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1 John 3

VI. Exhortation to moral purity (1 John 3:1-12)

- (1) Belief and love of Christ's coming produces moral purity (3:1-3)

1 See how great a love the Father **has given us**, that we would be **called children of God**; and *in fact* we are. For this reason **the world does not know us**: because **it did not know Him**.

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.

1 See what kind of love the Father has given us: We are called God's children—and that is what we are! For this reason the world does not recognize us, because it did not recognize him, either.

1 **Behold**, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

- Having just mentioned being "born of Him" (2:29), John is amazed about this "manner of love" that makes us "children of God"

- "Behold" [KJV] - John wants his readers to "Behold" God's love for them, to study it in order to understand it more fully

— It means that God wants us to see His love and *know* His love, and shows that He is not ashamed to give it

— "...has given us" - speaks of both the measure of God's love (better translated "lavished on us"), and the manner of God's giving of love (one-sided, not a return of something earned)

— "...called children of God" - the greatness of God's love is demonstrated in the result: by it, we are called His children (by the Father, 2 Cor 6:18; by the Son, Heb 2:11; by the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:16)

— God could've dealt with fallen humanity in a number of ways: He could have had charitable compassion, a pity for our plight

— If that would've been God's dealing with us, He could've put forth a plan of salvation where man could be saved from hell, but instead God went so far beyond just that, to the point that on the basis of His love for us alone, we can be called His children.

— There is a sense that saving us from hell, then making us children, was an "unnecessary" blessing. God could've put forth a plan of salvation that saved us from hell, and we would have been content.

— But God went so much further than just saving us from hell...He poured out blessing after blessing on us, out of His abundant grace, to bring us to the point that He adopted us as His own.

— These are blessings that Adam didn't have and could never dream of. We are completely wrong when we think of redemption as merely a restoration of what was lost with Adam. We are granted more than Adam in Christ than Adam ever had.

— If we are children of God, it should be demonstrated in our treatment of our siblings

- "...the world does not know us" - because of our unique Parent, we are strangers to this world; we are not related to this world because our Father is not of this world

- "...it did not know Him" - we should expect the world to treat us as it treated Him

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.**

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.

2 Dear friends, we are now God's children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

- "...we are children of God" - the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:16)

- If you are a child of God, you have an inward assurance of this

- "...it has not appeared as yet what we will be" - the details of our future destiny are clouded

- In this sense, we can't even imagine what we will be like in future glory

- "...when He appears" - a reference to the Rapture

- "...we will be like Him" - we're not left completely in the dark about our future state...God has just chosen to not give us all of the details quite yet

- God's ultimate goal in our lives is to make us like Christ (Rom 8:29). Here, John speaks of the fulfillment of that goal.

Rom 8:29: For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son*, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers *and sisters*;

- Even though we grow into the image of Christ now, we have a long way to go. No one will achieve this goal outside of eternity when God Himself makes us like Christ.

- In eternity, we will not cease being ourselves; rather, we'll still be ourselves, but our character and nature will be perfected into the image of Jesus.

- "...because" - *hoti*, the reason we will one day be like Him is because we will see Him just as He is

- "...we will see Him just as He is" - to the extent that we see Jesus as He is, to that same extent you are like Him in your life

- This seems to imply some type of reflection: if we're looking at Christ, we're focused on Him, we study His Word, He's like a mirror reflecting Himself onto us. The more we do this, the more we become like Him.

3 And everyone who has this hope **set on Him** purifies himself, just as He is pure.

3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

3 And everyone who has this hope based on him keeps himself pure, just as the Messiah is pure.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

- "...set on Him" - notice that our hope is not in eternity, the Rapture, or our future glory; our hope is set on Him and Him alone
- "...purifies himself" - knowing our eternal destiny and living in this hope purifies our lives; when we know that in the end we will be like Christ, it motivates us to be more like Him today

— The coming of Christ at the Rapture is always meant to purify the bride (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; Titus 2:11-13)

(2) Those in fellowship with God sin less (3:4-6)

(A) Definition of sin (3:4)

4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

4 Everyone who keeps living in sin also practices disobedience. In fact, sin is disobedience.

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

- John defines sin as disregard for the law of God, which is inherently disregard for the law Maker, God Himself

(B) Christ came to remove sin (3:5)

5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and **in Him there is no sin**.

