

**1 John**  
**The Christian's DNA (Part 2)**

**1 John 2:28-3:3**

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Well, we have just begun the second cycle or the second movement of the three tests of eternal life. John gives us these three tests to see whether or not we really belong to the Lord Jesus, and he cycles through those three tests, three different times in this letter. He begins the second movement of the symphony, if you will, or the second path around the spiral staircase, looking at these three great tests. He begins the second movement with the test of obedience just as he did the first, “Do you Obey Jesus Christ and His Word?” That is a test of whether or not you're truly His.

Now, in this section that I just read for you a moment ago, chapter 2, verse 28, through chapter 3, verse 3, we learned that our relationship to sin and righteousness shows “Our Real Birth.” In essence, it shows whether we are “Dead in Sin or Born of God.” Are we still the way we were as we came into this world, dead to God, dead in sin, in trespasses and sin, as Paul puts it in the Ephesians, or have we experienced the new birth?

Now, regeneration or the new birth is such an important issue that we stepped away from 1 John last week to study in depth that great theme. But today we return again to John's letter and to the section as I said that we just read together, 1 John 2, verse 28, down through chapter 3, verse 3.

“We're learning here that a true Christian has been born of God and will, therefore, be like his Father in his character and conduct, “Like Father, like child.” If you have been born of God, if you have experienced what Jesus called the new birth, then you have your new Father's DNA. And if you have His DNA, then His character and conduct will imprint your own. Who He is and how He behaves will be reflected in how you think, how you speak, how you act, day in and day out.

Now, in this passage, John gives us several crucial insights into what it means then to be born of God. Two weeks ago, before we looked at regeneration, we looked at the first two of these insights. Just to remind you, we discovered then that if we have been born of God, “Our New Birth Will Be Certified at Jesus’s Revelation.” Chapter 2, verse 28, says when he comes, true believers will not be ashamed because we will have been born of God. On the other hand, those who are false believers, those who claim Christ, but have not truly been changed, that will be manifest as well when Jesus comes.

But we don't have to wait for the Second Coming for that to be manifest, for the return of Christ. Secondly, we learned that “Our New Birth Is Confirmed Now by our Actions.” Verse 29 says, “If we know that (the Father) is righteous” that's what we discovered, the “He” refers to. “If we know that (the Father) is righteous, (then we) know that everyone...who practices righteousness has been born of Him.” The two go together, again, “Like Father, like son.” So that's what we've discerned and studied so far.

Today, we come to a third insight about the new birth or regeneration, and it's this, “Our New Birth Is Followed by Our Adoption,” our new birth is followed by our adoption. And we discovered this in chapter 3, verse 1. Read it with me:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Now, let me just warn you ahead of time that I had initially thought that I would do all three of these verses, verses 1, 2, and 3 of chapter 3 in one message. It's not going to happen. I just want you to know that and there's a good reason for it. I just couldn't get over the fact that this is one of the richest passages in the New Testament, and certainly the richest passage in John's letter, and there is so much here for us to learn together. So, we're going to slow down and look at this a little more carefully.

Now, in verse 1, just as John does in the first chapter of his gospel, he connects the new birth, at the end of chapter 2, to our adoption as sons and daughters here at the beginning of chapter 3.

Now understand that they're not the same. God could have given you the new birth, He could have given you spiritual life and not adopted you as His son or daughter. Those are two different distinct things, and next week, Lord willing, I'll show you even more so how they are distinct.

But let me take you back to John's gospel, John, chapter 1, and remind you that in verses 12 and 13, John clearly distinguishes between the new birth and adoption. Now again, I'm not going to walk through this entire passage again, but I'll just remind you, as we looked at it last time, we discovered that the first thing to happen in these verses is the new birth in verse 13 because the verb tense puts that before the receiving and the believing in verse 12. So, the first thing to happen, logically, in the order of salvation, is that you were born again, verse 13, you were given new life. You were dead, and God called you through the gospel and gave you new life, as we saw in Ezekiel 36, you came to life.

Now, regeneration, then, is in verse 13, and it comes first, then the one who is born of God, John, chapter 1, verse 12, believes or receives Christ. You'll notice he says, "But as many as received Him," and then he explains what it means to "receive Him," at the end of the verse, "...even to those who believe in his name." So, to receive Christ is to believe into His name, to trust in Him as Savior and Lord. So, we are given new life. Now again, let me remind you that what I'm talking about isn't happening chronologically spread apart, rather, we're talking about the logical order; they all happen at a moment in time, the moment of your salvation. But in that moment, there is a logical distinction, a logical order that follows. You say, does that matter? It matters.

