

Introduction

There are lots of apps that can be used to accurately identify plants. The PictureThis is a popular app on Apple devices. Many people with Androids use the Google Lens. James Common is a very reputable botanist and author; and he tested a number of the leading plant identification apps. He found that PlantNet was the best app for identifying plants. Closely behind PlantNet was LeafSnap. The GoogleLens app that is on my phone is well down the list, he did not recommend it for accurately identifying botanical finds. He was also very impressed with PictureThis, which is an App for Apple users. He said, “it remains a comprehensive and reliable option, and overall, a good, safe bet for botanists.”¹

Our passage is not about plant identification, but about the identification of God’s children. Throughout this epistle of John, he gives about a dozen ways to identify a true believer. Instead of PlantNet, we are going to use another app, called BelieverNet. This app uses the various criteria given in the epistle to positively identify if someone is a believer or not. Plant apps use a picture of the leaves of a plant. Like the plant apps, BelieverNet uses a snapshot of our life and puts it through the built-in algorithms. The app analyzes whether a person practices righteousness. It looks to see if the person purifies himself. It looks to see if the person confesses his sins and is cleansed from his sins. The app looks to see how the person relates to other people. Does the person love his brother? Does the person lay his life down for his brothers? Does he share his worldly goods with a brother in need? Does the person love in deed and truth, or just in word only? Does the person believe in Jesus? Does the person keep God’s commandments? Does the person abide in Christ? It takes all these criteria and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it helps identify if a person is a true believer or not.

Why is this App so important for us? It is important so that people can know if they are a true believer. One reason that John wrote this epistle is for people to know if they are saved. As second reason was to keep believers from being deceived, particularly by the Gnostics. In 1 John 3:6-8, he wrote, “little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil.” He did not want people being deceived about their salvation.

(1 Jn 2:26) “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.”

(1 Jn 3:6–8) “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. {7} Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; {8} the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkard, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” God does not want you and I to be deceived about whether we are a child of God or not. God wants us to know and be confident that we are children of God. The tests and criteria that John gives in this epistle help people to know if they have eternal life. This is just as important today as it was when John wrote this.

¹ <https://commonbynature.com/2025/05/15/the-best-plant-app-comprehensive/>

(1 Co 6:9–10) “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, {10} nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

In our passage today, John gives three criteria to identify if someone is a believer. The first criterion is practicing righteousness. The second criterion is loving your brother. The third criterion is keeping God’s commandments.

Identifying the Children of God

1. Righteousness
2. Love
3. Obedience

1. **Righteousness** (1 Jn 3:1-3)

The first criterion we will look at in identifying believers is righteousness. John gives two specific criteria, purifying himself and practicing righteousness.

a. **Purifies himself** (1 Jn 3:1-3, Col 1:13, 1 Pe 2:9-10)

John begins by stating how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we would be called children of God. God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to die for our sins, so that whosoever believes would not perish but have everlasting life. We were separated from God, who is holy, by our sins, without any hope (Eph 2:12). However, God bestowed or gave to us this great love so that we could become children of God.

(1 Jn 3:1) “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”

A believer’s identity has changed. A believer is now part of the family of God; he is a child of God. John continued, “and such we are.” John is writing to believers, and he affirms that a believer is a child of God. A believer’s identity has changed, and for this reason the world does not know or recognize a believer. The unbeliever is of the world, but a believer is no longer of the world. A believer is in the world, but not of the world. He is no longer under the power and control of the ruler of this world, Satan. A believer has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Paul wrote in Colossians that He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

(Col 1:13) “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,”

Peter wrote that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We were once not a people, but now we are the people of God. We had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. We are now the children of God. We have a new identity, and for this reason the world does not know us. The world did not recognize Jesus, and now it does not recognize us.

(1 Pe 2:9–10) “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; {10} for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Since we are now children of God, we have a new identity. John writes that now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. Jesus’ disciples saw Jesus in the flesh, but they did not see Jesus as He really is. They did not see Him in the fullness of His glory; they only saw Him in the flesh. We are going to be like Him, but since we haven’t seen Him yet in His heavenly place, we don’t know for sure what we are going to be like. What we do know is that Jesus is pure and holy.

(1 Jn 3:2) “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

John goes on, saying, “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” God is pure and holy. He is the Light and in Him is no darkness. If we are going to be like Him, and He is pure, we have to be purified. The first characteristic of a child of God in the area of righteousness is that he purifies himself.

