

Moving from Fear to Living Hope

1 John 2:28-3:10

Dave Geldart | Tallgrass at The Well | July 18, 2021

- **Intro**

- Good morning!
- I'm Dave Geldart, Associate Pastor with Tallgrass Church
- This is the time where we study a section of God's word together, not just because we should or that's part of going to church. It's not just something to sit through.
- We believe that this really is GOD's word, and his primary means of speaking to us. So we come to this time eager and expectant that God would help us to understand his word, and speak to us about how it applies – to us individually, and together as a church family.
- Start with Prayer for this
- **Read passage 1 John 2:28-3:10**

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. **3** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1. Fear is a powerful emotion

- a. One of our most primal feelings.

- b. It's meant to help us tune in, clue in when we're in danger. When there's a real threat to our lives.
- c. **One of my earliest memories is one of fear** – I must have been only 4 or 5 but I remember creeping toward the bathroom at the other end of the hallway at night from my bedroom.
 - i. Problem was I had to pass by the big opening to the living room. I remember it being so dark. And I was terrified that there was an alligator laying in wait for me in that dark living room.
 - 1. This wasn't altogether baseless since we lived in Beaufort SC, and our back yard was a tidal marsh. And I'd just learned a few days ago about how an alligator had crawled up from the swamp in our back yard and walked across to the yard across the street.
- d. **As a young adult in college**, I remember looking down from the edge of a very tall cliff at the water in a reservoir 50 feet below. I was visiting my brother in Bolivar MO and we'd hiked to an old reservoir surrounded by high rock cliffs. And I remember my telling me to STOP, don't jump. You don't know what's right under that water. You could die right here!
 - i. Reasonable!
- e. If your life is like a car, **Fear is like an indicator light on your dash**
 - i. It's a POOR driver.
 - ii. but an extremely helpful light.
 - iii. We do well to pay attention to our fears. Not to let them drive us, but to learn what they're telling us about what's going on under the hood. And what's coming down the pike.
 - iv. Sometimes our fears are based in truth, and are helpful navigators
 - 1. As in my fear of jumping off that rocky ledge into the dark waters below
 - v. Other times, they're based not on truth, but on something else. And can lead us far off course.
 - 1. My fear of alligators in my living room for a lighthearted example – I almost peed my pants
 - 2. Though we all know that misplaced fear can have far more serious consequences.

2. I imagine many of you connected with one or two points of fear from this passage as we read it

- 3. 2 Main points of fear from this passage:
 - a. fear / shrinking in shame at the return on Jesus
 - b. fear about my sin disqualifying me as a true Christian
- 4. Today we're going to lean into these areas of fear.

- a. And we'll see how with each, God is calling us to move out of fear and into living hope

5. 3 main Options when we come across problem passages

- a. ignore them
 - i. pretend they don't matter or just try not to think about it
 - ii. This ultimately stunts your growth as a Christian and erodes the strength of your faith – your confidence
- b. freak out, and blindly and doggedly accept what you think it means as binding (even if it doesn't seem to square with your experience or other parts of the Bible)
- c. or do the wise thing and look deeper
 - i. DO SOME BIBLE STUDY
 - ii. assuming that your interpretation might be the problem.

6. Problem passages basics – how to study the bible

- a. look at the biblical context
 - i. in the same book
 - ii. then in the rest of the bible
- b. look at the linguistic context
 - i. language, range of meaning with words
- c. look at the historical cultural context
 - i. what was going on with the people this was written to?
 - ii. in their lives, in the culture around them

7. Look at our passage: **appears to say that true Christians don't ever sin. And that if you do sin, then it proves you're not really a child of God. And you'll be ashamed in front of Him when he returns.**

- a. BIG FEAR – this interpretation has caused lots of problems over the years

8. biblical context:

