

BIBLE BACKGROUND

1John 3:1-7

Verses 1,2

See what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. Because of this the world does not know us because it did not know him. Beloved, we are now children of God and what we will be has not been revealed. We know that whenever it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

John addresses the Lord in the personal term of **Father**, in the way the Lord Jesus demonstrated in his life and offered to his people out of grace (Jn 14:6,9). A direct outcome of the resurrection is the access we have to the Father through Christ. It is Christ who establishes the connection as well as revealing the Father and his love to his people (1:3). And so the opening words are about the Father's **love**. The details of the Father's love are found not only in Christ (3:16) but also in us. Of course, we do not love in the way God loves but we are the objects of his love and by loving and redeeming us in Christ, the Father has made us his children. We are **called children of God**. It is the Father who calls us children of God, that is, he grants this to us as a **gift of love**. By loving us in Christ, we become his children. Baptism is not mentioned here, though the anointing of the Spirit, probably referred to it (2:20,27) and passages such as 4:7 point more strongly to baptism (John 1:12,13; 3:5,6). To be **called** κληθωμεν is an act of ownership; we do truly belong to the Father and he has become responsible for our salvation.

And that is what we are reminds us of this. A constant reminder of the gospel is necessary so that our identity is not subverted by what we or others think of us. **We are called children of God** but we do not see it. This identity is hidden and therefore, thinking of ourselves in physical, material or technical ways is a real problem. The thinking and outlook of Christians can often be too small. **The world does not know us** but it also needs saying that we do not know what we are properly. In what way does the world not know the children of God? It could not mean that the world does not accept that we are followers of Christ. Rather, it means that the world does not believe the gift of salvation, that God is our Father and has bestowed his love on us and made us his children. It cannot recognize who we really are because it cannot recognize who Christ is: **it did not know him**.

Knowing εγνων, is not mere knowledge but the knowing of faith, personal knowledge of God as a husband and wife know each other.

Beloved αγαπητοι is the correct term of those the Father loves. As I said, **what we will be has not been revealed**. The Father declares us children of God. We are children of God in a spiritual sense, by faith. In God's kingdom, we are already completely children of God, physically and spiritually. The topic of our appearance, form and activity in this new realm is a source of speculation. The best clue to this new life as God's children is founded on the one and only Son, the supreme, divine child of God. He is the true image of God (Col 1:15). The revelation of God spoken of here, may refer to the coming of Christ but is more likely to our appearance before the Father. This is what Christ will see to.

We shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. The eyes that see the Lord are not responsible for the transformation of God's children when they are in his presence. Rather, it is God's act of raising us from the dead, of him seeing us that transforms us. We die and disappear from view but because he has raised his Son from the dead (Rom 8:29), the Lord is able to keep us in his view and then raise us to stand before him. His desire is that we be like him in our characters, though the physical rebirth should not be overlooked. One cannot happen without the other. Paul speaks in a similar way in 1Cor 13:12 and Rom 8:21.

The face is significant here. Moses wished to see the glory of God but the Lord said that he could not see his face (Ex 33:18-20). The glory of the Lord is revealed in his face, which is a metaphor for his

being. His nature, power and goodness shines through his face. In contact with him and through rebirth in the Spirit, raised believers in Christ undergo a transformation in their beings and bodies.

Verses 3-7

Everyone who has this hope within him purifies himself as he is already pure. Everyone who sins acts against the law because sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins and there is no sin in him. Everyone who remains in him does not sin. Everyone who sins has not seen him and does not know him. Children, let no one deceive you. The person who does righteous things is righteous because that person is righteous.

The presence of the Risen Christ within a person is repeatedly mentioned (1:3; 2:20,24,28; 3:15,24; 4:4,13-16; 5:12,20). This presence brings eternal life, fellowship, truth and love and now we hear of **hope within us**. Hope refers to the certain gift of eternal life with our heavenly Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, since we are children of God along with those who have the risen Christ within them. This leads the Christian **to purify himself**, which at first, seems strange, because we know that Christ purifies those who believe in him. Certainly, this is stated: **as he is already pure** (1:8). As a child of God, the Lord has cleansed the baptized believer (1:9). The verb is ἀγνίζει, not ἀγιάζειν. Keeping oneself sexually pure maybe in mind here, though there is the tinge of dedicating oneself to the Lord. This better fits the sense of doing something on **oneself** εαυτον. Since we are destined for life in God's presence and Christ is present in us with his resurrection power, we do truly belong to God as his children and will keep ourselves entirely for him.

Hence, sin is not merely a wrong that is against ourselves or others but is an act against God himself, or particularly, **against his law**. Sin is lawlessness, that is, rebellion, acting without constraints, and putting oneself in opposition to God. The very purpose of Christ was **to appear and take away sins** (2:2). And since he lives in the believer, it is completely unnatural in a sense to continue sinning. The one who lives in us is without sin; **no sin is in him**. The nature of Christ is without a flaw and we know that from the gospels. No accusation could be brought forward at his trial and there was agreement that **he had done all things well** (Mk 7:37).

Everyone who remains in him does not sin. This phrase may confuse people but it must not be taken in an absolute sense, otherwise Scripture is contradicted and it is clear Christians continue to sin (2:1; 5:16,18). This reference, and there are others (2:4,9; 3:9,10; 4:8,16; 5:1-4), is describing the new life of the Christian, resulting from the victorious power of Christ experienced within by the believer. This leads to faith in Christ, love of Christ, love of others and a firm maintenance of orthodox belief. In contrast, those who became apostates hated others and denied the human nature of Christ.

It is obvious, that such a person **does not know** the Lord Jesus and interestingly, **has not seen him**. To expect believers to have seen Christ is more unusual given the fact that John says that this is only a future expectation (3:2). Further, he makes it clear that we do not see God (4:12,20). The same thought is in 3Jn11. It can only mean that the believer has experienced Christ even beyond believing the truth. Faith is not mere knowledge, as I said, but knowledge of God, a personal encounter.

Finally, the Christian does right things because he has been made right with God, in the Pauline sense of being justified. **The person who does righteous things is righteous because that person is righteous** is parallel to being purely for God as one is already made pure for God as his child.