

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 24, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



## THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *The Father's Great Love* *1 John 3:1*

We are kicking off another chapter of the Apostle John's letter this evening by focusing on the first verse of 1 John, chapter 3. Look with me at these marvelous words that begin this third (3<sup>rd</sup>) chapter. (READ: 1 John 3:1)...

*"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." -1 John 3:1 (NKJV)*

Now, here is what we know about 1 John...

### **BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2<sup>ND</sup>, & 3<sup>RD</sup> JOHN:**

(1) **AUTHOR = The Apostle John** – If you will notice, the letter of 1 John bears no inscription (name, autograph, signature). It doesn't give us a name of an individual in the actual letter itself. For that reason 1 John is often called an "anonymous letter," but 2 and 3 John do carry an inscription. They are written by someone called "the Elder," a reference to one of Jesus' closest disciples/apostles who was a part of Jesus inner circle, John. The moniker "Elder" does indicate that John is advanced in years when these letter were written. The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John's Gospel, so the traditional view and the most commonly held view is that all three were written by the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20-24). There is no reason to doubt this and early church leaders titled these three little book by John's name.

John actually wrote 5 books in the New Testament... not just these three.

### **5 Books Written by the Beloved Disciple:**

- 1. The Gospel of John**
- 2. First John**
- 3. Second John**
- 4. Third John**
- 5. The Book of the Revelation**

And this I think is significant... all of his books were written later in life and after all the other books in the Bible were recorded.

### **Here are some facts we know about John:**

- **He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41)**
- **He and his brother James were fishermen with their father (Mk. 1:19-20)**
- **He and James were called Boanerges or Sons of thunder by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54)**
- **He was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37)**
- **He was a close associate of Simon Peter... the first ones to arrive at the tomb (Jn. 20:2-8), they suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (Acts 3 & 4), and they traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (Acts 8:14-17) not to mention that they were the disciples closest to Jesus**
- **He was one of the pillars (prime leaders) of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9)**
- **From external and extra-biblical sources (history/tradition), like Polycarp, Papias (*pappy-us*), and Justin Martyr (early church fathers) we are told the following about John from his writings – These early church fathers often quoted John and used his writings**
- **Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John - They have writings dated as early as the 2nd century**
- **John was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote The Revelation (cp. Rev. 1:9)**
- **He returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name - Archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines**
- **John outlived all the other apostles**
- **The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John probably close to the same time he wrote these small epistles which bear his name.**
- **Remember the book of the Revelation was written about the vision that John saw while banished to the Greek island of Patmos on the Aegean sea.**
- **Tradition says that this was after John had been sentenced to death by martyrdom.**
- **We know little about John's later life and death from the Bible**

- **The most insightful bit of information comes from John 21 when the risen Christ was talking to Peter about Peter's death** - After Jesus told Peter that he would not live long Peter asked about John's death. Jesus replied that if John lived until Christ's return, that was not Peter's concern. This was not a promise that John would live until the Lord returned, but it does seem to indicate that the Lord knew John would live a long time (John 21:19-23)
- **Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience**
- **Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus** – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John's death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...

### **God Questions? How Did the Apostle John Die?**

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9). The Bible does not give us details on how the apostle John died, but tradition gives us a few theories.

The most plausible theory of John's death states that John was arrested in Ephesus and faced martyrdom when his enemies threw him in a huge basin of boiling oil. However, according to the tradition, John was miraculously delivered from death. The authorities then sentenced John to slave labor in the mines of Patmos. On this island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea, John had a vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed, possibly due to old age, and he returned to Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. He died as an old man sometime after AD 98, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Another theory concerning John's death is associated with a second-century bishop named Papias of Hierapolis. According to one commentary on Papias's writings, John was killed by a group of Jewish men. However, many historians believe Papias was misquoted or misread and doubt the credibility of this theory.

There is also a legend that says John did not die but rather ascended straight to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. There is no biblical evidence to lend validity to this story.

Ultimately, it is not essential to know how the apostle John died. What is important is the fact that he was not ashamed of Christ (see Luke 9:26) and was willing to die for his faith. A man will not die for something he knows to be a lie. John knew the truth that Jesus had been resurrected, and he was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith in his Savior.

