



A Passion for Holiness – Part 5
1 John 3:2-3
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During the hey-day of his basketball career, Michael Jordan was idolized by kids and adults alike throughout the world. Television commercials and full length songs sang the virtue of wanting to be like Mike.

As a young child I started developing a love of sports. My dad was not much of a sports fan, even though he played basketball in his school years, so I am not sure why I gravitated to sports with such a passion at an early age, but I can remember mimicking the players on the Chicago Cubs as early as eight or nine years old. I would try to hold and swing the bat just like Ron Santo and Ernie Banks and Billy Williams. I remember trying to go through a windup and pitching the ball just like Fergie Jenkins. It was more difficult to mimic the Chicago basketball, football, and hockey stars of my childhood, but I still remember wanting to be Bob Love of the Bulls, Dick Butkus of the Bears, and Bobby Hull of the Blackhawks when each of the particular sport's seasons rolled around.

The more I watched and dreamed and practiced being like these sports legends, the closer I got to being like them, albeit in a very miniscule way. The way they played their respective games was ingrained in my subconscious and they were a model for me to follow as I developed my limited skills in each of these sports. My dreams of being a professional sports star faded as I got through my teenage years but I can still see in my mind the mannerisms of my childhood idols.

Wanting to be like Mike, or any other famous person, is a futile and unhealthy pursuit. None of us have the same talent, personality, drive, or any number of other specific characteristics that makes Michael Jordan, or any of us, unequivocally unique. None of us have the same opportunities, no matter what you have been taught, to be able to progress and excel in the same fields or professions. You are who you are, and that is quite enough because God is the One who created you to be you. Each of us should strive to improve ourselves in every way possible as we travel through this journey of life, but we should not try to be someone else on this earth. You can and should have good role models to encourage your individual growth and maturity but you should still maintain the uniqueness that God created in you.

All of that being said we do have one person we should all be striving to be like in every way; and that is Jesus Christ. One of the reasons Jesus put on human flesh and walked this same earth for 33 years was to leave us with a very real example of how to live our lives. **Hebrews 4:15** tells us: **"For we do not have a high priest (meaning Jesus) who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."**

So if you desire to live a holy life, you do have a perfect example to follow. And the only way you can truly follow that example is to know Him intimately and to be filled with His Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis every day of your life.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 John**.

1 John 3:2-3

Let's pray.

v. 2a – "Beloved, now we are children of God"

The Apostle John leaves no doubt as to whom he is speaking to. In this and several other verses in this epistle, John makes it abundantly clear that he is addressing true and genuine Christians; those who have confessed with their mouths that Jesus Christ is the Lord of their lives and believed in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead.

The church is for believers – not unbelievers. The vast majority of Scripture is written directly to believers. There are definitely warnings to unbelievers in the Bible and we are encouraged to bring unbelievers with us to church, but the church should not cater to unbelievers nor should we try to apply biblical principles to the lives of unbelievers. It is silly for us to expect unbelievers to live their lives in a godly way. Stop wringing your hands and getting upset and agitated every time you here about some politician trying to pass an immoral law or when someone in the media promotes things that are contrary to Scripture – they simply cannot act according to God's Word if they do not have God the Holy Spirit living within them.

I need to stop before I get too far off base right at the beginning here.

John writes to the children of God. You are a child of God if you are indeed a genuine Christian according to God's definition, not the world's definition. God says that all who come to Him that He will not cast out. God's Word says that absolutely nothing can separate us from His love once we have been adopted as His sons and daughters. God's Word says our eternal souls are securely held in His hand and nothing on earth, in heaven, or under the earth can snatch us out of His hand. And if you are one of His tonight all of these promises are yours and you can rest in them.

I sometimes have people ask me how they can know for sure that they are saved; how can I be sure that I am a genuine believer?

First of all, genuine believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them and He will confirm His presence in your life in various ways. Secondly, you will manifest what the Bible calls "fruit" in your life; fruit simply means your life will be characterized by obedience to the principles of God's Word. It doesn't mean you will be perfect and that you will no longer sin. There is some false teaching being taught in some circles that claims you will no longer sin once you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Go back a few chapters to **1 John 1:8-9**.

