

# Sermon Outline

## “ABBA! FATHER!”: KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

---

### BORN OF GOD (1 JOHN 3:9)

#### I. Introduction

#### II. Behold, the Love of the Father! (1 Jn 3:1-8)

- A. Divine adoption and sonship are key themes in the letter of 1 John.
- B. In 1 John 3, this theme of sonship comes across to us very clearly.
  - 1. The chapter starts with John calling Christians to “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God” (3:1).
  - 2. In verse 2, John encourages Christians to persevere in their holiness because the day is coming when we shall finally be completely conformed to the glorious form of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”
- C. In verse 3, John goes on to say, “everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”
  - 1. The double assurance that (a) we are already God’s children and (b) we will be perfected in due time should not breed laziness or complacency in the Christian.
  - 2. Instead, God wants us to use our assurance of salvation to stir us toward greater obedience.
    - a. It is precisely because we are God’s children now that we should conduct ourselves accordingly.
    - b. Christians should no longer waste time tinkering around with sin or fretting too much over things of this present existence.
    - c. Instead, we should live in the freedom that God has given us—the freedom to pursue the Kingdom of God.
    - d. This is what we have come to call “Gospel-driven sanctification.”
- D. From there, John proceeds to give us what seems at first sight like a warning.
  - 1. But judging from the “tone” with which John speaks—the tone which we discern from the overall context of the letter—this is not so much a warning as a statement of fact.
  - 2. John is simply stating that those who keep on practicing sin show by their conduct that they do not belong to God in the first place.
  - 3. He writes in verse 6: “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”
  - 4. By this, John is not saying that Christians are perfect.
    - a. In 1:8-9, John says that those who claim that they have no sin are liars.
    - b. In 2:1, John states: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

5. What John has in mind is probably someone who is living in a state of deliberate and outright rebellion against God.  
—Such a person who lives like that consistently is very likely not a believer. Such a person has neither seen Christ nor known Christ.
6. Moving on to verses 7 and 8, John continues on this theme of personal holiness: “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [referring to Christ Jesus] is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”
7. And then comes the clause where he talks about the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How is the theme of adoption shown in 1 John? (2) Based on 1 Jn 3:2, what is the double assurance that God gives us? (3) According to 1 Jn 3:3, what kind of life should emerge from this double assurance?

### III. The One Who Is Born of God (3:9a)

- A. In verse 9, John starts by saying, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning...”
- B. The fact that John says the believer is “born of God” tells us that the idea of divine fatherhood stands behind this verse.  
—If someone is said to be born of God, then obviously, he’s someone who has God as a Father.
- C. The phrase “born of God” is itself worthy of deeper consideration.
  1. This is the term that John uses for the believer in Christ.
  2. This phrase appears almost eleven times in this letter alone (2:29; 3:1; 3:9 [x2]; 4:7; 5:1 [x3], 4, 18 [2x]).
  3. For John, the believer isn’t merely a follower of Christianity, which is what our secular society calls us.
  4. The believer, according to John, is someone who has been “born of God”
  5. If we didn’t know better, the organic nature of the language almost suggests a biological link between God and the believer.
  6. A person who is born of God isn’t one who has merely been adopted into God’s family, although that is certainly true.
  7. A person who is born of God has come to share, in some way, God’s own life, God’s own nature.
- D. From Scripture, we know that God has only one begotten Son, Jesus our Lord.
  1. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who fully possesses the same divine essence and substance with the Father—Jesus is the Son of God who is fully God (Jn 1:1).
  2. When John says that we are born of God, he cannot mean that we are sons of God in the exact same way that Jesus was—that we become God.
  3. Nevertheless, judging from his choice of words, John *is* suggesting that there is some kind of intertwining of lives between God and the believer.
  4. John is saying that there is a deep interaction of divine and human life in each of God’s adopted children.

E. To understand what it means to be born of God, we would have to return to the Gospel of John itself.

1. Consider the following passages:

a. John 1:12-13:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

b. John 3:1-8:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born again* he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is *born of the Spirit*.

2. From John 1:12-13, to be born of God is to be adopted by God as his own child—and this comes about when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

3. Based on the Lord’s teaching to Nicodemus, to be born of God is to receive a new energy from God himself directly into one’s spirit.

a. This is a new energy, power, and/or life that enables a person to see and love the Kingdom of God.

b. The theological term used to describe this implantation of new spiritual life is “regeneration.”

c. New Testament scholar Colin Kruse explains that to be born of God is to be “brought to new spiritual life by the will of God and through the agency of his Spirit” (*The Letters of John*, 124).

F. As regeneration makes us children of God, it also increasingly bends us toward complete obedience to God.

G. This leads us to consider the next part of John’s statement: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning...”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Based on Jn 1:12-13 and 3:1-8, what does it mean to be born of God? What is the term theologians use to describe this? (2) What does regeneration do in the child of God?

