



Abiding and Practicing Righteousness (1 John 2:28-3:10)

I. INTRO

- A. No doubt most of us in this room believe in God.
- B. According to a 2014 Gallup poll about 75% of Americans believe in a Christian God (50% identify as Protestant and 25% identify as Catholic).
- C. Another survey by Baylor University's Religion Department, pointed out that approximately 40% of people who believe in God believe God is removed from the world, which by definition implies that there is a large percentage of people who believe in God but don't believe that God can be known.
- D. This causes me to ask two questions:
 - 1. What percentage of Americans really knows God?
 - 2. What percentage of consistent church attenders really knows God? [We have a lot of work to do.]
- E. It's really impossible to know, so let's make this personal:
 - 1. What percentage of the people in this room really knows God?
 - 2. How do you know you know God?
 - 3. When you think of knowing God, what comes to mind?
- F. How well we know someone is relative to the **number and depth** of shared experiences. [Illustration: one man said he will never say that he knows a person until he has been caught in a blizzard with that person and they only have one blanket.]
- G. The first epistle of John is all about knowing God. John first met Jesus, probably, as a teenager and knowing God continues to be the primary passion of his life over 65 years later.
- H. What John is saying in this epistle is that it is possible to have complete and full joy in the midst of life's difficult experiences: *"These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete."* --1 John 1:4
 - 1. Everything else will let you down – except for knowing God. Think of a dog chasing a car...what would happen if the dog ever caught the car?

2. We chase things until we catch them and then find they don't ultimately satisfy us. [Mick Jagger was right 😊]. John is saying if you want fullness of joy in the midst of difficult circumstances then your only real hope is knowing God.

I. Review:

1. Up until now he's talked about knowing the truth.
2. Throughout chapter two John has offered three self-scoring tests so that the readers may determine on their own if they are sincerely and wholeheartedly following Jesus...
 - a. There was the **Behavioral Test in 2:3-6**: Is there a growing desire to honor, please, and obey God because of what He has done for us?
 - b. There was the **Relational Test in 2:7-11**: Because God has forgiven us, are we willing to forgive one another?
 - c. There was the **Doctrinal Test in 2:18-27**: Have we believed the irreducible core body of truth (beliefs) that we have to believe in order to be a Christian – That Jesus is God, come from the Father?

J. Today we will see how John says this all comes together. We will also see three substantial benefits – or fruit of knowing God.

K. We will be looking at 1 John 2:28-3:10. As we prepare to read these verses I want to point out three things that will help us to better understand what John is getting at as we read...

1. Vs. 28 – Notice the first word: "Now..." Every other major translation use the words: "And now..." This is John identifying that he is turning a corner and beginning a new section in his letter. It is a transitional phrase. – probably where the new chapter should have been started.
2. The key phrase for our passage today is found in 2:29: "...Everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." --1 John 2:29 [We'll come back to this...]
3. In 3:1 there is a very powerful statement. The KJV probably has the best transliteration: "**Behold**, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed [lavished – NIV] upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." --1 John 3:1 (KJV)

- a. With this verse John goes from **knowing to beholding**. It is a declaration of worship that is embedded into this letter.
- 1) Think of it like lightening traveling through a lightening rod.
 - 2) It's like the truth of Scripture becoming radioactive and gushing out of our head and flooding throughout our soul.
 - 3) To move from knowing to beholding is like a father dropping his son of at college...
 - a) Dad helps him move into the dorm – and as he is leaving he grabs his son and kisses him, looks him in the eyes, and says: "I love you son and there is NOTHING I wouldn't do for you to help you become the man that God has called you to be – including die for you."
 - b) There's a very good chance that the son already knew his dad loved him – but now, this takes his dad's love to a whole new level...
- b. **John goes from knowing to beholding** – and he isn't just writing about it – he's demonstrating it to us.

L. With that said, I will read the text, pray, and then we will see what John has for us... ²⁸ *Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.* ²⁹ *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

¹ **Behold**, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. [KJV] ² *Beloved, now we are children of God [not everyone is a child of God], and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* ³ *And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* ⁴ *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.* ⁵ *You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.* ⁶ *No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.* ⁷ *Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who **practices righteousness** is righteous, just as He is righteous;* ⁸ *the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to*

destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ *No one who is **born of God** practices sin, because His seed abides in him;¹ and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* ¹⁰ *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not **practice righteousness** is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”* –1 John 2:28-3:10 (Emphasis added) [This is God’s Word, pray with me...]

