

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

Children of God

1 John 3:1-3

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In the late 1970s and into the 80s, a debate broke out across the nation. It was sparked by something known as “the Pepsi Challenge.” At the center of the debate was a blind taste test to see if more Americans preferred Pepsi or Coke.

Taste tests popped up everywhere from grocery stores to shopping malls. At the taste test, two identical cups would be set out. One would be filled with Pepsi and the other with Coca-Cola (not New Coke, that’s another story altogether).

You’d take a sip of each and say which one you like the best. I never did the taste test. I was too scared. I was raised in a Coca-Cola home, and I was afraid I might choose Pepsi by mistake. That would have been catastrophic. I couldn’t imagine what my brothers would have done to me if they found out I was a Pepsi man. So, I avoided the Pepsi Challenge like the plague because I just never could be sure I would know the difference between real Coke and the imposter. And, as weird as it might seem, I was afraid of finding out that I was a Pepsi Person.

And, in a way, the book of 1 John is sort of like a spiritual taste test. The Apostle John is writing to a group of Christians who have become the target of false teachers. Last week, we saw that these false teachers had claimed to be followers of Jesus but had actually abandoned the faith and turned their backs on Jesus. In 2:19, John says, “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” They had never been true Christians even though they had claimed to be. True Christians don’t abandon Christ. So, John lays out a sort of taste test that helps us know the difference between genuine followers of Jesus and imposters who really don’t know Him.

John’s test comes in three parts:

1. The Moral Test

Do you obey the commands of Jesus or pursue the sinfulness of this world? (2:3-6)

2. The Relational Test

Do you love others like Jesus or do you love the things of this world? (2:7-11)

3. The Doctrinal Test

Do you believe the truth about Jesus or do you agree with the philosophies of this world? (2:18-27)

John lays out those tests to help us tell the difference between a real follower of Jesus and someone who is an imposter. And, like any good teacher, John uses repetition to solidify those tests in our hearts. In our text for this morning, John’s getting ready to go through each of those tests again.

- The Moral Test – 2:28-3:10
- The Relational Test – 3:11-18
- The Doctrinal Test – 4:1-6

John knows that Jesus does a work in the lives of those who trust in Him. He changes them by His power. He produces fruit in them and makes them more and more like Himself. So, these tests are like a spiritual taste test that help us recognize the work of Jesus in someone's life, including our own. But John also knows that some people would hear these tests and become fearful. They would begin to doubt that they were really Christians. Even more, some would misinterpret these tests and think they were a formula for how to become a genuine Christian. They would make these an entrance exam to enter Heaven. They would think they had to live a sinless life and perfectly love others in order to become Christians.

So, throughout the letter, John stops and reassures us about what makes us genuine Christians. It isn't the work we do. It's the work Jesus does in us as we trust in Him. We don't defeat sin and live in obedience to Jesus in order to become Christians. We trust in Jesus and He changes us by His power and not our own. Jesus fundamentally changes who and what we are and that's what makes our lives taste different from this world. He makes us new creations. He turns water into wine. Or He turns Pepsi into Coke Zero (caffeine free).

Coke tastes like Coke because it's Coke and it's made by Coke. Christians taste like Christ because we are made by Christ.

And that's the focus of our text this morning. It's a call to remain confident in the work of Jesus. And when you remain confident in the work of Jesus, Jesus transforms you into someone who is just like Him.

So, let me go ahead and give you a bid idea for this morning, so you can be looking for it as we read today's text.

Big Idea: As we remain confident in the work of the Lord, we will live with hope and holiness.

1 John 2:28–3:3

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 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. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

John starts this section out with a call to Remain Confident in Jesus.

1 John 2:28

And now, little children, abide in him,

The word "abide" simply means "to remain or to continue in the same place." The way we abide in Jesus is by continuing in the same place that we begin our relationship with Jesus by placing our faith and trust in Him to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. John gets this concept directly from the teaching of Jesus during His earthly ministry.

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The way we abide in Jesus is by relying on Jesus to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. To see ourselves as completely and utterly helpless apart from the work of Jesus. It's depending on Jesus in a way that our confidence is in Him and not ourselves or our works or our world. And there are multiple words in the Bible for this that all point to the same dynamic – belief, faith, trust in Jesus, rely and depend on Jesus. It's all the same fundamental thing.