#### IV. Was John Teaching Perfectionism?

- A. What does John mean that a person born of God does not make a practice of sinning? Is John actually suggesting that Christians *cannot* sin? Is he saying that a child of God cannot fall into temptation or even prolonged seasons of sinfulness?
- B. We know that John was not teaching that Christians could attain perfect sinlessness in this life.
1. Consider the following:
    - a. First John 1:8-10: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”
    - b. First John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”
    - c. First John 3:2, 3: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared...”
  2. From those passages, John does not mean that the Christian can attain sinless perfection in his life.
- C. Two possible ways to take what John is saying in 1 John 3:9.
1. John is setting out the expectations of the household of God.
    - a. John is like a father telling his children, “In this family, we do not hit each other.”
    - b. Unlike Satan’s children who practise lawlessness, God’s children will practise righteousness.
    - c. What John is saying in 3:9 is not that different than what Paul says in Romans 6:5-7: “For one who has died has been set free from sin.”
  2. John is actually describing the inevitable conduct of the children of God.
    - a. John isn’t so much laying down rules for God’s children here as he is describing the actual behavior of God’s children.
    - b. Sinclair Ferguson explains it this way:

Perhaps the best way of understanding John’s teaching here is by recognising that a new relationship with the world of sin and the dominion of darkness has been established in the life of the child of God. In both sections of John’s letter where he describes the Christian as ‘not sinning’, he does so in the context of his adoption out of the family of the Evil One into the family of God. He is no longer under the dominion of the devil (in whose power John sees the whole world lying, 5:19). Freed from those family ties, and from the legal reign of sin over his life, the Christian ‘no longer sins’. Sin is no longer the characteristic feature of his lifestyle....We have been born again into a new family, and the power of the Father of that family, the likeness of the Elder Brother in it, have been bestowed also on us. *Yes, we sin and fail. But our lives grow in the settled direction of righteousness and holiness*, because that is the nature of the family disposition given to us, and that is the direction in which our Elder Brother guides us. (*Children of the Living God*, 44, 45)

3. In summary:
  - a. When the apostle John says that the child of God does not sin, he doesn’t mean that the child of God really has no sin in his or her life.

- b. He is saying that the child of God refuses to be comfortable with sin and continually resists temptation and sin.
- c. Even when he or she fails and falls into temptation, he or she returns to God who forgives sin through Jesus Christ.
- d. Resistance against sin—and along with that, a growing love for God, a sensitive conscience, constant returning to Christ for forgiveness—that’s the kind of lifestyle of the one who has been born of God.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we know John was not teaching that a Christian can attain perfection in this life? (2) What are two possible ways to take what John is saying in 1 John 3:9? (3) Do you see resistance of sin in your own life? Do you see the presence of a love for God and Christ?

## V. Why the Child of God Cannot Keep on Sinning

- A. Why is it that the child of God does not practice sin?
  - 1. This is why God’s child does not sin: “for God’s seed abides in him, and he *cannot* keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”
  - 2. The word “cannot” implies impossibility.
  - 3. John is saying that it is actually impossible for the one who is born of God—precisely because he or she has been born of God—to keep on sinning as usual.
- B. But what does the seed of God refer to?
  - 1. This is an important question because, judging from what John has written, the seed of God is exactly what prevents the child of God from constantly sinning without a care in the world.
  - 2. There are two or three possibilities to understand the seed of God (See John Stott, *The Letters of John*, 134).
    - a. The seed of God may refer to the Word of God, the Scriptures.
      - i. In a number of passages, the Word of God is compared to seed.
      - ii. Consider 1 Peter 1:23: “since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”
      - iii. In Luke 8 (the parable of the sower), the Lord Jesus states that the seed that was sown into the ground of human souls is none other than the Word of God (Lk 8:11).
      - iv. When John talks about the seed of God here, he may very well be referring to the Word of God, the truths of the Scriptures.
    - b. The seed of God may refer to *the Holy Spirit*.
      - i. Since John’s Gospel preserves the sayings of Jesus concerning regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the seed may also be taken as a reference to the Holy Spirit himself.
      - ii. If so, the seed is the very sanctifying, life-giving Spirit of God in the believer.
    - c. The seed of God may be the *new divine nature* that God imparts to the believer through the Spirit and the Word.
      - i. One danger of this explanation is the separation of the divine Nature from the divine Person.