(1 Jn 3:3) “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

How do we purify ourselves? In the Old Testament God made a distinction between the clean and the unclean. The priests had to offer sacrifices for sin, separate themselves from certain activities, wash their clothes, and bathe as part of the purification process. In the New Testament, Jesus is the one-time sacrifice, so there is no longer a need for a sin offering. We simply need to repent of our sin, and confessing it to God. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We are cleansed and purified by God when we confess our sins. A child of God purifies himself by confessing his sins, and is continually being cleansed.

(1 Jn 1:9) “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

b. **Practices righteousness** (1 Jn 3:4-10)

The second criteria under righteousness is practicing righteousness. John wrote that everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. The children of the world practice sin and lawlessness. If someone’s life reflects a lifestyle of sin and lawlessness, the person is not a child of God.

(1 Jn 3:4) “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

Jesus appeared in order to take away sins and in Him there is no sin. When John the Baptist introduced Jesus, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Jesus came or appeared in order to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.

(1 Jn 3:5) “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.”

(Jn 1:29) “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

No one who abides in Christ sins, because there is no sin in Him. If we are abiding or living in Him, we will not be sinning. No one who sins has seen Him, or knows Him.

(1 Jn 3:6) “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.”

In Matthew 7, Jesus said that not everyone who says to Him, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Those that enter do the will of the Father. When people start talking about all the things they did, Jesus will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” A child of God has come into a relationship with Christ. He knows Jesus, and Jesus knows him. A child of God will not be practicing lawlessness or sin, but will be practicing righteousness and doing the Father’s will.

(Mt 7:21–23) “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. {22} Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ {23} And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

Next, John makes it very clear, saying, “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteous is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” The first identification check is about righteousness. The child of God purifies himself of sin, by confessing and repenting of his sins. The child of God practices righteousness. That does not mean that he never sins, but when he does, he repents and confesses the sin, and then continues to practice righteousness. The practice of righteousness is about a righteous lifestyle. It is a lifestyle not characterized by sin, but rather, it is characterized by living righteously.

(1 Jn 3:7) “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;”

On the other hand, those that practice sin are of the devil. The devil has sinned from the beginning, and his children practice sin and lawlessness. One of the reasons that Jesus appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

(1 Jn 3:8) “the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

This is the second time that John uses the phrase, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose...” The first time he wrote it was to take away sins (1 Jn 3:5). This time he gives another purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. The works of the devil are manifold. The devil tempts people to sin. The devil is referred to as the liar, and he spreads lies, slander, and evil things. The devil is referred to as the accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). John wrote that the thief has come to steal, kill and destroy, so these are all things that Satan does.

(Jn 10:10) “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.”

On the other hand, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. He came to take away the sins of the world, and to set people free from their sins. He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. He came to destroy the effects of sin, sickness, disease, curses, condemnation, guilt, shame, and death. He came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.

Next, John wrote that “no one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Those who have believed in Jesus and received Him into their lives have been born of God. They have the seed of Christ in them, and they are new creations; the old things are passing away and new things have come. They have a new nature. They not only have the seed of Christ, they have the Spirit of Christ. Paul wrote that whoever is led by the Spirit is a child of God. If we are led by the Spirit of Christ and have the seed of Christ in us, we cannot practice sin, or live a lifestyle of sin. It goes against our new nature, and who we are in Christ.

(1 Jn 3:9) “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

John finishes the first criteria, saying, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.” When the data is put into the BelieversNet app, it is obvious whether the person is a believer or not. If the person practices righteousness, he is a believer.

(1 Jn 3:10) “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

2. **Love** (1 Jn 3:11-18)

The second criterion that the BelieversNet app evaluates is the love of a person. In verse 10, John transitions from speaking about practicing righteousness to loving one’s brother, which is the second criteria. A believer loves his brother, while an unbeliever does not love his brother. John is not talking about some mystical or theoretical feeling, emotion, or word; he is talking about practical, demonstrated, love. John breaks love down into three things: laying your life down for your brother, sharing worldly goods with your brother in need, and loving with deed and truth.

John begins by saying, “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” When they received the gospel message, they had been taught from the very beginning that we need to love God, and we need to love one another. Jesus taught His disciples what is known as the Royal Law. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” He impressed that message upon His disciples, and they taught this everywhere that they went.