- a. if the Bible really is a unified story written by God as the ultimate author, then God won't contradict himself.
 - i. If you're interested in reasons why we can trust the bible as reliable, I invite you to check out a teaching on the tallgrass website **"WHY BELIEVE THE BIBLE" from June 17, 2018.**
 - ii. I'll also link that when we post this teaching online.
- b. And if he speaks elsewhere about this topic, that can help us clarify what he thinks. Especially if the teaching is repeated and/or clearer elsewhere.
- c. **It turns out that the Bible does speak quite a lot about this topic. Here's a few samples:**
 - i. Starting in the same letter of 1st John
 - 1. John (in this same letter) affirms that true Christians (including himself) do continue to sin. Read 1:8,10.

2. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

3. Anyone who claims not to have sin is self-deceived and a liar.

ii. Lets look at two others from the rest of the Bible

iii. James 3:2. - ² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

1. Even if James had said “You all stumble in many ways,” he would be saying that true Christians continue to sin! But he goes even farther saying “We all stumble in many ways”—including himself, a seasoned Christian leader.

iv. Paul, early church planter and writer of much of the NT letters agrees!

1. Read excerpts from Rom.7:14-24.

2. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ...¹⁸ ...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ...

3. Paul is agonizing over the presence of ongoing sin in his present life as a seasoned Christian leader.

v. Can you relate to this like I can?

vi. These passages should be enough to make it clear that true Christians can and do sin.

1. This means we are misunderstanding what John means in 3:6.

2. SO, What then does he mean?

9. Study Tip #2: Look at the literary context – the original language

a. When we take a close look, it is clear that John is talking about something other than Christians simply committing occasional sins.

b. Notice that three times John uses the phrase “practices sinning” (3:4, 8, 9a).

i. If I yell in anger at my kids, (BENJI, have I ever done that?) -- that is bad. But if I eagerly “practice sinful anger” toward my kids, this is morally perverse.

ii. John seems to be describing people who intentionally embrace some kind of sinful behavior as a settled lifestyle.

c. Notice also that he uses a synonym for “practices sin” – namely, “practices lawlessness” (3:4).

i. “Lawlessness” is a stronger term than “sin;” it means a rejection of biblical ethics. If I yell in anger at my kids and yet acknowledge that that is wrong, that’s one thing. But if I insist that doing this is not only OK, but GOOD, righteous, that is lawlessness.

- ii. So John is describing people who claim to know and speak of God, and who not only intentionally embrace some kind of sinful lifestyle, but also insist that it is not wrong. In fact, it's enlightened!

10. Study Tip #3 – Cultural Context, Historical Context

- a. What's going on in the world the original audience was in?
- b. Who are these false teachers who practice lawlessness?**
- c. They are trying to deceive John's readers (read 3:7).
- d. You may remember that one of John's purposes for writing this letter was to expose and refute certain "false teachers" who claimed to know Christ, but who denied that He is Messiah/God (2:18-26; 4:1-6).
- e. What did these false teachers teach about sin?
 - i. We know both from John's own writings and from early Christian leaders who knew this situation that these false teachers practiced and encouraged sexual immorality—and taught that "spiritually enlightened people" were above biblical sexual ethics.
- f. These were the Gnostics!**
 - i. Let's talk a little about Gnosticism for a minute as it will help not only inform our study of these problem passages but also help us connect the dots to the Gnosticism that continues to exist alive and well in our culture today!

