

# THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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1 John 3:1-3

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SUBJECT: GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS CHILDREN

TITLE: WHAT MANNER OF LOVE

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-3

INTRODUCTION. I have never been as addicted to metaphors, similes, proverbs, and "wise" sayings as some of our neighbors in the Green River community, seven miles west of Sledge, Mississippi. I know you don't know anything about Sledge, but I can help you there. It is the home town of Harold Dorman. That doesn't help? Okay, he wrote some of those songs another Sledge product, Charlie Pride, made famous, including *Mountain of Love* and *Mississippi Cotton Picking Delta Town*. Of course, for those old enough to remember, Harold Dorman had tremendous success with *Mountain of Love*, as did Johnny Rivers. And that's about it. Of course when I was growing up there in the fifties they were still talking about "the Twenty-seven Flood."

But, back to those old sayings (I will let you judge the wisdom of them), one of my favorites was, "You can't have your cake and eat it, too." That seems so logical that you would think anyone would see the wisdom of it. And, as far as this world is concerned, I would not question it. However, I remember the time when the Holy Spirit made an impression on my mind - forgive me if I have offended anyone who thinks the Holy Spirit's ministry is restricted to what "I feel in my heart." I thank God that Christians do not have to choose between the mind and the heart.

Now for the lesson I received from the Holy Spirit: In Christ, you can have your cake and eat it too! There, I have said it: You can have your cake and eat it too. If you live to be one hundred, and feast on the Bread of Life every day, you will never make a dent in the supply. You can drink of the Water of Life every day, and never lower the level. While you cannot eat and physical cake and keep it, you can go daily to the Lord's table and take all you desire without diminishing in the slightest that which is stored up for you in Heaven.

To Karl Marx, and his blood-thirsty disciples - who, by the way, have murdered many times the fifteen million people slain by the Nazis - religion is dismissed as "Pie in the sky, bye and bye." While Hitler was an occultist, Marx and his ilk were atheistic humanists. The New Age religious cults, as well as the so-called Christian cults, like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, believe in a spiritual realm. But it is only from the Word of God that we come to understand the relationship between the seen and the unseen, that is, between the so-called "real word" and the real world.

Anything you can see with your eyes is in a state of deterioration: it is wearing out, rusting away, or eroding. Humans are "going the way of all the earth." Only that which is spiritual is lasting eternal. True Christians are people who have received eternal life by trusting in Jesus Christ. At the time of your salvation, God place His Spirit in you heart to empower you, nurture you, convict you,

to guide you, and have fellowship with you. His purpose is to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). As this happens the believer comes to understand that Heaven is far more than “pie in the sky, bye and bye.” In fact, the spiritual life is more real than the physical life.

I recently saw pictures of a friend made at high school reunions in 1979, 1989, and 1999 - and while I won't comment on his wife, my friend had undergone some changes. He is not at all like he was thirty years ago. Some of his hair has turned gray; some of it just turned loose.

It was martyred missionary Jim Elliot who, among other comments that showed wisdom beyond his years, made the often quoted statement: ‘He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for what he cannot lose.’ Jim Elliot also declared, “Be sure when it comes time to die, all you have to do is die.” You know, I believe if Jim Elliot could speak to us from Heaven right now, he would tell us that you can have your cake and eat it, too. You can enjoy all the benefits of a relationship with our Heavenly Father right here and right now, without losing even the most minuscule blessing awaiting us in glory. Now, let's see if our text today does not affirm the fact that we do not have to wait until we die before we can have a meaningful relationship with our Lord.

## I. BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS BESTOWED ON US, 3:1.

### A. He Proves His Love By Calling Us Children of God.

*“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.”*

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

#### 1. The Bible does not say that all people are God's children.

- a. That is what the devil says.
- b. Sadly, that is what a lot of people believe.
- c. If you believe that you are either lost or a deceived Christian.
- d. A new Christian may be deceived if he is not disciplined.
- e. No mature Christian should be deceived about this.

