

Living *as* Children of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:5; Ps. 51:4; Isa. 1:2; John 1:12; Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:1–10.*

Memory Text: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 John 3:1, NIV).

A new convert came to see the preacher and said, “No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.” The preacher responded, “Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my legacy? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ’s heir because it is for you that He died.” We are children of God and heirs of His kingdom, not through our perfection but by His grace.

This week we look more at what this promise entails.

The Week at a Glance: What does it mean to be a “son of God”? In what ways should we want to be “like God”? How does John define “sin”? What did Jesus do about sin at His first coming? How are we to understand John’s words that the one who is born of God “does not sin” (1 John 3:9, NKJV)?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 15.

Sons of God *(1 John 3:1)*

Read 1 John 3:1. What wonderful promise is found there? What does that promise entail? What hope should it give us? See also John 1:12, 1 John 2:29, 3:9.

First John 3:1 points to a spiritual birth; John 1:12 stresses the faith in Christ by which we become children of God. First John 3:1 stresses that believers are already God's children. God has taken the initiative to do this for us. The new birth is His work, not ours. We can bring about neither our own birth nor our adoption as God's children. Also, we do not need to worry about our status as children of God as long as we maintain our relationship with Him. This relationship is described as one between a father and a child; thus, it is very close. The ideal father takes care of us, loves us, and would give his life for us.

Stop and dwell on the implications of the promise that we are the children of God. At last count there are more than four hundred billion *visible* galaxies in the universe, each one containing billions of stars. Who knows how many planets are among those stars and how many are inhabited with intelligent life? Given the size of the universe in contrast to our planet, much less to each of us individually, how can we not be astonished that the God who created all this loves us and has made us His children? What a wonderful perspective this should give us on what our lives mean! What hope, what assurance, what confidence we should have for the future, regardless of whatever difficult circumstances we now face. God, the Creator of all that is, loves us, cares for us, and calls us His children. The New International Version translates 1 John 3:1 freely but catches its meaning well when it says that the Father lavished His great love on us.

Dwell on the implications of the notion that not only does God exist but He loves us, cares for us, and even died for us. How should this reality impact how we live? Why should it impact it?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *1 John 3:1–10*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that we are God’s children and are called to be like Him.

Feel: Be enveloped in God’s love.

Do: Respond to God’s love by resisting the temptation to sin.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: We Are Called to Be Like Our Father

A How do you understand the concept of being like the Lord “when we shall see Him” (*1 John 3:2, NKJV*)? How does the idea of children being like their earthly parents help deepen our understanding of this concept?

B Satan wanted to be like God; Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. How does this ambition differ from the promise that we will be like God when we see Him?

II. Feel: Enveloped in a Blanket of Love

A What synonyms does the word *lavished* bring to mind? How do you feel when you realize that this describes how God loves you?

B Sometimes we get impatient waiting for our promised inheritance in heaven. How can we nurture a spirit of patience and joy?

III. Do: Resisting and Rejoicing

A How does the Cross provide the antidote for our inadequacies?

B Why is no cost too high that enables you to put sin out of your life?

▶ **Summary:** God lavishes His love on us, calling us to be His children and offering us the victory over sin.

Results and Responsibilities *(1 John 3:2, 3)*

First John 3:1 is an introduction to the thoughts developed in the remainder of the passage for this week. It deals with results of this Father/child relationship, including subsequent responsibilities. As a consequence of their relationship with God, believers live pure lives not under the dominion of sin (*vss. 3–10*). However, first it is stressed that we will see Him and will be like Him.

Because we know about our present state as children of God, we also know that the future will be even more fantastic, even though we may not yet fully understand it. That we will see the Lord and be like Him should fill us with joy and confidence and not a little bit of awe and wonder.

What is the difference between Satan’s and Eve’s wish to be like God (*Gen. 3:5, Isa. 14:14, Ezek. 28:2*) and the promise of 1 John 3:2 that we will be like Him?

Satan wanted to be like God in power and may have craved the adoration of all created beings. However, it seems that he was not interested in being like God in character. His desire to be like God in power did not deepen his relationship with God but, to the contrary, has disrupted and ruined it.

Although Christians will be like God, they do not desire to take God’s place. They want to be like Him in loving others, in selfless service, in exhibiting purity of thought and righteousness of action. They respect the basic difference between Creator and creature and do not want to do away with it. For them the issue is love, not power. As Jesus showed us, to be like God is to give of oneself totally and unselfishly for the good of others. Jesus came to show us what the Father is like. “Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (*John 14:9*).

