



God's Unique Love

1 John 3:1-3

Walking in the Light
A study through the book of First John

After last Sunday's sermon, I had some communication with a couple of people about my pendulum illustration. One person posted online their personal struggle between the "Paliative-Care Jesus" and the legalistic response. I responded to her and said that I've had many experiences in the past when I would hear someone say something like, "If you love Jesus, keep his commandments," and my initial response would be, "So, I'll work hard to obey him and thus show that I love him." But that misses the point. That pendulum swings to the legalism. The point is "if you love Jesus, you *will* keep his commandments." So the question we ought to be asking is not, "How obedient am I," but **"Do I actually love Jesus, and does my obedience stem from loving Jesus?"**

Now, this tendency to swing to the legalistic side of the pendulum is quite strong, and even with this question, we can miss the point. We can then say, "Ok, I'll conjur up love for Jesus and prove to him how much I love him." But is that what God is calling us to? No. Look at what the apostle John says later in this letter: **We love because he first loved us.**¹ This verse takes us back to what we discovered last week, and what we'll continue to ponder this week: Our entire focus must be on our God and Savior. In the midst of the pains, sorrows, joys, trials, happiness, and sadness; our focus must be on abiding in Jesus. We cannot behold the glory of God without beholding Jesus. We cannot genuinely obey without the Spirit. We need our Triune God. Without him we can do nothing. And so the Scriptures teach that a reconciled *relationship* is basis of everything. If we're not living out of that reconciled, abiding relationship, nothing matters.

So, again, if we pendulum to one extreme or another, we'll miss the point: relationship with God. But you might understand what I'm saying here and find another pendulum swing. It has to do with God's love. It seems in my experience, and in conversations with various people who grew up in the church, they experienced one of two things as it relates to God's love. The first is a presumption of God's love. It's almost like God's love is thrown around so much that we don't even know what that means. Love, in our culture seems to emphasize enjoyment in someone and complete acceptance of them – and that's "it." So, we think, "God completely accepts me and enjoys me and all I choose to do – no matter what, no questions asked." That's one end of the pendulum. And so, for me, for a while, I would often roll my eyes when I'd hear people say, "God loves you." I may still do that because I think they mean this frilly, no-real-meaning kind of love. But I'd even think that way when people would teach it genuinely. I'd react against the phrase "God loves you," because it was almost like I didn't want to be like those other people who seem have no other awareness of God. But I've come to realize that if I diminish a characteristic of God, I am sinning! God needs no protection from his own character, and we are called to rejoice in all of he is. If we focus on God, we will focus on what he tells us to focus on, including and especially his love (as we'll see today)! We know that the apostle Paul *prays* that we would know the

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:19.

height, breadth, and depths of God's love for us. God's love is mysteriously glorious, and yet it is has been poured out on all of us who have entrusted ourselves to Jesus. May we know God's love *rightly*.

This leads me to the other pendulum swing. Some people grew up in contexts where God's love was barely spoken of. I've talked with different people in *this church* who went to churches where hardly anyone in the church would participate in communion because you don't want to presume that you're worthy to participate. "Watch out! Does God really love you?" So, one side of the pendulum presumes on God's love. The other side so elevates God's holiness that God's love gets sidelined. But again, if we minimize God in any way, we are sinning. We must accept everything God says about himself because HE is the point.

The point is not to *not be like other people on one side of the pendulum*. The point is also not elevate one attribute of God at the expense of others. The point is to be focused on God and to remain focused on him through abiding. Know him.

So, with this backdrop, what does John emphasize that we need to know about our Lord? Well, you may have picked up on me using the word "focus" multiple times already, and so I'm going to put that in the main idea for today: **Focus on the kind of love God has for us in making us his children.**

Let's read the first part of 3:1 together: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.² In these three verses, this is the only command. The command is that we would *see*. John has just gotten done talking about his wish that we would be filled with anticipation in seeing Jesus face-to-face for the first time – that we wouldn't shrink in fear at his return, but that we would have confidence. Until that day, John urges us to continue to abide in our relationship with him. Oh what a glorious day, amen?

And in verse 1 of chapter 3, it's almost like John is saying, "Stop for a moment. Don't just read on and gloss over what I just said." Have you ever had times when you're reading a book and you make it through a paragraph and your brain alerts you that you haven't been paying attention? Have you ever had that in a conversation with another person? For me, it sadly happens too often. Sometimes my children will call me by my name to get my attention and let me know they were talking to me. It can be bad. Pray for me! This is kind of what John is doing here. See. Look. Listen. Ponder. Meditate. Focus. Take a moment right now.

Christian, when was the last time you pondered God's love for you? You might feel silly doing that, but I think that's Satan and your flesh telling you to feel that way. God inspired John to tell us that he wants us to *see* what kind of love God has for us!