5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

5 You know that the Messiah was revealed to take away sins, and there is not any sin in him.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

- The mission of Christ at its most basic: He came to take away our sins (Cf. Gabriel's promise to Joseph, Matt 1:21)

— He takes away our sin in three ways:

- He takes away the *penalty* for our sins (justification)
- He takes away the *power* of sin in our lives (sanctification)
- He takes away the *presence* of sin (glorification)

— "...in Him there is no sin" - Jesus had no sin to take away, therefore He could take away our sin upon Himself

(C) Those in fellowship with Him sin less (3:6)

6 No one who **remains** in Him **sins continually**; no one who sins **continually has seen** Him or **knows** Him.

6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

6 No one who remains in union with him keeps on sinning. The one who keeps on sinning hasn't seen him or known him.

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

- If this verse means that abiding/remaining in Christ equals being a Christian, then John is blatantly contradicting what he said in 1:8,10. It would also contradict logic and every believer's experience.

- "...remains" - *menō*, abides; refers to fellowship with the Lord, not whether a person is a believer or not

— When believers are abiding in yielded dependence on the Vine, they are not at the same time guilty of sin (Cf. Gal 5:16), though they still have much spiritual maturation to experience

— "...sins" - *hamartanō*, the view that this is referring to habitual sin, as the insertion of "continually" [NASB20] implies, is ruled out by the context

— Many theologians will point to the present tense of this verb and believe that it "implies" sin of a habitual or continual nature.

— *Hamartanō* is in the present tense, third person, referring to people other than John or his audience (see note about present tense below)

— In v5 it says that in Christ, there is no sin. John clearly means that there is absolutely no sin in Christ. Then v6 says that those who abide in Christ do not sin. John could not have meant that Christ sins not at all and those who abide in Him sin, but not a lot.

— John's point in v6 is that sin is never an expression of abiding in Christ. When we're abiding in Christ, a believer does not sin at all. When a believer sins, it breaks their fellowship and intimacy (abiding) with Christ, just as a husband who is rude to his wife breaks fellowship and intimacy with her.

— A husband who is constantly rude to his wife will not have close fellowship and intimacy with her because he is not displaying the character necessary to do so. Same is true with our relationship with Christ.

— When a believer breaks fellowship with Christ by sinning, the only means to restore fellowship is to confess our sin (Cf. 1:9)

— Just as Christ consistently abided/remained in the Father throughout His earthly life, He had such perfect fellowship because there was no sin in Him. Likewise, we can have that same type/level of fellowship and intimacy with the Father when (not if) we are not sinning.

- Christ never sinned, therefore He had unbroken fellowship with the Father. Likewise, the Christian who consistently abides in the Father does not sin.
- "...continually" [NASB20] - note the italics, showing that the adverb was added by the translators for clarity; this word is not found in the original Greek
- In order to deal with perceived difficulties in v6,9 the translators considered it expedient to appeal to the use of the Greek present tense of *hamartano* ("sins") and believe it leads to a translation of "whoever has been born of God does not 'go on' sinning" or "does not 'continually' sin."
- The inference to be drawn from such conclusion is that though a Christian may sin 'somewhat' (how much is too much is never specified), he may not sin regularly or persistently
- However, the translators are stressing the present continuous form of the verb here in a way that is not done anywhere else in the NT
- If we were to translate 1:8 and 5:16, where the present tense also occurs, using the same method that the translators use here, these verses would contradict 3:6 (translator's present tense translation in brackets):

1:8: If we say that we have no sin [do not continually have sin], we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

- It would be deceiving ourselves to say that we do not continually have sin (1:8), since whoever is born of God does not continually sin (3:6).

5:16: If anyone sees his brother or sister committing a sin [continually sinning a sin] not *leading* to death, he shall ask and God will, for him, give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death; I am not saying that he should ask about that.

- If one born of God does not continually sin (3:1), how could a Christian see his fellow Christian continually sinning (5:16)?

- On all grounds, whether linguistically, exegetically, or experientially, the conclusion that this is speaking of "continual" or "habitual" sin is indefensible

It seems to me that those who say that this verse means that true believers will not practice sin habitually are either naive or have very little appreciation of the depth of human depravity.

Any sensitive Christian who is honestly trying to live a holy life will admit that he or she sins repeatedly every day. Every Christian is guilty of sins of omission, of motivation, and of ignorance, as well as deliberate sins.