Confidence (twice in this text you see confidence for the day of judgment; hope, which is a confident expectation for our future good)

We need to live with confidence in Jesus and not just dependence on Jesus. Think of the disciples in the boat as it was sinking.

Jesus is asleep. They are freaking out. "Jesus, we need you. Do something or we're cooked." That's dependence. We need Jesus. That's dependence. And Jesus graciously responds to their dependence on Him.

But He also wants something more for them. He says, "O, you of little faith." Faith that is growing and maturing is faith that is both dependent on and confident in Jesus.

- We need Jesus (dependence)
- We don't just need Him; we have Him as we trust in Him (confidence)

And John calls us to remain in that place. We don't just start the Christian life by trusting in Jesus, the whole Christian life is rooted in trusting Jesus and being confident in His work in us, not our work for Him. There is no life apart from the work of Jesus. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Him; we have Him as we trust in Him.

And the false teachers who were trying to deceive these Christians were essentially trying to draw them away from relying on Christ. So, John pauses in the middle of this letter and reminds us to keep on relying on Jesus. Be confident that Jesus will do in us what we can't do for ourselves. And there are at least three things in our text that Jesus does for everyone who is willing to place their confidence in Him.

1. The work of Jesus enables us to stand in the Day of Judgment.

1 John 2:28

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

One day, Jesus is coming again. And when He does, He is coming to judge the sin of this world. But we don't have to tremble in fear at the thought of Judgment because of the work Jesus did the first time He came into this world. He entered this world as one of us so that He could represent us before God the Father. He lived perfect, sinless life that we have all failed to live. He died a death at the cross that we all deserved to die, enduring the punishment for our sin. At the cross, God placed all our sin on Jesus and punished Jesus in our place. That's what John said earlier in chapter 2 when He said that Jesus is the propitiation for our sin and the sin of the whole world. A propitiation is a sacrifice that pleased God.

That's how we can be forgiven and accepted by God – through the work of Jesus. That's why *1 John 1:9* says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If you are relying on the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus to provide forgiveness for all your sin, you don't have to fear the judgment of God. You are cleansed of all unrighteousness. You are accepted by God. And you aren't just accepted by God; you are as acceptable to God as Jesus Himself.

That's the next thing the work of Jesus enables.

2. The work of Jesus enables us to be born into God's family.

1 John 2:29-3:2

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now,

Don't answer this out loud and try your best to be honest with yourself. On most days, how do you feel God feels about you? Acceptance? Tolerance? Frustration? That He has better things to think about?

When you place your faith and trust in Jesus, you are made into a new creation. You become a child of God. And you aren't a stepchild or a second-class member of God's family. You are loved by God. And do you know how God loves you? He loves you just like He loves Jesus.

John 17:22-23

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Command: See (Behold/Stop and look at this for a minute) what kind of love the Father has given to you! If you are trusting in Jesus, God the Father loves you with the same love He has for Jesus Himself.

How much do you think God the Father loves Jesus? He loves His Son with perfect, passionate, never-ending love. And He loves you with the exact same love.

And John says God has given that love to us. We don't deserve it (that's where thinking God loves us can really go wrong!). We don't earn it. We don't make it grow when we are good and we don't make it stop when we mess up. His love is given to us completely in Christ. There's nothing you could ever do to make God love you more and there's nothing you will ever do to make God love you less.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friend, let that good news wash over you. You are loved with the perfect, holy love of God the Father. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing will ever stand between you and the love of your Father. I'll never forget putting Logan into his car seat and driving home from the hospital with him. Something came over me that I had never experienced in all of my life. I had this urge to take care of

someone else in a way that I was willing to give my life for him. I was ready to step in front of a bus or jump in front of a bullet. And that love has only grown over time.

Then, Em and I had our girls. And a new level of love was unlocked in my heart. I wasn't just willing to give my life for my girls, I was willing to take a life for my girls. I started looking at every boy in the world and thinking, "I dare you. I just dare you to give me a reason."

Listen, I'm far from a perfect dad. But, as long as there is breath in my lungs, by God's grace nothing will ever stand between me and my kids. And do you think God's love for His kids is any less than mine? You're out of your mind if you do.