- (2) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D. Again, we don't know the exact time or order of the books having been written, but here are some possible dates for John's writings...

### **Dates for John's Biblical Writings:**

1. **The Gospel of John = AD 80 to 98**
2. **First, Second and Third John = AD 90 to 95**
3. **The Book of the Revelation = AD 94 to 98**

Of course we know God inspired the Bible and that it was written with His leading, but this may explain why the book of John seems so applicable to the readers of today. **Think of this... John had more time to think about what questions were raised in the 50 or more years after the resurrection of Christ. He knew what doubts had been raised and how to answer the questions before we knew to ask them.**

**(3) PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus** – Again, as with most books in the Bible, we cannot know with certainty when and from where these small letters of John were written. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that guesses. It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church. Also, 1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21; and 3 John 4 all reference John's readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

**(4) RECIPIENTS = 3 different audiences** - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

### **3 Recipients of John's Letter:**

1. **Letter 1 = The Ephesian church (and/or surrounding churches)** - The first epistle was not addressed to anyone in particular, but was written more as a sermon
2. **Letter 2 = Elect lady** - The second was written to an unnamed “elect lady.”
3. **Letter 3 = Gaius** - The third to a man name Gaius. There are three men who bear that name to whom the letter could have been written. There was a Gaius in Macedonia (Acts 19: 29), Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Derbe (Acts 20:4).

**(5) PURPOSE = Multiple purposes** - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

### **3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:**

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**
  2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1**
  3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**
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### Application Questions:

1. Practically, how can we keep our first love for Christ fresh and vital?
2. Since sinful anger is contrary to God's love, how should an angry a believer overcome this sin toward others who have hurt, wronged or deeply angered him or her?
3. Does God love the entire world in the same way and to the same degree that He loves His children? Give biblical support.
4. "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (James 4:4). How then should we properly love worldly people?

*Why does God love us?* This short question is among the most profound questions ever asked. And no human would ever be able to answer it sufficiently. A couple of things are certain...

### 5 Reasons We Can't Attribute to God's Love for Us:

- (1) God does not love us because we are lovable
- (2) God does not love us because we deserve His love
- (3) God does not love us because we are less sinful – We are not! We are most likely far more sinful than that we are willing a readily admit
- (4) God does not love us because we are better than others
- (5) God does not love us because we are like Him

If anything, the opposite is true. The state of mankind since the fall is one of rebellion and disobedience. Jeremiah 17:9 describes man's inner condition, *"<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* Our innermost beings are so corrupted by sin that even we don't realize the extent to which sin has tainted us. In our natural state, we do not seek God; we do not love God; we do not desire God.

Romans 3:10-12 clearly presents the state of the natural, unregenerate person, *"<sup>10</sup> As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one. <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. '"* How then is it possible for a holy, righteous, and perfect God to love such creatures? To understand this we must understand something of the nature and character of God.

In this very letter we are studying (1 John), in 1 John 4:8 and 16 tell us that "God is love."

- 1 John 4:8, *"<sup>8</sup> He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."*
- 1 John 4:16, *"<sup>16</sup> And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."*

Never was a more important declaration made than this—God is love. This is a profound statement. God doesn't just love; He is love. His nature and essence are love. Love permeates

His very being and infuses all His other attributes, even His wrath and anger. Because God's very nature is love, He must demonstrate love, just as He must demonstrate all His attributes because doing so glorifies Him. Glorifying God is the highest, the best, and the most noble of all acts, so, naturally, glorifying Himself is what He must do, because He is the highest and the best, and He deserves all glory.

Since it is God's essential nature to love, He demonstrates His love by lavishing it on undeserving people who are in rebellion against Him. God's love is not a sappy, sentimental, romantic feeling. Rather, it is agape love, the love of self-sacrifice. He demonstrates this sacrificial love...