Genuine Christians have even confessed to habitually practicing gross sins for extended periods of time. Every Christian is a habitual sinner, and we will be until the Lord takes us to glory. Obviously this does not mean that we should resign ourselves to sinning (Cf. 2:1; Rom 6:1). We should wage war against it. But we will never be

completely free from its degrading influence in this life. [Thomas Constable, Dr. Constable's Notes on 1 John, soniclight.com, 2025]

*As has been pointed out by more than one competent Greek scholar, the appeal to the present tense invites intense suspicion. No other text can be cited where the Greek present tense, unaided by qualifying words, can carry this kind of significance. Indeed, when the Greek writer or speaker wished to indicate that an action was, or was not, continual, there were special words to express this. [Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel...*, p58-59]*

- Other interpreters take John to mean that no one who abides in Christ has the power to sin, or, to put it positively: Christians who abide in Him have the power not to sin.
- Yet this is an idea that the reader must import into the verse. While it is true that Christians who abide in Christ have the power not to sin, this does not seem to be what John meant here. He seemed to link abiding and not sinning in a more direct cause and effect relationship.
- "...has seen...knows" - perfect tense, communicating intensity; it refers to intimately seeing and knowing a person
- John uses the three verbs in this verse (remains/abides, has seen, knows) to refer to a believer who is walking in intimate fellowship with God (Cf. 1:7; 2:3,10)
- For example, if you say "I'm seeing someone special" it means more than visually observing someone. It speaks of intimate fellowship.

John goes on to distinguish between the practical manifestations of righteousness to others by those believers who are abiding in Christ, and those individuals who are not abiding.

(3) Children of Satan and those in fellowship contrasted (3:7-12)

(A) Those in fellowship with God do right (3:7)

7 Little children, make sure **no one deceives you**; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, **just as He is righteous**;

7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

7 Little children, don't let anyone deceive you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, just as the Messiah is righteous.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

- This verse is very similar to 2:29, which states that walking in the light and having fellowship with the Lord gives a practical manifestation to others of a believer practicing righteousness

- "...no one deceives you" - a warning to John's believing audience to beware of the gnostic false teachers, who believed that physical matter was evil (1:1-3; 4:1-3) and that sin and God could somehow co-exist in fellowship with one another (1:5)
- This is why John uses absolute terminology throughout this epistle to expose these rank heresies, so that believers would not be deceived by them
- "...just as He is righteous" - the standard for righteousness is Jesus Christ

(B) Children of Satan do evil (3:8)

- 8 the one who **practices** sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.
- 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.
- 8 The person who practices sin belongs to the evil one, because the Devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason that the Son of God was revealed was to destroy what the Devil has been doing.
- 8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.
- In contrast to an abiding believer who practices righteousness is "he who sins is of the devil"
- John is drawing on Gen 3 as background here, where the power of evil/sin is represented by a serpent, the devil
- Note that John does not say that the one who practices sin is "born" of the devil, rather he is "of" the devil
- A person becomes "born of God" or a "child of God" through faith in Christ (Cf. 5:1,4,18; John 1:12; Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26; 4:6; Eph 5:1; Phil 2:15); a person becomes "of" the devil by imitating him, not by proper birth.
- The contrast between the manifestation to others of sin and righteousness in a person's life is striking
- "...practices" - *pōieō*, does not have the implication of constantly or habitually doing; it's never translated that way in 500+ uses in the NT
- It simply means someone who sins and does not imply anything other than that

(C) Those in fellowship with God cannot engage in continual sin (3:9-10)

- 9 **No one who has been born of God** practices sin, because **His seed** remains in him; and **he cannot sin continually**, because he has been born of God.
- 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.

9 No one who has been born from God practices sin, because God's seed abides in him. Indeed, he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born from God.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

- A difficult verse to interpret properly, and often misinterpreted to mean that if a Christian sins, they are not saved. This is the "sinless perfection" view, which directly violates 1:10.

— There is another view held by those who hold to Lordship Salvation, or those who believe some of its tenets, which is that believers still sin, but not as a pattern. If a believer has a *pattern* of sin in their life, it means they have never been born again.

— Those who hold this view always appeal to the present tense "does (*poieō*) sin" and "cannot sin" (*hamartanein*) and claim that these refer to (imply) habitually sinning or practicing sin

— However, most major commentaries of the Greek text over the past 50 years reject the interpretation that the born again person does not habitually sin. This is because Greek grammarians recognize that the present tense verb can be used in a variety of ways and can refer to current action and not necessarily to habitual, continual action, depending on the context and the presence or absence of qualifying words. See notes on v6.

— This is further boosted by both 1:9 ("If we confess [present tense] our sins, He is faith and just to forgive [present tense]...". And if you keep reading on in 1 John, 5:16 says, "If anyone sees his brother [fellow believer] sinning [present tense]...".

