

November 8, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Cleaning Up

1 John 2:28-3:3

1. Abide in Him (verses 28-29).
2. Behold His Love (verses 1-2).
3. Hope in Him (verse 3).

I'm not proud of this, but I will confess. My home office is often a mess. Ever since we, as a church, purchased this building, my meetings throughout the week have usually taken place here at the church building. Before we had a building, people would often come to my house, and meet with me in my office. We held leadership meetings in my office. We held Bible studies in my office. I met with others for the purpose of discipleship in my office. As a result, I had some accountability to keep my office clean.

But, not anymore. Most of my meetings now take place here at church, or offsite someplace. Meetings I have in my home office are few and far between. As a result, I have little accountability to keep it a clean and tidy place. And so, my desk piles up with books and papers all around. And I confess that I have not done a very good job in keeping it clean. Again, I'm not proud of this fact.

My pride comes to the forefront when someone comes to meet with me in my home office. Out of fear and shame, I will usually do a quick cleaning job. I will put my books back on the shelves. I will pile my papers into a stack. Sometimes, I will even vacuum the rug. All to make my office presentable for those who come.

And I would suspect that many of you have experienced the same thing, not with your office, but with your house. If you happen to have invite some guests over to your house for lunch or dinner, and at some point, there is a frantic clean that takes place. Various items are removed from the floors and tables and put away. Toys are placed back in the closet. The vacuum and mop come out to clean the floors. And then, your guests arrive, and you act like this is the way you always live. Your house is always this clean!

But, you know (and your kids know) that before they come, you do some "Cleaning Up." And when it comes to our lives, we have need to do some "Cleaning Up" as well. Because, in fact, there is a day when a guest will arrive in your life, and you want to be ready.

The guest is Jesus Christ. The time is his second coming. There will be a day when Jesus returns to this earth. And you will want to be ready for that day. You will want your life to be in order.

Now, unlike the illustration that I gave of a guest coming to your home (or office) at a specific time, nobody knows when Jesus will return. Jesus said, "Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36). In other words, when it comes to the return of Christ, you aren't going to get a day's notice. You aren't going to get even five minutes' notice.

Jesus Christ is returning to the planet, and you need to be ready. You never know when he comes or your time comes.

We have a neighbor who was planning to go on a vacation in Florida with a close friend of hers. But, a week before the event, she choked at a restaurant. She went many minutes without breathing. And with the lack of oxygen entering the brain, she was brain dead. They have recently removed her life-support, and she will soon die. Life expectancy for her was another 30 years. And yet, her time was up. We can only hope that she did some "cleaning up" before she choked that fatal afternoon a few weeks ago.

Your time may well come sooner than you think, and you need to be ready. My message this morning is entitled, "Cleaning Up." Our text this morning is 1 John 2:28-3:3. Let me read it for you now:

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

These five verses speak about the "appearing" of Jesus Christ twice. The first is in verse 28, "when he appears." The second is in chapter 3 and verse 2, "when he appears." And the call is to live a righteous life so that you are ready for his coming. Look at verse 28, ...

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.

In other words, Jesus is coming. And when he does, you will have one of two responses. Either you will have confidence or you will shrink from him in shame.

And it all comes down to this: are you abiding in him? That's what John says in verse 28, "And now, little children, abide in him." In fact, this is my first point, ...

1. Abide in Him (verses 28-29).

We looked at this concept last week. John told his readers to "let the [teaching] abide in you" (verse 24). He told his readers to "abide in him" (verse 27). And now, it comes again: "abide in him." This is the command of verse 28: "abide in him."

This simply calls for us to live closely with the Lord. It means that we should commune with him. We should live with him. We should dwell with him. He should be close to us. We should have "fellowship" with him. This is a word that John used in chapter 1:3, ...

1 John 1:3
that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

That's what we are talking about when we say, "abide in him." We are talking about a life that is in tune with God. We are talking about a life that shares itself with God. And one of the implications is that such a life will be a righteous life.

1 John 1:6
If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

This is what I'm talking about when I say, "cleaning up." I'm talking about walking in the light. I'm talking about a pure life. I'm talking about dealing with your sin. And of course, I'm not talking somehow forgiving your sins by your good works. No, the Bible is very clear that our sins are forgiven only through the blood of Jesus. It is ...

1 John 1:7
... the blood of Jesus his Son [that] cleanses us from all sin.

It is when we confess our sins, that we are forgiven of our sins.

1 John 1:9
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But, those who have their sins forgiven are those who walk in the light, those who walk with moral purity. Because, that's what it means to "abide in him." It means that we live like he lives. Look over at chapter 2.

1 John 2:5-6
... By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

To abide in Jesus is to walk like he walked. And Jesus Christ walked in perfect purity.

1 John 3:5
In him there is no sin.

And, of course, our perfection won't ever exist. But, the direction of our lives will be clear. Either we will live a godward life that enjoys the presence of God, that abides in God, or we will live a life contrary to the ways of God and is far from God.

