

1 John
Chapter Three
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1John 3:1-3 See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

We also know from John's gospel and from part of Paul's writings that we are God's children:

John 1:12-13 "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Rom 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

John repeatedly wrote about the world not knowing God:

John 5:37 "And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

John 7:28 Jesus therefore cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know.

John 16:3 "And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me.

Similarly the world will not know God's children. Christians should know that approval by the world is something to be feared and not something to be desired. Knowing that the world hates Christians actually gives us further acknowledgement that we are children of God.

John repeatedly assures them that they are children of God even if we do not yet know exactly what that fully means. It is enough to know that we will be like Him when He appears in His full glory:

John 17:1 These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee,

John 17:5 "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.

John 17:24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.

Paul also assured Christians that we would be conformed to the image of Jesus:

Rom 8:29 "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;"

2Cor 3:18 "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

With that great hope before us we should be eager to imitate Him in every way possible so that He will be pleased and will say: "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.'" (Matt 25:21).

1John 3:4-10 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

⁵And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰By 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.

Remember previously John had given his readers three tests to use to determine if they indeed were God's children: 1.) they must not walk in unrighteousness, 2.) they must love their fellow Christians, and 3.) they must hold to true doctrine. John is now going to return to this test but elaborate on the three topics by adding contrasts. He first will introduce the contrast between righteousness and sin (3:4-10), next the contrast between love and hate (3:11-18), and finally the contrast between truth and error (4:1-6) that will be preceded by an aside on the subject of doubt (3:19-24). Today the highest intellectual understanding is that there is no such thing as absolute truth but rather truth is relative. This relative nature of truth is repudiated by Scripture and Jesus even is quoted as saying "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32). To the modernist this statement is without meaning since such a person does not accept that there is a truth.

John uses *hamartian* that is translated "sin" and *anomian* that is translated "lawlessness". These words are sometimes used as synonyms but in this context they have different meanings. "Sin" is any violation of God's law and "lawlessness" was used to describe rebellion against God and particularly in association with Satan's rebellion against God. John and the false teachers did not agree that sin was also lawlessness. John saw their teachings and actions as sin and

associated with Satan's activities against the gospel. So John is telling the remaining church congregation that the practice of breaking God's commandments (sin) was also identifiable as association with Satan's rebellion. He will clarify this further in verse 10.

John tells them that Jesus came to take away sin and that He was totally without sin or a sin nature as we also read elsewhere:

John 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!" (John 1:29).

2Cor 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Since he identifies sin with lawlessness, John is also stating that Jesus came to take away actions of Satan against the church. Verse 6 seems to contradict 1 John 1:8, 10 but he is describing the results of two situations. The false teachers claimed to be sinless because they were born of God and unable to sin. Others were claiming to have a relationship with God apart from any obedience to His laws (antinomians). John states that anyone who abides with Jesus does not practice sin because they are committed to a life like that of Jesus. If they do sin they will immediately acknowledge and confess it and they will be forgiven. However those who practice sin demonstrate that they have never had the veil removed from their eyes and do not know Jesus.

In verse seven John tells them not to be fooled by any false teachers for only those who practice righteousness are righteous because of their being "in Christ". In verse eight he tells them not to be deceived by the false teachers for their actions show their unbelief and their lawlessness. He is probably referring to the actions of Satan in the Garden of Eden when he says that Satan has been a sinner from the beginning. God's plan from before the foundation of the world was to fight against the devil in all of his actions. Satan was a murderer and a liar from the beginning: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies." (John 8:44).

In verse nine he summarizes what he has said. It is important to note that John says that nobody born of God can **practice** sin because there then exists a mutual living of the believer in God and God in the believer: "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." (John 14:20). Many people have tried various convolutions of interpretations regarding Christians not sinning but the meaning is very simple and clear: Christians cannot **practice** sin. Christians do sin, as surely all reading this will attest, but when they do they will be ashamed and convicted by the Holy Spirit. They will repent, do whatever might need to be done to atone for the sin, and try never to repeat it. In trying to interpret the reason for a Christian not sinning is that he seed of God abides in him, people have put forward many possible concepts. Again, in my opinion, the explanation seems very simple and clear. A Christian has been born again and is a new creature:

1Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

1Peter 1:23 “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.”