Think about it this way, the New Testament never says that justification comes before faith. It always says, we are justified (What?) by faith. And yet faith and justification happen at the same moment in time. There is an important logical order in the mind of God, and therefore, there needs to be in ours. The same thing is true with these things. So, you were regenerated, you were given new life, then because of that, God gave you repentance and faith, and you believed, you received Christ. Only after you exercise faith, are we, verse 12, given the right to become children of God. Notice, "...as many as received Him (as many as believed, only they

have) the right to become the children of God,” that's adoption. So, you have regeneration, the new birth, new life given to you; then you believe, you receive Christ; and then you are adopted by God. So, clearly, there is a distinction. And again, we'll look next time and see there are a great many reasons to see a distinction between the new birth and adoption.

So, regeneration, then, or the new birth is followed by, in the same moment in time, but logically followed by a legal declaration in which God adopts us as His own children.

Now, why does John go from the new birth at the end of chapter 2, to adoption in chapter 3? Because mentioning the new birth in chapter 2, verse 29, reminds John of the closely related blessing of adoption. John himself is captivated, as we'll see, by this concept of adoption, and he wants us to be as well. Also, it fits in the larger theme of this paragraph. At the end of chapter 2, John made the point that the new birth affects how we live. The same thing is true with adoption. Adoption, chapter 3, verse 2, ends with our glorification, with our being made like Christ; and if we have the hope of the finalizing of our adoption, then verse 3 of chapter 3, we will be pursuing holiness. So, it fits in the theme of this paragraph, the test of obedience. So then, regeneration or the new birth, as Jesus called it, is followed by our adoption, and John wants us to grasp just a little of the magnificence of this great truth of our adoption. And that's what I want us to look at together this morning.

He begins by explaining in verse 1, “The Reason for our Adoption,” the reason for our adoption. Notice, it is because of the love that the Father has bestowed. Verse 1, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God.”

As we prepare for the Lord's Table, I just want to consider this this morning, “The Reason for Our Adoption.” Lord willing, next Sunday, we'll look at “The Reality of Our Adoption,” what it means and really unpack those great truths. But this morning, I just want us to think about why, what moved God to adopt us? There is only one reason in the universe that God has chosen to adopt us as His children, and verse 1 says it's His great love, His great love!

The Greek word for 'love' in verse 1 is the familiar Greek word 'agape.' It's typically love that is not motivated by emotion, but rather, is motivated by the will. God set His will on seeking our good and specifically on adopting us. We understand this even in the realm of human parents adopting children. He set His will on this adoption.

Now, like our English word for love, the Greek word 'agape' is used in a large variety of ways. It's used for everything from God's love for His own Son, to the Pharisees' love for the chief seats at social events in the first century. So, the nature of the love here is not determined by the meaning of the word 'agape,' just like the English word love, but rather, always, by the context. And the context here tells us so much about this love. In fact, I would say it this way. Chapter 3, verse 1, is filled with a number of rich truths about the love of God that moved Him to adopt us as His own sons and daughters.

Let's look at those rich truths together. First of all, God's adopting Love is "A Specific Love," it is a specific love. It's very specific in its object; it is bestowed, notice, only on us, not on the world at large, but on us. Now, whom does John mean by 'us?' Well, he means all genuine Christians; that's why he includes himself in this description with his readers. He means all of those who pass the three tests of eternal life that we saw in the first cycle.

Think of it this way, if you took those tests that we've so far looked at in this letter, if you pass the test of faith in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel, if you pass the test of a life that is characterized by a pattern of obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word, if you pass the test of a pattern of love for God and a love for His people, if those things are in your life, not in perfection, but in direction, if they describe who you are, then John is talking here about you. You can be confident that God has bestowed His adopting love on you. God's adopting love is specific, it is on us, not on the world at large. It's on us.