(1 Jn 3:11–12) “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;”

(Jn 13:34–35) “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. {35} By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Then, John gave an example from the Old Testament, of Cain and Abel. Cain, who was of the evil one, slew his brother. He killed Abel because his deeds were evil and his brother’s deeds were righteous. It is a good example because John is contrasting the deeds of the righteous and the deeds of the unrighteous. It is also a good example because that was in the very beginning of creation; so, from the very beginning of creation, the message from God to us is that we are to love our neighbor. It is also a good example because earlier he said that the world does not know us, just as it did not know Christ. Now, he adds to that, saying, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.” Just as Cain hated his brother because he was righteous, the world will hate us for being righteous.

(Jn 3:12-13) “not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. {13} Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”

Then John gives an assurance to us. He said that “we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.” Just as loving our brother is a witness to others that we are Jesus’ disciples, loving our brother is a witness and confirmation to us that we are believers. Loving our brothers is an important and distinguishing mark of a true believer.

(1 Jn 3:14) “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”

In contrast, those that do not love their brother do not pass out of death into life; rather, they abide in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

(1 Jn 3:15) “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

One might ask, “What about Paul? He was responsible for putting many Christians to death?” That is a good question. Paul did this when he was an unbeliever. When Paul became a Christian on the road to Damascus, he was forgiven of all his sins, past, present, and future. He was cleansed from his sins. His sins were removed from him as far as the east is from the west. Though his sins were as scarlet, they became white as snow. From that point onward, Paul was not a murderer, but a preacher of righteousness. He was a model and an example for all of us. Paul is the one that wrote 1 Corinthians 13, and gave us a much better understanding of what true love is about.

(Ps 103:12) “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

(Is 1:18) “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”

John is not talking about a theoretical love; he is talking about a practical love. He gives three practical examples of loving our brother. First, he said, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. What does it mean to lay down our lives for one another? I believe it is to sacrifice our time, our energy, our resources, our entire beings for the brethren. It is often thought of as serving one another, and it certainly includes serving one another, but it goes far beyond serving one another.

(1 Jn 3:16) “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

When Paul addresses husbands in Ephesians 5, he taught that just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so husbands are lay their lives down for their wives. Then, he gave some specific ways that Christ did that, cherishing, nourishing, and washing their wives with the water of the word. Laying down your life for your wife is more than serving her. Then, Paul wrote that they were to love their wives just as they loved their own bodies.

(Eph 5:25–29) “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, {26} so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. {28} So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; {29} for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,”

The second practical way to show love to a brother is through meeting physical needs. He said, “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

(1 Jn 3:17) “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

The church in Jerusalem practiced this kind of love. We find in Acts 2:44-45 that whoever had property would sell it as well as their possessions in order to share with those who had a need. When they saw a brother in need, they took it upon themselves to meet the need. This was not socialism; people still owned their own properties, but they were willing to share their possessions with others to meet their needs. The early church understood that even when they had an abundance, their life did not consist of their possessions.

(Ac 2:44–45) “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; {45} and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

(Lk 12:15) “Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

They also understood what Jesus had taught about storing up treasures in heaven. They were not trying to store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust could destroy and where thieves could break in and steal. Their focus was not on the temporal things, but on eternal things. They were storing up treasures in heaven.

(Mt 6:19–21) “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. {20} But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; {21} for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In Mark 10:21, Jesus told the rich young man to sell all that he possessed and give to the poor and he would have treasure in heaven. Giving to the poor is one way of storing up treasures in heaven. The early church had a love for their brothers, and laid their lives down for one another.

(Mk 10:21) “Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he instructed the rich to be generous and ready to share. Who are the rich? In Randy Alcorn’s book, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, he gives this definition of rich.

“Statistically, if you have sufficient food, decent clothes, live in a house that keeps the weather out, and own a reasonably reliable means of transportation, you are among the top 15 percent of the world’s wealthy. If you have any money saved, a hobby that requires some equipment or supplies (fishing, hunting, skiing, astronomy, coin collecting, painting), a variety of clothes in your closet, two cars (in any condition), and live in your own home, you are in the top 5 percent of the world’s wealthy.”¹

By Randy’s definition, most of us are wealthy. These instructions are for all of us. There are different degrees of wealth, but this is for all of us. What were the instructions that he gave? First, they were not to be conceited. Being conceited or arrogant can negatively affect our attitude towards those in need. We will be less apt to show love and concern for them, because love is not arrogant (1 Cor 13:4). Second, they were to fix their hope on God, not on the uncertainty of riches. If our hope is on the things of the earth, and not on God, they are an idol, and sharing with those in need will be negatively affected. Third, Paul encourages the rich to do good and rich in good works. Fourth, he instructs them to be generous and ready to share. This applies to all of us; we are to be generous and ready to share with others.

