

1 John
The Christian's DNA (Part 5)
1 John 2:28-3:3
September 18, 2022
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Well, we want to turn our attention as we prepare for the Lord's Table this morning, to a passage in 1 John that fits very well with the Lord's Table, 1 John, chapter 3. Turn there with me, and as you're turning, let me just say that there are some of you here this morning who are old enough to remember Milli Vanilli. It was actually one of the most popular pop acts in the late 1980's and early 1990's. They experienced meteoric fame; in fact, their debut album was on the Billboard Top 100 for 26 weeks, including at number two. They won three awards at the American Music Awards, and they won the Grammy for Best New Artist. They sold millions of records.

But their fame quickly turned to infamy, which is why many of you who are younger have never heard of them. You see, it was discovered that the two men who were the faces of Milli Vanilli didn't sing a single vocal on any of their releases. They were lip synching to tracks that had been secretly recorded by other vocalists. The really sad thing to me is that they had actually begun to believe the lie themselves. A former record company manager told Billboard Magazine, "Their egos were so big because they were such big stars that they were like, 'We can sing, no problem.' They became believers in their own false story."

You know, as I thought about that, I was reminded of the fact that as tragic as that story is, and by the way, it ended tragically; one of the two men who were part of that group, within a few years of that all coming out, got involved with drugs and ended up overdosing at the age of 32. But as tragic as that story is, I think it's even more sad that even professing Christians aren't always the real thing. And sometimes, like Milli Vanilli, they can begin to deceive themselves of that reality.

John the Apostle didn't want a single genuine Christian to ever wonder if he or she was a fraud. John wanted us to know that we are, in fact, the real thing. And so, he gives us 1 John through

the inspiration of the Spirit; and in this wonderful letter, he gives us three tests of eternal life, not so much to prove that we're frauds, but rather for true Christians to learn that they're not, to learn that we're the real thing.

One of the tests that we've discovered together is that we are to obey Jesus Christ in His Word. If we are genuine Christians, we will obey Him. And we're learning, in the second time we're looking at this test in the second cycle of the test as John repeats them, we're learning that our obedience to Jesus Christ and to His Word shows "Our Real Birth." Have we experienced the new birth, or are we still dead in sin? Have we been born of God, or are we, in fact, still dead to Him? This is the message of 1 John 2, verse 28, down through chapter 3, verse 3. The point of this paragraph is that a true Christian has been born of God and will, therefore, be like his Father. If we've been born of God, we have His DNA; and if we have His DNA, our character and conduct will reflect that of our Father.

In the passage, John gives us several crucial insights into what it means to be born of God. We've already worked our way through most of this; let me just remind you of what we've seen. We've learned that the reality of the new birth, if we've been born of God, that will be "Certified at Jesus' Revelation." When He comes, we will receive Him with confidence if we're really His, or we'll shrink away in shame if we're pretenders, if we're frauds. The new birth will be "Confirmed Now by our Actions." That's the last verse of chapter two. Thirdly, it will be "Followed by our Adoption," chapter 3, verse 1. And then last week, we learned that the new birth will be "Completed with our Glorification."

John's final insight, that we come to this morning, is that the new birth will be "Evidenced in our Sanctification." It's really a similar point to the one he made at the end of chapter 2, but it's slightly different in its nuance. Our new birth, if you've really been born of God, it will be "Evidenced in Sanctification."

Look at verse 3 of chapter 3, “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Now you’ll notice that verse 3 begins with the little coordinating conjunction ‘and.’ It actually makes a couple of very important points, that little word ‘and.’ First of all, it makes a general doctrinal point, and that is in the New Testament, “belief always determines behavior.” Or, to put it differently, “doctrine always precedes and directs our doing; what you know, drives how you live.” In this case, understanding your glorification in verse 2, produces sanctification in verse 3. That’s why that little ‘and.’

The word ‘and’ makes a very specific contextual point. As we saw last week, verse 2 teaches that everyone who is born of God will ultimately experience glorification, we will see and be like Jesus Christ. The word ‘and’ linking verse 3 to verse 2, tells us that there is an inevitable connection between the hope of future glorification and the pursuit of present sanctification.

Lloyd-Jones puts it this way:

I am to live a holy life because I am a Christian. I start from the standpoint that I have been made a child of God by the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, I am destined for Heaven. And it is because I know this that I am preparing now.