Secondly, God's adopting Love is "A Special Love," it's a special love. What kind of love is this? What class of love does this belong to? Well notice in our verse, it's the kind of love that moved God to adopt some as His own children, to call some His children. It's a special kind of love. God doesn't call everyone His child in this sense. It's true that God loves all men; we've

studied that before. Just as God commands us to love our enemies, God loves His enemies. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 44 and 45, Jesus said, "...I say to you, love your enemies. . .so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." And he goes on to say, "Listen, your Father in heaven loves His enemies." (Paraphrase). And he describes how. He says, "Think about it. God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. God does good to His enemies and that shows His love for all mankind. You need to love your enemies as well." (Paraphrase). That's Jesus's point.

So, God loves all people, but listen carefully, that doesn't mean that God loves all people in the same way and with the same intensity. Verse 1 makes that very clear, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God." God loves His own with a unique, special, eternal, adopting love. We're often identified as those God uniquely loves. For example, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 7, Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, and listen to how he describes them, "to all who are beloved of God in Rome." He wasn't saying the rest of the people living in Rome weren't loved by God in some regard. But he's saying, "You believers, you are the unique object of God's love." The same thing in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 4, "Brethren, beloved by God." And God's special love for His own is always moving toward a specific goal, and that goal was adopting us as His own children.

Turn to Ephesians, chapter 1; Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 3. Paul begins his letter to the church in Ephesus with this amazing long sentence that begins in verse 3, and runs all the way down through verse 14, just one sentence in the Greek text. But he begins this way in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." He says, "The Father is the one who has initiated this plan of redemption." (Paraphrase.) And then he goes on in verses 4 through 6, to describe the Father's role in the plan of redemption. Now you understand that all the members of the Trinity act together in all that they do; we have one God in three persons. So, it's not that one person in the Trinity does something and the other members don't contribute at all, but rather, what the Scriptures are clear is that one member of the Trinity takes the lead in certain activities. And this is what the Father did in the plan of redemption. Notice, verse 4, "just as He (That goes back to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we're talking about

the Father.) just as (the) He (Father) chose us.” The word ‘chose’ means ‘to select out from a larger group.’ That’s what He did. He chose, He selected us from a larger group in Christ, and he did so without reference to us before the foundation of the world. In other words, His choice, His selection was unconditional; it wasn’t conditioned on anything in you or me.

And then he says, why, He chose us to what end, to what goal? And he gives three ends here. First of all, personal holiness, “...that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” God chose us, selected us to make us holy, to make us like His Son.

Verse 6 gives the third of those goals and that is God’s glory, “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” But go back to the second goal God had in mind in choosing us, the end of verse 4, “...In love He predestined us.” That is, He predetermined our destiny, and what was the destiny he predetermined us to? “Adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” I love the last part of verse 5, “...according to the kind intention of His will,” literally, “according to His good pleasure.” In other words, God, in love, predetermined to adopt you. But He didn’t do so grudgingly; He did so with His whole heart, with delight, with joy. What amazing truth! Why, why did God set His love on you and me? The answer here is because He had decided to adopt us.

Now many of you here this morning, you get this in a way the rest of us don’t. You get it in a unique and personal way. If you are adopted or if you’ve adopted children, you understand what it means to select out of a group, a child on whom you will set your love and whom you will adopt into your family. Folks, that is exactly what God did for you. If you’ve passed the test, if you’re a Christian, if you’re a true follower of Jesus Christ, that is what God did in your case; He has chosen you for adoption, to adopt you as His own child. That’s the reason He set His love on you.

I like the way Lloyd-Jones says it. He says:

We are what we are not because of our goodness, not because of our lives, not because of anything in us. It all comes from the love of God, that everlasting inscrutable love. Whatever made Him look upon us?

Do you ever ask yourself that question, “Whatever made Him look at me, choose me?” Lloyd-Jones says, “Why? We don't know! It's amazing! While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us, while we were sinners and opposed and aliens, it was then He did it. We are beloved of God.” God loves all mankind, but that's not the kind of love John's talking about in verse 1. It's God's unique, special, love by which God calls sinners, those who were His enemies, now His children.

Thirdly, God's adopting love is “A Supreme Love,” it's a supreme love. It's of the highest quality. It's the greatest love! The Greek word translated “How great,” in verse 1, only occurs seven times in the New Testament. It literally means “of what kind or of what class.” In the New Testament when it is used, it normally implies “being amazed, being filled with wonder; there's a sense of awe and admiration when you see something that's truly amazing.”