A popular interpretation of these verses [v6,9] distinguishes between occasional sin (which every Christian commits) and a continuing lifestyle of sin, which a genuine Christian cannot pursue. Appeal is usually made to the present tense to support this view. The Greek present tense describes ongoing action (action in progress). The problem with this view is that the author of 1 John does not appear to distinguish anywhere else between a lifestyle of sin and occasional acts of sin. Also, to make such a significant interpretative point on the basis of the Greek tense alone is extremely subtle. One can only wonder whether John's readers would have gotten the point. [W. Hall Harris, III, 1,2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 143]

— In addition, the view that claims "born again people don't habitually sin" simply doesn't hold water logically. From a practical standpoint, how many times must you sin a particular sin before it can be considered habitual or a pattern, then conclude you are not born again?

— Those who embrace this view subjectively evaluate how much sin they are committing or not committing to determine whether or not they are truly born again. Interestingly, most if not all who believe in this faulty interpretation believe they themselves have reached the bar of works necessary to maintain/prove their salvation, and judgingly look at others as if those individuals have not.

- And, if God can prevent most sin in their lives so that sin is not a "pattern," why doesn't God prevent all sin in their lives? Doesn't make logical sense.
- In reality, there is a human element of choosing daily whether or not to appropriate God's grace resources in the process of sanctification, and such choices and patterns can fluctuate in one direction of the other throughout the course of our Christian life.
- The view that this verse is saying that a habitually sinning Christian is not a Christian at all should be rejected based on:
 1. Greek grammar
 2. Other verses in 1 John (Cf. 1:9; 5:16)
 3. Logical deduction
 4. The view's undermining of the absolute assurance of salvation
- To rightly interpret this passage, we must consider the context (especially what is said previously in v6), the content of the verse, and compare Scripture with Scripture to arrive at a correct biblical conclusion.
 - "No one who has been born of God" - when considering what is stated in v6, this refers to someone who is both "born of God" (a believer) and abides in Him
 - Some interpret this to be the new nature which cannot sin. While this statement is true doctrinally, this verse does not say "whatever is born of God" but "whoever is born of God." It is referring to a person, not the nature of the person.
 - It is referring to the one who has been born again. No believer ever commits sin as an expression of his new nature ("His seed"), yet the believer still sins when he yields to his sin nature, which still desires to reign as king in his life (Rom 6:12).
 - The sin nature reigns practically when believers fail to appropriate by faith (Rom 6:11) Christ's victory over the sin nature at Calvary (Rom 6:10), which they can claim because of their identification with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:1-6).
 - "...His seed" - the new nature, which comes from God through the new birth (2 Cor 5:17)
 - "...he cannot sin" - in context, when a believer is abiding with Christ (v6), they do not sin. When a believer sins, they are no longer abiding in Christ, and they must invoke 1:9, not to get saved again, but to restore fellowship with Christ.
 - If we were able to abide in Christ without interruption, we would never sin (v6). The sinless nature of Christ controls the abiding Christian, whereas the sinful human nature controls the non-abiding Christian (Cf. Rom 6:16).
 - Sin is never the product of our abiding experience. It is never the act of the regenerate self. Sin is the product of ignorance and blindness toward God.
 - To view sin as intrinsically foreign to what we are as regenerate people in Christ is to take the first step toward spiritual victory over it
 - There is a certain idealism in John's sweeping assertions. His message in v9 applies in its absolute truth to the 'perfect man' in Christ Jesus.

- John is saying that when a Christian abides in Christ, he will behave as his heavenly Father, and others will recognize that he is a child of God
 - If someone says, 'A priest cannot commit fornication,' one cannot deny that as a man he can (is able to) commit it; but priests, functioning as priests, do not do those things
 - The Bible uses language in a similar way, 'A good tree cannot produce bad fruit' (Matt 7:18). Of course a good tree can produce bad fruit, but not as a result of what it really is, a good tree.
 - Also Jesus said, men 'cannot' fast while the bride groom is with them (Mark 2:19). Of course, they can fast, but to do so is incongruous and unnatural.
 - When a Christian sins (and John believes he can and will, Cf. 2:1), in that act he is behaving like a child of Satan. Who he really is is not being made evident. To use Paul's phrase, he is walking like a 'mere man' (1 Cor 3:3).
 - No sin ever committed by a Christian has come from the new creation/nature inside who has been born of God. Instead every sin a believer commits comes from their old sin nature.
- When understanding this verse in context, the interpretive challenges of this verse clear up both exegetically and doctrinally:
 - When believers abide in Christ, they will have confidence before the Lord when He returns
 - When believers fail to abide in Christ, they will be ashamed ("draw back") before Christ when He returns
 - When believers walk by faith in fellowship with the Lord, they practice righteousness toward others, reflecting Christ
 - When believers do not walk by faith in fellowship with the Lord, they do not practice righteousness toward others nor do they reflect Christ
 - When believers have the hope of Christ's appearing abiding in them, they purify themselves just as Christ is pure
 - When believers do not have the hope of Christ's appearing abiding in them, they do not purify themselves
 - When believers abide in yielded dependence upon the Lord, they do not at the same time sin because Christ has come to take away sin and in Christ there is no sin
 - When believers fail to abide in Christ, they fail to see and know Christ in intimate fellowship
 - When believers who are born again and abiding in Christ, they do not sin because they have God's seed (the new nature) in them via the new birth, and the new nature is incapable of sin
- This verse does NOT teach the following:
 - it does not teach that a sinner who is born again is incapable of practicing sin