### **How Has God Demonstrated His Love:**

- (1) **By sending His Son to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin (1 John 4:10)** – *“<sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*
- (2) **By drawing us to Himself (John 6:37 & 44)** – John 6:37, *“<sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”* And verse 44 says, *“<sup>44</sup> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*
- (3) **By forgiving us of our rebellion against Him (1 John 2:12 & Romans 5:8)** – *“I write to you, little children, because your sins are **forgiven** you for His name's sake.”* And Romans 5:8 says it, *“<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
- (4) **By sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, thereby enabling us to love as He loves (John 16:5-7 and Romans 5:5)** – *“<sup>5</sup> ‘But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’’ <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”* And Romans 5:5 says, *“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been **poured out** in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

He did this in spite of the fact that we did not deserve it. Again, *“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

And here is something you need to know tonight... God's love is personal.

- He knows each of us individually
- And loves us personally
- His is a mighty love that has no beginning and no end

It is this experiencing of God's love that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Why does God love us? It is because of who He is... **“God is love.”**



If you think of it... God's love for us, that He would love us at all, is amazing. Why would God love us at all?

As I have pondered the love of Christ for us, and the different ways that the Bible presents it to us, I have seen four ways that the depth of Christ's love is revealed...

#### **4 Ways the Depth of Christ's Love is Revealed:**

*We might also call these 4 assurances of God's love for us... these may be seen as assurances in your life that God loves you...*

**(1) We know the depth of someone's love for us by what it costs him** - If he sacrifices his life for us, it assures us of deeper love than if he only sacrifices a few bruises. So we will see the depth of Christ's love by the greatness of what it cost him.

**(2) We know the depth of someone's love for us by how little we deserve it** - If we have treated him well all our life, and have done all that he expects of us, then when he loves us, it will not prove as much love as it would if he loved us when we had offended him, and shunned him, and disdained him. The more undeserving we are, the more amazing and deep is his love for us. So we will see the depth of Christ's love in relation to how undeserving are the objects of his love. Listen to Paul's words in **Romans 5:5-8**, *"<sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. <sup>6</sup> For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

**(3) We know the depth of someone's love for us by the greatness of the benefits we receive in being loved –**

- If we are helped to pass an exam, we will feel loved in one way.
- If we are helped to get a job, we will feel loved another way.
- If we are helped to escape from an oppressive captivity and given freedom for the rest of our life, we will feel loved another way.
- And if we are rescued from eternal torment and given a place in the presence of God with fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, we will know a depth of love that surpasses all others.

Look at our passage again, and read on down a few verses in **1 John 3:1-3**, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."* So we will see the depth of Christ's love by the greatness of the benefits we receive in being loved by him.

**(4) We know the depth of someone's love for us by the freedom with which they love us**

- If a person does good things for us because someone is making him, when he doesn't really want to, then we don't think the love is very deep. *Love is deep in proportion to its liberty*. So if an insurance company pays you \$40,000 because you lose your spouse, you don't usually marvel at how much this company loves you. There were legal constraints. But if your Sunday School class makes all your meals for a month after your spouse dies, and someone calls you every day, and visits you every week, then you call it love, because they don't have to do this. It is free and willing. So we will see the depth of Christ's love for us in his freedom, *"No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord"* (John 10:18).

That's what I see in the New Testament. There are specific texts that stress each of those four ways of seeing the depth of Christ's love for us. Listen to Paul's prayer in *Ephesians 3:14–19*, *"<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* In a simple word, that is what John wants us to see and understand in our verse we are looking at this evening (1 John 3:1)

Love is one of the greatest motivators in the world. When someone loves you, it gives you hope and strength. When you feel unloved or rejected by someone you love, it can be devastating.

**George Matheson** was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish pastor. He was born with an eye defect that left him totally blind by age 18. Shortly after this, his fiancée left him, deciding she would not be content to be married to a blind preacher. Years later, at age 40, Matheson was alone on the night of his sister's wedding. Something happened, perhaps the memory of being rejected by his own fiancée years before, that caused him severe mental suffering. Suddenly, the words of a hymn came to him as if dictated by some inward voice. The whole thing was done in five minutes and he never had to edit or correct it (from Kenneth Osbeck, *Amazing Grace* [Kregel], p. 49). The first verse is, *"O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe that in Thine ocean-depths its flow May richer, fuller be."*

The third verse reflects Matheson's experience of God's love through suffering, *"O joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee; I trace the rainbow thro' the rain, and feel the promise is not vain that morn shall tearless be."*



In his blindness and loneliness, perhaps feeling forsaken by the love of a woman, Matheson sought and found comfort in the unchanging love of God (this story is also in, John MacArthur, *The Love of God* [Word], p. 151).

