

Children of the Light

1. Intro & Context

- One of the accusations that is often levelled at the Anglican Church here in Sydney is its strong on doctrine, weak on emotion
 - People will argue that Sydney Anglican's work hard at preaching and understanding the Bible ... it's all very cerebral, all quite intellectual
 - But there is not much to write home about when it comes to experiencing God, and living lives that are genuinely transformed by Jesus
 - That the lives of Sydney Anglican Christians are not very different to middle-class Aussie secular people

- And if you were here last week with us as we looked at 1 John 2:15-27, you might have thought that this just confirms these accusations
- Because last week, John was stressing the critical importance of having the right doctrine > that orthodoxy matters
 - That Christians must hold onto the truth the disciples taught them

- But in today's passage, John goes on to says that not only does truth matter ... but right living matters too
- That the mark of being a Christian is not merely right doctrine ... but right conduct as well
- And as we'll see from what John begins to say in these verses ... is that the truth of the gospel ought to lead to transformed lives
- Real Christianity always leads to a change of character and a real change in behaviour
- And so while it's important that the truth about Jesus is upheld and understood in order for you and I to know God and have eternal life
- The mark of whether a person has been gripped by that truth will be evident in the way they live their life
- And there are three things that demonstrate a person has grasped the truth about Jesus
 - Gripped by the privilege of being a child of God
 - Convicted of the necessity to avoid sin as they live for God
 - Compelled to love one another in response to God's love for them
- So I want us to look at the passage this morning under three headings
 - Privilege of Children of God
 - Living as Children of God #1 – avoiding sin
 - Living as Children of God #2 – loving one another

PRAY**2. Privileges of Children** (2.28-3:6)

- Look with me at 2:28-3:6 ... and in these verses John says ...
 - when you are in Christ
 - when you remain in him
 - when you trust in Jesus and death and resurrection
 - you are a child of God
- We see that there in v1 and 2
 - *that we should be called children of God*
 - *Dear friends, now we are children of God*
- This is quite frankly staggering
 - A Christian is a child of God!
- You think about it
 - The almighty creator of the heavens and earth
 - The one who designed the infinitely complex human brain
 - The one who put a gazillion stars in the sky
 - The one who created the beauty of a rose
 - The one who can part the Red Sea, cause mountains to quake, send plagues on entire nations ...
- That God ... considers those who are in Christ his children!
- Think about the way a parent considers their children
- It's Mother's Day and most of us will have opportunities to celebrate with or reflect on our relationships with our mothers
 - I know as a parent of our children ... Liana would take a bullet for our kids
 - She constantly is thinking about what's best for their welfare
 - Relationally, spiritually, academically, socially, ethically
 - Of course that's born out of a deep love for them
- Now that would be true for most mothers
- But if that's how we ... as imperfect as we are ... care for, love and uphold our children ... how much more so the one who **is** perfect and considers those in Christ as his children
 - That the God of the universe! ... would want to make you and I one of his children ... is staggering
- In fact we are reminded of this truth every time we do the Lord's Prayer

- How's it start?
- Our Father ... intimate, immanent
- Who art in heaven ... all-powerful, transcendent, sovereign
- And so the Christian has this immense privilege of being called a child of God

- Now in the same way you're considered someone's child because you were born to them ...
 - A Christian is considered a child of God because they are born of God
 - See this in 2:29 and 3:9
- How is a person born of God?
 - John describes it for us at the start of his gospel
 - **John 1:12-13** ¹² *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--* ¹³ *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

- A person is born of God when they receive Jesus and put their trust in him
 - And what happens ... God gives them the right to be child of God
 - You can't earn it through your heritage
 - You don't become a Christian because you decide
 - You can't receive it because you are born into a believing family
 - The privilege is something that is given
 - It's status to be received from God

- Which means ... our privilege as children of God comes via adoption
 - We're adopted children of God
 - We're not by nature children of God
 - We are by nature children of Adam (not Adam Hart ☺)

