (with God)
- v10-15: Our horizontal relationship (with our fellow man)
- v16-24: Our response to God's love for us

## Chapter three

So, let's get zoom into the chapter and look at verse 1. We read:

### 1 John 3:1

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

What manner of love! It should take us back. It should astound us, that which God has done for us in sending His only Son to die in our place, for our sin. And not only that, but that he would reconcile us to Himself that we might be seen as His children. Furthermore, not only are we seen as children, but heirs. We read in Romans:

### Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

No wonder Paul then says...

### Romans 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Friends, what God has done is nothing short of staggering. We should be confounded, stunned, bemused by this great truth. It should take our breath away.

Our culture talks a lot about love, and indeed whether in a romantic relationship, friendship or within a family, the lengths or sacrifices people will go to for those they love are sometimes immense. And occasionally stupid of course. But nonetheless, there are some great demonstrations of love we see. But *none* of those compares to what God has done for us. That's why John says behold! A word that is also translated know, or perceive. So stop for a moment. Consider what God has done. Understand it. Perceive the magnitude of it.

I love that Christmas song we sing;

*Noel, Noel - Come and see what God has done. Noel, Noel - The story of amazing love! The light of the world, given for us!*

You know, this isn't something God is going to do. It is something He has *already* done. And the wonderful reality of what God has done is that He now looks on us as He looks on His own son, because He looked on His own Son as if He were us. That's incredible. And it's true. We read Jesus' words in John's gospel:

**John 17:23**

I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Do you get that? That God loves you as He loves His own Son!

I'm not always a fan of preachers stories, as I think they can sometimes distract, or draw attention to the preacher. But there's one I read yesterday that I think is genuinely helpful.

The story is told of two brothers who wanted to play Little League Baseball. As they signed up, the registrar was puzzled when, according to their papers, he noticed they were six months apart.

"You're brothers?" he asked.

"Yep," they answered.

"But you're only six months apart," the puzzled official countered.

"Well, one of us was adopted," said one of the boys.

"Which one?" asked the registrar.

"We ask our dad all the time," said the boys, "but he says he can't remember."

That's the extent to which our Heavenly Father loves us!

Yet there's more...

**1 John 3:2**

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We are the children of God now. That's already the case. Yet we're not yet what we shall be - God has not finished with you yet! There's more to come... We read in Philippians...

**Philippians 3:20-21**

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians we also read that we shall all be changed. That this corruptible must put on incorruption. Oh, what a hope we have! That we'll be changed. And that we'll know Him perfectly. That we'll see Him as He is. Imagine that - knowing God perfectly.

Typically, when you get to know someone better, you start to see all their flaws. But that's not the case with God, for as we draw ever closer to Him, we'll see more of His glory, His beauty, His majesty. And standing before Him in Heaven we'll indeed see Him perfectly.

But what about now? Well, John continues...

**1 John 3:3**

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

This is a critical reminder that while we are to look forward with eagerness to Jesus' return, we are not to forget about living in a manner that pleases God here.

So, what does it mean to be pure? Well, Paul writes the following in Colossians, likewise giving the context of our future hope as the reason we purify ourselves...

**Colossians 3:4-4:6**

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

If you have the hope of Jesus returning, and that you'll spend eternity with Him - then those things we just read are what you are to work at now. Not in your own strength, but with the help of your Heavenly Father, Jesus your Saviour, and His Holy Spirit in you.

Note that it says "everyone who has this hope purifies himself", not "everyone who has this hope is already pure". It's not something that happened in the past, but something we must do in the present. We have already been adopted, but now there should be obedience to our Heavenly Father.

And if we're to pursue purity, we should naturally aim to keep ourselves from anything that is impure - and specifically, that means keeping from anything that is sin. We are instructed in the book of Romans:

#### **Romans 6:11-14**

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

What is sin? John writes...

#### **1 John 3:4**

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

So, sin is the transgression of, that is the breaking of, God's law. It literally means to miss the mark. The law isn't there to help us out of our sin, or let us off the hook - rather, it leaves us helpless. But that doesn't mean it's not useful, for we read in Psalm 19:7 that the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. That is, the law is the mirror that lets us know how very dirty, how wretched we are before a pure, holy, perfect God.

And it builds a concrete legal case against us. Someone must pay for the crime. And it should be us, yet we read the very good news in the next verse...

#### **1 John 3:5**

And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

Jesus was perfect. That's why He could pay for our sin - because He didn't have to pay for His own (because He had none). And because He wasn't merely a man, but fully God, He was able to pay for the sin of the whole world, as we read in Isaiah 53:

**Isaiah 53:6**

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Again, what manner of love God has shown to us!

John continues...

**1 John 3:6**

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

So, does this mean we never sin as Christians? No - because John already wrote in chapter 1:8 (writing to believers) that "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Christian's *will* sin. However, it's God's desire that we do *not* sin, indeed John wrote in chapter 2:1 "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin."