(1 Ti 6:17–19) “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. {18} *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, {19} storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”

Before moving on, there is one caution about giving to the brother in need. Before saying that, the overwhelming attention given in Scripture is to be generous to the poor, so this caution should not deter us from giving generously to those in need. In Thessalonica, there were some in the church who were not working. They could work, but they were not working. Their lives were out of order, so Paul gave them an order not to let those who were unwilling to work to eat in their fellowship meals. He commanded and exhorted them to work in quiet fashion and eat their

¹Money, Possessions and Eternity, Randy Alcorn, Page 301

own bread. He followed that with an encouragement to all of them not to grow weary of doing good, which would include giving to the poor.

(2 Th 3:10–12) “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. {11} For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. {12} Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

Third, John, instructed them not to love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. People say that talk is cheap, and I think John would agree. Like James, he wanted people to be doers of the word. He did not want people talking about loving their brother; he wanted people laying their lives down for one another. He wanted them to share with those who had a need.

(1 Jn 3:18) “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

John said that we will know by this that we are of the truth. When we love our brother, we will know that we are of the truth. Other people will know that we are disciples of Jesus, and we will also have an inner witness inside of us, or an assurance, that tells us we are of the truth. If for some reason our heart is condemning us, we need to understand that God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

(1 Jn 3:19-20) “We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him {20} in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.”

Since our church recently gave some money for Bibles to a church in Kenya, I have had a number of other people and churches in Africa contacting me to give them money. They want money for a facility. They want money for a sound system. They want money for chairs. They want money for Bibles. They want money to help care for the orphans. I was speaking to one of those pastors this week, and I asked him what the top two or three things that he wanted us to do for him. The first two things were money for a facility and money for Bibles. I told him that our church could not do that, and that is not what I offer to churches. I provide training for pastors and leaders. I told him that I would not be working with him or his church. After I had gone back to my office to study again, my heart was unsettled. When my wife came in to the office, I told her how I was feeling on the inside. She had heard the entire conversation and knew what it was all about. She assured me that I had done the right thing. I also shared this with another leader in our church, and he was grateful that I had said what I did to this person. Our hearts can get troubled sometimes, and it is good to open up to trusted friends.

3. **Obedience** (1 Jn 3:19-24)

The third criteria that the BelieversNet app evaluates is our obedience. John said that if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments. I think that confidence in our prayer life is something that all of us desire; we all want effective prayers that avail much. When we are practicing righteousness and loving our brother, we can be confident before God in our prayers.

Notice that we have what we ask because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. Keeping His commandments is called obedience. Our obedience to do the

things God tells us to do give us confidence in our prayer life. In addition to being obedient to God's commandments, we gain confidence by doing things that are pleasing in His sight. Not everything that we do is spelled out clearly for us. There are gray areas where we need to use wisdom and discernment. In these areas, we should ask ourselves, "What course of action would be most pleasing to the Lord?"

(1 Jn 3:21-22) "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; {22} and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."

Jesus always did the things that were pleasing to the Father. In John 8:29, He said, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." Jesus set a great example for all of us to follow. Paul wrote the Corinthians a similar message, saying, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." One of the things that please God is our obedience to Him, especially when we do it with an attitude that wants to please Him.

(Jn 8:29) "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

(2 Co 5:9) "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."

What are the commandments that a believer is going to keep? John mentions two commandments. The first commandment is to believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ. In John 6:29, Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." We do not earn our salvation; it is by grace through faith that we are saved. The only work is to believe in Jesus, and our righteousness is credited to us. The second is to love one another, which Jesus had given to the apostles at the Last Supper. Some scholars say that this is really just one commandment, which is to believe and to love. These two are one; they go together. When you believe, you also love. You cannot love, especially with God's perfect agape love, without believing in Jesus.

(1 Jn 3:23) "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."

(Jn 6:29) "Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

John ends the passage saying, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." Our obedience to God gives us assurance, boldness, and confidence in our prayers. Our obedience to God is pleasing to the Lord. Our obedience to God is also one of the ways that we abide in Him, and He in us. We know that Jesus abides with us by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to us. We have the BelieversNet app in us, and the Holy Spirit uses these three criteria to let us know that we abide in Him.

(1 Jn 3:24) "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

In John 14:21, Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” Our obedience in keeping God’s commands shows our love for Him. Notice that when we are obedient to His commandments, He discloses Himself to us. Our obedience brings about fellowship with God, and we experience His presence and His Spirit in our lives.