11. Gnostics

- a. people who believed that the physical world was lowly and bad, and the spiritual was good
 - i. Dualism
- b. The physical world was accidentally created by a lower and evil deity, Yahweh, the god of the OT
 - i. But the true God, the Father, cares only for the spirit. And will liberate his followers from this dreadful physical existence and restore them to the transcendent realm if they achieve "Gnosis"
 - 1. Greek word for Secret knowledge
 - 2. enlightenment
- c. So Gnostics believed our bodies were debased, degraded, unimportant.
- d. Prisons for the soul to get released from
- e. The inner light, the inner self. The feelings and desires inside a person, that's the REAL important part of you.
- f. And life is about finding yourself by looking WITHIN
- g. So they denied that Jesus was God incarnate. He was just a human.
- h. And the spirit of the Christ came upon him at baptism and left him before he died on the cross.
- i. And thus liberated, God would never resurrect Jesus' body. It was the problem!
- j. So the resurrection didn't happen. Except maybe in some metaphorical sense.
- k. And the main goal of life is to escape and overcome the physical world and enter a disembodied pure heavenly realm.
- l. So, what you do with your body, doesn't really matter. Do what you want/feel!

- m. **In Rev. 2:6,14,15**, Jesus identifies these false teachers in Ephesus and vicinity as the “Nicolaitans,” (Gnostics) and condemns them for teaching His people “to commit acts of (sexual) immorality.”
 - n. **Early Christian leaders’ writings (Against Heresies, Irenaeus, Ignatius of Antioch) speak of a** false teacher in Ephesus named Cerinthus (a well known Gnostic leader). He not only openly practiced sexual immorality; he also taught that “spiritually enlightened” people were exempt from such biblical sexual ethics and should show their enlightenment by casting off old and oppressive restraints.
12. So all this study helps us see that this problem passage is easily solved with a little study
- a. **John’s main point in this passage is not that true Christians do not commit sins. Nor that Christians who struggle with sin need be afraid of Jesus when he returns.**
 - b. INSTEAD It is that self-proclaimed “Christian” teachers who practice and advocate sin, especially that what you do with your body doesn’t really matter, and deny the resurrection of Christ are actually counterfeits who are serving the devil (whether they realize it or not).
 - c. It’s those people who will shrink away from Christ in shame when he returns. NOT CHRISTIANS.
 - d. **In fact, its ironic (perhaps diabolically so) that this passage that has caused so many Christians to be afraid and feel insecure, but was actually originally written to encourage Christians to not be afraid and to know that they were secure in Christ. And to eagerly anticipate his return.**
13. What about you?
- a. **Where do you connect to this topic?**
 - b. So if you are listening to my voice this morning and you have trusted in Christ, yet have struggled with FEAR, feeling like you must be a second class Christian because you still struggle with sins.
 - i. Or worse, that your struggle with sin is evidence of your rejection by God, his anger toward you.
 - c. **Hear from God’s very word that that is NOT true.**
 - i. **God wants to turn the light on in the living room** and show you that the alligator you feared actually isn’t there.
 - 1. Instead your heavenly father is right there eager to pick you up and comfort you with his words.
 - ii. **1 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. ² He is the propitiation for our sins
 - iii. **Romans 5:8** declares, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
 - iv. **Romans 8:1** teaches us, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
 - v. **1 John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

- d. Or maybe you're here this morning and you've never asked for Jesus to forgive your sins and become the Lord of your life. **You live in reasonable fear of meeting God BECAUSE YOU'RE STILL DEAD IN YOUR SINS** and at enmity with God.

If you've never accepted God's invitation to you to become his child through your faith in Jesus, why wait?

- i. You can choose to become his child right now.
- ii. **1 John 1: 9 -⁹** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- iii. In the quiet of your own heart you can pray to God about these things. And become his child today. And let him take away your fear and replace it with his love.

14. **GOD'S ANSWER TO THIS FEAR:** This fear isn't actually based in truth. If you're in Christ, you don't have to be afraid. Jesus' forgiveness covers you forever. And continues to function for you even as you sin. In fact, it's your sorrow over your own sins that evidences you're not being deceived into this settled lifestyle of enlightened lawlessness.

15. **So don't be deceived. And don't be afraid.** If you hold on to Christ you won't ever be ashamed before Him!

- a. God wants us to be assured and confident NOW about the glorious future that awaits us.
- b. And the living hope we have in relationship with God himself who loves us more than words can say.