- **Illustration - Adoption**
- We know a number of families who have adopted children
- One family we know have adopted a little boy from the Philippines
- Mum and Dad are anglo, fit as, look like models, Dad looks like he could play NRL for St George
- And they've got this little, scrawny, dark skinned, delightful Filipino boy who they've adopted
- To look at him ... it's obvious he's adopted
- But to see the way his mum and dad treat him, care for him, include him in their family and love him dearly ... shows he's one of them

- I'm not sure the circumstances that led to him being adopted ... but obviously he was in need of a family and secure future
- For that boy to have been given an opportunity and to be welcomed, loved and cared for ... given where he has come from ... is a wonderful privilege
- But it was not their son's merits that got him adopted ...
 - nor were our friends obliged to adopt him
 - they decided in their grace and goodness to do that for him
- And if you're a follower of Jesus ... you are children of God who have been **adopted** into his eternal family
 - And God welcomes, loves, cares for you like you were one of his own
 - Completely unmerited ... not because you deserved it ... but because of his grace and goodness for you
- And in v1 John speaks of this love that God lavishes on those who are his children
 - Firstly by adopting them as his children
 - Secondly, by dealing with our sin
- You see its only possible for you and I to be adopted into God's family
 - if we're reconciled to him
 - if we're in relationship with him
 - if there's no barrier between us and him
- And for that to happen ... God who is holy needs to make us holy
- And so God in his love
 - atones for our sin
 - deals with the wrath our sin deserves
 - so that we can be his adopted children
- How does he do that?
 - Through Jesus who as John says in v5 *appeared so that he might take away our sins*
- So the person who believes in Jesus, who continues in him
 - Has this **IMMENSE** privilege of being born of God
 - Adopted into his family
 - And considered one of his children
 - And this is what you **are** says John
 - This is not just a future reality ... this is what you are **NOW**
- And that means ... as John said in v28 ...

- *when Christ appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*
- You have
 - no need to fear God
 - no need to be afraid of judgment
 - no need to doubt your eternal future
 - no need to question where you stand before Him
- For when you are in Christ ... you are a child of God

3. Living as Children of God #1: Avoiding Sin (3:7-10)

- With any position of privilege there are of course responsibilities that come with that
 - If you're the Cronulla Sharks Chairman ... you have the privilege of overseeing the reigning NRL premiers ... but you also have a responsibility not to take cocaine
 - If you are an elected member of parliament you have the privilege of high salary, various allowances, post-retirement perks ... but you also have the responsibility to represent the interests of your electorate and not your own
- Same is true for those who are born of God and called to be children of God
 - It's an immense privilege ...
 - However, with that privilege also comes responsibility
- And in the remaining verses ... John teaches those responsibilities are two fold
 - First is ... not to sin
 - Second is ... love one another
- In v8-10 John's point is ... when you're a child of God ... it's not appropriate for you to sin
 - It's inconsistent with the status you have
 - It shows a lack of understanding of the privilege that you have and the responsibility that goes with it
- Why is that?
 - Because the righteous do what is right
 - And he who is sinful is of the devil
- John is big on painting pictures in black and white
- For John it's an either or proposition
 - Either you're in Christ and your life reflects that status

