



How do you motivate someone to keep going when they are tired? How do you motivate someone to keep going when they are discouraged? Outnumbered? In the popular song, *Carry On* by Fun, the lyrics say:

If you're lost and alone  
Or you're sinking like a stone  
Carry on  
May your past be the sound  
Of your feet upon the ground  
Carry on

We are shining stars  
We are invincible  
We will find our way home

Perhaps an inspirational anthem but what's the source of strength? Where do people find inspiration to keep going? What keeps you going in your relationship with Jesus?

In our verses today from 1 John 2 and 3, we learn that a child of God has been given everything they need to continue walking in the light. To keep going, regardless of what life throws at you, we're given seven different reasons to "continue in him."

**And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears** (conveys the thought of the invisible becoming visible) **we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (2:28).**

### **Continue in him so we can be confident and unashamed when Jesus returns**

"Coming" is the Greek word *parousia*, a word used for the visit of a ruler to some part of his dominions, an occasion for celebration and rejoicing. Those who are remaining in him will be confident in his presence.

Imagine a child running into a royal chamber of a King. There is no fear of rejection. There is no fear of emotional distance. There is no fear of them being too busy. The king is all consumed with His child. He delights in his child. He stops the proceedings of the court if he hears the patter of their feet coming toward him. "Listen, here comes my child." The king has given full and unrestricted access to himself and the child takes it.

Do you know him like that? Are you availing yourself of him with such boldness? Are you turning to him in prayer throughout your day? To his Word every day?

These are the privileges he offers you. He will meet with you and blow your mind with the insights he offers. This has been my experience, for sure. Whenever my spiritual life has become dull. Whenever I've become bored with God, bored with going to church and in general, the spiritual life is kind of flat, it is caused by my laziness. Because when I'm memorizing his Word and journaling, my mind is filled with wonder, filled with relational connection with the God of the universe. This is the confidence we can have. This is the experience he offers us.

So after years of a relationship, the invisible becomes visible and the Holy Spirit inside of us leaps at his presence, our soul expands. In 1738 Charles Wesley wrote a hymn:

And can it be wrote  
No condemnation now I dread  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine  
Alive in Him, my living Head  
And clothed in righteousness divine  
Bold I approach the eternal throne  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me?

**If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him (2:29).**

### **Continue in him because you've been born of him**

Notice that "has been" is in the past tense. There was a birthing that took place in the past. This is the first time John has used this idea of spiritual birth. But as we move into the rest of the book, this figures prominently in the rest of the letter in 3:9; 4:7; 5:1; 5:4; 5:18.

It's the analogy of a father and a child. God is the Father who grants spiritual birth to his children. This is why we're called "children of God" throughout this letter. The point is that we share his DNA. We share in the family inheritance. We will share in the rule of the kingdom. And behavior that follows this new identity is doing what is right.

**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (3:1).**

### **Continue in him because we've been lavished with love**

The birthing that a Christian receives occurs through love that is lavished. It wasn't stingy love. Nor was it lavish selfishness, like

a mythological god who spurned offspring so they'd have more servants. No. The Heavenly Father has unconditional perfect love and he lavishes it on his children. When this occurs, our souls are awakened. Ephesians 2 says we are brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. Literally we are resurrected from the dead! The birthing he gives us is accomplished by his lavish love.

**And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made know. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (3:1b–2).**

### **Continue in him when you don't fit in**

As a child of God, we look like him. I said earlier that we share his DNA. If God had black hair, a Roman nose, broad shoulders, a short stocky stature, pigeon toed walk, we would too. We bear his resemblance. These verses are saying, "don't be surprised that the world doesn't recognize you." If people don't recognize the Father, then they'll not recognize you either.

In fact, not only does the world not know us or recognize us, verse 2 says that we don't seem to recognize ourselves. The verse says, "*what we will be has not yet been made known.*" That's curious. There's obviously a part of our design that looks like God the Father that we haven't even accessed yet. And we won't access it until Christ appears. For when he appears, when he returns at the second coming, we will be like him.

Imagine the hope and encouragement these words bring to people who are doubting the legitimacy of their beliefs. To these early church Christians, John is saying, continue in him when you are misunderstood. You don't even fully understand what you'll become when Jesus returns! The questions that spring up are:

- » Since we look like God the Father, what does he look like?
- » Since we're going to look like Jesus after the second coming, what does he look like?

Good questions.

### **All who have this hope (3:3).**

What hope? The hope that we will look like the Father and Jesus. And hope has a strong effect on our hearts. We are capable of enduring the depths of suffering if we have hope. As I've gotten older, I'm realizing that life is filled with a lot of suffering. I am burdened and broken-hearted by the suffering that so many of you have gone through and are going through. When I was younger, I thought I could fix you up and make everything better. Now I have companionship to offer, hugs to share, and prayers to lift up on your behalf. And I am filled with unwavering hope that as we turn to our Father, He is purifying us through these hardships.

**All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure (3:3).**

### **Continue in him because it's your true source of hope**

Now the questions What does the Father look like? and What does Jesus look like? begin to be answered. This verse says "*he is pure.*" Stated another way, he is holy. Stated another way, he is sinless.