16. **So HOW can you be assured? Grow more confident?**

- a. How can we know and experience that NOW?

17. **2 Main kinds of assurance .. CONFIDENCE– objective and subjective**

- a. Objective in that it's real and binding for us, even when you can't feel it
- b. Subjective in that once you receive Christ, he will begin to help you experience his presence and love for you personally
- c. It takes BOTH to have a healthy spiritual life. Objective assurance to ground and root us in no matter what we're feeling.
- d. And experiences of his love for us for us to enjoy

18. **Objective Assurance: the Word**

- a. **1 John 5:13¹³** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.
- b. God has spoken to us directly and repeatedly in His Word about his love for us, our forgiveness, our status in Christ, and the great hope that awaits us both after we die, AND BEGINNING NOW
- c. This is the primary foundation of our assurance. It allows our subjective experiences of assurance to rest on this firm foundation. **The colored pencil in the coloring sheet. So that even without the color, we still have the dark black outlines of the picture.** And at worst, it's enough.

- d. But so laid on that foundation, bounded by the dark black lines of scripture, our subjective experiences are freed to enliven and enrich the picture of our hope.
 - i. **They bring the COLOR.** The real beauty. The stuff of our relationship that Jesus that gives us wings. Makes it full and enjoyable.

19. So that God's spirit, living inside you, abiding with you, can teach you to trust and experience him.

20. Subjective assurances:

21. #1 The Spirit helps assure you of your secure position as God's beloved Child by helping you know what's true

- a. 1 John 2:20,27
 - i. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. (Gnosis).
 - ii. ²⁷ But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.
 - iii. Not that you instantly know everything, but in contrast to this secret knowledge of the Gnostics, God's Spirit promises to help us to discern what is true.
- b. **You begin to develop an inner sense**, almost a feeling, that is unsettled when you're hearing or considering something that's untrue – even if your mind can't quickly say WHY!
- c. And also a sense of assurance of truth when you hear it.
 - i. You just know – THAT'S RIGHT, that's TRUE
 - ii. Even if you don't fully know why. Until you later can confirm through studying the scriptures
- d. This helps you begin to experience the reality of God's Spirit living within you.

22. The Spirit also does this same thing with your conscience

- a. ^{3:9} No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.
 - i. God's SEED is his Spirit now alive within you. Helping retune your conscience.
- b. It becomes more and more sensitized. To sin.
- c. Things that you didn't used to think twice about now cause you a deep sense of unquiet.
- d. Unsettledness.
- e. GUILT
 - i. NOT SHAME
 - ii. Guilt says you did something bad
 - iii. Shame says YOU ARE BAD
 - iv. Guilt and conviction of sin are from GOD – confirming to you what's true about sin and the right living he's calling you to. BECAUSE YOU ARE HIS CHILD
 - v. Shame and condemnation says you did bad SO YOU ARE BAD.... You are NOT God's child – THESE ARE FROM THE DEVIL.

- f. Hebrews 12 says that As a loving father disciplines the child he loves, so we begin to experience this sensitized conscience, and at times even Gods discipline when we sin. NOT BECAUSE WE'VE LOST HIS LOVE, but as clear evidence that we HAVE IT.
- g. This assurance of God's love for you has been hijacked by the evil one. We must take it back. And experience our sensitized conscience as actually ASSURANCE of our status as Children of God

23. The spirit helps us personally experience God's love for us and our status as his beloved Child

- a. **1 John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.
- b. **Romans 8:16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
- c. **Romans 5:5** (and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.)
- d. Very subjective
- e. But also quite in line with objective truth from scripture
- f. **Happens sometimes when we're reading God's word** about his great love for us
- g. Or when we consider the beauty of his creation
- h. Or listening to a worship song
- i. Or in the tender touch from a friend
- j. **And something inside you whispers** this is just a taste of how much I love you
- k. **For me this happens most consistently in 3 venues**
 - i. Worship music
 - ii. Time alone with God, Journaling
 - iii. And outside under the stars
 - iv. **Usually, but not always, makes me cry.**
 - v. As my spirit is momentarily OVERFLOWED with God's love for me. It overwhelms and overflows me, and my body can't contain it. And something wells up inside me and all I can do is weep – not in sadness, but in joy and profound comfort.

