

# 1<sup>st</sup> JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 3:1

Lesson #11

## Introduction

We've completed chapter 2 of our 1<sup>st</sup> John Bible study, and now we're moving on to chapter three. When you teach the scriptures you can't help but find times that the content of one or two verses is too much to combine together into a single lesson, but seems too short for separate lessons all their own. This is such a time for me. I wanted to include verses 1 through 3, but I soon realized that there was too much for just one lesson. Therefore, in spite of the possible brevity, I'm going to make this lesson separate and keep to the one opening verse of chapter three, because the topic deserves a lesson of its own. The title is from the words of the verse itself:

## The Children of God

*1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.* 1 John 3:1 (NASB)

When one discusses the term children, there are at least two perspectives that immediately come to mind. One is that of family affiliation. For instance, one might declare "these are my children," meaning they belong to me, they're my own offspring. The other way it's commonly used is in describing their stage of maturity, like one says "well, they're only children" when they do something silly. These are the most common uses, and John is going to use both of these in the first three verses of chapter three. In this first verse, that we're discussing in this lesson, the former is what John has in mind, concerning ownership and family affiliation.

## Verse 1a:

*1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.*

John is writing this epistle to the churches, to the Christian believers, and his reference to being children of God is specifically addressed to those who are Christians, not to humanity in general. Otherwise this verse would have no meaning. John is saying that it's the believers in Jesus Christ who are the object of God's great love, and who are those whom He considers to be His children. He's not talking about all humanity in general. The great love of God is expressed in His bestowing upon us the adoption into His family as His own children. But wait a minute, aren't we all His children?

In one sense, it's true that all humanity are children of God. In the sense that we all got our existence, our life essence, through the breath of God that He breathed into Adam, and made him a living being.

*7 Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.* Gen 2:7 (NASB)

In that sense all people are equally the offspring of God. The verse says that man became a living being, but it doesn't add any reference to our being considered His children. Now this doesn't, by itself, create any distinctions or differences among mankind, but it doesn't eliminate the possibility either. Just being the offspring of Adam doesn't necessarily make every one of those offspring exactly the same in the eyes of God. Now I realize this assaults the sensitivities of many of us, especially in this present 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture, but, the scriptures are literally filled with references of God making very specific choices between various individuals and people groups. Freely exercising His sovereignty.

In Genesis chapter 12, God specifically calls out one man named Abram, and tells him that he and his decedents will be blessed, and that God is giving them all the land from the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the river Euphrates for their eternal possession. An unconditional promise by the way, not in any way contingent on any kind of faithful performance by Abram or his descendants, and just for the record, it has never been repealed either.

In Exodus God calls a man named Moses to go into Egypt and bring out all His chosen people who were being held captive as slaves, so they could separate themselves from all the other tribes of humanity and become the chosen people of God, to be His worshippers. Many years later, in his book of Deuteronomy, Moses writes as a reminder:

*6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.* Deut 7:6 (NASB)

In the New Testament we have even further and clearer verses of God's intentional distinctions and sovereign choices, regarding who is, and isn't, considered to be His family, where Paul tells the Romans:

*6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; 7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.*

Romans 9:6-8 (NASB)

In this verse Paul was explaining, through the examples of Isaac and Ishmael, why so many of the Jews, who were fleshly descendants of Abraham, and apparent heirs to all those promises of blessings, were being lost to sin and worldliness, and going to destruction. Paul explains that it's because God doesn't consider family decedents to simply be offspring of the flesh, but recipients of the promise of faith as well, which is what distinguished Abram from his contemporaries, and there's a very distinct difference between the two.

At that time, and still today, all who were on the earth were the fleshly offspring of Adam, but Abram alone was a man of faith in God, and that made him a child of God. A unique and beloved child, amongst an orphaned humanity. But not really orphaned, because all those who aren't children of God by faith, are, by default, given over to the family of Satan, so that there's no such thing as a free agent in God's creation plan. One is either a child of God or a child of Satan, regardless of their feelings or beliefs to the contrary.

Different times, and different cultures, and different philosophies each react to this teaching in their own manner. In our present day times, and location, being Americans, we were brought up being told that everybody is equal in the eyes of the law. And everyone is entitled to equal justice and the pursuit of happiness. Principles that make our country the great place to live that it is today. These laws and principles are enacted by mankind, and apply to mankind, and we extend them to cover other forms of life and environment as seems proper to us.