Now, why is this a reality? Why is sanctification such an important part of the new birth and that it follows the new birth? Why is that? Well think about it this way, in regeneration, in the new birth, when you were born again, you received a new nature, you are not the person you used to be. Christianity isn’t about turning over a new leaf or saying a prayer. It’s about being radically changed from the person you were when you were born and lived through life and being changed into a different person with a new nature.

2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17 says, “...if anyone is in Christ, *he* is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” However, even though we have a new nature, there is still a part of us that remains unredeemed until death or until Christ returns. The beachhead of that unredeemed part of us is the body, but it’s more than that. And Paul labels it,

in the book of Romans, as the ‘flesh,’ it's the flesh. And sanctification is the process by which we put to death the deeds of the flesh, and we grow in likeness to Jesus Christ progressively through this life.

Here's a definition of sanctification as Lewis Berkhoff gives it in his Systematic Theology.

It is the work of God's free grace by which His Spirit continuously delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness.

We could put it like this, God works in the person who's been declared right with Him, who has been saved, so that there will be a decreasing pattern of sin and an increasing pattern of righteousness. John's point in verse 3 is that sanctification, necessarily, certainly, inexorably without exception, follows regeneration.

Now, as we prepare for the Lord's table this morning, I want us to consider several important details in verse 3 about our sanctification. The first detail we learn here is, “The Extent of Sanctification.” Verse 3, “...everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Literally, the Greek text says, “Everyone having this hope.” There are no exceptions; this is true of every genuine believer. Or as our Lord put it in the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5, verse 8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they (And only they.) will see God.” Hebrews 12:14 says, “Pursue...the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”

You see, the false teachers and the false Christians, in John's day, claimed to know Jesus, but their lives were not marked by purity like Jesus', but by sin like the devil. And so, John writes, “Listen, everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself.” If you're a Christian, you've been born of God, that's verse 29 of chapter 2; and one day, you'll be like Jesus Christ, that's chapter 3, verse 2. And if one day you'll be like Jesus Christ, you are gradually becoming more like Him even now, that's verse 3. There are no exceptions.

One writer, Culpepper, puts it this way, “Those who hope for heaven, but do not pursue righteousness, have pipe dreams, not hope.” So, the extent of sanctification is every true Christian, there are no exceptions to that, there are no flatliner Christians; where there is life, there will be growth, it might be slow, it might be intermittent, it might be hard to track at times, but growth there will be because growth comes with life.

There's a second detail here about our sanctification, and that is, “The Motivation for Sanctification.” Look, again at verse 3, “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him,” there's the motivation. This is the only time, by the way, in his writings, that John uses the word ‘hope.’ And he adds the demonstrative pronoun ‘this,’ “this hope,” which points back to verse 2, look at it again. “Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. (But) We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” That's our hope!

Now, as I have mentioned to you on many occasions, when you come to the word ‘hope’ in the New Testament, you have to start by forgetting what you know about the English word. It's not the same word; it's not the same concept. You see, frequently we use the English word ‘hope’ for something that we desire, but we aren't confident of.

For example, I'm, as you know, a football fan; I grew up playing football and grew up cheering the Dallas Cowboys, still do. It's been a bit of a drought over the last bit, but I still cheer. And I hope that the Cowboys have a winning season. That's a desire, but I'm not necessarily confident that it's going to happen. Sometimes we even use the word ‘hope’ for what's nearly impossible. I hope the Cowboys will win the Super Bowl this year. But I'll be shocked if that happens in light of what's going on.

So, our English word then, consists of ‘desire mixed with uncertainty,’ desire and uncertainty. That is not at all like the word here. The Greek word is ‘desire plus certainty, plus eager

anticipation, desire, certainty, and eager anticipation for when it comes. In fact, the leading Greek Lexicon defines the word 'hope' like this, "Looking forward to something with reason for confidence in its fulfillment." This hope of glorification that spelled out in verse 2, look at it again, includes three great expectations that we're certain of, and we're eager for; one, Christ will appear; number two, we will see Him; and number three, we will be like Him. That is hope! And that hope, if it's real, will motivate us.

You say, "How does hope motivate us?" Well think about how this happens generally in life. Think about when a woman is pregnant. How does the couple's hope in this biblical sense? They are, they are certain that it's coming, and they are eagerly anticipating, how does their hope change the way they live? It is their hope, in the biblical sense of the word, that compels that couples to make huge changes in their lives. Think about the money and time they will invest in making a nursery for that child. Or maybe they'll even make one of the greatest changes and they'll buy a gas minivan.