(Jn 14:21) “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Conclusion and Applications

It is a wonderful privilege to be a child of God. John began by saying, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.” While we were yet sinners, God reached out to us in love, and paid the price for our sins so that we could have eternal life with Him.

Now that we are children of God, we should represent God. Our lives should be holy, just as He is holy. A child of God will fix his hope on God and purify himself, because He is pure. A true child of God will practice righteousness. The seed of Christ is in a child of God, and he will not want to sin; he will want to live a righteous and holy life. The life of a believer and the life of an unbeliever are radically different. It should be obvious to anyone looking at our life that we are a believer.

The second area that the life of a believer should be different from an unbeliever is love. Believers will love their brothers and sisters in Christ. This is not saying nice things; it is not in word, but in deed and truth. Believers will lay their lives down for one another. Believers will share with brothers who are in need. Just as Jesus laid His life down for us, believers will lay their lives down for one another. There should be an obvious difference between our life and the life of an unbeliever.

The third area that the life of a believer is different is in obedience to God’s commandments. Believers try to do what is pleasing the Lord. Believers keep God’s commandments, and believe in Jesus and love others. Their obedience to His commandments give them confidence and boldness in their prayer life. Their obedience also is a way that we abide in Christ, and that God has fellowship with us.

Our first application is to examine yourself. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul wrote, “Test yourself to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!” John gave three areas to look at your life, and he said it should be obvious whether you are a believer or not a believer. Have you received Christ into your life and been born again? Does your life reflect and represent God? Are you confessing and forsaking your sins, purifying yourself? Are you practicing righteousness in every area of your life? Are you living a morally pure life, or are you living an immoral life? Do you love the brethren? Do you meet with the brethren every week to worship together? Do you lay down your lives for your brothers? Do you share your worldly goods with those in need? Do you keep God’s commandments? Are you obedient to God’s commandments? Do you have the assurance of your salvation in your heart, or does your heart condemn you? Do you have assurance because of the Holy Spirit working in your life? Examine yourself.

(2 Co 13:5) “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?”

Our second application is for those who realize that they are not a believer, and want to become a child of God. The only way to be a child of God is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He came and died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. If you believe that, then it is just a matter of asking Jesus to come into your life, to forgive you of your sins, and then to confess Him as Lord of your life. That simply means yielding control of your life to Him, and allowing Him to lead you.

Our third application is for those who know that they are children of God, but still have some areas to grow in. The Holy Spirit may have spoken to you about an area that you need to repent about. You want to purify yourself, so that you can be more like Him. Perhaps you have been looking at things that you should not look at. Perhaps you have not been loving your brother. Whatever the Lord may have spoken to you about, confess it to Him, and ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you of it. Ask Him to help you overcome this so that you can live a holy and righteous life.

(1 Jn 3:3) “And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for Your love and for adopting us into Your family. You desire Your children to be holy, just as You are holy. You want our lives to properly represent You and the Kingdom of God. Help us to purify ourselves and live pure and holy lives. We want it to be obvious to others around us that we are the children of God. We don't want to look and act like the world; we want to be like You. Help us to love our brothers, and to lay our lives down for the brethren. Help us not to love in word, but in deed and truth. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Is it obvious for others around you to see that you are a child of God?
- How do we purify ourselves? What is our part in this process?
- Why is it difficult to quickly identify Christians today?
- What are some things that the church can do to improve in this area? (Matt 28:18-20)
- What are some ways that you have laid down your life for your brothers?
- What are some important keys in learning to give to those in need?
- How did John connect our prayer life to our lifestyle?
- Why is obedience to God's commandments an important part of abiding in Christ?

Identifying the Children of God

Introduction

1. **Righteousness** (1 Jn 3:1-3)

a. Purifies himself (1 Jn 3:1-3, Col 1:13, 1 Pe 2:9-10, 1 Jn 1:9)

b. Practices righteousness (1 Jn 3:4-10, Jn 1:29, Mt 7:21-23, Jn 10:10)

2. **Love** (1 Jn 3:11-20, Jn 13:34-35, Ps 103:12, Is 1:18, Eph 5:25-29, Ac 2:44-45, Lk 12:15, Mt 6:19-21, Mk 10:21, 1 Ti 6:17-19, 2 Th 3:10-12,

3. **Obedience** (1 Jn 3:19-24, Jn 8:29, 2 Co 5:9, Jn 6:29, Jn 14:21)

Conclusion and Applications