If you have any doubt that many who profess to be children of God not only believe that all their relatives and friends are going to Heaven, they believe they may take their pets with them. One lady, said, “Oh, yes, I can just see my dad sitting back in his recliner with his dog in his lap.” Well, I hate to burst her bubble, but as much as I love my English Shepherd, Bear- if you have seen him you can appreciate his name - he will not be in Heaven. We don't even allow him in church here on earth! Bear has always been exuberant and powerful - and this hill belongs to him, at least in his mind it

does. A couple of years ago, while my wife and I were in Nashville for a meeting of the Board of Trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, someone rolled his car up behind my wife's car at 2:00 A.M., and whatever his purpose was, the occupants couldn't get out of their car. When Mark heard the vicious barking and growling he eased down to the carport door and flipped on the light, and they started the engine and scratched out in reverse. I don't know if they were planning to break into our house or the church, but there was no way they were getting out of their car.

Bear is always very friendly to church members and other friends who come before we retire at night. Well, I am not sure friendly says it all. When he was younger, he had some really anti-social habits. For one thing if you showed up in our carport wearing shorts, the legs had better be tight. Otherwise, Bear's nose would slide in between the leg and the material and go straight up. Did you ever try to carry on a conversation with someone who is standing on her tip-toes while pivoting first right, and then left, and then back again? If we don't allow Bear in church here on earth, willing as he is, there is certainly no place for him in Heaven. But - and that is a big "but" - Bear will come as close to going to Heaven as any person who does not receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And He comes as close to being a child of God as the person who has never been born-again.

2. The Bible tells us that God loves the World (John 3:16).

3. It teaches that only born-again believers are children of God.

*"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).*

I recently spent about two hours visiting with a well known Catholic Priest, who serves a rather large Catholic church. This is not the first time I have visited with John. As a matter of fact, he assisted me in his grandmother's funeral service. John has told me what he tells others: "I got my training from the Catholic Church, but I came to a relationship with Jesus Christ through my Baptist grandmother. I got my religion from the Catholic Church, but I got my theology from my grandmother, Ada Kennedy." He is still convinced that his grandmother was the most outstanding woman he has ever known. At her funeral service, John shared with us her concern for him as a child and a youth. She talked with him about his need to be born-again, and he assured us that he had indeed, been born-again.

John and I talked openly about some of his members who have embraced New Age philosophies, and they do not even know it. He mentioned the very prominent lady in Monroe, Louisiana, who told him he preached like a Baptist preacher. To which, he said, "Well, I'll take that as a compliment." Apparently, she had not intended it as such.

John studied homiletics under my old professor from New Orleans Seminary, Dr. V. L. Stanfield. When he mentioned that, I remembered that Dr. Stanfield had been contacted by head of the Catholic seminary in New Orleans, who told him that their priests did not know how to preach. He asked Dr. Stanfield if he would come over to the Catholic seminary and teach the students how to prepare and

deliver sermons. Dr. Stanfield asked what he had in mind and the official said, “Teach them just like you do at the Baptist seminary. So, he started them with John 3:16.

John and I also discussed the scandal which has brought such shame to his church over the last few years. I said, “John, what the media will not tell people when they report this is that all priests are not doing this. This is a homosexual issue. When they use the term “pedophile” they leave the door open for people to believe any priest may be guilty of this. They love talking about pedophiles, but cannot bring themselves to call these men homosexuals.” He said, “That is absolutely true. Every child who has been abused has been a male, and he was abused by a homosexual.” My friend is disturbed by liberal bishops who have failed to take a stand on homosexuality, just as he was disturbed by a seminary professor who approved of the ordination of homosexuals.

John has apparently been accused of being homophobic. I thought about telling him about the homosexual I accidentally “outed” when I made the comment that if anyone ever accused me of being homophobic, I would explain that while it may be true, I can’t help myself: “I was born that way.” The individual could not keep his mouth shut, so I realized I had offended him. John rightly concludes that if you ordain a homosexual and put him in one of their schools or a children’s home, he is going to abuse some child.

John and I did not sit down and debate our differences, we discussed common concerns, and while I cannot understand his religion, I thank God that he professes a relationship with Jesus Christ. We discussed my close friend, James Remedies, whom he knew from a pastorate in north west Louisiana. James had grown up in the Catholic church, but through the witness of a friend at Louisiana Tech, he came to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. John told me he knew James had become a Baptist. I didn’t tell him that James began witnessing to his brothers and sisters, and over the years most of them have been saved. I believe there are many Baptists who are going to Heaven, and I believe every Catholic who is born-again by the grace of God will be in Heaven. I also believe a lot of both will spend their eternity in hell.