I remember years ago, I was walking California, and I came across this brand new Honda minivan, and there's a bumper sticker on it, and the bumper sticker said this, "From hippie to yuppie (That's young, urban, professional.) From hippie to yuppie in nine short months."

You see, their hope changes how they live. In the same way, our hope, the confident, certain expectation of future glory compels us to battle our flesh. Why? Because we know what's coming. Our hope causes us to persevere, to keep battling, foot by bloody foot because of the hope of what we know is coming.

This is how life works in so many areas. I mean, think about it. Many people only get through the work week in hope of what? The weekend, the weekend's coming! Others only get through a year's work in the hope of vacation. Every day people endure serious and painful surgeries in the hope of a better, healthier, more pain-free life.

But notice here, our hope is not fixed on us, but notice what he says, “on Him!” Our hope is in a person, Jesus Christ, 1 Timothy 1:1, “...Christ Jesus...is our hope.” Our hope is grounded on His promise, that's verse 2, and on His person. I love the way Hebrews 10:23 puts it, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, (Why?) for (because) He who promised is faithful.”

Now, look back at verse 2 in 1 John 3, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be.” That is, it hasn't been manifested; it hasn't been made visible. But “...We know that when He appears, we will be like Him.” There is our hope of sharing Christ's glory, “Because we will see Him just as He is.” There's our hope of seeing Christ's glory. John says that this hope of seeing and sharing the glory of Christ compels us to pursue sanctification.

This is everywhere in the New Testament. Let me just show you one text; turn to Philippians; Philippians, chapter 3, verse 12. Paul has just talked about his justification, that he's been declared right with God through the work of Jesus Christ. That's the paragraph before. And then he says in verse 12 of Philippians 3, “Not that I have already obtained.” Now you'll notice the word ‘it’ is added by the translators; I don't think it helps here. You could literally translate the first phrase of verse 12:

Not that I've already arrived, (Arrived at what?) or have already become perfect, (I'm not yet perfectly like Jesus Christ, but what do I do?) I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

He said, “Listen, the reason Christ saved me was to make me like Him, and I press on to that same goal!

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet, (I'm not there yet.); but one thing I do: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press

on (The picture is of a runner in a race.) I press on toward the goal, (Because I want the prize! And what's the prize? It's) the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

It's being like Jesus Christ, and he says, "I run with all my strength, with all my energy pursuing the goal, and the prize that comes with it." That is the reality of our motivation; it's what compels us towards sanctification.

There's a third detail back in our text, and that is, Our Role in Sanctification." Again, notice verse 3, "And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself," purifies himself. Now, that is a very interesting expression. And it teaches us a couple of important truths. Let me just give them to you, a couple of truths about our role in sanctification.

First of all, sanctification is, "Not a ritual that I perform, but it is a real cleansing of heart and life." Back in the Septuagint, that is in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the translation that was done a couple of 100 years before Christ that was used in the New Testament era, in the Septuagint, this word 'purifies' is used exclusively for ritual or ceremonial cleansing.

But in The New Testament, at times it's used that way. For example, in the book of Acts, it's used that way when Paul is preparing to take the Nazirite vow in-Acts 24. But it's also used for moral purification to become spiritually clean internally. It's clearly that sense that John has in mind here. It's not talking about ritual or ceremonial cleansing; he's talking about real inward cleansing. How do I know that? Well, we're going to see it in the very next paragraph. In the very next paragraph, he keeps talking about sin versus righteousness, sin versus righteousness. He's talking about real cleansing of the heart and life.

The second point we learn here about our role is that as we live this out, sanctification is not a one-time event, it is an ongoing process. The Greek verb is in the present tense, literally, "Everyone having this hope is purifying himself." In other words, this is not something we do once; this is something we do repeatedly, daily in an ongoing way. And we do it throughout

this life, we never arrive at perfection in this life. Now in systematic theology terms, this continual cleansing of ourselves is referred to as “Progressive Sanctification.”

There's a third lesson we learned here about our role and that is, “Sanctification is not received passively but is worked out actively.” This cuts across what a lot of people think about sanctification. It's not received passively; it's not something God just zaps me with, it's something that I have to work out actively. Notice again, verse 3, the Christian “purifies himself.”

Now, please be careful here, don't get confused. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from the stain and the guilt of sin and makes us acceptable to God. That work is something Christ must do and He alone. This is clear in John's letter; look at chapter 1; 1 John 1, verse 7. It says, “...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Go down to chapter 2, verse 2, “...He himself (the Righteous One, Jesus) is the propitiation (the satisfaction of God's justice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.” Anywhere in the world someone gets saved, it's through the work of Jesus Christ. Chapter 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 (Notice this, not through us and our actions, but) through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son (Here it is, again.) to be (the satisfaction of God's wrath) the propitiation for our sins.