But there's a problem if we try to apply them between mankind and God. The very premise that makes our national laws just is that there is no distinctions between one man and another, that we're all created equal, and are entitled to equal representation and freedom of choices. This is good, and is right and proper, but, it's not the situation that rightly applies to the relationship between mankind and Almighty God. We're not created equals with God, and we're not entitled to anything but that which He's sovereignly prescribed. (Repeat)

Satan's pride couldn't accept this, and he rebelled against God for this very reason, because he wouldn't accept God's absolute authority over him. And this is at the heart of all mankind's problem with God, we don't, and we won't accept that we're not autonomous beings who are in complete control of our own destinies. We refuse to accept that God has His own predetermined agenda for mankind, and His own set of rules, and it trumps ours every time. Listen, I'm not just spouting some kind of rhetoric, for the first thirty-five years and two and a half months of my life I was also one of these people, so I know well of what I speak.

*4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved [me], 5 even when [I was] dead in [my] transgressions, made [me] alive together with Christ (by grace [I] have been saved), 6 and raised [me] up with Him, and seated [me] with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward [me] in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace [I] have been saved through faith; and that not of [myself], it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that [I] may boast. 10 For [I am] His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that [I] would walk in them.* Eph 2:4-10 (NASB)

You'll immediately notice that I've read this verse in the first person singular, so that I understand that it applies not just to some nebulous, nondescript group, but directly to me personally, and directly to you my beloved brethren as well. Read it that way yourself, I encourage you, and see how it affects your thinking. But the point is, that in spite of my previous personal agenda, God had **His own plans for me**, as He does for every creature that He's ever made or will make. And He has a family that He's chosen personally, and individually, from before creation, who are specifically called His own:

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*

Eph 1:3-5 (NASB)

This verse tells us who did the choosing, when He did that choosing, what He did it for, His feelings toward us in doing so, and the manner in which He carries it out. This verse, and many others, speak of a choice. The term chose, or choice, requires that there be at least two separate groups, or there can't be a choice. There's the thing(s) chosen and the thing(s) not chosen. A choice demands a separation of some kind, a different use or disposition of that which is chosen from that which is not. In many cases the disposition is already known, like the inspection of food, it's either kept if it's deemed good, or its thrown away if it's deemed spoiled.

And likewise, God has predetermined that mankind is either a member of His family or they are a members of Satan's family, and the disposition of the two groups has already been set, only the determination of family affiliation awaits. But then the question arises as to who makes that determination? Do we humans make that determination, or does God make that determination? Do the scriptures shed any light on this? And if God makes it, then doesn't that some how seem unfair to us humans? (Of course, we never seem to ask if our choosing isn't somehow unfair to God) Concerning this very issue, Paul says to the Romans:

*10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

Romans 9:10-13 (NASB)

So what does this mean? Are we being told that God reserves the sole right to dispose of humanity as He sees fit, and as serves His own purposes? (Repeat) But wait a minute, if this is the case, then doesn't it kind of make it unfair? Wouldn't it make God somehow kind of unrighteous, or unjust, if He made this choice Himself? If He himself gets to pick His own family, then where do we fit into this equation? What is our place, and what is the scope of our personal rights, and the extent of our authority to chose a family for ourselves? Now I don't really know how we get the idea that we're supposed to be able to make this choice ourselves, do you know anybody who was asked in advance what family they wanted to be born into? How is it that we don't understand that this is always a choice made by others.

The matter of family, and children, is one of serious concern to God. He does not simply leave it randomly up to mankind whether they do or don't want to be His eternal children forever. Being among that family is the highest of honors, and is by specific invitation only. So you say, well hasn't God invited all. Hasn't He said "whosoever will, let them come?" Yes, He absolutely has, and then He said that no one on the earth can come to that condition of mind, where they want to come to God, unless they are specifically drawn by Him. (Jn 6:44) And even stronger, Jesus said that no one is humanly able, nor divinely allowed, to come to this frame of mind unless the Father specifically grants His permission. (Jn 6:65) So, the One who said "whosoever will," is the One who has final say as to who will and who won't have that "will." God has kept absolute sovereign control over who is, and who is not, His children, and He made that decision before He ever began creation. Paul continues his explanation with the following:

*14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then, it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." 18 So then, He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.*

Romans 9:14-18 (NASB)

Now I can imagine the shock that this might be to those who are unfamiliar with holy scriptures. And to those who are accustomed to what we might call a redacted bible, where these verses are simply skipped over and ignored, or twisted to mean exactly the opposite of what they actually say. But this is the teaching of the holy scriptures, the eternal word of

God. We're told that God has indeed reserved the right to choose His family for Himself, and furthermore, that He has exercised that right. And not only that, but that He did so before He ever began creation.