- Or, you're sinful and you're of the devil
- **Application**
- Clearly this is a warning for those who claim to be in Christ ... to take sin seriously
- Sin is not just a bit of naughtiness on the side that we justify and dismiss
- No ... John says ... choosing to sin and
 - to have no sense of remorse or guilt
 - to have no conviction of the need for repentance and forgiveness
 - Shows you've not grasped the seriousness of sin and how serious God is when he says ... *'no one who is born of God will continue to sin'*
- Whatever it is ...
 - Racism, porn, drunkenness, domestic abuse, grumpiness, sexual promiscuity, laziness, theft, lack of generosity, impatience, apathy, anger, envy, lack of self-control, gossip, discontentment, pride, malice, unthankfulness, selfishness, irritability, judgmentalism, sexism, jealousy
- We need to be honest with ourselves about our sin and realise those things are not okay
- That there's no such thing
 - as Respectable Sins ...
 - That my sin is okay because "everyone does it!"
 - Its not okay to say to ourselves "I know I shouldn't, but it's not that bad"
- Because John says sin is incompatible with the status a Christian has as a child of God
- Now what are we to make of v9?
- Read out of context we could understand this verse (and verse 6 like it) it seems to be saying that a true Christian, someone who is a child of God is constitutionally incapable of sinning
 - Now our personal experience tells us that's not true
 - But we also know theologically it's not true ... because John has told us
 - 1:8 - *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves* (also v10)
 - 2:1 - *But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*
- So what are we to make of this?
- It's clear that John is not denying the reality of sin within the life of a Christian

- He's talking about the persistent practice of sin
- He's talking about the 'habit of sinning' ... not the isolated act of sin
- So the Christian is not meant to read this and think ...
 - "On no! This is impossible, I'm such a sinner ... therefore I'm not really a child of God"
- No ... the Christian is meant to read this and realise
 - "I need to take my sin seriously and do whatever I can to rid my life of it"
 - "I can't presume upon God's grace and forgiveness shown to me through the death and resurrection of Jesus"
- Because to carry on sinning shows I haven't grasped the **privilege** of being a child of God and the **responsibility** I have to be holy like the one who saved me is holy
- And so this verse is meant to jolt us
 - its meant to confront us
 - it's meant to be like a bucket of cold water on any complacency and apathy you might have about the sin in your life
- John warns us ... that lives of wilful, disobedient, unrepentant unrighteousness, cannot be lives that are born of God that know and remain in him
- Such a person faces eternity without God ... for they are children of the devil
- John's point is that the person
 - who is in Christ
 - who remains in Christ
 - who believes in Christ
 - ... is NOW a child of God
- Therefore you have the immense privilege of forgiveness and salvation
 - And in light of that privilege ... sin should have no place!

4. Living as Children God #2: Loving one another (3:11-18)

- So the first thing John says children of God are to do is avoid sin
- The second thing he says is that you also should love one another
- We see this in v11
 - *This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another*

- Then John contrasts this mutual love Christians are to have for one another with the behaviour of Cain
 - Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve
 - Cain murdered his brother out jealousy and hatred
- That's the opposite of love says John ... and that's of the devil

- Instead ... children of God are to love one another
- And rather strongly, John says ...
 - if you don't love your brother ... then you're not a child of God
 - if you're not showing love to one another ... how can you be a child God?
- But a believer is one who loves their brothers and sisters in Christ
 - It's evidence of where they stand and what they believe
 - The two go hand in hand

- And then John gives us another illustration
 - He pointed us to Cain to show us what love is NOT like
 - Now in v16 he points us to Jesus to show us what love IS like
 - ¹⁶ *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

- As we look to Jesus and his love for us at the cross .. we see what love is like
 - Brotherly love is not warm fuzzies
 - It's not romantic
 - It's not conditional on you loving me back
- Love for one another is
 - Sacrificial
 - Costly
 - Other person centred
 - Seeks the good of others

- You see John's point ...
 - The self-sacrifice of Jesus is not just a virtue to be admired
 - It's an example to copy
- We ought to lay down our lives for our brothers otherwise our profession to love one another is empty
 - We ought to do this because we belong to Christ
 - Because he lay down his life for us

- And love is action orientated ...