II. BODY

- A. The first thing I’d like to do is to go back to 2:29 because, as I mentioned, it is the key to unlocking this passage.
1. Let’s look at it again: “...Everyone...who practices righteousness is born of Him.”
 2. Simply stated, what John is saying is: We cannot live a righteous life without being born of Him (or born again). [We must acknowledge our lack of perfection...]
 - a. God’s righteousness comes to us as a gift – clearly stated in Rom 5:17: “*For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*” --Romans 5:17
 - b. The only way we can come to know God is by receiving the gift of Christ’s righteousness by faith. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*” --Ephesians 2:8
- B. To use theological language, what John is referring to is the Doctrine of Regeneration [covered by John Svendsen in the Foundations Class on May 26th] John (both Johns 😊) know we need to know about this -- to live it, receive it, and understand it. **Why would the Apostle say this?**
1. There’s been a lot of false teaching over the years in and around Ephesus – so John is going back to the basics.
 2. John has seen a couple of generations of church life by now and he’s talking to some people who were raised in church or have a lot of

¹ See also Galatians 4:19: *My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.*

experience in the church and many, perhaps, are not seeing the kind of victory over sin in our lives that they long to?

- C. I want to review this **essential doctrine** for a few minutes, then cover three life altering benefits from the ensuing text...
1. J.I. Packer, the famous theologian and author of the classic book, *Knowing God*, was asked, “Which theological issues would he commend young Christian leaders to study in order to be prepared for the next 50 years of ministry?” **His #1 answer: Regeneration.**
 - a. Last week I spoke about the “God longing” in every human heart.
 - b. Think of all the people who believe in God but don’t know (or realize) that God is available to be known...
 - c. John is telling us (his readers) that the key is understanding the doctrine of regeneration.
 2. Here’s how J.I. Packer defines regeneration: Regeneration in Christ changes [our] disposition from lawless, Godless self-seeking (Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7) which dominates [humankind] in Adam into one of trust and love, of repentance for past rebelliousness and unbelief, and loving compliance with God's law henceforth. It enlightens the blinded mind to discern spiritual realities (1 Cor. 2:14-15; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:10), and liberates and energizes the enslaved will for free obedience to God (Rom. 6:14, 17-22; Phil. 2:13). –J.I. Packer ²
 3. Four short statements to help us unpack regeneration:
 - a. Regeneration is the supernatural act of God in which He gives us new spiritual life. In the Bible, it is sometimes referred to as “being born again.” [*re* = again, *generation* = born]
 - b. Regeneration happens simultaneously to justification. We are justified and regenerated instantly. (Sanctification is what takes the rest of our lives.)
 - c. Regeneration is how we know that we are children of God. (We go from “have to” to “want to.”

² J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Books 1984: 925.

- d. Regeneration means we have new desires for righteousness and a delight for God’s law. It does not mean we have been perfected.
- D. It is essential to understand that to be re-generated (or, as John puts it: “born of Him”) We are given a **new heart** and **new nature** so that we have, at our deepest level, a **new identity** and **new passionate desire for God’s Word and God’s ways**. If you don’t have that, you haven’t experienced regeneration.
- E. Our passage provides us with **three life altering benefits of regeneration** through receiving Christ’s gift:
 - 1. We will have a **new confidence** to live without shame.
 - a. *“...Abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”*
--1 John 2:28
 - b. There are two kinds of shame: 1) Legitimate shame and an 2) Illegitimate shame.³ What’s the difference?
 - 1) Legitimate shame is facing our failure to trust in God. The proper response to legitimate shame is repentance.
 - 2) Illegitimate shame is when we rely on false god/s (idols), which fail to meet our needs and heal our wounds. We then seek to deflect sin through contempt and blame shifting-- like Adam and Eve. The proper response to illegitimate shame is grief.

Contrasting Illegitimate Shame & Legitimate Shame		
	Illegitimate Shame	Legitimate Shame
The Basis: As a human...	You are hopeless	You are limited
The Focus	On self	On God
The Feeling	Vague heaviness	Specific Conviction
The Eventual Result	You hide from God	You go to God

- 2. We will have a **new status** as God’s child.

³ Dan Allender. *The Wounded Heart*, NavPress, 2008: 48-51.

