

Living In The Light 1 John 2:28-3:18

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and C@5 on 21st May 2017

Intro

How good do I have to be to be a real Christian?

How often can I fail and still be a real Christian?

As we've been thinking about what John's saying in this letter, we've heard some pretty hard things... as our John was telling us last week.

John (the apostle) tends to put things in pretty black and white terms with no middle ground.

If you love the world, then love for the Father is not in you.

Confronting stuff, isn't it?

And in today's passage in v9 we hear the words:

"No one born of God sins... they cannot sin for they have been born of God"

Wait a minute... Is he really saying that a Christian is incapable of sin?

I'm very conscious that I'm capable of sin — in fact I'm pretty good at it!

Some people have been telling me how they've been struck by the reality of what terrible sinners they are as we've been doing this series.

Don't forget that John's purpose is to assure us, not to discourage us.

But how can we hear things like 'Christians don't sin', and that they cannot sin without feeling discouraged, when — if you're like me — you know you're actually pretty good at sinning.

Remember I said at the beginning of this series that John is setting up sign posts for us to check that we're on the right track.

What sign post is he setting up here in these verses?

We're going to concentrate just on the first part of that passage today — from 2:28 to 3:10.

What Is A Christian?

The first thing to get straight here is 'what is a Christian?'

It might sound a bit too obvious to ask that.

But without the right answer to that questions we won't understand what John is getting at in these verses.

So what is a Christian?

Firstly, a child of God.

Often we think of the mechanics of the gospel without fully appreciating what a wonderful thing God has done for us in it.

In the gospel, sinners become the children of God, intimately loved by him.

God's grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus is that everyone who believes in Jesus has become a dearly loved child of God.

In chapter 1 of John's Gospel, John says:

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12 NIV11)

Don't lose sight of this when you read some of the hard things John is writing here.

We too often think of the gospel as the means of forgiveness and justification with God, and too little about why God has forgiven and justified us.

He's done it to make you his child — his dearly loved child.

God isn't just like a judge who fixes the problem of our sin.

He adopts us as his children.

Look at verses 1 and 2 here.

Before John gets onto the harder stuff, he's reassuring us.

Look at the love the Father has lavished on us in Christ, that we are now called children of God!

Let that sink in.

God loves you so much that he now calls you his child.

It isn't just an illustration of our relationship with God.

No, in v2 it's reality — this is what we are — as much as Murray, Jasmin and Bryce are my children, I am God's child, and he's my Father who loves me.

We're not perfect yet — as v2 goes on to say — but we will be one day. We'll be like Jesus.

But we are no less his children now.

The TV show 'Who Do You think You Are' helps people discover their family history in a way that will often change the way they think about themselves.

J.I. Packer in his classic book 'Knowing God' says that Christians make far too little of this astonishing truth.

How much we make of it will profoundly affect what we think about what John says about Christians and sin - as we'll see.

Family Likeness

I love a good Dad joke.

The best test of a good Dad joke is when the kids just look at you with that expressionless face afterwards.

But in the last couple of years, when we get together for dinner, I sometimes get beaten to the punch to get the Dad joke out.

Beaten by my own son — Bryce!

Like when someone asks 'may I leave the table' and before I can get the words out he says 'where are you going to leave it?'

Then I look at him in astonishment, and he looks at me as if to say 'did I really just say that?'

The family likeness is unavoidable!

Family likenesses is what John's on about from v4 on.

Look at what he says in v8

"The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning." (1 John 3:8 NIV11)

'Of the devil' means a child of the devil.

If we are sinning, we're displaying the family likeness of the devil.

And that's where it's important to get another thing really, really clear — what is sin?

And like the question 'what is a Christian' you might think "isn't it obvious".

Look at what John says in v4.

In v4 sin defined as "lawlessness" - being without the law, not living with the law.

Sin is not just about doing right and wrong.

Sin is “lawlessness” — where the law represents God’s rightful rule.