Let's then consider the context, that in verse 3 John is talking about Christians purifying themselves. That we might sin less, aiming to be sinless. Followed by verse 4, where he describes what sin is - that is breaking of God's law. The word *commit* there (as in "whoever *commits* sin") is one that speaks of continual action. And then here in verse 6 he is saying that he who abides in Jesus, does not do that. In other words, if you abide in Him you won't persist in sin. Indeed you simply *can't* persist in sin (for if you do, you're not abiding in Him!).

Let me put it another way: The closer you are to God, the less you'll be able to even bare the thought of sin. And if close to God, if truly abiding in Him, you'll simply not be *able* to habitually, continually, practice sin. Because you can't abide in Him, and perpetually sin. You can't be faithful to Him and unfaithful at the same time. Do we still sin? Yes. But there's a huge difference between the Christian and unbeliever. The Christian sins and wrestles with it. The unbeliever sins and relishes it.

The wrestling is evidence you are spiritually alive. In fact, your sin will make you miserable, it will make you uncomfortable. Even the smallest amount of sin will bother you - just like a small pebble in your shoe makes you walk uncomfortably at the beach, so does sin in the life of a believer.

On the contrary, relishing sin is evidence you are still dead in your sins. *Whoever sins has neither seen Him or known Him...*

We read in verse 7...

**1 John 3:7-8**

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

So, who is your father? Well, who do you look like?

If, on reflection, looking at the law, you realise your father is the devil - the god of this world - hope is not lost, because that's exactly why Jesus came. That he might save you from your sin and the consequences of it - but you must put your faith and trust in Him.

If, though, you have a new Heavenly Father, then note this...

**1 John 3:9**

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.

This is the result of Jesus sacrifice. That we don't *have* to sin. That it no longer has power over us. In fact, God has given us all we need that we might not sin. We read in 2 Peter:

**2 Peter 1:2-4**

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

If we are born again, this is the new nature in us. Jesus living in us, through us, through His Holy Spirit. That like Joseph, when confronted with sin, we'll say "how can I do this and sin against God?"

J Vernon McGee comments on these verses:

The question is: Have you been born of God? I believe in the security of the believers, but I also believe in the insecurity of make-believers. It is well for us to take an inventory and to look at our lives. We must examine ourselves and see whether we are in the faith or not. Are you really a child of God? Do you long after the things of God? That is the important thing.

**J Vernon McGee**

John then, now gives a test to all - whether they are in the faith or not.

#### **1 John 3:10**

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

So this is the test: Do you practice righteousness? And do you love Christians? Not tolerate them, but love them. If neither, then you are not a Christian yourself. That's what John says here. He's clear. And he's clear elsewhere in this letter too.

The Bible does not teach that we are all God's children. We are all His creation, but only those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ are His children, adopted into His family at Christ's expense. And the alternative is that we are children of the devil.

Finnis Dake concludes that there are 21 evidences in this letter that you or any person is a child of satan; walking in darkness, saying you have no sin, failing to please God and keep His commandments, failing to walk as Christ did, hating anyone, failing to overcome satan, loving the world and things in it, leaving Christian fellowship, ignoring truth, denying God and Jesus, doing unrighteousness, making no effort to purify self, committing sin, murdering, shutting bowels of compassion, lacking faith, being destitute of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, being of the world and having fellowship with it, having no personal acquaintance with God or knowledge of eternal life, making no confession of Jesus, being overcome by the world.

If that describes you - you must do something about it!

But as for the children of God, there will be evidence of their parenthood - there will be love. We read...

#### **1 John 3:11**

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

Where did we hear this message? Jesus said, as recorded in John's gospel:

#### **John 13:35**

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Think of the first time that didn't happen in the Bible, and we get to v12...

#### **1 John 3:12**

not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Of all the silly reasons to hate someone, righteousness is surely the most stupid one. Yet Cain, whose offering was by his works, was jealous that Able's offering by faith was accepted. That enmity was and is rooted in self-righteousness, believing that one's own actions are good enough to merit God's favour. The world does not want to hear about God's righteousness that says their actions are not good enough. They do not want to know about their sin. And we therefore read...

#### **1 John 3:13**

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.

The world hated Jesus first. Why? Because the light exposes the darkness. We should be salt and light. But for those who want nothing to do with Christ it will be like salt in a wound, and light in the eyes. As such, we should expect no better treatment from the world than Abel received from Cain.

Jesus said:

**John 15:18-21**

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

Because of this natural tendency of the unbeliever toward self-righteousness, Christians are, as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians, like an aroma of death. Because of this, loving Christians is actually evidence of the new life in us - it's evidence we are saved. We read:

**1 John 3:14**

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

In case you are wondering if this is talking about our attitude to all people, well, yes we should be loving to all, but this verse is specifically talking about Christians - the term *brethren* here is specifically referring to brothers from the same father. And we should love our spiritual brothers and sisters. Love them!

When you realise someone you have recently met is a Christian, oh what a joy that should be!

One of the best examples I've seen in my life was when I was hired for the company I currently work for. The interviewer asked some questions about why I had things to do with church on my CV, and I didn't expect that would pan out well. But I was offered the job, and on my first day found that the interviewer was my new boss. When we spoke 1-to-1 the first time, he recalled the interview questions and said "I'm a Christian too!". That was so wonderful, and he's now one of my best friends.