Friend, see what manner of love the Father has for you. He gave his only Son to save you. He won't let anything in heaven or earth come between you and Him. If you are trusting in Jesus, you are His beloved child and His love for you will do something that is unimaginable to our little brains. It's the next thing our text says the work of Jesus enables for us.

3. The work of Jesus enables us to become like Jesus.

1 John 3:2

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.

When Jesus returns, John says we will be like Him. John says we don't know exactly what it will be like and all that it will entail. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says that eye has not seen and ear has not heard and it hasn't entered into the imagination of man what God has prepared for us in Jesus. But Romans 8:29 says we are destined to be conformed to the image of God's own Son. We will be transformed to become completely like Jesus in every way we can be like Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:51–53

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When Jesus comes again, we will lay aside all the corruption and effects of our sin and brokenness. We will receive new, glorified bodies that are just like the resurrection body of Jesus. We will be morally perfect so we will be able to stand in the presence of our holy, perfect God and see Him as He is.

Think of the ways you struggle with sin and temptation. The things you hate that you are so strongly compelled to do because of the sin nature that still exists within the part of you that has yet to be transformed.

One day, all that will be gone forever and you will be like Jesus. You will love all the things that Jesus loves the way Jesus loves them. You will want what is good and right the way Jesus wants them. You will DO what is good and right like Jesus. You will be fit to dwell forever in the presence of God and the perfection of heaven. That day is coming. You will stand in the presence of Jesus and, though you won't be like Him as God, you will be like Him as a perfected man. He will make it happen by His unlimited power. That's why you won't shrink back at His coming. That's why you won't need to fear His judgment.

You can be confident that as you rely on Jesus, He will finish the work He has begun in you. Christian, that's your destiny in Jesus. That's the work He has promised to do in you as you abide in Him.

And that confident expectation is what the Bible calls "hope." And notice what John says, HOPE MOTIVATES HOLINESS.

1 John 3:3

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

When we remain confident in the work of Jesus that makes us children of God and will result in us becoming like Jesus, it motivates our hearts to pursue holiness.

- When you hear that you will be made like Jesus, is there something in your heart that wants to be like Jesus?
- When you think of living forever without any sin or impurity hindering you from enjoying the presence and pleasure of Christ, do you want that?
- So, that hope is stirring up a desire. Our destiny of holiness is stirring up a desire for holiness.

Even more, if you are truly confident that Jesus is doing that in you, it starts to take shape here and now. When we truly expect that Jesus is making us more like Himself and will ultimately make us just like Himself, that destiny stirs up a desire and that desire impacts our direction.

That's one of the evidences of having been born again. You believe Jesus is making you more and more like Him and you begin to want it more and more, so you begin to step into the life He has already prepared for you more and more.

Most of you will leave this room and go out one of the back doors of this room. You'll go into the foyer and out one of those doors. You know your destination (let's call that destiny). And you want that destiny. You want to go get some lunch? (You desire that destiny) So, how does that influence the first step you take in the aisle when you leave your row? (Direction) How does that influence the direction you head as you go out the back doors? Or as you leave the building? You know where your destination is and so you step in that direction.

And that's sort of what John is pointing to here. When you are confident that Jesus will make you just like Him in holiness and righteousness, if you are born again that's something you desire. That's why it's called hope and not dread. You don't dread overcoming sin and temptation, you hope for it in Jesus. And that hope, that confident expectation, begins to impact the way you walk in this world. You step toward holiness and away from sin.

That's why 2:29 says that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of God. He isn't saying you have to do righteousness to be born of God. He's saying when you are born of God, you have a new identity and a new destiny in Jesus. And that hope, that confident expectation, impacts the direction of your life. You move toward holiness and obedience to Jesus because that's the direction you believe you are heading in Christ.

That's where we will pick up next week. But, for this morning, the call of God for us is to remain confident in the work of Christ. Rely on Him and keep on relying on Him. Trust in Him and keep on trusting in Him. Abide in Him and He will abide in you. Coke tastes like Coke because it's made by Coke. Christians taste like Christ because they are made by Christ, and that hope will produce holiness.