

- ***READ I Thessalonians 2:1-8*** The love and influence of a mother towards her children can hardly be described in a way in which it is done justice. I would dare say that not a person present can honestly say that his or her life hasn't been impacted in some way by motherhood whether it be on the giving or receiving end of that love or influence. There is not a human relationship that can match the bond that exists between a mother and her children. For this reason we take a day each year to recognize the vital role that mother's play in our lives, and I hope that we, as a nation, will all use this day to especially express that appreciation in whatever way we are able to do so.
- I would also say that the Apostle Paul and other inspired writers understood the great love that is shared between a mother and her children. In the text that we just read together a moment ago, Paul states the he was gentle among the Thessalonians even as a nursing mother would be with her children. He uses this metaphor to help them understand just how much he cares and love them. Jesus would even express His love for Jerusalem and her people in the same way when He stated in **Matthew 23:37** that He wishes He could gather them us as a hen does her chicks. There is just something special about a mother's love and care for her children which is why so many songs are sung, books are written, and movies are directed the give attention to this wonderful relationship. And then, of course, even inspired writers and the Divine Creator recognized this as being the case.
- However, there is one relationship that might be even more impactful upon the children within it, and that relationship would be that which is between our Heavenly Father and His children who have been born to Him through Christ and His sacrifice. (**I John 5:1**) This relationship is at the heart of the letter that John wrote to those he even referred to as, "*My little children*", and this morning I would like for us to consider the important instructions given by John to these, who were God's children, that would aid them (and by extension us) in being able to remain in this all-important relationship while living on this earth. We could spend a lot of time focusing on all of the instructions from John to those receiving this letter, but I want to focus specifically on those instructions that are connected to his thirteen references to these brethren as children.

John's Instructions To God's Children

I. Do not sin...keep His commandments...walk in the light. (2:1,3-6 & 1:5-7)

- A. The first mention these brethren being little children is in **2:1** where John states plainly that he was writing these things so that those who were receiving this letter would not sin. That intention is pretty clear and to the point, and John will expound even more upon what sin is in **3:4** when he writes that "*sin is lawlessness*." To be lawless would be to break God's laws and commandments, and John's intention in writing this letter is to admonish and encourage these brethren to not do such a thing. Instead they were and we are to keep His commandments, and the preceding verses tell us why it is so important that God's children do this very thing.
- B. **I John 1** lays out a perfect foundation for this letter that is all about being a part of the family of God through fellowship, walking in the light, knowing Him, remaining in Him, being in Him, and having Him. Over forty times throughout this letter these ideas of being in spiritual relationship with God are mentioned. If we want to be His children then we must give great effort to avoiding the sins that can cause a great chasm in our relationship with God. This demands that we walk in the light of God just as He Himself is the essence of light. He is that which is good, holy, pure, and righteous. If we will be committed to walking in this manner then we will be His children who are well pleasing in His sight.

II. If you do sin...go to God for forgiveness. (2:1 & 1:9)

- A. However, we must understand that our loving Father recognizes our propensity to fail to live up to His desires for our goodness, holiness, purity, and righteousness. Whereas we might fail to be so forgiving and patient towards those whom we have relationships with that fail us...God is very long-suffering. Peter tells us that He does not want anyone to perish, but that He desires for all to come to repentance. (**II Peter 3:9**)

- B. This patience of God is clearly seen in the fact that the Holy Spirit inspires John to remind the children of God that if they do stumble, then there is a way of return back to a proper relationship with God. That way of return exists in the form of our ***“Advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ the righteous one.”*** Not only did He intercede for us through His sacrifice on the cross in which He served as our atoning sacrifice, but he continues to intercede for us when we sin. At those points of sinning against God, we can and must confess our sins so that righteous Jesus can stand before God and plead on our behalf. Through our confession and repentance and Jesus’s advocating on our behalf...John tells us that our Heavenly Father is ***“faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** It is at this point that we again walk in the light and have wonderful fellowship with our loving Father.

III. Beware of false teachers. (2:18-23)

- A. But in order to stay in that fellowship with God, we must be aware of those who might seek to lead us away from the truth of God by teaching that which is false. John specifically makes mention of those whom he refers to as ***“antichrists.”*** A certain book series and a number of movies have sensationalized this term, but it is used to simply denote one who is against Christ. John refers to these as people who would deny that Jesus was the Christ.
- B. John’s thoughts on the matter were quite simple...if someone was not willing to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ then they deny both the Son and the Father who had sent Him. It would be impossible for a person to walk in the light with God if they were not willing to acknowledge His only Son whom He had sent to be that atoning sacrifice for our sins that makes it possible for us to be forgiven and walk in the light! While we might not be dealing with the exact same type of people as these recipients were, we can still run into people such as Muslims, Mormons, and those who remain committed to Judaism. We cannot be brethren with these people or children of God if we are not willing to acknowledge our Brother Jesus Christ **(Hebrews 2:11)** as the only way to God. **(John 14:6)**