So, understand this, you will only be made right with God, you will only be saved through the work and the work alone of Jesus Christ. You can only be cleansed from the guilt and the stain of sin through His work.

But, having been cleansed from the guilt and the stain of sin, now, being a Christian, we have a role in cleansing ourselves from the controlling power of sin in our lives once we have been redeemed by the work of Christ. Again, don't misunderstand, only God can truly change our hearts. Just as only God can save us, only God can sanctify us. However, when it comes to

sanctification, God only produces that change in our hearts as you and I expend maximum effort in obedience in the use of the means that God has provided.

By the way, this is the way God normally works. Think about this fact. Only God can heal you. And can God do that directly without the use of means? Sure, he can; I think He does that often in the lives of people. But how does God work normally? He uses means, He uses doctors and medicine and the healing power that He's put within the human body. Think about crops; only God can make a crop grow. But again, He uses means to accomplish that normally. The farmer sows the seed, the farmer plows the ground first, sows the seed, then he weeds, and then he allows time and sun and rain to have its effect. In the same way, sanctification is also God's work, but He uses means and what means does He use? He uses you. He uses your pursuit of obeying Jesus Christ.

Turn to Philippians, chapter 2, one of my favorite passages about this; Philippians, chapter 2, and look at verse 12, "So then, my beloved," now notice the people he's writing these verses to are already loved by God, they're already Christians. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Work it out, you've been saved, your beloved by God, you've been redeemed, you belong to Him, now work that salvation out. This is a call to progressive sanctification, this is a call to pursue obedience with your maximum effort.

But notice why this works, verse 12-13, "...work out your (own) salvation...for (Because here's why.) it is God who is at work in you." This is why sanctification works; not because of what we do, but God uses the means of our pursuit of obedience to be at work in us. And notice what God's work in us looks like, verse 13: "God...is at work in you, both to will (That means God is the one who produces a willingness to obey, a desire to obey; He changes our desires and-gives us the resolve to pursue obedience.) and to work."

He's the one who actually produces that obedience through our desire for obedience and our willingness to pursue that. So, you see how it works; I expend the maximum effort and God produces the change. That's the reality of sanctification. So, that's our role.

There's a fourth detail we learn back in our text in 1 John 3, and that is, "The Pattern of Sanctification." Verse 3 says, "...everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure," (literally, "as that one is pure") John, seven times in his letter, uses this demonstrative pronoun to refer to Jesus Christ. John's referring here without question to Jesus Christ, and he says, "Jesus is pure; He isn't a sinner now, and He wasn't a sinner in the past who has now become pure—He never had to purify Himself as we are commanded to do. He was and is completely sinless!"

Look at 1 John 3, verse 5; 1 John 3:5 puts it very clearly, "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin." 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He...knew no sin." Hebrews 4:15, He is "without sin." Hebrews 7:26, Jesus, our High Priest is "...holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners." He is the standard of our holiness. Folks, do not compare yourself and evaluate your holiness by the people around you. Don't look at your spouse and go, "Ha, I'm doing pretty well." No! Evaluate your holiness by Jesus Christ; He's the model, He's the pattern, He's the standard and He's the goal. Look back at chapter 2, verse 1, "Jesus Christ is the Righteous One," verse 6, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." He's the standard!

And let me just say what John is saying here is if being like Him, if pursuing that standard is your desired final destination, if you really want one day to be like Him, then guess what? In this life, you're going to choose the only road that leads there, and that's pursuing Christ's likeness here. "Everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Now there's one last point I want to make; it's not in our text, but it's an important point, a question I know that many have, and that is, what is "The Means of Sanctification," what's the

means? There are so many unbiblical means that Christians try to use to gain holiness. I've got a full list of my notes. Let me just give you a couple: man-made rules or legalism, some secret method or formula.

Listen, there's always somebody writing the book saying, "Here's the secret." There's no secret, some sudden spiritual crisis, and this takes different forms in different denominations. The Methodist form of this is a second blessing, a second crisis like salvation. The Baptist form is full surrender or a rededication of your life. Some Bible churches say this, you've accepted Jesus as Savior; now you need to accept Him as Lord. That's not a biblical concept at all. But this idea that there's some spiritual crisis that catapults you into a new level of spiritual maturity, it's a lie. You're never going to go to bed, immature, and wake up the next day spiritually mature; it's not going to happen like that. That's why the New Testament compares spiritual growth to physical growth—it is slow, tedious, at times imperceptible, but if there's life, it's relentless, it will happen.