2 Cor 5:17 “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

After being born again by an act of God, the Christian is then involved in a life-long process of progressive sanctification: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;” (Phil 2:12) The sanctification is the putting aside of the Adam nature to sin and putting on the Christ nature of righteousness. It is because of this ongoing process that the Christian cannot **practice** sin.

Verse 10 gets to the bottom line and introduces the next section. The children of God and the children of Satan are obvious by what they practice. He again brings together love and righteous living. He had three tests in chapter two: righteous living, love of fellow Christians, and proper doctrine. He omits the last one here but it is inferred by the practice of righteousness since one must know proper doctrine to practice it. Many people in visible churches say they are Christians when they are not. Some people only mean that they are not Muslims, Buddhists, or some other non-Christian “religion”. Some people say that they have studied the writings of leaders of many religions and have decided that the writings of Jesus are more appealing to them and so they decided to be Christians. But Christianity is not just some philosophy that one decides to adopt. Rather people who are Christians are those whom God has adopted into His family after causing them to be born again. A Christian practices righteous living because he is born again and adopted into God’s family rather than practicing righteous living as a means of being a Christian.

1John 3:11-13 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹²not 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. ¹³Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you.

He continues with his previous statement about the parentage of people. He has previously written about this love command not being new **and** being new (see comments regarding 2:7-11). Jesus stressed this love: “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.” (John 13:34-35). The love that Christians have for each other should be apparent in any group of Christians. Mentioning Cain shows that hatred has also been present from the beginning. The eighth chapter of his gospel was probably foremost in John’s mind as he wrote this sentence:

John 8:40-44 “But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father. They said to Him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.”

The actions of Cain flowed out of his evil heart and only showed his true character rather than being a cause of his becoming a child of the devil. Righteousness always draws hatred from the devil and his children: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.” (John 15:18). Hatred from the world is an expected reaction and if such is not received toward us then we are failing as representatives of Jesus Christ.

1John 3:14-18 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Passing out of death means that the person has been granted escape from the fear and power of death:

John 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Cor 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1Cor 15:54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory.

1Cor 15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

1John 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.

The love of Christians for each other is proof that we no longer abide in death. John then links hatred with murder as did Jesus:

Matt 5:21-22 “You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. First-degree murder certainly illustrates the hatred that the murderer has in his heart and such is certainly incompatible with Christianity.

The supreme example of this love is the love exhibited by Jesus Christ as He gave His life for His chosen people:

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

John 15:12-13 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

This love of Jesus is an example for us and we should be willing to make sacrifices for fellow Christians. Christian love demonstrates its existence by what we are willing to do for other Christians. If we have material substance in excess of what is needed for ourselves and our immediate family and fail to help fellow Christians in need then a heart failure is apparent:

James 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

1Cor 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1John 3:19-24 We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him,²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.²¹ 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.²³ And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

The Christian must walk his talk and his love for other Christians must go farther than just saying “I will pray for you.” Prayer is important but we should also be ready to meet others in their need. When we spontaneously love others by our actions this reaction informs us that we are indeed God’s children. Sometimes our conscience or the accuser can accuse us of wrong motives but then we can rest knowing that God is our judge and that He understands our hearts and knows everything associated with any action or inaction we make. We should remember that only God can properly know our motives for any of our actions or thoughts: “But to me it is a

very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.” (1Cor 4:3-4).

Satan will do whatever he can to disturb out peace with God so we should be very careful in our self-evaluations. As we walk according to the commandments of God we become more and more molded in His image and then our requests become aligned with His will for our life rather than any selfish goal we might have otherwise. John then clearly states the commandment that we are to obey. We are to believe the gospel message of who Jesus is and what He has done and is doing for His people:

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John joins the proper belief in Jesus with the love for other Christians and so shows the strong bond between the two. Belief is the basis for the love, which is the expression of true faith. Knowing Jesus means also knowing the Father. We make our requests to the Father in the name of the Son and the Father gives: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” (John 15:16).

There is a total and complete bond between the Trinity. Our fellowship with God is fellowship with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Our abiding in God is evidenced by our keeping of His commands. The giving of the Holy Spirit to believers by the Father and the Son was well-known in the early church:

John 14:16-17 "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:2 until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

Gal 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

The Spirit then testifies to us that indeed we are God’s children and that we abide in Him. This indwelling of the Holy Spirit provides peace of God that surpasses all understanding: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:7).