As shocking as it seems to be to many people, God has not chosen to make every human that has come forth out of Adam to be His eternal family. In fact, His family is a very, very small minority of Adam's offspring. He knew full well what He was going to do with each group before He ever began to create them, and although most are not His family, nevertheless none are wasted, but every creature serves their specific purpose in God's eternal plan. Now brace yourselves, because we're going to see this explained in the next verses from Paul:

*19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.*

Romans 9:19-24 (NASB)

There we have it, Like it or not, agree with it or not, the scriptures make it too clear to escape, that God clearly and unmistakably considers it to be His sovereign right to dispose of His creatures, any of them and all of them, as best suits His own needs and desires. That which He created out of nothing, He will utilize at His good pleasure. We're told that some of the vessels that He's made are for honor, and some are for dishonor. Some will be used to demonstrate His power, and some will be used to demonstrate His mercy, so none are wasted. And such, declares the scriptures, is the just and righteous right of a divine omnipotent being. He is God, and we are not, it really does come down to that. And we can embrace it, or we can join with Satan in revolt. But we can't change it to suit our own preconceptions of fairness and self importance.

This teaching negates the idea that we are all children of God whom He loves and truly desires to save and bring into His eternal family. We have this perception of a soft and passive God who has no favorites and sees everyone the same, and is willing to accept anyone and everyone whom He can persuade to join His family if they so desire, so He can bless them forever. And because this concept is so prevailing, we have lost our comprehension of the immense value of His adoption and acceptance into His eternal family. If it's just an open offer, sitting there waiting for anyone who wants it, anytime they wish, then it really isn't all that rare and precious, is it?. It isn't more valuable than all else in the world, and worth selling everything we own to obtain, like the pearl of great price, or the treasure buried in the field. We hear the term "child of God" so often that we've lost any real concept of the term. It's used so loosely that it can include anybody and everybody; but some day, when the true are separated from the false, both those who are, and those who aren't, will come to grips with the immeasurable value of the difference.

If you're a child of God, a member of His eternal family, then you're a royal priesthood, you're a chosen people, destined for glory by the final transformation of your body, and soul, into conformity to Christ's glorious body, whereby you will serve by His side as His companion, and God's eternal worshiper. In addition to its intrinsic value, This is perceptively valuable because it's rare, very, very rare indeed, and few there will be who find it. If John is writing to you, and you are one of those, then you have reason to rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. You are far more blessed than the one who has won a Lottery, or won a tournament, or been selected to some exclusive and prestigious club; you have been chosen by God to be His eternal family, and there's not another prize in existence that even comes close to that. So, rejoice my dear brethren, and don't be afraid, because God has chosen gladly to give you His eternal heavenly kingdom. (Lk 12:32) But not to everybody, only to a few. Now let's move on to the second half of this verse:

**Verse 1b:**

*For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

It's very true that the world does not know us. In fact, the term Christian is commonly applied to any and all who hold certain conservative political and philosophical viewpoints. The news media will swiftly apply the term "Christian" to every

right wing extremist and radical action group that pops up. To them, and the unbelieving masses, the term "Christian" is simply a set of philosophical perspectives, and telling the difference, or even admitting that there is any difference, isn't likely to ever happen. And in their defense, to them there probably isn't, because they perceive all those who are called Christian as being self-deceived hypocrites, and any further distinctions are irrelevant. The world truly doesn't know how to differentiate between the real Christians and the wannabee's, and has no inclination to try. They simply dislike all of them.

If you're anything like me, then you might occasionally get annoyed at this constant "labeling" that the liberal news media loves to employ. We see the most heinous criminals being called "Christians" and their atrocious acts being portrayed as those of genuine Christian believers. In these radical cases, we know they aren't, and they also know they aren't, but it still annoys us, so I suppose the liberals will continue to do it as long as it works. But our concern is for those who might actually believe these bogus reports, and conclude that Christians really do behave this way. We can't help but be upset to see the name of our blessed Savior slandered in such a way, and associated with these behaviors.

Remember what the Pharisees and Sadducees said about Jesus when He healed a blind and mute man. Someone asked the question as to whether He might be the promised Messiah, and when the indignant Pharisees heard this they declared *"This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."* Matt 12:24 (NASB)

There was nothing under the sun that Jesus could say or do that was going to change these peoples minds. They hated Him and all He stood for, and no amount of miracles or preaching was going to change their minds. They convinced themselves that He was an imposter, in spite of His signs and miracles, and wrote them off as satanically empowered. This is precisely the same as today. We often hear people say that if we could just duplicate those miracles that Jesus did then we could persuade the whole world. Well Jesus did those miracles, and He preached those words of life, and almost nobody believed Him. Instead they hated Him, and envied His recognition and attention. This seems to make no sense, why would people hate someone who heals countless sick people and tells everyone of the forgiveness of God?