- it does not teach that if a so-called believer practices sin, that he was never truly born again
- it does not teach that a believer can lose their salvation
- it does not teach that all genuine believers will persevere in faith and holiness all the days of their lives or they were truly never born again

In 1 John 3:3-9, John lays out five reasons why Christians should not sin:

1. Because they need to be ready to meet the Lord (v3)
2. Because sin is illegal (v4)
3. Because it is unchristian (v5-7)
4. Because it is diabolical (v8)
5. Because it is unnatural in a child of God (v9)

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 and sister**.

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.

10 This is how God's children and the Devil's children are distinguished. No person who fails to practice righteousness and to love his brother is from God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

- The absence of presence of sin in a believer's life provides evidence of under whose authority they are living at any particular point in time in their life
- John divided the world into two classes: those whose parentage is either divine (Christians) or diabolical (unsaved)
- Those who are "of the devil," either saved or unsaved, do the devil's work by opposing the truth
- Saved people are "of the devil" in the sense that they follow the devil's leading and do his work, although they no longer belong to the devil (Cf. Peter, Matt 16:23)
- "...of God" [2x] - describes God as the animating force or power behind our actions/attitudes; it is not an indication of a saving relationship with God
- "...obvious" - *phaneros*, manifest, evident, apparent
- A sinning Christian *conceals* his true character and parentage when he sins, and *reveals* it only through holiness. A child of Satan *reveals* his true character by sin. [Zane C. Hodges]
- Christians can and do identify other Christians by their righteous behavior. This is not the same as saying that every true Christian without exception will produce good works

(Cf. John 15:1-8).

- Christians who are abiding in God will produce good works, and others can identify them as Christians by their "obvious" godly behavior
- John is not suggesting that our behavior is a test of our salvation. His only test of salvation was faith in Jesus Christ (Cf. 5:1,9-13). He is talking here about how God's children manifest themselves and are perceived by others as such.
- "...anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God" - the absence of righteous behavior in a believer indicates a lack of fellowship/intimacy with God. Such a person is not manifesting the life of God, but the life of the devil.
- Same goes for the absence of love for one's "brother or sister" (a fellow believer). If a Christian does not demonstrate love for another Christian, it is a sign the unloving Christian is not in close/intimate fellowship with God.
- An unloving Christian is not "of God" in the sense that God is not animating what he is doing. This believer is not doing what God would have him to do (love his brother/sister), thus by not loving he is doing the devil's work rather than God's work.
- "...his brother *and* sister" - more evidence that this epistle was written to believers because an unsaved person has no Christian brothers or sisters to hate
- The NIV of this verse is both a paraphrase and a mistranslation of the verse
1 John 3:11 [NIV]: 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.
 - There is nothing in this verse about not being a "child of God." How could there be? One must be a child of God before one could hate his brother. An unsaved man has no Christian brother to hate

(D) Exhortation to avoid the loveless, Satanic example of Cain (3:11-12)

(a) Exhortation to love (3:11)

11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we are to love one another;

11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;

11 This is the message that you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

- The "message" that John and his followers had heard from the beginning was Jesus' command to His disciples "to love one another" as He had loved them (2:7; Cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12)

(b) Cain's Satanic, loveless example (3:12)

12 not as **Cain**, who was **of the evil one** and murdered his brother. And for what reason did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil, but his brother's were righteous.

12 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.

