

Let Me Show You My Children

I John 3

By John Roy, Pelham Road Church

Greenville, SC April 2018

Years ago, back in the pre-digital age a man once carried a wallet. A folded leather pouch that contained valuables. Some of the valuables were photos. Photos of the family. Of course, I am going way back, but there was a day when a father would pull out his wallet and say, “Let me show you my children?” Then they would unfold 3 or 4 pictures of the family.

Today, the father or mother might say “Hold on a second, let me get my phone.” They would then open their pictures app and look for the folder labeled “children, family, Owen, Aiden” and don’t think they are going to stop at 3 or 4, now they have hundreds. Eating ice cream, playing T-ball, crying, sleeping, being held by grandpa, then there’s the one where they are holding a sign “First Birthday,” Pictures, then and now have been the way we share what our children look like. Photos show how the children are growing and changing. Photos tell the truth. Of course, they are our way of bragging but they are also a confession or declaration if you like. This is what my offspring looks like. Good thing you can delete the photos you don’t like.

Years ago, when I first read 1 John in Greek class it occurred to me I John is God’s photo album. Or at least could be. In a day prior to photography God is describing

what His children look like. Since God could not take a photo, he is describing with images what the children of God look like, and even what they act like.

The first thing to hear in I John is the children of God look like they live righteously.

Scripture speaks of us and our relationship to sin. If you were to take the words literally you may arrive at the conclusion that the children of God, do not sin, or no longer sin. Such an understanding of sin does not pass the reality test. Surely the children of God, avoid sin, frown on sin, do not endorse sin, we need to take this seriously but not necessarily literally.

If God actually had pictures to pull from the Holy wallet. God would show a picture of spouses being faithful to each other. A parent forgiving the harsh words said to them by their child. A person telling the truth. Someone donating money to help a person out. God's children are as uncomfortable with sin, as a diabetic at Marble Slab Ice Cream or as a deer on a highway. Deer do sometimes cross a highway and diabetics do sneak a little ice cream from time to time. But they do not live there, it is not their practice, if it is, it becomes fatal.

A fellow minister told me about an invite he had to participate in a funeral. He knew the man, and he had known the man's history, he didn't pay his bills on time, was unfaithful to his wife, ridiculed family, friends, and enemies alike it didn't really matter. He cheated at business and in a small town this did not go unnoticed. The minister, who I know, was going to read some comforting scripture and mention the man's love for his dogs.

Others who had been invited to “mourn” the passing called the deceased a “good man” they spoke glowingly about him. As my friend said he wondered if he was in the wrong service. Their praise was non-specific, they had no examples, but there overarching theme was “he was a good man.”

My friend said, if this fellow qualifies as good we need to have a serious talk.

I agree, I think we need to hit the pause button. When we start calling “bad” good, words lose their meaning. When we start re-labeling average as good, we may as well start handing out trophies to everyone. This is why the scripture calls us to “righteousness”-----to live righteously is to be just. Not good or nice but just.

God’s children spend their lives doing the just or right action.

Sin is not the right or just thing to do. God’s children avoid this because God’s seed is in us, the seed whispers and at times shouts calling us to defend the ridiculed, tell the truth, avoid temptation, and spread hope. When God shows of his children, the first picture announces their love for justice and righteousness, and how they labor to stay away from sin.

But God has more pictures. The next ones show God’s children doing the loving thing. There’s a picture of God’s children giving out water in Haiti, a picture of God’s children at a candlelight vigil for people gunned down, a picture of them wiping away the tears of a child in a school, of forgiving their spouse and making love work.

Here are some quotes from I John they are strong words to make a point but they are not written in fine print. “Whoever does not love abides in death.” As the

earlier statement about sin, this may be a bit of an overstatement, but the preacher is making a point. Love is so essential to being in God's family that it would be impossible to imagine life without love, so if you can't love then you die.

"All who hate brother and sister are murderers and you know murderers do not have eternal life in them." There will always be people who ask "who is my brother or sister." Remember there was another who was told to love and he asked Jesus---"who is my neighbor." You remember that answer? If we are asking who is are brother and sister, I don't think we are going to like Jesus answer. We are looking for a small circle of like minded people, Jesus is going to tell us anybody who is in need is our family, he will draw the circle wide and it will include people based on need not area code, based on need not what God they worship, based on need not what country they are from.

"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the worlds good and sees those in need and refuses to help." There are some who read the Bible and all they are looking for is an endorsement of the way they live. The Bible when properly understood should make us uncomfortable. Scripture does not verify our politics, our economic system, our prejudice, or our pre-conceived notions. Instead it tells me that if I refuse to help when I can help---I need to look in the mirror.

"Little children, let us love in truth and action." Prior to that notice in verse 18 it is written—let us **not** love in word or speech. It appears God is tired up lip service, thoughts, well wishes, and saying the right things. The picture of God's children is one of action. The photos of God's children are blurry, because they are not posing or sitting they are moving and doing.

So when God pulls out his pictures to show us the family. The photos are of people living righteously and doing the loving thing.

On a more private note if God was showing pictures of us this week what would God be showing? The photography taken when you were asked to forgive and be loving, does it show a child of God or is it just a picture of you. The picture taken when gossip was being spread, will it show a child walking away or does it show you passing it on?