- a. *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”* --1 John 3:1 (KJV)
 - b. It’s a new legal status. The regenerated Christian is adopted into God’s family. Who chooses to adopt the child -- the parents or the child? That’s right, it’s the parents.
 - c. The order of salvation: Election → Calling → Regeneration → Conversion → Justification → Adoption. Then comes Sanctification → Perseverance → Glorification (*“We know that when He appears, we will be like Him...”* --1 John 3:2b)
 - d. I also wanted to point out that some people might think the NT writers are being sexist by using the word *“sons.”* In actuality, it’s just the opposite. In Roman times only sons were eligible to receive an inheritance. So, what John (and the other NT writers) are doing here is actually elevating the role of women in the church.
3. We will have a **new desire** to live a life changed by God.
- a. *“No one who is born of God practices sin, because **His seed abides in him**; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”* --1 John 3:9
 - b. “[Christianity] is not an art, a matter of dexterity and skill, but a new nature. And the regenerate person cannot sin as he did before he was born of God, and as others do who are not born again. There is that light in his mind, which shows him the evil and malignity of sin. There is that bias upon his heart, which disposes him to loathe and hate sin. –Matthew Henry ⁴
 - c. This moves us into Sanctification and Perseverance...and then in Glorification.
- F. We are not saved by trying to be righteous. We need a complete overhaul from the inside out.
- G. In regeneration we have:
1. New confidence
 2. New status

⁴ *Concise Commentary*, 1 John 3:1-10.

3. New desires

III. CONCLUSION

- A. As we close I would like to go back to the language of moving from *knowing* to *beholding*.
- B. Here are three examples of moving from knowing to beholding...
1. **John Bunyan** a 17th century, Christian author (*Pilgrim's Progress*) and preacher spoke of a "complete deliverance from his dreadful doubts and despair [which] came one day while he was passing through a field. "Suddenly [a verse] fell upon his soul." By the eye of faith he seemed to see Jesus, his righteousness, at God's right hand. He says, 'Now did my chains fall off...I was loosed from my afflictions...my temptations also fled away...Now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God'." ⁵ [He got what John is talking about.]
 2. **D.L. Moody** a 19th century American evangelist, pastor, and publisher was walking up Wall Street in New York City...and in the midst of the bustle and hurry of that city...the power of God fell upon him as he walked...and he had to hurry off to the house of a friend and ask that he might have a room by himself, and in that room he stayed alone for hours [as] the Holy Spirit came upon him filling his soul with such joy that at last he had to ask God to withhold His hand, lest he die on the spot from...joy. ⁶ [It wasn't that they weren't Christians before – they began to live what they truly were – revolutionized...]
 3. **Jonathan Edwards**, in one of his sermons⁷ provides us with a perfect illustration – related to honey -- he said there is a difference between having an opinion (or belief), that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense (or experience) of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace on the heart. It's possible to have no doubt that honey is exceedingly sweet and pleasant to the taste – but still not have experienced it. He said there is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and (then) having the

⁵ Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*, 1911, Rev. 2000: 133.

⁶ R.A. Torrey. *Why God Used D.L. Moody*, 1923: 51-55

⁷ Jonathan Edwards. *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine*. A sermon preached at Northampton, MA in 1734.

experience of tasting its sweetness. Edwards is saying we can really, really believe – but still not experience...

- C. *“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.”* —Psalm 34:8
- D. A vision for KHC...I don't want us to have to choose between knowledge and experience...God wants us to have both!

Questions For Group or Personal Study/Reflection

1. Read 1 John 2:27-3:10. Take time to identify words, phrases, or concepts that repeat throughout these verses.
2. Some people have interpreted 1 John 2:27 to say that we do not need to go to church or listen to a pastor. How would you respond if someone asked you what this verse meant?
3. Honor and shame were major cultural motivators in the first century. How is “shame” viewed in our culture? How does John use these motivators in 1 John 2:28? As you look at your heart and your life could you stand in front of Jesus confident and unashamed? What will it take to get you there?
4. One focus of 1 John 2:27-3:10 is that we are children of God. What does John say about being a child of God? Compare what John wrote in John 1:12-13 and 3:5-8 to the verses here in 1 John.
5. What does 1 John 2:27-3:10 tell us about sin? What would be a good summary statement from this regarding “sin and the Christian”? How does John's definition of sin (1 John 3:4) compare with some of the viewpoints people have today?
6. Although Christians can and do sin, how does knowing Christ change our relationship to sin (1 John 3:6)? Explain the relationship between habitual sin and isolated acts of sin?
7. Define “righteous” and “righteousness”. What does it mean to “practice righteousness”? What does that look like?
8. What does regeneration mean? Why is it important? Why does the new birth make it impossible for God's children to have a life characterized by sin (1 John 3:9)?
9. As one who has been born of God, what are some ways you see the family traits of obedience and love developing in your life? In what area would you like to be more obedient?