Think of the incredible contrast between the character of Jesus and the character of Satan. A created being, Satan sought a position higher than he had but for a purely personal and selfish motive, while Jesus—the Creator—chose to make Himself “of no reputation” (*Phil. 2:7*) for the good of others. What’s your natural tendency, to be more like Christ or more like Satan? If the latter, how can you change?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: To be called the children of God is a privilege that calls for responsible living.

Just for Teachers: As you study this week’s lesson, focus on the privilege and the obligation of being God’s children.

God is love. All religions agree on that. Yet, if we were asked how that love is expressed, the answers most likely would point to the benefits that God gives: the sun and the moon, the rain and an abundant harvest, health and wealth. In the Bible God’s love is seen not just in material blessings but in relationships: He creates humanity in His image, He sends His only Son to die to save sinners, and He makes them His children. At this generosity John is rendered almost speechless! He exclaims, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us” (*1 John 3:1, NKJV*).

Discuss: How is God’s love involved in making us His children? (*John 3:16; Rom. 5:7, 8*).

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: John uses the phrase “born of God” numerous times (*1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18*). It underscores that the Christian life is not an accident but a result of Christ’s redemptive work (*John 3:1–3, 16; Col. 2:12, 13; Titus 3:4–7*). As we accept this work in faith, we are “born again,” and hence, we are called God’s children (*Rom. 8:14*). Explore with the class what being born again means in relation to being called God’s children.

Bible Commentary

He who called the worlds into existence by the word of His mouth (*Ps. 33:9*) has now through His incarnate Word called us to be His children. By nature we are sinners, in enmity with God. We are at odds with our Creator. But through Christ Jesus we are reconciled (*2 Cor. 5:18*), are at peace with Him (*Rom. 5:1*), and now are adopted as His children (*Eph.*

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A Definition of Sin (1 John 3:4)

The false teachings that John confronted in these letters may have stressed the present blessing of salvation but may have ignored the importance of living pure lives. The false teachers may not have worried about the problem of sin or its consequences. Therefore, John emphasizes that our future depends on how we live now. This has nothing to do with righteousness by works. We are saved by grace alone, but our lives must reflect that we are saved. So, John, after having called Christians to purify themselves, goes on to show what that means.

What do the following texts tell us about the nature of sin? *Exod. 9:27; Pss. 36:3; 51:4; Isa. 1:2; Jer. 3:13; Matt. 7:23; Rom. 6:17, 20; 1 John 1:8; 3:4; 5:17.*

In Scripture sin is described as missing the mark, falsehood, deliberate violation of God's standard of truth, revolt, wickedness, disobedience, transgression, trespass, lawlessness, and unrighteousness.

In 1 John 3:4 sin is defined as "lawlessness" (*NIV*). Later in 1 John 3:11–20, John relates the story of Cain, who murdered his brother, a clear example of "lawlessness." Then in verses 22 and 24 of the same chapter, he refers to the commandments and the necessity to keep them.

Besides the legal implications of the term, *lawlessness* reminds us of the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (*NIV*), the antichrist par excellence, and the climax of his activity just prior to the Second Coming. This lawlessness is exhibited by the antichrists in 1 John, who flagrantly rebel against God and align themselves with Satan. Church members are indirectly warned in 1 John 3:4 to renounce such an attitude and all sin. It's one of the great ironies of the Christian world today that many of the same preachers who rail against sin continue to make the claim that God's law has been abolished because we are now under grace. What a horrible distortion of what grace is all about!

What's your favorite sin? That is, what sin do you find yourself continually indulging in? What are the ways in which you justify it in your mind? How much less sinful does it seem with each passing year? When are you going to wake up and realize that sooner or later, unless you claim God's power to overcome it, it will destroy you?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

1:5). This is an unquestionable reality. But to be God’s children is not only a privilege but a profound responsibility.

I. Being God’s Children: The Privilege *(Review 1 John 3:1, 2 with the class.)*

With God as the Creator, all human beings are His children. But being believers, we are children in a special sense—redeemed from sin and adopted into God’s eschatological family. This idea of adoption goes back to the original divine purpose inherent in the covenant. That purpose is to create a redeemed family that will inherit the kingdom of God, as opposed to our first family that failed by choosing a way that was contrary to God’s will. Human design has nothing to do with this adoption: it was accomplished by Jesus “according to the good pleasure” of God’s will “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (*Eph. 1:5, 6*).