Although human love is wonderful, God's love is far greater. It is the most life-changing force in the universe. The apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14-19, *"<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

My task is to speak about this unfathomable love of God in Christ. To the extent that God opens our eyes to see it, we will be changed people.

The apostle John has just said our passage from last week in 1 John 2:29, *"<sup>29</sup> If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him."*

The thought that we have been born of God causes John to exclaim in our passage in 1 John 3:1, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him"*

His point is simple and powerful...

*The Father's great love has made us His children and it distinguishes us from the world*

### **3 Simple Truths of the Father's Great Love in 1 John 3:1:**

- (1) The Father's great love has been bestowed on us**
- (2) The Father's great love has made us His children**
- (3) The Father's great love distinguishes us from the world**

### **THE FATHER'S GREAT LOVE HAS BEEN BESTOWED ON US**

The apostle John had been blessed more than most men in the history of the world. Many prophets had desired to see what John had seen and to hear what he had heard. Jesus said to His disciple, including John, in Matthew 13:16-17, *"<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; <sup>17</sup> for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

Think of it... John had personally sat under Jesus profound teaching.... He heard it first-hand. He had seen Jesus perform dozens of powerful miracles. He had seen Jesus transfigured in His glory. He had witnessed Jesus alive from the dead and stood transfixed as He ascended bodily into heaven.

Here he is as an old man. We ask, “John, as you think back over your illustrious life, what stands out? What motivates you and gives you hope?” And John replies in our passage (1 John 3:1), “*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*” His words show us several things about the Father’s great love. I want you to see these in this love the Father has bestowed on us...

## **2 Important Things Concerning the Love the Father Has Bestowed on Us:**

**(1) The Father’s great love should both amaze and instruct us** – Notice our verse again...

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” - 1 John 3:1*

“*Behold*” is often translated, “*see.*” It is both an exclamation and a command. As an exclamation, it shows that *the Father’s great love should amaze us.*

- Some things grow commonplace over time.
- We’ve heard about them and known them for years.
- Maybe at first, when it was new, an idea or experience affected us.
- But over the years, the effect grows weaker and weaker, until finally it’s just a far-distant memory.
- But the Father’s great love for us is the kind of experience that should grow stronger and stronger over the years, until it totally dominates every aspect of our lives.

Listen, the love of God should consume our thoughts and control our behavior...

### **When we “see” the love of the Father it should...**

- 1. It should motivate us to serve God and to live holy lives -**
- 2. It should give us comfort in all our trials** – If He truly loves us, and He does, He won’t leave us.
- 3. It should fill us with the eager hope of being with Him in heaven -**
- 4. It should fill us with awe and worship** - That He, the holy sovereign of the universe, would set His love on a sinful, self-willed rebel like me! “Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, should die for me!”

Don’t let yourself ever hear of the Father’s great love and think, “Ho hum!” It ought always to amaze you.

But, also, the word *behold* is a command. This shows that *the Father's great love should instruct us.*

**The command is... “Stop everything else! Look at this and think about it! Ponder the significance of it!”**

The word translated, “*what manner*” (translated as “how great” in some translation) is, literally, “what kind.” It originally meant, “of what country,” and always implies astonishment (John Stott, *The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 118). It’s as if John thinks about the Father’s great love and says, “*Where does this come from? It must be from heaven, because there’s nothing like it in this world!*” ★

**Alexander Maclaren (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], on 1 John, pp. 298-299) points out that a habit of devout, thankful meditation on God’s great love as seen in the sacrifice of His Son for us, along with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God because of it, lies at the foundation of all vigorous, happy Christian living. He uses the illustration that if you had a friend in Australia, but you never thought about this friend and never communicated with him, that friendship would fade and not have much significance in your life. For the friendship to affect you, you must think often about this friend and what he means to you. Maclaren also points out that such thought always requires great effort.**

We all have too many other things crowding into our daily lives. If we do not deliberately take the time and effort to block out all of these pressing things and to focus on what God has done for us in Christ, His great love will get crowded out of our thoughts and daily lives.