The reason is told to us, because He also told us that we were hopelessly condemned sinners, enslaved to our love for sin, and the only hope of salvation was repentance from those sins and faith in Him. If He hadn't told them this, then He would have been the most successful and loved Rabbi of that day. He would have never been crucified, and mankind's sins would still be upon us all. It was by the providence of God the Father that mankind could not, and would not, believe Jesus Christ, and that providential hand is still firmly guiding every move of humanity.

Because the world didn't know the true Messiah, it surely won't know His followers either. We will continue to be an annoying mystery to unbelieving society. They will never figure out how to tell the real from the phony, nor will they wish to do so. Many will insist that no such distinction is possible, because we're all phony. This isn't going to change in this age; the scriptures warn us that at the end it will peak, and reach a crescendo, and persecutions will escalate.

There's some Christian denominations that believe the church is supposed to grow in strength and numbers until it gains political control of the earth so that Jesus can return. I have no quarrel with these brothers, nor do I doubt their sincerity, and many are genuine scholars, but I myself cannot find any support for that conclusion, and hold to the more popular literal interpretations of these scriptures, that declare that perilous times of persecution and hardship await those who follow Jesus Christ, and hold to His teachings of repentance from sins, and faithful obedience to the word of God.

Jesus told His disciples that if the world hated them then they should remember that it hated Him before it hated them, so they shouldn't be surprised or dismayed when it happened. If we preach what Jesus preached, if we call those things sins that Jesus called sins, and we exhort mankind to repent of them and believe in Jesus Christ, then we should expect it to get us nothing different than what it got Him, and those Apostles who followed Him when they preached it.

The world isn't going to recognize, much less accept those people who profess Christ, as being God's unique and only children, whom He has chosen from before creation. In fact, its hard enough to even get the Christians to believe this, even though it's plainly taught in His scriptures. The rejection by the world is something that God has predetermined to

be part of the process that He's designated for His elect, and knowing that in advance prevents us from coming to false conclusions.

Pragmatism is a part of human thinking, if it works then we automatically assume that it's good, and if it looks like it isn't working then we assume that we need to change it. If we applied this thinking to Jesus' ministry, what would we have concluded after a couple of years of His traveling all around the territories, and the apparent lack of real believers that He seemed to be generating. If it weren't for the miraculous healings of the sick, which accounted for the big crowds, almost nobody in the whole area would have even known His name. He was famous for His healing, not His preaching.

We mustn't be concerned that the world doesn't know us, that it doesn't have any interest in what we're preaching, and that it finds us annoying, if not downright troublesome. But we have only one message, and it cannot ever change. It cannot be amended to suit the times and reflect the popular culture. God has reserved the right to choose for Himself who will be His family, and He has done so already, and it's through repentance of sins and faith in His beloved Son Jesus that each and every member of that family will be eventually adopted into it by saving faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way, and it isn't subject to change. This won't be popular with the world, but it will be one-hundred percent effectual for each and every child of God whom He has chosen and predestined for adoption into His eternal family. Of all those that the Father gave to Jesus, and whose names were recorded in the Book of Life from before creation, He will lose not one. So says the Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jn 6:39, 10:28-29)

### **Conclusion:**

Now, to briefly conclude this lesson, by way of summary, this verse starts out by telling us that we should look and see how great a love the Father has bestowed on us. So great that He calls us His children. God makes a marked distinction between those who are simply His created beings, and those who are His own children, and members of His family. It is the highest expression of love to be brought from enslavement to sin, and the family of Satan, into the redeemed and regenerated family of Almighty God.

There's no closer expression of personal relationship than that of family. The marriage of two separate human beings creates a family union that is declared to be one flesh, meaning one entity. And the offspring of that union are members of it. It is the highest known form of unity. This is the expression of God's love toward us, His making us one family with Himself, and His Son, and His Holy Spirit. This is quite a family indeed that we've been adopted into. And failing to realize the significance, the rarity, the honor, would be a tragedy of cosmic proportions. Therefore, let us ponder this verse, and savor the sweetness of the love of God toward us, who have been chosen to be His eternal family, out of all of those who have ever inhabited this planet earth. Thank You Father, for this indescribable gift.

And the verse went on to tell us that as God's children we wouldn't be recognized as such by the world, because God's Son Jesus wasn't recognized by the world. Just like Jesus, this will cause many difficulties in our lives, and a few will believe us, but most will not, and they will resent our claims to family affiliation with God. They'll call us arrogant, elitist, self-deceived, and all those things that they called our Lord Jesus when He was here. He didn't conquer the world with His preaching, and we won't either, but He was always faithful to His heavenly calling from God his Father, and likewise let us be ever faithful to that same calling, until we're finished with our work here on earth, and are called into the presence of that loving family household. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

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