Now, as we look at this command we notice a couple of unique things about it. First, John emphasizes the **kind** of love God has. If you ever think about God loving you, and your definition of love is purely drawn from worldly experiences, you're missing it. This word for "kind" in the Greek actually originally meant "**of what country?**" In our day we might say, "See the out-of-this-world love of God that he has for us!" The point is that the kind of love God has for us is **so unique that only God can give us and express it**. Isn't that astounding, Ventura? See of what country this love is from?! It's from God's Kingdom. It's from God himself, who is Love.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:1.

This statement should astound us. When we try to judge God's love on the basis of experiences here, we will only limit God. I know people who've gone through horrific, traumatic circumstances in marriages and in their households growing up; and sadly their view of love is tainted. "Maybe God acts the same way," they think. Not so. God's love cannot be bound or defined by this fallen world. Instead, if we want to see the glories of God's love, we can see it most clearly defined in John 3:16. Yes, one of the most misused and (I think) misunderstood verses in the Bible. I want to share it in a different translation, the Christian Standard Version. There, we read the following: **For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**³

What's different from what you're used to? The word "so." But the word "so" means "in this way." God shows his love in this way: he gave his one and only Son to a condemned people who were rebellious and bound in sin so that those rebellious people could be rescued from the condemnation and find their true life in God himself. God loved by giving Jesus. What sacrifice! God loved by Jesus giving himself! God loved by the Spirit showing us these realities and actually applying Jesus' sacrificial life and death to our account before God. Have you trusted Jesus? If you have, you have been experienced God's love. But that love isn't just past tense. It's in the present.

John wants us to see that God's love is working right now. God didn't just love you and give you forgiveness of sins. That's incomprehensible enough. Of what country is this love?! But there's more that should cause us to exclaim even more. This is the second point: **his unique love is seen in being children of God.** John writes, "that we should be called children of God; and so we are."⁴ This is one of the unique ways God shows his out-of-this-world love. We are called children of God. And then John immediately says, "and so we are!"

This has to be understood in the context of all that God is. The holy God who in no ways clears the guilty. The God who created all and holds every human accountable to himself. The God who rules over all things and everything that happens is under his sovereign control. We should also understand this in context to who we are. While created in his image, we've rebelled. We've sinned. Jesus states that we're not children of God, but we are born children of Satan because we do what the "father of lies" has done from the beginning.

This is the plight of humanity. So, does God only forgive us or does he also welcome us into his presence? And, if we're welcomed into his presence, how does he welcome us? Do you get that question? Our relationships look different with people depending on their relationship to us, right? My relationship with Tracy has unique characteristics that is different than any other relationship. Then I have a unique way I interact with my children, different from other children and people. How I respond is going to be different depending on the type of relationship.

John says God has called us children, and his word is his bond. We *are* his children. How can this be? Because we are united with Jesus. We abide in him. Jesus is God the Son, and so now we are children of God, too. God the Father could no more deny you, Christian, than he could deny Jesus. Isn't that almost unbelievable? But let me state this in the positive: because we are God's children, we now are loved with a steadfast, everlasting love that is as unique as the love between God the Father and God the Son. We are now treasured by God, according to Ephesians 3, and God views us as his inheritance.

³ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Jn 3:16.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:1.

This will only melt your heart if you know God's glory and what you deserve. It's then that you can say that love is different from this world. It's not solely acceptance and enjoyment. Love is *giving of self*. God has given his complete self to us. What tremendous love. Are you seeing? Are you focusing? I pray you'd take more time even today and this week to ponder how great God's love is for you. Take breaks in the day to think and meditate on his love.

But many people don't "get this," and only the Spirit can make this make sense (as John alludes to in the previous chapter). But here, John makes it explicit. The end of verse 1 is, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."⁵ Maybe the Christians were listening to the false teachers, or they tried to reject them but still wondered if maybe what they were saying was at least somewhat true. But John says, "They don't get what we're saying because they don't really understand God's love. But you do know God's love." In other words, don't focus merely on what they're saying (or the level of confidence in what they're saying), focus on God and his truth. He loves you in astounding ways that don't make sense! Let that sink in.

Now, John moves on to show the practical implications of God's unique love.

Implications

1) We are God's children now, and will someday be like Jesus (v. 2).

In verse 2, we read, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."⁶

Notice how John begins verse 2. In talking about God's love for all of us, and our need to contemplate God's unique love, John then shares his love for the readers. This is always the affects of God's love. When we know God's love, we love others. John says this later in this letter as well: whoever loves God must also love his brother.⁷ How beautiful of an example right here. God's love is so compelling to John. This disciple who loved the Savior and knew the Savior's love on this earth in person, still can't get over the immeasurable love, and is showing that love towards these Christians.