The Father’s great love also should instruct us about our relationships with one another. This is the apostle Paul’s thought in *Ephesians 5:1-2*, “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*” Imitate God by walking in love, with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as your great example!

If you need more specifics about what walking in love really looks like, go to Paul’s great chapter on love in *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*. He writes, “*4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.*”

Can you substitute your name in place of “love”? (“Buddy is patient,” etc.) Those qualities should increasingly describe your relationships with others, beginning with those that you live with.

We’re all prone to excuse our lack of love by blaming those that we are supposed to love.

- We say, “I am usually a very loving person, but if you knew how unloving and hurtful he has been is, you’d understand why I treat him as I do.”
- Or, “Just don’t think I can let it go... the things she has said behind my back!”
- Or, “I work long hours to provide for my wife, but all she does is gripe and criticize me. Sure, I’m mean and angry sometimes, but who wouldn’t be?”
- But such excuses don’t hold up because such unloving behavior does not in any way resemble God’s great love for you.
- Where would you be if God made up excuses for why He should withhold His love from you?

He doesn’t need to make up excuses—He has legitimate reasons why you do not deserve His love!

- He would have been completely justified to leave you in your sins, with no remedy.
- But, instead, He so loved you that He sent His only begotten Son to bear the penalty that you justly deserved.
- Now He says, “Imitate My love by loving those who are insensitive, mean, and unloving toward you.”

So John shows us that the Father’s great love should both amaze and instruct us. Stop and behold it often!

**(2) The Father’s great love has been lavishly bestowed on us as a gift** - Notice our verse again... *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” -1 John 3:1*

The word *“bestowed”* is, literally, “given.” It points to the fact that God’s love is not earned or deserved. Rather, it is purely a gift that comes from His undeserved favor, or grace.

Paul emphasizes this in Romans 5... look at it with me **(READ: Romans 5:1-11)**

*“<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and*

perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. <sup>6</sup> For when we were still (helpless) without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. <sup>10</sup> For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup> And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” – Romans 5:1-11 (NKJV)

1. First he says (5:6), “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”
2. In 5:8, he adds, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
3. In 5:10, he states that “while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son....”

Add up the terms: we were *without strength (helpless)*, *ungodly*, *sinners*, and *enemies* of God. His great love is demonstrated in that He sent His Son to die for us while we were in such an awful condition!

Paul says a similar thing in Ephesians 2:4-7, “<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” God is under no obligation to save us. He could have left us, as He left the fallen angels, with no way of salvation. He justly condemned them to the eternal fire without any chance to repent and be saved. But, instead, He set His great love on us to raise us from spiritual death to life, and even more than that, to make us His beloved children through the new birth!

Paul ends that great chapter, Romans 8, with these triumphant words in Romans 8:38-39, “<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The fact that God’s great love is a gift means that you cannot do anything to earn it or deserve it. All you can do is receive it. You cannot vow to pay it back, because the cost is infinite and because God will not be anyone’s debtor. This means that your

pride is one of the biggest factors that will prevent you from receiving and experiencing God's love in Christ. But if you will acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you cannot do anything to deserve or earn God's love, the gift is there for the taking, no matter how badly you have sinned. All that you can do is to receive God's gift of eternal life by faith and bow in wonder, thanks, and love in response. The Father offers such great love to all who will receive it.

### THE FATHER'S GREAT LOVE HAS MADE US HIS CHILDREN

*<sup>1</sup>Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.* -1 John 3:1

Because God has bestowed His great love on us, we are now called children of God. John adds, *"and such we are"* (the KJV and NKJV omit these words, but there is solid manuscript support for them).

ESV - *"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."*

NIV - *"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."*

NASB - *"See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and in fact we are. For this reason the world does not know us: because it did not know Him."*

NLT - *"See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him."*

The idea is that we not only have the name or title, *"children of God,"* but that that title reflects our true condition. Through His power, God causes us to be born again through His Holy Spirit (see John 3:1-8; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:9, 10; 5:1, 18). He imparts new life to us, so that we are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. We actually become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), although we never become "gods" in any sense. But, we share His very life.