You remember when the disciples were in the boat there on the Sea of Galilee? Jesus was asleep, the storm came and was raging, and the ship was going to sink, and Jesus gets up and He speaks to the wind and the waves, and suddenly, it all goes deathly quiet. In Matthew, chapter 8, verse 27, this is how the disciples responded. It says, “The men (disciples) were amazed, and said, (Here's our phrase.) ‘What kind of man is this, (What kind of man is this?), that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’”

You see, the disciples affirm that Jesus fits in an entirely different category than any man they had ever met before. “What kind of man is this?” And that is exactly what John is saying in chapter 3, verse 1 of his letter. He's saying, “What kind of love is this? What category do you fit this love in?” And the answer is, “There is no category but this one, this is how it fits.” The Father's love for us is in an entirely different category from any love we have ever experienced. John says, “Consider how great, how wonderful, how amazing, is the Father's love; it's impossible to fully understand it, it is incomprehensible!”

It's like Paul says of Christ's love in Ephesians 3, verses 18 and 19. He says:



(I'm praying, Ephesians, that you will) be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

If I can borrow Paul's words, Christian, ask the Father to help you grasp the height and depth and length of His love for you. And then, go to the scripture and learn the dimensions of His love.

Consider the height of God's love. Psalm 103, verse 11, "...as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness (steadfast love) toward those who fear Him." You walk outside after the service and you look up in the sky, and scientists tell us that what you see, the outer ranges of what we think of as our sky, the edge of space is 62 miles above you when you walk outside, 62 miles up. But scientists have more recently discovered that our atmosphere actually extends out farther than that. They now say it extends out 6,200 miles from the surface of the planet. That's the height of God's steadfast love, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love towards those who fear him." It can't be measured; it can't be exhausted. Imagine walking outside after this service and seeing all of that atmosphere that surrounds you and being afraid that you're going to consume all the oxygen that's there. The same thing is true of the love of God; you will never ever exhaust it. It's as high as the heavens are above the earth!

Consider the length of God's love. Psalm 103, verse 17, says, "(The steadfast love) of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him." Christian, God's love for us reaches back as far as we can go into eternity past when He set His love upon us and decided to adopt us as His children. It reaches forward into eternity future, to everlasting, and it never ends. His love for us is always there. If I look back as far as possible, and if I look forward as far as I can, from vanishing point to vanishing point, what I see is that the Father has always loved me and always will. There has never been, nor will there ever be a time in the eternal existence of God, when He has not or will not love me! And, Christian, the same is true for you. That's how long He's loved you. That's the length of God's love.

Consider the depth of God's love. How far down does God's love reach? How far down was His love willing to go on our behalf? Well, all the way from heaven because he allowed His Son to leave heaven's glory to come to earth, and not only to come and walk on this planet, but to go so far down that He became one of us. He became one of His creatures. He took on Himself full humanity and became everything that you are except for sin. But He kept going down, His love kept going farther because then He humbled Himself, Paul says in Philippians 2, to the point of death! He died for you!

But He went even farther down because He didn't just die; He didn't die a glorious death, He died, according to Philippians 2, the death of a criminal because you were, and I was a criminal. And He died as a criminal in our place, satisfying the justice of God. That's how deep the love of God is.

But His love goes even deeper, because not only did He die for us, but then the eternal perfect God adopts us into His family as His own sons and daughters. That's what John is saying here. But even farther down, think about this, Christian, God loves us as He loves His one-of-a-kind Son. He decided to set love on us and treat us just like His Son by nature even though we are His adopted children. You say, "Is that Biblical?" Yes, it is! John 17:23, Jesus prays, and He says, "(Father,) You...loved them, even as You...loved to Me." Let that sink into your mind for a moment. That's the depth of God's love for us. God's love is supreme.

God's adopting love is also "A Sovereign Love," it's a sovereign love. It's interesting that John doesn't say here in verse 1 that God loved us. Instead, he says, "The Father has bestowed love on us." The Greek word translated 'bestowed' is the normal Greek word that means 'to give.' God has given His love to us. John's point is that God decided to love us, and this fits so well with the rest of Scripture that emphasizes the reason God loves His people is not because of anything in them. God's love for me and you is not conditioned on us. God didn't look down and say, "Wow, there's a lovable one. I'm going to love him; I'm going to love her." No, it had nothing to do with us. God's decision to love was based entirely on His own sovereign, gracious decision.

