

5,21,26 1 Jn. 3:1-12, Transformed by the Spirit of Truth

(1 Jn. 3:1-3) Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

This first verse is one that embraces everything that explains the motivation of John, Paul and the others to sacrifice all they were to see Christ glorified. I know we don't realize fully what this means, and we probably won't until we're face to face with our Father, but when we really understand the suffering each member of the Triune Godhead has gone through over the last 6000 years in order to have a family destined to be in the likeness of the Son, falling down and worshipping Him will be as natural as breathing.

Before He created anything, Christ knew in detail exactly what it would take for Him to reach the final goal of having a Bride in his own image; flesh of His flesh; bone of His bone.

In 1 Cor. 12 Paul told us that when one member suffers, the whole body suffers. This is even more true in relation to the Head of the body. Besides the suffering our Savior when through in the days of His flesh and on the Cross, He has also suffered every pain experienced by every member of His body for the last 2000 years.

Paul describes that as you and I "filling up" the sufferings of Christ

(Col. 1:24) Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking (or what remains to be fulfilled) in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

There is definitely mystery in this, but in the wisdom, purpose and compassion of God, in order to raise sinners to the place of princes in the heavenly realms, God has seen the necessity of suffering in purifying and perfecting the character of His children, knowing that because of our union with Him, He also would suffer in us.

The Cross and the indwelling of the Lord have placed Him in the deepest pains possible for no other reason than doing what was necessary to save us, perfect us, and secure our destiny as His children.

At the heart of all creation is love – it drives and governs all that God is and all that He has done. The more we grow in our knowledge of Christ and the more clearly we can see what He is like by meditating on what we see of His life in the Gospels when He was among us, the more overwhelmed we become as we realize that of all the gods man has invented, the true God is the embodiment of the greatest love possible.

That's why John wrote; "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God."

Alexander Maclaren does an excellent job of magnifying the love of God;

We are called upon to come with our little vessels to measure the contents of the great ocean, to plumb with our short lines the infinite, and not only to estimate the quantity but the quality of that love, which, in both respects, surpasses all our means of comparison and conception. Properly speaking, we can do neither the one nor the other, for we have no line long enough to sound its depths, and no experience which will give us a standard with which to compare its quality. But all that we can do is look, and ever look, at the working of that love till we form some not fully inadequate idea of it.

So, we must turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. According to John's constant teaching, that is the great proof that God loves us. The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man of the depths of that Divine heart lies in the gift of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle bids me 'behold what manner of love.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, but gives 'Him up to death for us all.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which is evoked by no loveliness on my part, but comes from the depth of His own Infinite Being, who loves because He must, who must because He is God. I turn to the Cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which

desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love that will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of Man died there for sin, I 'behold,' and I hear, the 'manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us,' stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure, in its quality transcendent is the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Savior.

It would have been a love beyond our imagination just for Him to save us and make heaven our eternal home, but to select us out of all creation as *the* race of beings that would be brought closest to God Himself in relationship, and raised higher than the angels in destiny and glory, takes what we know of His love to a whole new place of wonder.

We don't see all this now, except by faith, but as Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 1:8; "Whom having not (yet) seen- you love. And even though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

When faith attaches itself to what has been revealed of God to us, we can move increasingly through greater knowledge of Christ to personal experiences of deep gratitude. Which is why Peter was so insistent that we "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Peter knew that no one he had written to had physically seen the Lord as Peter had, but he also knew that the effect of believing what the Holy Spirit reveals to us of Who Christ is, is "joy inexpressible".

Our true happiness in this life does not come through circumstances, it comes from an increasing knowledge of the Son of God – of all He has done and all He has suffered to bring us to Himself.

We take being called "the children of God" way too lightly; there is so much more than we realize that has gone into making our relationship with Christ possible and

there is even more that we don't realize that will eventually be manifest when we are glorified with Christ and fully experience what it actually means to *be* a child of God. And, again, as our passage shows us – all of this, and more than we can imagine at present, is because of “what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us.”

This is Ironside's take on this passage;

This is something different from the general love of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That is infinite love to lost men everywhere. If you are not a believer, be assured of this: the love of God goes out to you and he has extended His love to you in that while you were yet a sinner Christ died for you. However, there is a love sweeter and more precious than that, but it is not for you until you trust in Christ. But if you have already trusted in Him, then you can *enter into* the Father's love.