And each of these lives will know a different outcome at the coming of Christ. For those abiding in Christ, there is nothing to fear. John says we can have "confidence" (verse 28) on that day. The appearance and coming of Jesus Christ will be a great blessing!

In Titus 2:13, Paul called it "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Because, on that day, believers in Christ will receive our full reward. Jesus will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

If you are abiding in God, then you should be longing for the day of Christ's return. Do you remember the words at the end of Revelation? In chapter 22? Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon," to which John replies, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). Because, a believer can

stand in confidence on that day. The reason why 1 John was written was so that we might have confidence on that day.

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

He writes to give you assurance that on that day. All will be well. You have eternal life.

But, not so the one who isn't abiding in Christ. That day will be a day of shame for him (verse 28). Worse, it will be a day of sorrow. Consider the parable that Jesus told.

Matthew 24:45-51

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Such will be the end for those who do not abide in Christ. Oh, church family, Abide in Him (verses 28-29), so that you may have confidence on the day of his appearing.

You say, "I don't know if I'm abiding in him." What does that look like? That's the purpose of verse 29.

1 John 2:29

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

Do you know that Jesus is righteous? Surely you do. Then be sure that "everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him" (verse 29). Abiding in Christ will demonstrate itself in living a righteous life. And if you are not living a righteous life, then you are not abiding in Christ.

And it might just be that you have some "Cleaning Up" to do in your life. This morning is a good time for inventory. Are there things in your life that are clearly not righteous behavior? Are there things in your life that you need to abandon?

A good test for that is the "shame" test. Are there things in your life that you would be ashamed of showing Jesus? Are there things in your life that you would be ashamed of showing others? Then, do some cleaning in your life. Cast these things away.

And I encourage you to clean up in the right way. Don't merely think that you can change your behavior on the outside and things will be fine. But note carefully the grammar of verse 29. It says that "everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." In other words, the righteous behavior that someone exhibits is simply an expression of the reality of the heart.

Jesus said that you will know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:20). So also here. The one who has been "born of him," is the one practices righteousness. If you aren't practicing righteousness, then the fundamental problem is not one of external behavior. Rather, the fundamental problem is one of the heart. The behavior is demonstrating the heart. It demonstrates the reality of whether or not God is a part of your life.

And so, when I encourage you to "clean up," I encourage you to look within. Are you "born of him?" Are you "born of God?"

That's the reality of what Jesus spoke about to Nicodemus. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It's the reality of God working in your life that will change your behavior. And if, indeed, you are changed. And if, indeed, you are a child of God, then marvel at that fact. Because, it is an expression of God's love toward us.

This is my second point.

2. Behold His Love (verses 1-2).

1 John 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.

This is the sort of verse that ought to stir your heart as you consider the work of God in your life! John is here calling us to stop and reflect upon the Father's love for us.

We often experience God's love toward us in his kindness and in his grace. But here, John calls us to think about God's love for us. He calls us to give it our attention. He calls us to wonder at his great love for us.

Earlier in our service we sang Stuart Townend's great song, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us."

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.^[1]

That's the reality that John is calling us to contemplate here -- that God would take a sinner, and claim him as a child. He calls you "his child!" When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being "born again," Nicodemus was blown away. He said, "How can these things be?" (John 3:9). How can it be that God will claim that we are his children? This is the miracle of adoption. God treats us as His own.

You parents know of the value of your children. They are worth more to you than anything in this life. You can lose house and home to fire. You can lose cars to accident. You can lose money to your investments. But, none of these compare to the value of your children. Your joy is wrapped up in their joy. Your joy is wrapped up in their success. When things go well with them, your heart flutters with joy!

It was a joy of mine this fall to see my 16 year-old daughter, Hanna, thrive in volleyball. As a sophomore, she was the captain of the team. As a sophomore, she played more on varsity than anyone else on the team. And she was told on Friday that she was all-conference, honorable mention. And as a dad, that gives me great joy to see her thrive and do well at volleyball.

As many of you know, Stephanie (our 12 year old) is in a theatre production of Mary Poppins next weekend. She is playing the part of Jane Banks. It is a huge honor for her to get such a large part in the play. In fact, her part is probably the largest in the production. Because, in many ways, the whole play is about Jane and her brother Michael. The story begins with the Banks family, who are dysfunctional in many ways. At the heart of it are Jane and Michael, these bratty little children. But, Mary Poppins, the nanny, comes on the scene and changes everything. And when she leaves, the Banks family has been restored. These bratty little children have been changed into delightful children.

They had their final rehearsals this past weekend. Yvonne got to videotape a bit of what it's going to look like on stage. When she showed them to me, my heart was so happy because Stephanie is doing so well! I even began to tear-up at the joy she will experience on stage, and the feelings that she will bring to those who watch.

Now, I share these things not to brag about my children. Not to say, "Look at how great my children are." Because, things are going well for many of your children. And if you were a preacher, you would be using your children as an illustration, bringing out how they are succeeding in scouts or fencing or basketball or art or academics.

I share these things to show you a father's affection for his children. And I will say this. As much joy as it gives me to see my children succeed in life. There is a greater joy that I have. It's when I see them walking in the truth.