Sin is not just breaking rules.

It’s the attitude of the person who decides that they are the ultimate authority in their life, not God.

It’s possible to have that attitude and be a very good person... never doing anything as much as utter an unkind word to anyone.

It’s possible to have that attitude and be the most anti-social person in the world.

Here’s the point — both display the family likeness of the devil.

Do you see that the wrong things we know we say and do, do not mean we are of the devil — that we bear his family likeness...

...because as Christians we are not lawless.

We submit ourselves willingly to the rightful authority of God over our lives when we begin to trust in Jesus as Lord.

Anyone who doesn’t do that does bear the family likeness of the devil — no matter how respectable they appear or how much good or how little evil they do.

There’s no neutral position... which is where I thought I was until 1990.

I wasn’t living for God specifically but I was doing the right thing by my own standards — and I wasn’t that bad a person.

I was a child of the devil.

But, through the gospel, praise God, I am no longer.

I am a dearly-loved child of God.

If your faith is in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, *you* are a dearly-loved child of God.

And we now bear the family likeness of God's children.

But what does that mean.

Here's where we come back to John's hard words.

Bearing the family likeness of God's children — according to v9 means no one born of God keeps on sinning.

Christians can't sin/don't sin.

But we know that we sin every day.

We know from chapter 1 that John can't mean that Christians never sin.

But what does he mean?

When our children were small and they'd hit each other, we'd say to them:

"we don't do things like that in our family".

Was it possible for them to hurt each other — yes.

Did they do it again — yes!

John isn't saying it isn't possible for us to sin - just like it's possible for our children to do wrong things.

What he's saying is that that's not who we are as God's children.

v9 reveals an amazing truth about God making us his children.

It's more than normal adoption as we know it.

When he adopts us, God puts his Spirit within us which changes the way we think about life.

He puts his attitude within us — his attitude to sin.

And God's attitude to sin is written in our hearts and minds as we read v5, and that Jesus came to take away our sins and we say "Amen, praise the Lord!"

And when we see in v3 that we who've trusted in Jesus don't want to be what we were anymore, and we seek to purify ourselves to be like Jesus... and that means working at putting sin out of our lives.

Which brings us to the final point... living in God's family.

Living In God's Family

Friends, John is giving us some tests here, but he's not setting a pass mark — how good do I have to be to be a real Christian... how many time can I fail before it's too many.

The fact that you're even concerned about your sin is a mark of the family likeness of God in you.

If your faith is in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, you are a child of God.

We are God's family.

And in God's family we don't sin.

But you do sin... and I sin.

John's already given us the solution in chapter 1.

Confession — and forgiveness.

But God hasn't just forgive us. He's made us his children.

He wants us to bear the likeness of members of his family — he wants us to be like Jesus.

He wants us to say with him "we don't sin in this family".

That attitude will shape our lives.

We don't gossip... we don't watch SBS late at night when the soft-porn world movies are likely to be on... we don't cheat on our tax returns...

But when we do, we hate it, and we realise we need to go to Jesus, confessing our sin...

That's the test of the family likeness — not whether we do lots of good things.

It's whether Jesus is Lord of our lives and his Spirit is in us, making our attitude to sin like his.

We can't live not caring about our sin — look at what's happened to you — you are in God's family now and sin no longer fits with who you are.

Live out the family likeness.

If you're one of the people who've been struck by the reality of your sin in the last few weeks as we've been reading John, be assured that the word of God is being made complete in you.

If you look at what John is saying and you're in despair when he says that Christians do not sin because you know that you can sin and that you do it every day, then don't despair — be assured.

That is the family likeness of God in you, agreeing with God "we don't sin". This isn't the family likeness.

You know who you are and you know what you will one day be.

So don't give up.

Keep doing what John tells us in chapter 1 to keep doing.

Take the sins that you and God hate to the cross where he forgives all the sins of his true children.