So putting this idea together with 2:2 and 3:3, when Jesus Christ returns we will be pure like him. We will be holy like him. We will be sinless like him. And that's so foreign to our experiences that 2:2 says "*what we will be has not been made known.*" It's fair to say we experience some but it's too little to even make a fair evaluation of what it will truly be like.

For my 40th birthday I went to iFly. It's an indoor skydiving experience. A wind machine blows at you so strongly from the bottom of a tube that you suspend in the air. If you're experienced, you can move your body into specific formations and move all around, like you're flying. It's kind of like flying. But is it flying? No. It's only a taste of what a bird experiences as it soars on the wind. And likewise, our experience with purity is only a taste of the purity and holiness we'll fully experience when Jesus returns and we are fully glorified.

The accumulation effect of these verses is—continue in him. There's a pay off if you continue in him—confidence at his return. Experience the dignity that comes from being born of him. Experience the strength that comes from remembering the lavish love of the Father. Be content when the world doesn't "get" you. Let hope fill your heart as you look to Christ's return. Continue in him and be encouraged! Keep going. You are walking in the light. You are a child of God.

As we keep reading in 3:4, the theme shifts from all of these encouragements to deconstructing a Gnostic teaching and practice. To properly understand these next verses you must understand why the Apostle John wrote these sentences. You'll remember that one group of Gnostics believed that a truly enlightened person had a separation of their soul and body. So the implications were that your soul is purified and saved by believing in Jesus, but since your body is separate, you can do anything you like with your body. With this in mind, these next verses deconstruct this mistaken belief.

**Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him (continues in him) keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him (3:4–6).**

These verses mean that on-going sin that is unrepentant does not comply with a child of God who's trying to walk in the light.

### **Continue in him because the Gnostics are wrong about sin**

We know that these verses can't mean that a Christian is sinless because that would contradict too many places in the Bible and

even the book of 1 John. As an example, the scriptures say in 1 John 1:9-10: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."*

Additionally, Paul described himself as the worst of sinners many years into his ministry as an Apostle. Add to that our personal experiences of claiming to be sincere followers of Jesus Christ and sinning on a daily basis, verses 4-6 clearly can't simply mean *"no one who lives in him keeps on sinning."* What do these words mean?

Remember that John is writing to provide encouragement to the Christians to continue in him. The message of these three verses is continue in him because the Gnostics are wrong about sin. You should remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles and grow in spiritual and intellectual maturity. Are there churches that get this point wrong? Absolutely.

Some well-intended churches teach that a person can reach a point of sinlessness, that over the course of their life they can sin less and less and eventually go days without sinning. Other well-intended churches teach that God's love is so big that it covers everything so that the idea of sin doesn't even exist anymore. We can do whatever we want and God's love is bigger. Both of these positions miss what scripture is saying.

**Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray.** (continue in him) **The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister (3:7-10).**

In the attitude of bolstering the confidence of the early church believers, John provides the perspective that some are trying to lead them astray. Sometimes it helps just to know what's happening because not knowing can catch you off guard.

In a strange way, this is why some people love Haunted Houses. You don't know what's coming, you're caught off guard, and there's a thrill to it. I loved Haunted Houses as a teenager. One year the Lion's Club went over the top. As we were leaving the Haunted House, we let our guard drop and we were laughing about the scares. When a large man wearing a hockey mask jumped out holding a screaming chain. We were disoriented. We were screaming our heads off and we started running like

mad to get away. The second time through wasn't so scary because we knew what was coming.

That's kind of like what's going on in these verses. John is saying "people are going to try to lead you astray. Be ready. Be prepared. Don't get discouraged or overly dismayed ... continue in him by doing what is right."

These verses contain the second and third usage of the phrase "does what is right" or "does not do what is right" in our verses for today. This phrase was also used in 2:29. What does "do the right thing" mean? I don't think it's up to personal interpretation. Nor do I think it's the same as a parent saying, "do what's right with your friends tonight."

Instead, I think it's the same behaviors that describe someone who's walking in the light (1 John 1:5-7), and the same behaviors of a child of God. Do what is right means:

- » Live in fellowship with one another (1:3)
- » Live in fellowship with God (1:3)
- » On-going sinfulness (1:8,10, 2:1b)
- » Regular confession of that sin (1:9, 3:4-6)
- » A sincere desire to live in obedience to Christ as seen in
  - walking in the light (1:7)
  - keeping his commands (2:3-6)
  - loving his brother and sister (2:9-11)
  - not loving the world (2:15-17)
  - remaining with fellow Christians (2:18-19)

This is what it means to "do what is right."

Young William Wilberforce was discouraged one night in the early 1790s after another defeat in his 10-year battle against the slave trade in England. Tired and frustrated, he opened his Bible and began to leaf through it. A small piece of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written by John Wesley shortly before his death. Wilberforce read it again: "Unless the divine power has raised you up... I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing the abominable practice of slavery, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might."

Be encouraged today, child of God. Life will bring disappointments that will break the depth of your soul—continue in him.

You will be discouraged by your own weaknesses—continue in him.

You will be misunderstood and judged because of your beliefs—continue in him.

You will grow tired and weary—continue in him.

You will struggle with sin—continue in him.

Remember, child of God, your Savior is coming for you. And he is glorious. You have been born of the seed of your Heavenly Father. You have been lavished with love. You have been made righteous by the purity of Jesus, and you are growing in sanctification.

Continue in Him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*