And this is where human adoption and divine adoption part ways. This is a key difference. Sometimes, not always, but sometimes human parents choose a child to adopt based on something in that child. Maybe there's something in the child's appearance that sort of draws out their heart. Maybe it's the way the child responds to them unique from the way the other children around respond to them. But God didn't choose to adopt us based on anything in us. Why did God choose to adopt us? Why did the eternal God set His love on us with the goal of adopting us? Well, the answer is the same reason He chose Israel, Deuteronomy 7, verses 7 and 8, “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because (of things that were true about you) ...but because the LORD loved you.”

Do you see what Moses was saying to Israel? It's the same thing the New Testament says to us, “God loved you, because He loved you,” He loved you because He chose to set His love on you completely outside of you. There was absolutely no reason in you for God to love you. There was no reason in you for God to set His mercy on you. There was no reason in you for God to adopt you. It was simply His gracious, sovereign decision. He sovereignly gave us His love; He bestowed it! What's the ultimate cause of our adoption? Scripture's answer is the sovereign grace of the Father; adoption was the gracious purpose of the Father in choosing us, and His choice to adopt us was based solely on His sovereign unconditional love. Unconditional, meaning it was unconditioned on anything in us.

A fifth truth about God's adopting love is that it is “A Secure Love,” it's a secure love. The word ‘bestowed or given’ tells us that this is a gift. God's Love can't be earned; it can't be purchased. The tense of the verb, though, it's captured well in our English text here, is the Greek perfect. It emphasizes that this gracious gift of love was given to us in the past, and it'll always be ours; it will never be taken away. It's like Paul says in Romans 8:38 and 39, “...I am convinced that nothing in life or death or eternity will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Paraphrase.) We are secure in the love of God.

Finally, God's electing love, and I couldn't leave this out, is “A Saving Love.” It's not in our text; it's implied here, but turn over to chapter 4; 1 John 4, verse 9:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and (Look at what this love did.) sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The word propitiation means ‘the satisfaction of God's justice.’ Jesus came to die, not because He deserved to die, but because we deserved to die. And He satisfied, as we sang earlier, the wrath of God against our sins by dying in our place. What love is this? The eternal Son of God, God's one-of-a-kind Son, was forsaken by the Father so that He might welcome us as His adopted children. What love!

How should we respond to God's adopting love? Let me give you a couple of thoughts really quickly. First of all, “Live in wonder in praise about God's love.” Look at the first word in our text, “See,” it's an exclamation! John wants us to stand in awe of the love of God that moved Him to adopt us. As one writer puts it, “It's meant to take our breath away, to startle and amaze us so that we're left gasping. What kind of love is this?” That's the point, be amazed; stand in wonder!

Secondly, “Meditate on God's love.” And this is how you can be amazed; this is how you can stand in wonder. The word “see” actually means ‘to take special notice, to consider, to ponder.’ Christians, why don't we get this? It's because we haven't taken the time to meditate on the love of God as it's revealed in the Scripture. We don't fully get it because we've not spent any time there. We've not poured over what God Himself has revealed.

D. Edmond Hiebert writes:

The imperative calls upon the readers to take a heart-moving look at the amazing love which gave them membership in God's family. To see the Father's love aright is to sink down in adoration before it, it is beyond comprehension. (Meditate on God's love.)

Thirdly, believe what God has revealed about His love for us, “Believe God's revealed love.” In 1 John 4, verses 17 and following, and we'll get there in our study. But in that text, John says, “Listen, you need to really come to a mature understanding of God's love for you, because if

you will do that, it will take away your fear of the judgment, because you'll understand that God has set His love on you, and nothing's going to change that.” (Paraphrase.) It’s so important to believe what God has revealed because many believers have never experienced the love anything like God’s in any other relationship.

Maybe you grew up in a home with a wonderful father, or maybe you've never had a decent human model of what this love looks like. But the question for you is this, “If you've passed the test, if you're a true follower of Jesus Christ, are you willing to take God at His Word? Are you willing to believe that God loves you with this kind of love, even if you don't feel like it, and even if you've never experienced it anywhere else?” God wants you to believe Him; He wants you to believe what He's revealed.

And then finally, number four, “Give constant thanks to God for His love,” give constant thanks. This is everywhere in scripture, but Psalm 118, verse 1 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love is everlasting.” When is the last time you gave God thanks for His everlasting love?