4. All who believe in Jesus Christ receive eternal life.

5. You do not have to wait until you die to receive eternal life.

Andrew Murray said that death is not a change of direction, it is another step in the way the Spirit-filled Christian has been going all along. You can have your cake and eat it, too. Jesus said, “*And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand*” (John 10:28).”

By the way, I can save you some serious money. Many Christians spend a lot of money on the latest fad, and they will buy anything they find in the “best seller” section at the local Christian book store. A few years ago, it was Promise Keepers; after that it was WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?); and then it was *Experiencing God*; and now anything Beth Moore writes sells. This is not a criticism of Henry Blackaby and Beth Moore - I would like to see people buy more of them, especially at

LifeWay Christian Stores. But for the frugal believer, here is a suggestion: buy a stack of Andrew Murray books and spend a couple of years with them. They are cheap, but no one is surpassing his spiritual wisdom and insight today.

## B. The World Cannot Comprehend the Christian Life.

1. The world does not know Jesus Christ.
  - a. The world knows someone named Jesus lived two thousand years ago.
  - b. The world does not know Jesus Christ in a redemptive sense.

Perhaps I can explain this if you will look with me at Isaiah 1:2-3:

*“Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, ‘Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master’s manger, **But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.**”*

When Isaiah writes, “The ox knows its owner,” he uses a word which means to recognize. When he writes that “Israel does not know,” that word means to know by experience. There are a lot of people who recognize the name Jesus, who do not know Him personally, experientially, intimately.

2. The world does not know us.
  - a. The world knows there are people called Christians.
  - b. Many lost people think they are Christians.
  - c. The world does not know how one comes to be a Christian.
  - d. It does not understand why Christians live they way they do.
  - e. Sadly, the world is confused by some people who profess to be Christians.

A visitor left a church after one of the “faithful” members prayed. His mother, thinking he was ill, followed him out and asked what was wrong. He explained that he had seen that man the night before at some club where he was checking something in his line of work. He told her the man had been drunk, “and the woman he was with was not his wife.” Yet the man had prayed a very emotional prayer.

I listened to a man give his testimony about how the Lord had saved him from almost certain death when his boat capsized and he was about to be drawn under a larger vessel. A friend of his later told me that the same man might pray a moving prayer during a worship service and then be using obscene language before he got beyond the front steps.

The world does not understand why some professing Christians live like that and others do not.

James Dopson appeared on Hannity and Combs one evening to discuss some issue dealing with the family - I believe it had to deal with news accounts about a number of children who had been abducted, molested, and killed. Combs aggressively demanded, "Which is the greater sin," and he went on to mention both these abductions and the latest corporate fraud case to make the news. The implication was clear to the host, but James Dopson's response obviously was not. When Dopson tried to stress that all sin is against God and that we need to repent of all sin, Combs once again demanded, "But, which is the greater sin?" To which Dopson again stressed the need for repentance from all sin.

## II. CHILDREN OF GOD LIVE WITH A BLESSED HOPE, 3:2-3.

*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. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

### A. By the Grace of God, We Are the Children of God.

#### 1. We are children of God because we have been born again.

When I was growing up we went to Vacation Bible School the second week in August each year. It was the hottest part of the year, but it was lay-by time in cotton country, that time between the last hoeing and the first picking. Farmers could permit their children to attend VBS each afternoon for three hours, then we would all go back for revival services each evening the same week. The opening assembly included pledges to the American flag, the Christian flag, and the Bible. The pledge to the Bible remains the same, but the other two have been changed. The pledge to the American flag was changed to include the now famous words, "under God." Unfortunately, most people say, "One nation - under God" (with a definite pause after nation). As my wife teaches here children, it is "one nation under God."

The pledge to the Christian flag was changed at one point. Formerly, it read, "uniting all mankind in service and love." It now reads, "uniting all Christians in service and love." There is an important distinction here and we must not miss it. We are not all children of God. Only believers are.