IV. Remain in Christ. (2:24-3:6)

- A. We do not sin, we seek forgiveness when we do sin, and we are always on the lookout for false teachers so that we might be able to remain in this precious fellowship with Christ and the Father. While there are blessings that we certainly enjoy in this life through being children of God such as fellowship with other believers and the peace that passes understanding **(Philippians 4:7)**, we are ultimately striving for that which will be the reward for all of our labors in Christ...eternal life. **(2:25)**
- B. That eternal life will be ours if we remain in Him through not sinning, keeping His commandments, and walking in the light. The reward will be a confidence that we possess at His appearing on the last day. Instead of being ashamed for our sinful selves, we will be able to stand rejoicing because we have given every effort to be righteous as He is righteous. We can be such a thing by embracing the strength that He provides and not continuing to sin. **(3:6)** If this is our endeavor then we will know Him intimately through spiritual fellowship, and we will be overjoyed at His return as His children.

V. Do not be deceived by sin. (3:7-10)

- A. Yet again, John follows up this idea by another warning that we not allow ourselves to be deceived by the craftiness of the devil and the sin that he so desperately wants us to fall into. It can be so easy for us to not take sin seriously, but I hope that we have been reminded up to this point that sin is so terrible because when we sin we are separated from our God. And yet, the devil wants to blind us to this reality. He seeks to do to us even as he did in the beginning to Eve when he caused for her to see the forbidden fruit as that which was desirable. **(Genesis 3:1-6)** He doesn’t want us to view sin as bad. He might even try to entice us to think that sinful things are good!
- B. Those same sorts of temptations continue to plague us today, and Satan continues to give very effort to entice us towards giving into those lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the pride of this life and everything it contains. **(2:16)** Satan would have us to think that those things are perfectly natural and ok to embrace, but thinking along these lines will only show that we have been deceived by the evil one. We must stand strong against his schemes so that we might avoid being ***“the devil’s children.”*** **(v.10)**

VI. Love in action and truth. (3:18-5:3)

- A. The most emphasized way in which we can be God's children is to embrace His greatest characteristic. This characteristic is used to describe God Himself when John writes in **4:16**, *"God is love."* John's specific instruction that is addressed to God's children states, *"let us not love in word or speech, but in action and truth."* John's meaning in this statement is quite clear. *"It is easy to tell someone that we love them, but true love is seen in what we do."* If we don't think that the Holy Spirit through John takes the issue of love seriously, then we would do well to consider that **love is mentioned specifically or alluded to over 30 times** from **4:7-5:4**. That number doesn't even include the references to love that are found in chapter 3.
- B. Why the strong emphasis on love? Again, it must be because God Himself is love, and if we want to be His children then we must adopt this same characteristic within ourselves. We must learn to follow the example of God's love in the fact that He didn't just state His love for mankind, but He was willing to show His love for mankind by willingly giving up His Son on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He isn't a Father who, unlike ourselves, is content with simply saying something and not backing it up.
- C. Instead, if He states something then He most certainly will back it up, and He will not leave the message unclear. He was willing to go all out for those who had turned their backs on Him as enemies through sin (**Romans 5:10**), and we must be willing to love not only those who love us, but even those who might hate us just as we hated God. We must love one another if we are going to remain with God, and we must also remember the powerful words of **5:3**, *"For this is what love for God is: to keep His commandments."* We cannot say that we love God in action and truth if we are not willing to follow His commandments, even His commandment to love one another, and accept His truth.

VII. Guard against idols. (5:21)

- A. Everything that is discussed throughout this letter could be summed up by the final admonition that John leaves with these brethren, *"Little children, guard yourselves from idols."* It can be easy of us to dismiss such an admonition for ourselves by think that warnings against idols only apply to making sure that we aren't going into our closet and bowing down before a little figurine. Sure this was a real danger for those in the Bible, especially the children of Israel who were about to enter into a land where such practices were common, but the danger of idolatry remains real even today.
- B. While there are still places in the world where literal idols are present, our idolatry takes a different form and can be manifested in different ways. The simple explanation for that which could become an idol is anything that might take the place of God as the sole focus and greatest desire within our lives. When we rightly focus on our lives in Christ then we will desire nothing more than to be as he would have us to be, and we will trust in Him no matter what situation we might find ourselves in. But when we allow for something else to take our focus off of Him, then that particular thing becomes an idol that has replaced Jesus as our sole focus, greatest desire, and the one in whom we put all of our confidence and trust. With this undemanding of idolatry, we recognize that just about anything could become an idol in our lives, but as children of God...we are laser-focused on not allowing anything to replace God because we desire so strongly to be His pleasing children.

While the influence of mothers can be seen all throughout our lives, we must recognize that the greatest influence upon us ought to be that of our Heavenly Father. Our mothers might love us to the point of giving up their lives for us, but only the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were willing to enact such a plan that would result in our ability to be reconciled to Them in spiritual fellowship. While we will eventually lose our earthly relationships with our mothers, the relationship that we have with our Creators through the sacrifice of Jesus will remain forever more if we will follow the instructions that have been handed down to us by John. May we always be thankful for being God's children, and may we never forget what took place for us to be adopted into such a glorious position.