God says those who say they have no sin are deceiving themselves; and again make no mistake about to whom John is speaking. He says "**If we say we have no sin.**" John includes himself in that statement, to make it abundantly clear that if genuine believers say they have no sin they are deceiving themselves; and again in **verse 9**, "**If we confess our sins**", not if unbelievers confess their sins.

Back in chapter 3, John further explains who a genuine believer is.

1 John 3:7-9

For some the language here seems to point to living a perfect and sinless life because at the end of **verse 9** it says "**and he cannot sin**" – but they somehow skip over the beginning of **verse 9** where John defines that as someone who "**practices sin.**" Those who practice sin are those who have not changed their ways and who have no regrets as to their sinful behavior; someone who does not feel guilty or does not even consider their behavior as sinful in the first place. Those who seemingly have no conscience and no concern when they act sinfully are those who practice sin and are not God's children.

This in itself gives me pause for great concern for those who claim they no longer sin while claiming they are genuine Christians at the same time. I have to wonder if their conscience has been seared to the point of no longer recognizing sin in their life and thus fall into the category of those who practice sin.

Verse 7 answers the question for those who are unsure about their salvation: "**The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.**" Genuine believers confirm their salvation by being obedient to the commands of God's Word. They do not earn their salvation by practicing righteousness they simply confirm their salvation by willingly and joyfully practicing righteousness.

Beloved, you are a child of God! Perhaps the greatest weakness in most Christians is not realizing this fact; not realizing who you are and whose you are. Quite frankly, any unhappiness you experience in this life could probably be traced back to this lack of understanding. Instead of looking at this truth of who we are and whose we are, we look at our circumstances and our situation as the greater reality. You are a child of God! Let's say that out loud together – "I am a child of God!"

This same lack of understanding leads to not living our lives as we ultimately should. If you truly understood who you are and whose you are do you think that would impact your behavior? Do you understand the greatness and the honor and the privilege of being a child of God? Do you understand your position and your standing among all the creatures of this world, including the angels and the demons? Do you understand that demons, although infinitely more powerful than you are, cannot stand against God's children? Do you understand that the awesome and mighty and powerful angels are at your disposal because you are a child of God?

Does this knowledge affect how you are to live your life? Does this knowledge help you when all outward appearances say you should pack it in and give up? Does this knowledge help you stop living like a beggar and start living like the royalty that you are?

Did you know that every single comfort and encouragement recorded in the Bible is offered only to God's children? When things go wrong in the world or in your life do you realize that every blessing in God's Word is for you? The world has nothing like we have! They turn to drugs and alcohol and therapists and psychologists and the pleasures of the flesh to alleviate their fears. Is it any wonder that antidepressants are sold by the boat load in this country? Unbelievers do not have the infinite storehouse of promises and blessings and encouragement that are available to the children of the King.

Another aspect of being a child of the King is that you do not own anything. The King owns all things and it is the King who protects by His unlimited might and provides from His vast and infinite treasury. And did you know that if you are living according to the King's principles and following what the King says you are not to be taking ownership of anything?

I recently moved my insurance office and the expenses for this move went far beyond what I expected. I was given an allowance from Allstate for the move and the change in technology and I was planning for this allowance to not only cover the immediate expenses but also to help get ahead on some other bills and expenses. That didn't happen.

I have made a lot of financial mistakes in the past due to not following what God said in the area of handling finances, but for the last 6 months or so we have been paying down our debt and not adding to it. So do you know what I can do now when things get tight? I can say, "Lord, my God, my King, I no longer take ownership of this bill. Yes, I am still obligated to make the payment but I no longer claim this as my own and I request Your help to eliminate this debt."

Some of you may wonder if I am serious about this. I proclaimed in January that Connie and I are trusting God to get debt free by the end of 2009. Humanly speaking this is impossible with our current incomes and expenses, but credit has been eliminated as an option when things get tight. So if you want to know how serious I am and how much I believe that as long as I follow God's principles I have no right to take ownership of even my bills, I cut up my credit cards in front of you here tonight.

I do this because I am a child of God and God's Word tells me to get out and stay out of debt. I don't do this publicly to receive any glory but only as an example to you and because I have publicly proclaimed my trust in God to become debt free this year.