As I mentioned earlier, our experience of God's love is limited in this life to what we learn of Him by revelation, but knowing what's coming and Who it is that has planned this, can add an immense anticipation for us.

And we know that when we become like Him, we will fully realize what an incredible thing God has done. Faith grabs hold of part of this now, and along with increasing revelation, it also creates a deep sense of expectation of what will one day be ours; and, of course, of being able to literally embrace the Savior Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

In the last part of 1 Jn. 3:1 we read, “Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”

When we studied John's gospel, the Lord told us that if the world hated Him, it would also hate us; that being rejected by those outside Christ, and by Christians who were living a lie, was always a possibility. Many unbelievers did not reject Christ until He started saying things that caused them to draw a line which they refused to cross. And as we've seen with Paul, it wasn't just Demas that walked

away from the battle, most of the New Testament letters were written to correct departures from the Truth in one form or another. Even by the end of the first century, churches still aligned with apostolic teaching had been reduced to a small minority of people.

John's point is simple: If they had known the Lord they would have recognized men and women who truly represented Him. But for whatever reason, they decided to remain in their comfort zones with their backs turned to the Truth.

In the ESV translation, it was summed up like this; "There is a built-in friction between those who know and serve Christ and those who do not."

We've talked before about the interaction between the visible and the invisible world, and how everything which happens in the visible world can be traced to some action taking place in the invisible world – just like Daniel's delayed prayer in Dan. chapter 10 because of the attempt of the "prince of Persia" to prevent Michael the archangel from bringing the answer to Daniel; or Elisha's request to the Lord to show his servant what surrounded them;

(2 Kings 6:15-18) When the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So, he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So, when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

I know it's difficult for those of us who've spent most of our lives using our five senses to determine reality, but faith in God's Word allows a sixth sense to engage, and enable us to realize that the visible is controlled by the invisible, not the other way around. That "built-in friction" may be invisible because it's in the spiritual world, but it's very real, and it's an obstacle that only God can overcome.

Now, in 1 Jn. 3:2-3 we read;

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

As we just saw in 2 Cor. 3 compared with 1 Jn. 3:2, there is a mystical work of the Holy Spirit that takes place anytime we get a glimpse of Christ. In John 16:14 the Lord Himself said, “

He (speaking of the Holy Spirit) will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The word translated “glorify” could also be translated “clarify” – “The Spirit will clarify Me by taking Who I am and revealing that to you.”

And in vs. 3 John adds “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” This takes us back to the connection between faith and inward transformation into the image of Christ, which has been the Father’s goal since He said, “Let us make man in our image” in Gen. 3.

After the fall, and the original thought of God for Man was sabotaged by the enemy, everything the Lord has done throughout history has been a work of recovery. God never abandoned His original plan for us. He’s taking those who come to Him through the process of inward transformation by giving them a progressive spiritual revelation of the Son. Through that process, the working of the Cross removes the dominion of the flesh and the Holy Spirit shapes our inner man into the image of Christ.

That’s why it’s so important to increasingly see Christ *as He really is*, and the clearer He becomes to us, the closer we get to the final transformation into His image. That’s also why Jesus warned of “many Jesus’s” that would be offered to us as imitations of the real Christ to prevent that recovery from happening.

If the Jesus you are becoming occupied with (through churches, books, podcasts, etc.) is not as glorious as the Jesus of the Bible, then the image you will take on will be something other than a manifestation of Christ.

Eventually, God will have a Church through whom He can fully and perfectly manifest the glory of Christ to all creation. This has been the goal from day one, and God will overcome all deceptions and obstacles to that goal being reached. For you and I, our spiritual battle is to reject all that is not true of Christ, align ourselves with the Father's purpose, and *commit* to that purpose by becoming living sacrifices willing for the Potter to shape us as clay in whatever way will achieve the outcome of Christ being fully formed in us.

This is also why John was so insistent throughout his letters that his readers understand the importance of walking in the Truth and not allowing anything or anyone to sidetrack or deceive us.

Every church, every teacher, every Christian book we read presents a Jesus to us. And according to scripture, in our generation the majority of those Jesus's are going to be less or other than the true Jesus. If our Christ is an imitation, that's exactly what our lives will be. It's an absolute law of spiritual nature that we become what we behold.