And, now he shows the implications of God's unique love. Since we are called children, and we are children of God, then John says "we are God's children now." Why does he say this? I'm thinking about the arguments that the false teachers were making. They're deceiving and trying to get people to listen to them. But who's should we listen to? We should listen to our Heavenly Father who loves us.

This makes me think of times in childhood when I would hear things other children were saying. Sometimes even children might be jealous or make fun of me or others. But I'd talk to my parents. Why? Because they loved me. It didn't really matter what other people said. It mattered what my parents and family thoughts. This is what John is getting at here. You are God's child *right now*. And he's not an abusive Father. He's not even the greatest earthly Father. He's the Father of fathers. His love is out-of-this world, and what he says goes!

But John doesn't only speak of God the Father here in this text. When he moves on to talk about the pronoun's "he," I think he's continuing from several verses back to refer to Jesus. So, we not only listen

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:1.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:2.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:21.

to God the Father, who loves us; we also look to God our Brother, who is our Savior Jesus. Do you see this? We are God's children. That means we are a part of his family, and clearly that also means that we will take on the family traits of God's family. "How?" Answer: Jesus. "But we're not like him right now." Correct. We aren't sinless and righteous in all our ways right now, but oh how amazing that someday we will be. John goes so far as to say that we don't know what we will be. Think about that. We are so marred by our own sinfulness and brokenness that we cannot even imagine what perfection is. And John says that's what we will be someday! This reality amazes me because we often think we need to know the conclusion before we can do something. For example, if you're going to build a house, you want to know the plans first, right? That's understandable and right. But what about us? How can we grow if we don't even know what we're going to be like someday?

I think John's emphasis here is on the power of Jesus over and above ours. God's promise is that he'll conform us to the image of Jesus! He will do it. In Romans 8:29, we're told, **"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."**⁸ Who promises to restore the image of God in us and to make us righteous like Jesus? God does! Then in Philippians 3, Paul says that **"from [Heaven] we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."**⁹ Who will transform us to be like him, living forever? Jesus will! Someday we will be unimaginably perfect! And that perfection will come in a moment. At the mere sight of Jesus, who believe in Jesus will be changed! Again, imagine what your first sight of Jesus will be? No shirking back. Complete joy. Changed, transformed, complete in his love.

See the unique love of God here? We have everything to look forward to as children of God. But John gives a second implication.

2) We (i.e. – "everyone") will purify ourselves due to the expectant anticipation of seeing Jesus (v. 3)

Let's read verse 3 again: ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ¹⁰

Right here we can be tempted to the pendulum swing. Here is the statement to purify ourselves! So, if I have hope in him, I'll purify myself, right? That's true. But then we think, "I'll purify myself in order to prove I have hope in him." Wrong! If you don't have hope in Jesus and being like him, you can't conjure that up. Instead, you ought to pray, "Lord, please give me hope and anticipation for your return."

Notice here that John uses the word "everyone who." This shows up several times in 1 John, and this is the first occasion. The "everyone" is "everyone who has this kind of hope in Jesus." And notice here that the emphasis is on Jesus, not on mere feelings of hope. Some people might have feelings of hope, but they don't look forward to Jesus coming. That'd be like my daughters looking for my parents car to come to our house, but not being excited about my parents picking them up and taking them out to places. That makes no sense. In the same way, hope without Jesus makes no sense.

But John says that if you hope in Jesus on the basis of his love and you look forward to God completely transforming you into the image of Christ, you will purify yourself even as he is pure. The focus is on

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:29.

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 3:20–21.

¹⁰ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:3.

Jesus, and since Jesus is so powerful that you can be transformed at the visible sight of him; John reveals that even just hoping in Jesus' return, and pondering who he is will lead us to transformation. This reminds me of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:18: **And we all. . . , beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**¹¹ The Spirit empowers us to purify ourselves and become more like Jesus. As I've said in week's past, people who say that they can be Christian and be unconcerned about obedience have missed Jesus. If you see Jesus, you will be transformed from one degree of glory to another! God will see to it. So, based on the love of God, fight against sin. Pursue purity of life.

Ventura, my dearly loved church family, **Focus on the kind of love God has for us in making us his children. Listen to your Father, ponder your Savior and anticipate his return. He will be faithful to perfect you. In light of these realities, purify yourselves like Jesus is pure.** By the way, if you're wondering what that means to purify yourself, we'll get to that next week. You can feel free to read ahead. For now, for today, stop and see the kind of love God has for us in making us his children. Let his otherworldly love sink in today (and always). And as we move into the conclusion of this service, we are going to sing together the song *Satisfy us with your love*. I pray this can even be a mantra for us. As you sing, ponder the words, pray the words, and may the Spirit overwhelm and empower us through the love of God in Christ Jesus for us!

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 3:18.