

4. 1 John 3:1-10 of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

John closed chapter 2 by making the argument in verses 28-29 that the Lord is righteous and everyone who does right is born of him:

28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

29 If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

Those born of Him can be nothing else but children of God. This sets up the contrast in chapter 3 between children of God and those of the devil.

Children of God

3 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. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

The wonder of wonders is that we may be children of God. That he lavished his love on us was evident from the beginning of Christ's teaching. Jesus taught in John 3:16: "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The end of that love was that we should be children of God. The world does not know us and did not know Christ, for John has taught that all that is of the world is evil. In 1 John 2:16 he taught: "For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."

The concept of our being children of God may be difficult for us to comprehend, since it has not been revealed, but we live in hope that we shall be like him. Since we have the entire revelation before us in the written word of God, we have some insight into what we will be like that early Christians did not have. Paul described this new nature in 1 Cor 15:50-53:

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal, with immortality.

Peter emphasizes the spiritual nature of what we will be in 2 Peter 1:3-4:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

In the Revelation to John, Jesus, himself, built a metaphoric collage of what we, the children of God, will be like:

- Rev 2:7: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."
- Rev 2:11: "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."
- Rev 2:17: "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."
- Rev 2:26-29: "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the

nations –

27 'He will rule them with an iron scepter;

he will dash them to pieces like pottery' –

just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give him the morning star.”

- Rev 3:4-5: “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.”
- Rev 3:12: “12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”
- Rev 3:21: “I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

For sure, we will be like him and see him just as he is. If we have this hope, we will purify ourselves, as Christ is pure.

John had asserted early in the letter this need of purification in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” In this need for us to purify ourselves, John found agreement with Paul and James. Paul wrote in 2 Cor 7:1, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us **purify ourselves** from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” James concurred in James 4:8, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and **purify your hearts**, you double-minded.”

In the next section, John compares these purified children of God with the sinful children of the devil.

Sin Is Lawlessness

4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 5 But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 6 No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

This section contrasts the purified child of God to those who keep on sinning. John starts by defining sinners and sin. Everyone who breaks the law is a sinner, and sin is lawlessness. The word for lawlessness appears twice in the original text, illustrating the inseparable connection between sin and lawlessness. The original language is literally *without law*. The very purpose of the Lord’s coming was to take away lawlessness (sin). In John 1:29, John recorded John the Baptist saying: “29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

While in him was no sin, we, who cannot be completely free of sin, must not keep on sinning. If we continue in sin, we have neither seen nor known him. John will come back to this prohibition against continuing in sin at the end of the letter in 1 John 5:16-17:

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

The Hebrew writer wrote of the absolute danger in continuing in sin in Heb 10:26-28:

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

If we continue in sin, we have neither seen nor known him. Continuing in sin takes us back to a place where it is worse than had we never obeyed the gospel. We lose it all.

Those of the Devil

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

In verse 7, John continues with the contrast upon which his thesis rests. John places those who do right and righteousness with the Lord and those who do sin and sinfulness with the devil. The devil and sin go back to the beginning—even to Adam, Eve, and Cain. John had described the sinful nature of the devil in John 8:43-45:

43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

When Christ destroys sin, he is destroying the devil's work.

Continuing in Sin

9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

Being born of God is doing what is righteous. It is a state of being in which one cannot continue in sin. The preventive treatment for sin is the word of God (God's seed). The definition of *seed*, as used here in given in the parable of the sower in Mark 4:13-15

13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer **sows the word**. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

In the conclusion to this section, John clearly defines who the children of the devil are: they are anyone who does not do what is right and anyone who does not love his brother. The next section—1 John 3:11-21—expands on the concept of brotherly love as a defining quality of the children of God.