This means that becoming a Christian is not a matter of human willpower, but rather of God's power. In John 1:12-13 we read, *<sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them He gave the <sup>[a]</sup>right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* Those who receive Jesus Christ do not do so because of their will, but because God by His sovereign will causes them to be born again. This takes away all ground for boasting and leaves us



bowing in adoration and awe, that the Father would bestow His great love on us apart from anything in us.

The fact that God's love has made us His children should also cause us to feel His love and to love Him in return, even (or, *especially*) in all of the trials that we encounter. I have told you before that I never appreciated how much my dad loves me until I held my firstborn in my arms. As I gazed at her, helpless and dependent and so beautifully formed by God, it hit me: "My dad loves me as much as I love her! And, what is even greater, God loves me far more than this!" As we already read from Romans 8, there is no trial on this earth, and not even death itself, that can separate us from His great love!

Perhaps at times you have wished that you had been born into a family with great wealth. But the truth is, such families are often lacking in love. It is a far greater privilege to be born into God's family as His dear child. All the riches of Christ are yours for time and eternity! John adds another thought:

### **THE FATHER'S GREAT LOVE DISTINGUISHES US FROM THE WORLD**

*"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." -1 John 3:1*

The great tragedy of those in this world is that they do not know God. In **John 1:11** we read, *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."*

John undoubtedly has that verse in mind at the end of **1 John 3:1**, where he writes, *"Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."* Jesus warned His disciples that they would suffer persecution, especially from the religious crowd. Then He added in **John 16:3**, *"And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me."* (See also, 1 Cor. 1:21.)

Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord distinguishes us from the world. One of the distinguishing marks of God's children is that they know Him. Jesus said in **John 17:3**, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* In 1 John 3:10, he divides the world into two opposite camps: the children of God and the children of the devil. If you have experienced God's great love as shown at the cross of Jesus Christ, you are a child of God and know Him. If you have not trusted in Jesus Christ, you are a child of the devil and do not know God. There is no third camp.

Because of this divide, if you know God's love in Jesus Christ, you are an alien in this evil world that has rejected Christ. You should *feel* like an alien when you are in the company of the world, or when you encounter the world's godless entertainment. You should not expect to be popular in the world's eyes. You should not seek to gain the world's approval; to the

contrary, you should fear it (Luke 6:27). When you go into the world, you should not go to join them in their dissipation (1 Pet. 4:3-4). Rather, go as Jesus did, to seek and to save the lost. He attended the gatherings of sinners, but not to join them in their frivolous revelry. He went as the Great Physician, to heal their terminally ill souls (Luke 5:29-32).

Can you honestly say, “The world does not know me”? Can you truly say, “I am a stranger to this world”? If you cannot answer those questions affirmatively, you’d better examine how well you know and experience the Father’s great love. If you know His love and you are His child, you will be distinguished from this evil world that rejects His love. As the hymn writer put it, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace” (Helen Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”).

## CONCLUSION

Several years ago, John MacArthur had the opportunity to spend several days traveling with the well-known gospel musicians, Bill and Gloria Gaither. At one point, he asked Bill what, in his estimation, were the greatest Christian lyrics ever written, aside from the inspired Psalms. Without hesitation, Gaither began quoting the words from F. M. Lehman’s “The Love of God”... look/listen to these words...

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell.  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;  
His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin.

When hoary time shall pass away, and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,  
When men who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,  
God’s love so sure, shall still endure, all measureless and strong;  
Redeeming grace to Adam’s race—the saints’ and angels’ song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry.  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure—the saints’ and angels’ song.

Gaither said that no lyrics in all hymnody surpass the third stanza of that song (MacArthur, *The Love of God*, pp. xi, xii). That third stanza, by the way, was part of an ancient lengthy poem composed in Arabic in 1096 by a Jewish songwriter, Rabbi Mayer, in Germany. The lines were found in revised form on the walls of a patient’s room in an insane asylum after

his death. The author of the hymn heard these words cited at a camp meeting, where he wrote them down. God later gave him the words for the first two stanzas and the chorus, which his daughter put to music (Osbeck, *Amazing Grace*, p. 47).

If you know God through faith in Jesus Christ, pause often to revel in the Father's great love that made you His child. If you do not know God, His great love calls you even now to the cross, where Jesus Christ shed His blood to pay the penalty for all that will believe in Him.