Because we are adopted into God’s family, we are no longer aliens, orphans, or strangers left to wander in sin’s hopeless desert. Rather, God has drawn His circle of love around us, and we have become the privileged heirs of His covenantal promise. Hence, “we are children of God” (*1 John 3:2, NKJV*). That’s our present privilege now. The world may not understand it. The community around us that is alien to the revelation of Christ may not fathom it. But we are sure of it. What’s more, there is a future attached to the present privilege. We do not know fully what that future will be like, but “we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (*1 John 3:2, NKJV*).

To be like Jesus, to be with Him, to see Him face to face—what a wonderful privilege for the children of God. Hence, John’s exclamation: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us” (*vs. 1, NKJV*).

Discuss: “Born of God” can be contrasted with “born of the devil.” List some characteristics that well may be placed under each category, including what may appear on the surface as positive qualities.

II. Being God’s Children: The Responsibility *(Review 1 John 3:1–10 with the class.)*

Having shown us the lofty privilege of being God’s children, the apostle quickly outlines three great obligations that are inherent in being God’s children.

First, God’s children will live in the hope of Christ’s second coming. This calls for a life of purity even as Jesus is pure (*vs. 3*). If believers are

The Appearance of Jesus *(1 John 3:5, 8)*

What do the following texts tell us about Jesus and what happened at His first coming? *1 John 1:2; 3:5, 8.*

Jesus, at His first coming, appeared in human flesh. He came to solve the sin problem, and He came to destroy the works of the devil. If so, believers cannot have anything to do with sin or the originator of sin, the devil. By making common cause with sin, or by aligning ourselves with it, we are making common cause with Satan and are rejecting Jesus.

According to 1 John 3:5, Jesus takes away sins. This statement seems to be an allusion to John 1:29. How did Jesus accomplish this task? *Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rev. 1:5, 6.*

First John 3:5 does not directly tell us how Jesus took away sins. However, the context of 1 John and of the Gospel of John make it clear that Jesus did this by dying on the cross. Whereas Hebrews clearly states that Jesus did away with sin by His self-sacrifice, Revelation teaches that Jesus freed us from our sins by His blood.

While the first part of 1 John 3:5 may indirectly point to the Cross, the second part stresses the absolute sinlessness of Jesus, which was needed in order for His death on the cross to save us.

The antichrists of 1 John may not have comprehended fully the true value of the Cross and the substitutionary death there in our stead. How foolish; for Christ's death in our behalf, in which He suffered the penalty for all our sins, forms the foundation of the plan of salvation. Christ's death was the only way possible for humans to be saved and have the promise of eternal life. To miss that is to miss the point of the entire gospel.

In your own struggles with sin, guilt, fear, and lack of assurance, how does the Cross answer these challenges for you? How can you better avail yourself of the hope and promises we have through Jesus, not just for forgiveness but for power to overcome?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

going to be like Jesus when He comes (*vs. 2*), they must be like Him here. Sanctification never can be minimized in a believer waiting for the Lord's return.

Second, God's children who abide in Him will not continue in sin (*vss. 6, 9*). John is not teaching sinless perfection (*see 1 John 2:1*) but freedom from the captivity of sin. No one can claim to be a Christian and yet continue sinning. Life's direction in a Christian must change: from sin to righteousness, from darkness to light, from this world to the world to come, from children of the devil to children of God. The Christian mandate is clear: we belong to Christ, and by His grace we shall be like Him. Moral and spiritual integrity are not options for God's children. A sanctified life is the sign that one is a child of God. Otherwise, there is no point in claiming that Jesus "appeared to take away sins" (*1 John 3:5, RSV*).

Third, God's children will be aware of the seriousness of sin. Sin is a rebellion against God's law (*vs. 4*). It had its origin in the devil (*vs. 8*). It cost the life of God's Son (*vss. 5, 8*). To indulge in sin is to deny Jesus (*vs. 6*) and to become the children of the devil (*vs. 10*). While Christians cannot claim perfection here on earth (*1 John 1:8–10*), they must not continue to live in sin (*1 John 3:6, 9*).

Discuss: One of your church members quotes 1 John 3:9 and says that a born-again Christian cannot sin. How would you answer?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: We are called not only to be God's children, but we *are* His children. There is a seriousness, a decisiveness, about this. Ask your class to share how they can practice this truth in the church and in the community.

Thought Questions:

❶ The Bible pictures the church as a family under the headship of Christ. We all are children of the same family, and hence brothers and sisters. Think of instances in which you may not have treated another person as a family member. What is the remedy for such a failure?