12 Do not be like Cain, who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because what he was doing was evil and his brother's actions were righteous.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

- "...Cain" - an example of an unloving brother; John uses him as an example of someone controlled by Satan in his actions and attitudes, not by God

- "...of the evil one" - describes Satan as the animating force or power behind Cain's wicked attitude and actions (Cf. "of God" in v10, see note there)

- Cain was envious because of Abel's righteousness, which motivated him to kill his brother (Gen 4:3-8; Cf. John 8:40,42,44)

— Saying that Cain was unsaved, and therefore it's understandable (not unexpected) that he was envious and murdered his brother, does not work. The Bible never says that Cain was unsaved, therefore it would be conjecture to assume such a thing just to make the verse fit a theological narrative.

— Christians have committed murder, as Cain did (Cf. David killed Uriah, 2 Sam 11:15-17; 1 Peter 4:15). Christians are capable of any and every type of gross sin. It should be obvious that a true believer in Christ can hate his brother or sister Christian.

— The definition of envy is... discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence, success, or good fortune, accompanied by some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages.

— Often our pride tempts us to dislike those who are more righteous than we are, because they make us feel guilty by comparison

VII. Tests of fellowship (1 John 3:13-24)

(1) Hatred from the world (3:13)

13 Do not be surprised, brothers *and sisters*, if the world hates you.

13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

13 So do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

- If we as Christians feel or demonstrate loving concern for one another, it should not surprise us if unrighteous people hate us for behaving more righteously than they do (v12)

- Apparently John's first readers could not understand why the world hated them, because he told them to not be surprised
- Christians are to the world what Abel was to Cain, so we should not be surprised if the world hates us
- Sometimes when unbelievers who become angry with us, they are reacting more against God in us than against us personally. Hatred is the natural response of a sinful world toward the righteous.
- "...if" - first class condition, it assumes the truth of the premise that the world hates believers

(2) Love of the brethren (3:14-15)

14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers *and sisters*. The one who does not love remains in death.

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.

14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another. The person who does not love remains spiritually dead.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

- Love for other Christians shows the presence of the new life of Christ in us

— However, love for others is a secondary ground for our assurance of salvation; the primary ground for our assurance are the promises of God (Cf. 5:13)

15 Everyone who **hates his brother or sister** is a murderer, and you know that **no murderer has eternal life** remaining in him.

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life present in him.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

- "...hates his brother or sister" - this person hates his brother (or sister) which indicates that he himself is a believer and is failing to love another believer

— When he does this, he is not abiding in Christ

- "...a murderer" - God likens this hating of one's brother (or sister) to being a "murderer"

— Why does God define hatred as murder? Because God does not need to see the action of murder to discern the attitude of hatred that underlies the sinful action which is its consequence

- "...no murderer has eternal life" - the common interpretation of this verse mirrors the misinterpretation of much of 1 John...to live in the "practice" of murder or to have a life style of habitual hatred of the brethren, is a demonstration that we do not have eternal life abiding in us, and we are not born again (saved)
- They will point to three "tests" to measure the proof of a genuine Christian: the truth test, the love test, and the moral test. If we believe in what the Bible teaches as true, if we show the love of Jesus to others, and if our conduct has been changed and is becoming more like Jesus, then our claim to be a Christian can be proven true. This is a complete misinterpretation of this verse and the overall intent and purpose of 1 John.
- Does this verse really mean that genuine believers who "practice" hatred on a continual basis are not genuinely saved? What about Moses, who murdered an Egyptian, or David who was guilty of the murder of Uriah? Does this verse mean that neither Moses nor David are saved? What about Saul/Paul, who murdered Christians in the name of the Lord, including Stephen?
- You can't interpret "no murderer has eternal life" as common scholars do, then go on to say that Moses, David, and Paul were saved. You simply cannot have it both ways. If this verse says murderers do not have eternal life (are not saved), then Moses, David, and Paul are in hell today.
- This interpretation also creates the problem of how many times you can sin before it's constituted as a "practice," especially as it relates to murder? Is it once, like Moses and David, or multiple times, like Paul?
- "eternal life" - the key to interpreting this verse is to define "eternal life" as Jesus Christ (Cf. 1:2; 5:20)
- "...remaining in him" - *menō*, abiding (3:5; Cf. John 15:5)
- This verse is simply reiterating the same truth as 3:5 and John 15:5, but from the opposite angle: Whoever [a believer] hates [a failure to love] his brother [a fellow-believer] is a murderer [as God perceives the heart], and you know that no murderer [the believer who is hating his brother] has eternal life [Jesus Christ] abiding in him [by way of Christ's fellowship].
- In other words, when a believer hates a fellow believer, he is not at the same time abiding in Christ and having fellowship with Christ, nor is Christ abiding in him and having fellowship with him. The two are mutually exclusive.
- Once again John is destroying the incipient Gnostic's false teaching that light and darkness co-exist with God (1:5), which would have a devastating effect upon these believers and would compromise their walk with a holy God (1:6-7)
- This interpretation is consistent with both the general and specific context of this chapter (beginning in 2:28), and the content of the verse, specifically "eternal life" (1:2) and "abiding in him."