One of my seminary professors came to class one day and told us about speaking to a janitor as he walked from the parking lot. He asked the janitor how he was doing, to which the janitor responded, "I'm just fine, Sir; just fine. I've been born twice, I've died once and I ain't ever going to die again." The professor noted that this is not exactly how they teach it in the class room, but he got it right.

#### 2. We are children of God by adoption.

*"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:5-6).*

3. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

*“Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7).*

B. We Do Not Yet have Perfect Knowledge of Our Eternal Form or Existence.

1. What we do know is that “when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.”

- a. “When He is revealed” holds before us His glorious return.
- b. We are not given the date, but we do know many of the circumstances.
- c. We also know that we will be like Him forever.

This is great! The Holy Spirit is actively trying to conform us to the image of Christ here and now (Rom. 8:29). That is Sanctification. And we will be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ in Heaven. That is Glorification. This is exciting! Ask me if I know where Heaven is. Yes, it is where Jesus is. Ask me if I know what I will be like in Heaven. Absolutely! I am going to be like Jesus.

Once, when I stopped by to visit my father’s younger brother, he looked at me for a moment, and chocking back the tears, he said, “Son, you look just like your daddy.” I suppose he meant that I looked a lot like my father had looked at the same age. In many ways, I am like my biological father. In many other ways I am very much unlike him. I loved my father and I respected him, but I did not always think as he thought. For one thing, My father maintained an integrity that has been an inspiration to me throughout the years. He never volunteered any opinion that might be spiteful or painful. But you had better be sure to ask the right question, because if he did respond he would tell you exactly what he thought. Daddy was an orphan who had to drop out of school and help make a living for himself and his grandmother by the time he was twelve or thirteen years old. Whereas some who went through a similar experience never developed an appreciation for education, my father stressed to all four of his children the need for a college degree. Mother stressed a commitment to the Lord and Daddy supported her. Daddy stressed a need for education and Mother supported him.

Now, here is the down-side of looking too closely at any human being when it comes to an eternal hope. I have pictures of my father made when he was a young man. I once persuaded him to pull off his shirt had have a picture made with me. I was sixteen and he was thirty-seven. When he “struck the pose,” he looked like a smaller version of Charles Atlas (make that Mr. Universe today). By the time Mike, his youngest child, was sixteen years old, our father no longer looked like Charles Atlas, and ne no longer moved like him. Yet, as he watched some young adults working out, he was invited to see if he could do push-ups. He did several - with an adult sitting on his shoulders! However, within a few years strokes and heart attacks had taken away his strength and his stamina.

If you ask me if I am like my earthly father, I might have some difficulty answering that question.

But if there is one thing I know for sure it is that I will for all eternity be just like my Savior. Of course, my biological father is already with Jesus, and he is like Jesus.

2. When He is revealed, “we shall see Him as He is.”

When Jesus Christ comes again, He will not be returning as the Suffering Servant, but as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will not come again to be mocked, slapped, flogged, and crucified; but to make all enemies His footstool. Those who walked with Him in the Holy Land two thousand years ago saw Him as He was then, but people did not follow Him because of His physical appearance:

*“For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (Is. 53:2).*

They who followed Jesus on earth saw His holiness, His compassion, His wisdom, and a measure of His power. When He returns He will be revealed in absolutely holiness and power.

### C. EVERYONE WHO HAS THIS HOPE IN HIM PURIFIES HIMSELF, 3:3.

1. “Everyone” here means all born-again believers in Jesus Christ.
  - a. Postmodern men and women must hear this message.
  - b. All people are not going to Heaven.
  - c. In fact, most people are not going to Heaven.
2. “This hope” refers to those who will be like Jesus throughout eternity.
  - a. Hope in the New Testament is not wishful thinking.
  - b. Biblical hope denotes assurance.
3. Everyone who has “this hope in Him purifies himself.”
  - a. In the first place, you cannot purify yourself.
  - b. Only the Holy Spirit can purify you.
  - c. He will purify you only if you desire it.
  - d. He will not purify you if you do not desire it.
  - e. He will purify you, but not without your participation.

CONCLUSION. God wants you to be pure, just as Jesus is pure. If you remain focused on Jesus



Christ, as He is revealed through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will conform you to the image of Christ here and now - and you will for all eternity be with Him, and you will be like Him. This is the absolutely hope of every believer.

INVITATION