Another wrong means is solely prayer. Some people don't expend any effort, they just keep praying, "God change me, change me, change me, change me, and then they blame Him when He doesn't. A charismatic experience, self-reformation or behavior modification, all of those are wrong means to produce sanctification.

So, what are the primary biblical means of sanctification? I wish I had time to really fill this out, let me encourage you to go listen to a couple of messages. One of them is part 4 of a series I taught on Romans 8:5-13; I really get into the meat of it there. Also listen to Ephesians 4, verses 20 to 24. Both of those messages deal with this at length; let me just give you a summary. Here are the primary means. Number one, "Live by faith in Christ." Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

My faith, if I'm going to be sanctified, can never be in me, but always relentlessly in Christ.

Number two, and this is absolutely key, “Read, meditate on, and apply the Word of God.” The Word of God is the means of sanctification above all other means. In John 17:17, Jesus was praying to the Father for His disciples, and He prayed this, “(Father) Sanctify them in (by means of) the truth, Your word is truth.” In other words, sanctify them by means of your Word, that’s what He was praying. You must read, meditate on, and apply the Word of God.

Number three, “Expend maximum effort to pursue obedience by putting off old patterns (of thinking, attitudes, words, behavior) and putting on new patterns of those things.” You see, Biblical sanctification is synergistic. That is, you participate, and the Spirit participates.

John Owen put it this way, “The Spirit works in us and with us, not against us or without us.” Sanctification is not solely my work, and it’s not solely the Spirit’s work; nor is it cooperation in which I do my part and the Spirit does His part. Rather, we work **because** the Spirit is at work in us as we saw in Philippians 2. Still, your progress and sanctification will be conditioned on and commensurate with your effort. It requires putting specific patterns off, putting them to death, and putting on the virtues of Christ.

Number four, “Depend completely on Christ and His Spirit, to enable you to pursue obedience and produce real change.” In other words, don’t think you’re doing this. John 15:5, in the context of bearing fruit, Jesus says, “...apart from Me you can do nothing.” Romans 8:13, “...if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Real sanctification, real heart change is accomplished solely by the Spirit of Christ that dwells in us. We must never depend on our own efforts or even on the means of grace, but always on the Spirit of grace.

And number five, “Pray for sanctification.” Christ prayed the night before His crucifixion, and He still prays for the sanctification of His followers.

Listen again to John 17:17, this is a prayer, “(Father) Sanctify them in (by means of) the truth, Your word is truth.” Jesus prayed and is our Great High Priest, still prays for your holiness, and He taught us to pray faithfully for our own sanctification, as well as for the sanctification of those in our family and church. The final petition of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6, verse 13, “...do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” That's a prayer for sanctification, and Jesus said, “Pray that all the time.” Everyone who has this hope fixed on him, purifies himself just as He is pure.

Listen, if you call yourself a Christian, that verse describes you, not in perfection, but in the direction of your life. And if it doesn't describe you, if verse 3 does not describe you, you are not a Christian. You are just lip-synching with Christian words, and I say this with a heavy heart, “You are a fraud.” Perhaps like Milli Vanilli, you've begun to deceive yourself that you really are the real thing, but according to the Word of God, you're not. “Everyone who has this hope in Him fixed on Jesus, purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (Paraphase.)

If you're here this morning, and you've claimed Christ but as you look honestly at your life, you say, “That's not my desire, that's not what I've done, that's not the pursuit of my life,” and you say, “I'm not a real Christian.” Then listen, you just need where you sit, to repent in your heart, to cry out to the God of mercy, and ask Him to do what you can't do, and that is, change you at the heart level to radically change you into a new person. And God has never turned away a person who came with a contrite, humble heart, seeking that through the work of Jesus Christ because of His death for sinners and His resurrection. God will answer that prayer, and through Christ, He will do that work in you, if you'll humble yourself even this morning.

Christian, let me ask you, “Are you daily repenting of and confessing your sin? And are you seeking to put off patterns of sin and true repentance? Are you seeking holiness? Are you seeking to be like Jesus Christ? Are you seeking to put on the virtues of Christ?” “Everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”? Or Hebrews 12:14 “Pursue...the sanctification (Pursue it.) without which no one will see the Lord.”