24. Another subjective assurance (v10) is our increasing love for other brothers and sisters in Christ. EVEN those who are very different from you. Or even annoy the hell out of you!

- a. More about this one in a few weeks when we get into chapter 4

25. Again, subjective assurances aren't enough to build your Christian life upon. But they color in the spaces between the lines of scripture, and help us really experience our personal loving relationship with God.

- 26. Because God WANTS you to be secure in his love. Assured of your belovedness as his son. As his daughter. And he's moved heaven and earth to bring you close to himself.
- 27. In fact, in opposition to Gnostic teaching, God came here. Wrapped himself in flesh. And became human. And not only did he die to pay for your sins, but he was physically resurrected to give you a living hope of your own physical resurrection.
- 28. You matter. Your whole being matters. Body and soul.

29. **He's in the business of loving you.** All of you. And he wants to help you move from fear to living hope in him.
30. **To turn the light on in the dark living room of your fear** and help you experience his presence and his love. **A living hope that will not disappoint**
31. **So the application for today's study of this passage is:**
- a. **HEAD: Lean more deeply into the objective assurance God wants you to have through his word**
 - i. Reading and studying
 - ii. Memorizing passages that directly speak to your fears or your position in Christ
 - b. **HEART:**
 - i. **Take steps to become more emotionally healthy**
 1. We tend to experience God's love for us in proportion to how emotionally healthy we are.
 2. For me, I grew up a largely emotionally disconnected individual. Made life work by desensitizing myself to pain and sadness. Unfortunately it meant I desensitized myself from connecting with ALL my emotions. That cost was too high....
 3. And it's been a long journey for me to heal and reconnect with this essential part of my humanness.
 4. And for so long I lost hope of experiencing God's love for me like other people seemed to experience.
 5. But as I pursued health through counseling and soul care, I've come to see how these are deeply connected.
 6. At one point, through a time of healing prayer, I sensed clearly from God that if I wanted to hear his voice, I had to be willing to cry.
 - a. NOT an easy step
 - b. But it's been a turning point.
 - c. As I finally decided to quit resisting, and let it go. As I sobbed in a living room in front of others on that same journey, something inside finally broke. In a good way.
 - d. I experienced a peace deep inside I'm not sure I ever had – even though I was a believer and had been since age 7.
 - e. And since then, things have been different.
 - f. Oh I'm still me. Have the same tendencies. Same knee jerk to shut down my emotions. But more and more I'm stepping back and choosing to feel.
 - g. And I've been experiencing SUBJECTIVE experiences of God's love for me ever since. Not every day. Not even every week. But from time to time.
 - ii. **So for you, you may, like me, need to admit the potential link between your emotional issues and your ability to experience God's love. Hear his voice.**
 1. You'll need help. Can't heal that one alone.

2. Share about this with your Christian community.
3. Pastors.
4. Counseling!

c. HANDS:

- i. Share about your experiences of assurance with others.**
- ii. Share what you know, with who you know.
 1. And this morning I want to invite you to share about your experiences with confidence and assurance
 2. What are some ways YOU experience God's assurance that you're his beloved child?
 3. This will be a great blessing to others. Not primarily from a teaching standpoint, but by creating the conversation.
 4. We desperately need to be able to talk about these things together.
 5. So we can walk with one another.

32. Testimonies – open mic-

- a. *What are some ways YOU experience God's assurance that you're his beloved child?*

33. PRAY – what is God speaking to you this morning about this?

- a. *What next step is he asking you to take in response to this?*