Say it again with me: "I am a child of God." Do not ever forget that.

v. 2b – "and it has not appeared as yet what we will be"

The word "**appeared**" would probably be better translated as "manifested." For while the Bible does not begin to give us all of the details of what we will be like when Christ returns, we do have many Scriptures that do give us some of the details; and I am not going to take the time tonight to search out those details because it will not necessarily add to the main point.

Let's back up and read **verse 1** of this chapter to gain a little context.

1 John 3:1

God has bestowed on us this tremendous honor of being His sons and daughters yet the world will not know us in this way because it didn't even recognize Jesus as His Son. We have not yet been manifested to the world as what we will one day be. And quite honestly, when the world criticizes you or persecutes you or laughs at you because of your faith in Jesus Christ, it is a great confirmation that you are on the right track with your Christian walk.

The world cannot see the glory that lies within us. The world does not treat us like sons and daughters of Almighty God because they did not treat Jesus like the Son of God. They are blind to who we truly are and unfortunately many of us act the same way – it should never be! I am not telling you to walk in sinful pride as to your true identity but you need to stop walking around in defeat as if you were a peasant with no hope.

I am a child of God right here and right now. When I get to heaven I will be no more a child of God than I am now. I will be better in every way because I will then be perfect in every way, but my position as His child will not change. Conduct does not change relationship when it comes to family. I can be a rebellious son but it will never change who my father and mother are. By the same token, a true and genuine child of God cannot change their relationship as a child.

The beautiful story of the Prodigal Son shows us this. While the son was living in sin and spending all of his wealth on parties and prostitutes he was still the father's child just as much as the older brother was. When he returned he was still the father's child. Nothing changed his relationship as the father's child.

v. 2c – “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is”

The Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is a fact; He will come again on the clouds and we will at that very point in time be like Jesus. The inner struggle we now endure between the Spirit and the flesh will no longer be. The never ending battles with temptation will be over. Trials and tribulations will be a distant, or better yet, a non-existent memory. We will be like Jesus finally and forever. We strive for that now but the striving will be over then and the reality of being like Jesus will be here.

And we will also finally see Him as He is.

Hold your place in **1 John** and turn with me in your Bibles to **1 Corinthians**.

1 Corinthians 13:12

Did you catch all of that? “**For now we see in a mirror dimly**” meaning we see the reflection of Jesus Christ in our lives faintly as we currently strive to be like Him. “**But then face to face**” meaning we will not only see Him face to face but we will see the perfect reflection of Him in our lives. “**Now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known**” meaning every limitation we experience now in our understanding and knowledge of Jesus and His Word will be melted away. We will fully know Jesus just as much as He fully knows us.

Now how exciting is that? Say it with me again: “I am a child of God.”

Now let's go back to **1 John** and see how all of this applies to our continuing topic of holiness.

v. 3 – “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”

What hope is John talking about? – The hope (the surety) that we will one day be perfect and sinless just as Jesus is perfect and sinless. When we have this hope fixed on Jesus Christ our response will not be to live as we please but will be one of tremendous gratitude and humility, and will lead us to express our feelings to Him by obedience to Him and His Word.

John 14:21 says, “**He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me.**” Every one of you who owns a Bible has the commandments of the Lord. Owning a Bible or a bookcase full of Bibles means absolutely nothing in respect to your relationship with Jesus. Reading your Bible and studying your Bible and meditating on your Bible and memorizing your Bible, which I tell you to do all the time, means absolutely nothing in your relationship with Jesus IF you do not follow all of that up with being obedient to everything you discover and learn.

Jesus basically repeats Himself a few verses later in John’s gospel by saying, “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word**” (**John 14:23a**). In **John 15:14** Jesus says, “**You are My friends if you do what I command you.**”

I trust the message is getting through loud and clear. You purify yourselves just as Jesus is pure by following His supreme example of being obedient to God’s Word – always! Don’t make the mistake that most Christians make by being obedient only when it is convenient or only when it fits in with your personal theology. We must develop the habit of obedience no matter what the present cost in our life. We must be obedient when it hurts to do so. We must be obedient when everyone else is not. We must be obedient when the world wants to reward us for disobedience.

Beloved, you are a child of God; a child of the Sovereign King of all kings. Rest in His protection and provision, exult in His promise that you will one day be just like Jesus, and purify yourself by being obedient to His Word as you pursue holiness.

Let’s pray.