3 John 4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

And when I see my older two at college walking in the truth, it gives me the greatest joy in my children. When I see my oldest daughter make the choice to go to a secular school where her faith would be challenged. A school where she isn't surrounded by a Christian bubble. And when I see her finding faithful friends on campus; and when I see her deeply involved in Campus Crusade; and when I see her serving faithfully in her local church, my heart jumps with joy.

And when I see my oldest son in college, excited about his church. Excited about his college group. And telling me of the impact that some of his Christian friends are making in his life, my heart is thrilled. He can be a starving artist (which might be the reality). But, if he is walking with God, I have no greater joy. Because, as a father, my heart is wrapped up in the joy of my children.

Again, I say these things not to brag on my children, because I know that many of you parents could share similar things with the spiritual well-being of your children. I share these things to show the heart of a father toward his children.

And, here's the application. That's the sort of affection that God has for us. As his children, there is bond of love between us. And as he looks down upon us, there is joy in his heart when we walk in the truth. And when we fail, there is grace and compassion in his heart toward us.

Can you believe it? Almighty God has a tender heart of compassion toward us, just like we have toward our children. Psalm 103:13 says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." But God's love for us is greater than any love that a father has for his children. Again, Psalm 103, ...

Psalm 103:11-12

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Behold His Love (verses 1-2). "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8).

Like the song we sang earlier, in Jesus, we are children of the Heavenly Father.

Children of the heavenly Father
safely in his bosom gather;

nestling bird nor star in heaven
such a refuge e'er was given.

God his own shall tend and nourish;
in his holy courts they flourish.
From all evil powers he spares them;
in his mighty arms he bears them.

Neither life nor death shall ever
from the Lord his children sever;
for to them his grace revealing,
he turns sorrow into healing.

God has given, he has taken,
but his children ne'er forsaken;
his the loving purpose solely
to preserve them pure and holy.

Now, in our day and age, there are many who think that God is like this to everyone. And I say, not so. Because, not everyone is a child of God. Look down at chapter 3 and verse 10, ...

1 John 3:10

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

Next week we will look at that verse in more detail. But, for now, I want for you to notice that there are "children of God" and there are "children of the devil." These are two categories of people. And these categories didn't start with John. Jesus put people into these categories. To the religious Pharisees, he said, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (John 8:44).

And from the very beginning of mankind, there has always strife between the children of God and the children of the devil. To the serpent, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

You simply need to watch and see the conflict that Jesus had with the Pharisees to see this in action. Jesus called it hatred. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18).

I believe that this is what John had in mind in the second half of verse 1.

1 John 3:1

... The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

See, there are children of the world and children of God. And the children of God will see Jesus and receive him and trust in him. And the children of the world simply won't understand. John wrote in his prologue.

John 1:9-13

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the reality is this: the children of God will see Jesus and believe in Jesus. John brings us back to this point in verse 2, ...

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.

Church family, we are God's children. It's because of the Father's love that we are his children. But, something further awaits. When Jesus returns, we will be children of God in a greater way. No longer as the sinful children to whom the Father extends his grace, but as sinless children in the presence of the Father.

1 John 3:2

... we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

There is something about beholding the glory of Christ that will transform us into his likeness. How exactly this works, I don't know. Is the act

of seeing him a strong enough experience to fully conform us into the image of his son? (Romans 8:29). In other words, does seeing him cause our being to change?

Or is it simply that if we see him, then we must be like him. In other words, is seeing him the result of our change in being? I don't know. These are mysteries to be sorted out in eternity.

However, I do know that this takes place today, as we look into the person of Christ. "And we all, with unveiled face, 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" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is talking about the process of sanctification. The more we see of Christ, the more we are being transformed into his image. The more we grasp who Jesus is, the more we walk in his way. Our journey takes us deeper into his glory. This is what I'm calling "Cleaning Up." It's the process of sanctification here and now.

But there is a day when will see him face to face. And on that day, we will be different.

1 John 3:2
... we shall be like him.

"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). In that day, sin will be gone. We will have perfect fellowship with God. We will have a deeper knowledge of God. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

This has been called, "The whole object of Christianity ... to bring us to the vision of God, to see God."^[2] And it will all be because of his love for us. Do you see his love? Do you Behold His Love (verses 1-2)?

Let's move on quickly to our final point. Abide in Him (verses 28-29). Behold His Love (verses 1-2). And, ...

3. Hope in Him (verse 3).

1 John 3:3
And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

This is the point of my message this morning, "Cleaning Up." If you have the hope someday of being pure, then you will seek purity here upon the earth. If you believe Jesus, who said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), then you will seek purity upon the earth.

When an event is in the future, you will prepare. Whether that be a vacation or business trip, a big event, a test, or a newborn. You will prepare for these things. We know that Jesus will return. We should prepare for His return.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 8, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Stuart Townend Copyright © 1995 Thankyou Music. <http://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/how-deep-the-fathers-love-for-us/>.

[2] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 1, p. 112.