Why is it a joy? Well, first, because we have a common Saviour - I've noted before how having a common friend draws two people together. But it's deeper than that, for when we realise someone is a Christian, we're realising in that moment that we have the same Father! Picture the joy of family reunions where family have been separated. That's a good example of the joy and the love we should have.

And on the contrary, we read...

**1 John 3:15**

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

This is not saying that an actual murderer cannot be saved, but that a Christian will no longer live in hatred - for Jesus made this clear, as recorded in Matthew chapter 5, that hate is murder in the heart, in the same way that lust is adultery in the heart.

So do we hate the brethren? I hope not. Yet sometimes there is much hate, even among those who call themselves Christians, when it comes to politics or even sport. But that should not be the case. And actually, John writes here that no-one who persists in that kind of attitude is actually a Christian. And here is why, because we have an example...

**1 John 3:16**

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Jesus is our example in laying down His life. Not for His benefit, but for ours. He owed us nothing. There was absolutely no reason why He should die for us, other than His love for us. And likewise there may times where you can find no reason to love someone. No reason to lay down your life, or your calendar commitments, or your finances to love a particular person. But that doesn't excuse you from loving them. We are called to love even the most objectionable Christians we know.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son - that's our example to follow. And John continues:

**1 John 3:17**

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

We're in the middle of a cost of living crisis. Are we doing what we can? This is a question we need to each consider personally. You know, we're so abundantly rich compared to generations that went before us. When my parents first married, they didn't have the money to buy a wardrobe - and so put nails in the wall that they could hang their clothes on. And I'm sure many of us know of parents or grandparents that didn't grow up with a TV. 50 plus years later and as a society we've kind of lost the plot on what essential means. We're so used to luxury that we demand it. We feel entitled to it. It's not that it's wrong to have these things. But we've gone a long way beyond what is truly essential. There are people struggling to eat. Are we doing enough?

In particular, because of our love for the brethren, churches should be amazing places where the church family really does love each other. When that happens, it is not only a blessing internally, but a witness externally. What does this look like? Let me give you some examples...

- When one set of friends had really difficult time following the birth of their children, their church family brought meals round on an almost daily basis
- One church we know, has two families with children in life-threatening conditions. An added complication is that both fathers are self-employed, adding a financial burden - so the church family are supporting them both financially
- Another church close to us has a young Christian family that cannot afford to rent - so someone in the church bought a house especially so they could offer it to them at a greatly reduced rent
- I've known others in this town directly support those in ministry as their ministry support didn't provide sufficiently for their family needs
- And we've done things as a church - whether as individuals or collectively - to support those who have been out of work in difficult circumstance

So do you see need in your church family, or with any Christian brothers or sisters you know? Can you meet that need? If so, is there any reason you should not do so?

#### **1 John 3:18**

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

We should show our faith by our works - we looked at this last week.

Indeed, love is not something you say, and not simply something you feel, but something you do. You can't say "I love you" and do nothing to show that. Love REQUIRES action.

#### **1 John 3:19**

And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Wow, John is saying, our love for Christian brothers and sisters is evidence that we are saved! When we do these things. When we love. That's when we know we are of the truth.

But what if we've fallen short here? Well we read:

#### **1 John 3:20**

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

Remember that promise we read at the beginning of chapter 2?

#### **1 John 2:1-2**

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

We have an advocate!

Yet how much better to have dealt with sin, for when we are abiding in Him, and not persisting in sin, we can have confidence that God will hear us:

#### **1 John 3:21-22**

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.



However, the opposite is also true...

**Psalms 66:18**

If I regard iniquity in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear.

So we are to walk with God, abiding in Him, keeping His commandments, doing those things which please Him. And it's then that we can expect God to answer our prayers.

I've quoted this many times, but it's a very helpful comment that Ben Patterson made...

Perhaps one reason God delays answers to our prayers is because He knows that we need Him, more than the things we ask of Him.

**Ben Patterson**

If your walk with God is not right, then that is the most important thing that needs addressing, not whatever else you're praying to God about.

How do we set our walk with Him right? John writes:

**1 John 3:23**

And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

First, your relationship with God.

Second, your relationship with others.

By doing these things, we'll know that we know Him, and love Him. And so will others. As we read earlier, Jesus said:

**John 13:34-35**

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And now John notes:

**1 John 3:24**

Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

So then, this is another evidence of the new life in us. That we are filled with the Holy Spirit who will convict us, comfort us, and help us. Are the words of the Bible of no comfort to you? Do you have no conviction of sin? Then is the Holy Spirit in you?

If He is in you, then fruit should follow as we read in Galatians...

**Galatians 5:22-23**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

## Application questions

Oh, what do we do with all this? As always, we need to apply it - it's no use as mere head knowledge. So this week, I suggest asking yourself these questions:

- Are you astounded by what God has done for you? If not, consider it more!
- How are you currently purifying yourself?
- Who is your father? Do you wrestle with sin, or relish in it?
- Do you love Christians? If so, what are you doing about it?

- Are you keeping His commandments?

**Let's pray.**