- It is also consistent with the overall theme of this epistle, which teaches us that a believer walking in the light abides in Christ and has sweet fellowship with Him (who is love), resulting in love and not hatred for fellow believers.
- Consequently, when a believer hates his brother, you know he is not abiding in Christ's fellowship, nor is "eternal life" (Jesus Christ) having fellowship with him
- The NIV again completely butchers this verse in their paraphrase and misinterpretation (Cf. v10):

1 John 3:15 [NIV]: Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that **no murderer has eternal life residing in him**.

- Again, what about Moses, David, or Paul? If this statement is true, those three are in hell right now, which is obviously preposterous.

(3) Love described (3:16-18)

(A) Christ's example (3:16)

16 We know love by this, that **He laid down His life for us**; and **we ought to lay down our lives** for the brothers and sisters.

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.

16 This is how we have come to know love: the Messiah gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

- "...He laid down His life for us" - in contrast to Cain, who murdered his brother and demonstrated hatred, Jesus laid down His life for us, demonstrating love (Cf. John 10:11)
- Most people associate Christianity with the command to love, so they think they know all about love Christianity once they have understood its teaching in terms of their own concept of love. However, John found it necessary to explain clearly to his readers what he meant by love, using Christ as the supreme example.

- "...we ought to lay down our lives" - not speaking along the same lines as Christ laid down His life for us; John is not inducing us to martyrdom for others

- Jesus laid down His life once, but we ought to lay down our lives for our fellow believers repeatedly in self-sacrifice. John is describing love as a readiness to do anything for other people

- It's easy to lay down one's life. The difficulty in love is doing the little things, the day-by-day self-denials and petty sacrifices of our rights and our wants, for the benefit of others, which no one else notices nor applauds.

(B) Purpose of prosperity (3:17)

17 But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother *or sister* in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him?

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?

17 Whoever has earthly possessions and notices a brother in need and yet withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God be present in him?

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

- We may not have the opportunity to save a fellow believer's life by dying in his place, but we can and should do the next best thing, which is to sustain his life or offer him assistance when he has material needs

— When we give to a fellow believer in need what might keep me alive, I am following Jesus' example of self-sacrificing love

(C) Love must be practiced (3:18)

18 Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

18 Little children, we must stop expressing love merely by our words and manner of speech; we must love also in action and in truth.

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

- John emphasizes that love is not talk, but rather action. Many Christians substitute talk for love, talking about meeting one's needs instead of actually meeting them.

— Our love for God is manifested by obedience to His commands, but our love for other believers is manifested by self-sacrifice in their best interest.

— The evidence of Christ-like love is not verbal professions but vital performances.

Concrete acts rather than empty words (Cf. 1 Cor 13:1; James 2:15-16).

(4) No internal condemnation (3:19-21)

19 We will know **by this** that we are **of the truth**, and will **set** our heart **at ease** before **Him**,

19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him

19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and how we will be able to keep ourselves strong in his presence.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

- "...by this" - by what John said in v17-18, namely that tangible demonstrations of love for other believers show the believer's true character and are evidence that believer is close intimate fellowship with Christ

- "...of the truth" - does not refer to salvation! Whether our love for other believers displays itself in action on their behalf is not a test of whether a person is saved or not!
- Whether you outwardly demonstrate God's love to other believers is not a test of whether or not you're truly saved!
- "...set...at ease" - *peithō*, assure, to quiet; by demonstrating love through action (Cf. v17-18), we both gain assurance that we are walking in truth and we quiet our hearts when it accuses us of being guilty for not doing more
- "...before Him" - the context here is standing before Him in prayer, but it may also refer to believers standing before Christ at the Bema Seat judgment of rewards (1 Cor 3:10-15)
- We can stand before Him confidently, both in prayer (the context here) and at the Bema Seat judgment of rewards, if we demonstrate God's love to others through our actions

20 that **if our heart condemns us**, that God is greater than our heart, and He knows all things.