- *v17 - If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*
- Intentions of love are not enough says John ...
 - Actions speak louder than words
 - Love is neither sentiment or talk ... its deeds and action
- True love is revealed in practical care
 - Sharing material possessions, sharing our time, sharing our love, sharing our gifts ... for the good of one another
- **Application**
- Often we have this desire to love one another ... but sometimes don't get it right and we don't end up loving people like we ought
- That might be because of
 - our own selfishness and sinfulness ... which we need to personally address with the Lord
- But it could also be because we're not **aware** of one another's needs
- Last year on Vision Sunday I talked about how one of our initiatives for 2017 would be to implement a way we can better pastorally care for one another
 - If we are going to be a church where loving one another is part of our DNA, we needed to have some mechanism to ensure we can do that well and do it for everyone
 - Otherwise what tends to happen is pastoral care tends to fall on the shoulders of a few pastorally minded people
 - The result is ... the few get overwhelmed or burnt out ... and many people who do need care fall through gaps
- So to ensure we love one another well ... it's something we all need to be doing
 - Because as John tells us ... loving one another is part of what it means for you to live as a child of God
- So today I want to tell you about an idea that a number of people here at church have had input to ... that we hope and pray will help us to love one another as John exhorts us to
- The proposal is fairly simple and seeks to leverage the existing structure and fellowship of growth groups

- The aim would be that growth group members to form pairs or triplets within each growth group with the purpose of pastorally caring for one another
- What do we mean when we say we want to be pastorally caring for one another?
 - Well its loving one another ... like John is urging is readers to here in 1 John 3
- So what might that look like? Well it could include;
 - Calling a member when they miss church or growth group to see if everything is okay
 - Sharing prayer points and praying for one another
 - Providing meals in other times of need
 - Encouraging one another in Bible reading
 - Speaking the word of God to each other as you seek to encourage and support one another
 - Support and encourage each other in mission and those you are missioning to
 - Doing hospitality together and including others in that
- That's not prescriptive and its certainly not the limit of it ... because there is no limit to love

- You don't have to meet separately ... although some of you might
 - Most of you will still be seeing each other at GG and church
 - But there are plenty of ways to keep in contact to share with each other, share prayer points, follow up with one another

- For those of you who aren't currently in a growth group ...
 - this a great reason for you to be part of one
 - GG are a place where we can spiritually, emotionally, practically care for and encourage one another
- However, if you can't get to one of our GG ... but would like to be part of a one of these care groups ... then I'd encourage that
 - Indicate your interest on the Comms Card

- This is not just something for loving one another who are connected and integrated
 - It's also a way we can care for and love those who are new
 - So one thing I'm suggesting is that each pair or triplet seeks to include someone who is new at C@P or not so well connected

- That way we can be praying for, looking out for, welcoming, caring and loving the newcomer, the fringe person, unconnected person ...
- And in doing so ...
 - Not only are we ensuring everyone is being loved and cared for
 - But it will help draw them into the family of God so they too get to experience to the love of God shown to them in Christ and in his people
- Now hopefully this resonates with you
- Because last year many of you completed the National Church Life Survey
 - The summary results were published recently
 - First page says ... The people of this church want to give attention to ...
 - Building a sense of community – 33%
 - Ensuring new people are included – 33%
- If we're able to get this happening, we ought to be able to just that
 - Build community
 - Connect new people
 - Love one another
- How wonderful would it be therefore ... where we're naturally looking out for each other and actively welcoming and connecting those who are new to C@P
- You'll have more time to discuss this this week in GG's ... but I pray this will be something we can get happening so we can do exactly what John is urging us to do ... love one another as children of God
- As always ... where does our motivation, strength and power come to love one another like this
- Comes not from a system, or a pastors urging or a guilty heart
- It comes from understanding that you're a child of God
- And that in Christ ... you are deeply loved
- That the one who is calling you to love one another ...
 - has not only loved you ...
 - but loved you in the most sacrificial way possible ...
 - laying down his life ...
 - so that you may have your life and have it for eternity
- And by laying down his life for you Jesus has paved the way for you to enjoy the immense **privilege** of being a child of God
- So do not continue to sin
- And love one another ... as Christ has loved you