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No Sin! (1 John 3:6, 9)

How can 1 John 3:6, 8, 9 be reconciled with 1 John 1:6–2:2?

First John 3:6 and 9 contain strong and perplexing statements, asserting that no one who lives in Jesus and no one who is born by God sins. This sounds quite absolute. Christians have wrestled with these statements and have tried to find explanations. After all, what true Christians haven't wrestled with the reality of sin in their lives?

What we—in any case—can safely assume is that the apostle John does not contradict himself. In chapter 1 he says that people who claim to be without sin deceive themselves. In chapter 2 he points to our goal, which is not to sin, but he adds that if we do, then we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. Our present passage must be understood in the light of the previous discussion on the topic of sin: Christians stay away from sin, but if they sin, they confess their wrongdoing and accept divine forgiveness.

Expositors have come up with different attempts to solve these difficult verses. Two are briefly mentioned:

1. John portrays the ideal in 1 John 3:6, 8, 9—which he also mentions in 1 John 2:1. The difference is that in 1 John 3 no qualifiers are added. A reason may be that John wants his hearers and readers to be clear about the issue of sin. Sin cannot be taken lightly. Followers of Christ cannot play with sin.

2. The verbs *to sin* and *to do (sin)* are found in the present tense, which oftentimes points to continuous actions. The meaning would be that disciples of Christ cannot *continuously* sin. They may fall in sin here and there, but they have separated from sin and do not practice a life of sin. They are not dominated by sin. The New International Version follows this view by translating the verbs with “to continue to sin.”

No matter which interpretation is accepted, chapter 3 must be understood in the light of chapters 1 and 2. Though sin is real, Christians have no choice but to put it away from their lives, no matter the cost.

OK, you're a sinner. No one is going to debate that. The question is, How much blood, sweat, and tears do you expend in the battle against sin in your life? In what ways does your answer help explain your lifestyle?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 Think on This: The Christ of history, the Christ of experience, and the Christ of hope—any way you look at Him—is incompatible with sin. What can you do to advance Christ’s cause?

Application Questions:

1 How is waiting for the Second Coming related to living a life of purity? Reflect on 2 Peter 3:10–14.

2 What kind of defense is needed to fight Satan’s deceptive war on His saints? (*See Eph. 6:11.*)

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: As God’s children, we are called to walk as children of light. The lesson points out two important implications of walking in the light: (1) to live in the hope of the Second Coming and (2) to live in full awareness of Satan’s deceptive ways to tempt you back to sin. Encourage the class to apply these implications to their lives.

1 Close the class with a hymn or special music that touches on this very important idea of living in the hope of the Second Coming.

2 Have a class member end with prayer, asking for God’s watch care throughout the week. Pray especially that not one of us will be ensnared by deception as we seek to walk in the light of God’s love.

Further Study: *Read Rom. 8:12–17, Phil. 2:14–16.*

“Let none deceive themselves with the belief that they can become holy while willfully violating one of God’s requirements. The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit and separates the soul from God. ‘Sin is the transgression of the law.’ And ‘whosoever sinneth [transgresseth the law] hath not seen Him, neither known Him.’ 1 John 3:6. Though John in his epistles dwells so fully upon love, yet he does not hesitate to reveal the true character of that class who claim to be sanctified while living in transgression of the law of God. . . . And the claim to be without sin is, in itself, evidence that he who makes this claim is far from holy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 472, 473.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What does it mean in practical terms to be “like God”? In what ways can we be “like God” in a positive manner and in a negative one?
- 2** Some people are afraid of the idea that we are saved only by what Jesus has done for us. They say, if our salvation rests in Christ’s righteousness and not in our own, what’s to stop us from continuing in sin? How would you respond to that concern?
- 3** Someone once explained his or her understanding of the Cross this way: “I don’t use the Cross as an excuse or a cover for sin. What the Cross does for me is keep me from giving up altogether on God when I do sin.” Discuss the reasoning in that line of thought.
- 4** It’s virtually impossible not to be impacted by whatever society and culture you live in. In your particular society, what sins are deemed really bad that perhaps in another culture might not be deemed that bad, or even bad at all? How much should we let society influence our understanding of what sin is? What sins does your society not frown on that the Bible is explicit about?
- 5** We all know the promises we are given for victory over sin. At the same time, under what conditions, if any, should someone struggling with a sin, perhaps some kind of addiction, seek professional help and counseling? What do you say to the person who thinks that those who seek professional help are showing a lack of faith in God’s power?