- ii. This could lead to the notion that human beings can become God.
  - iii. So I would equate the divine Nature with the Holy Spirit himself.
- C. What should we make of these two or three options?
1. Obviously, they are not mutually exclusive. Scripture teaches that both the Word of God and the Spirit of God (who is himself the Divine Nature of God) dwells in the Christian.
  2. When the Spirit of God dwells in us, he speaks the Word of God into our souls.
  3. So we could say that the seed is the Spirit of God who continually speaks the Word of God powerfully into the heart of the Christian.
    - a. And as he does so, he brings new life where there was none.
    - b. He forms love and obedience in the Christian's life.
    - c. He brings new order into the Christian's soul.
- D. We can now see why it is virtually impossible for the believer to keep on sinning as before. It is because the seed of God—the very Nature of God himself—dwells in his or her soul—and that seed exerts its own power and influence upon the Christian's life (Stott, *The Letters of John*, 131).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) According to John, why is it that the child of God does not practice sin? (2) What is the seed of God? (3) How does the Seed of God prevent the Christian from giving himself over to sin completely?

## VI. Some Implications

- A. True righteousness is impossible apart from divine regeneration.
1. Unless a person is born of God and carries the seed of God's Word and Spirit, that person cannot do works that are ultimately pleasing to God.
  2. Unless the seed of God dwells in a person, he or she cannot truly live as a child of God.
  3. Therefore, true holiness is always Gospel-driven, Gospel-created.
- B. Emphasize the antithesis.
1. According to the Oxford dictionary, an antithesis is "a person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else."
  2. From John's writings, God is teaching us that the Christian is now a different creature compared to a non-Christian—and the Church is a different organism compared to the world.
  3. You can see why such an idea would be offensive to people—it is offensive because it seems to suggest that the Christian is some kind of superior human being.
  4. Before we jump to qualify things, is such an idea entirely false and without a shred of validity? Is the child of God *not* in some sense superior to his unbelieving fellow human being?
    - a. Based on what we read in Scripture, we would have to say yes: The child of God is superior because the child of God carries the divine Nature of God himself.
    - b. Of course, the child of God is still incomplete and sinful in many ways.—He or she is only at the beginning stages of the ways of God—and still has a long way to go.

- c. And yes, there are also many non-believers who are far more diligent, compassionate, and merciful than many Christians.
  - d. But we must let Scripture define reality for us.  
—And Scripture says that regardless of what your own experiences may suggest to you, the child of God does have the seed of God in his or her heart—which is not something the unbeliever has.
  - e. One day, this seed of God will completely overtake all the sin in the Christian’s life and reveal to the world a stunning creature—the human being who shines with the holy glory of God in Jesus Christ.
  - f. Because of this seed of God within us, we are able to form a truly distinctive Christian culture.
    - a. Because the seed of God is within us and not within the unbeliever, there will be a distinctively *Christian* approach to looking at the world.
    - b. There will be a distinctively *Christian* approach to...
      - the way we play sports
      - study
      - educate
      - create wealth
      - entertain
      - and relate to our culture.
 —For one, the Christian should do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus while the unbeliever does not (Col 3:17).
    - c. Yet, the way a Christian behaves *will* have—or at least ought to have—a different flavor to the way a non-believer behaves. This is because the child of God is born of God while the unbeliever is not.
- C. Encourage one another toward holiness based on the fact that God dwells in us (see also 1 Cor 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) “Unless a person is born of God and carries the seed of God’s Word and Spirit, that person cannot do works that are ultimately pleasing to God.” Discuss. (2) What is the antithesis? (3) How do you build a Christian culture in your place of work or study? (4) How ought we to encourage one another toward holiness?

## VII. Children of God in the World

**Because we have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I are now children of God. You and I now have the divine Nature of God in us. And we can be said to have been born of God. For that reason, let us *be* the children of God in this world. Let us live as human beings who carry in our own persons, the very life of God himself. Let us put aside our remaining sins so that we might become more hospitable environments for the divine Presence. And in response to grace, let us pour out our lives in love for our God and Father. The good news is that God has not left this all up to us. His divine Nature works within us to overcome what is sinful, such that we will grow in holiness and become perfectly sinless one day.**

- A. Some diagnostic questions
  - 1. What is it that holds you back from a life more filled with prayer and thanksgiving?
  - 2. What is it that prevents you from consciously devoting your work to the glory of God?
  - 3. What is it that holds you back from investing time, attention, and affection in your brothers and sisters in Christ?
  - 4. What is it that prevents you from seeking the Kingdom of God in all the areas of life that God has placed you?
- B. Know that your Abba Father loves you too much to let you sell your soul to lesser things.
- C. Know that Abba your Father also loves you too much to withhold himself from you.
- D. The Seed of God in you is the beginning of God's work in your life—and God aims to have all of you.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Now that we are born of God, how ought we to live? (2) What are things that prevent you from living fully as a child of God? (3) What provision has God made to help us grow in holiness?