20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

20 If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

- "...if our heart condemns us" - we can overcome feelings of false guilt by remembering that God, who is "greater than our (guilty) heart," "knows" our real motives ("all things")

— God does not judge on the basis of appearance, like human beings, but on motives

— If we have demonstrably been "walking in love" and our heart still condemns us (false guilt), John assures us that God is greater than our heart, and reminds us that we cannot base our relationship with Him purely on how we feel in His presence

— Condemnation can well up inside us that has nothing to do with our standing before God. It may be the work of the enemy (who accuses the brethren, Rev 12:10), or the work of an over-active conscience. At those times, we must trust in what God's Word says about our standing, not how we feel about it.

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

- When we have intimate fellowship with God and true love for fellow believers, demonstrated in deeds of self-sacrifice, we can have confidence toward God and our standing with Him

— A clear conscience gives us boldness (confidence) to approach God's throne of grace in prayer

(5) Answered prayer (3:22a)

(6) Obedience (3:22b-24a)

22 and **whatever we ask**, we receive from Him, because we **keep His commandments** and **do the things that are pleasing in His sight**.

22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

22 Whatever we request we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

- "...whatever we ask" - John did not place any conditions on prayer and answers here, but did later (Cf. 5:14-15)

— To be effective, prayer requires two things:

- Obedience ("we keep His commandments")
- Willing service ("do the things that are pleasing in His sight")

— In 5:14-15, John will add a 3rd requirement/condition:

- The petition/prayer must be in line with the will of God. Such conformity of wills between us and God is brought about through God's Word and as the believer lives in Christ.

- "...keep His commandments" - the believer who walks in the kind of obedience and love that John speaks of will experience answered prayer. This is not because their actions have *earned* them what they ask, but the fact that their love and obedience come through intimate fellowship with Him, along with knowledge of His will, which is the key to answered prayer.

— The key to prayer is being in such close intimate fellowship with God that we ask for things that are on His heart. And what is on His heart is also on our heart because of our intimacy.

— Prayer is a call to action on what God desires; the more we know about what God desires, as explained in His Word, it will directly and positively benefit us and our prayer life
- "...do the things that are pleasing in His sight" - when we're in close fellowship with Him, we will have hearts that just want to please the Lord in everything we do

— Oftentimes Christians will do things that are pleasing to God when they are also pleasing to us. Of course God is glorified when we enjoy His goodness, yet intimacy with Him means that we will have a special focus on pleasing Him, even if it doesn't particularly please us.

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.

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.

23 And this is his commandment: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus the Messiah, and to love one another as he commanded us.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us.

- Jesus taught the apostles, including John, to trust in Him and to love each other (John 13:34; 14:1; 15:12,17). This is a distillation of His teaching.

- "...believe" - *pisteuō*, aorist tense, pointing to John's reader's original faith in Christ for their justification

— The first commandment and greatest work we can do is to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ (Cf. John 6:29)

— This isn't about intellectual knowledge about who Jesus was, or even the fact that He died on the cross. It's about putting our trust, faith, reliance on Him, on His name (who He is), that He is sufficient to take on my sins and make me perfect in the sight of God.

- "...in the name of His Son Jesus Christ" - to trust in the effective power of His name when they prayed (Cf. John 14:12-15; 16:24)

— This is an added ground for confidence in prayer

- "...love one another" - the second commandment, quoting Jesus' idea from John 15:12:

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

The Christian who "hates" his brother (v10b-15)...

- Is utterly out of touch (fellowship) with God
- Exemplifies the murderous spirit of Cain
- "Abiding" in the spirit of death

The loving Christian...

- Takes Christ's own self-sacrificing love as a model by which he himself should love in actual deeds (v16-18)
 - Doing this relieves him of a guilty conscience
 - He will have confidence before the Lord in prayer
 - He should expect answers to his prayers precisely because he is pleasing God (v19-23)

(7) Spirit's presence (3:24b)

24 The one who keeps His commandments remains in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He remains in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

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.

24 The person who keeps his commandments abides in God, and God abides in him. This is how we can be sure that he remains in us: he has given us his Spirit.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

- This verse gives us the definition of abiding or remaining in Christ: to abide means to obey His commandments

- Obedience on our part results in mutual abiding: God abides in us, and we abide in Him

— Those believers who abide in Christ know they are abiding in Him because of the presence and assurance of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Rom 8:16)

— You can't be abiding in Christ and not know it (though you may struggle with doubt sometimes)

— The believer who does not keep God's commandments does not have the confidence that he abides in Christ, and does not have the assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence in his life.

— God "abides" in the obedient believer with His presence, fellowship, power, and blessing (Cf. John 15:10-11,14), but He indwells every believer (Cf. Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:13).

— The evidence that He abides in us is the manifestation of His Spirit in and through us

- This is the first reference to the Holy Spirit in 1 John