Here's a better explanation of this than what I could come up with;

We become like that which obsesses us, which occupies us. If you see what people are occupied with, you can see their character changing by their obsessions. They are becoming like the thing which is obsessing them; they are changing; they are becoming different. Something has got a grip on them; they can never think about anything else, talk about anything else; and it is changing their character. Now Paul said, "For me to live is Christ – being occupied with Him." It would be a good thing if the Lord became our "obsession," our continuous occupation. As we steadfastly fix our gaze upon Him, the Spirit changes us into the same image.

That's simply the reality of spiritual growth and transformation; it's the invisible work of the Spirit working out God's recovery of His original intent in those who

belong to Him. This is the way God has determined it would happen, so it's Satan's agenda to do all he can to supply us with alternate Jesus's to draw our attention away from the Truth.

And Satan knows that the imitation will have to be so exact and compelling that only mature spiritual discernment will be able to tell the difference. The responsibility of the pastor or teacher is to ensure that those he serves are not being presented with an imitation, but *only* with the Truth.

(3 Jn. vs's 3 & 4) I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the Truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the Truth.

Now you see why John placed so much importance on "walking in the Truth". The characteristics of Christ which need to be engrafted into us for God's original purpose to be realized will be lacking if we are not growing in our knowledge of Christ as He really is.

In the eyes and in the presence of the world, John made it clear in Jn. 13:35 that the way they will know we are disciples of Christ is the manifest love we have for one another. But the apostles also knew that the only way this love could be embodied in us was through a growing knowledge of the Truth.

This is why the enemy does not go to war against friendly congregations with inspiring songs and practical-application style sermons. As long as the Truth is watered down to the point of spiritual irrelevancy, the enemy has nothing to worry about.

His strategy is not to prevent large, successful Christian churches and organizations; his strategy is to prevent God's original thought from being realized in disciples who are learning of Christ. It's not hugs and handshakes that threaten the enemy; it's the Truth, because Satan is a liar and deception is his greatest and most consistent weapon to use against us.

The next part of 1 Jn. 3 is one of the areas in this letter that has been fiercely debated for centuries; entire theological movements have formed on the basis of these verses.

(1 Jn. 3:4-9) Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

Reformed theology (Calvinism) loves this part of John's letter because to them it's saying that we can distinguish who is and who is not saved by observing their lifestyle. That's not John's point at all, but I'm sure you can see how it could give that impression, especially when you add vs. 10; "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God."

If the "lifestyle demonstrates salvation" didn't contradict nearly everything we saw in the Corinthian letters, it would be easy to buy into it. For example,

(1 Cor. 3:1-3) I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

This is only one of many places in the New Testament that teaches the principle of 'Christian carnality' – the teaching that shows that believers, when ruled by the flesh, live a lifestyle that is *indistinguishable* from the unbeliever's lifestyle – they are *both* radiating the works of the flesh. A carnal Christian is "behaving like mere men."

John is simply fighting the Nicolaitan belief that what our body does is irrelevant. As long as our inner man is abiding in Christ, we can "behave" any way we want.

But a person *truly* abiding in Christ won't "behave" like an unbeliever, which is John's counter to this false movement he was addressing.

Also, to say that a true believer won't continue in sin after salvation is to contradict 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10 which says,

If we say that we have no sin (present tense), we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

But 1 Jn. 3:9 says, "Whoever is born of God does not sin"; what do we do with that? 1 Jn. 1:8 & 10 made it clear that *all* who are "born of God" sin, and if anyone says they don't, they make God a liar and His word is not in him.

Several translations decided to add the phrase "practices sin or practices righteousness", alleging that the verb supports ongoing action. But the actual word used is "poieo", which simply means "to do". As one lexicon stated it;

It was needless for the NKJV to change the KJV's "doeth righteousness" to "practices righteousness", since the Greek verb is the common one for "to do" and carries no special overtones here like "makes a habit of" or something similar.

So, what's really happening in 1 Jn. 3? Let's start with a summary of this by John G. Mitchell (who, by the way, was my second favorite professor at seminary, just under David Needham who was remarkable); anyway, heres' what he wrote;

Here in 1<sup>st</sup> John, we have a statement of *experiential* knowledge. That is to say, our experience in fellowship with God is tested. If our relationship to God is a personal fellowship with God who is light, then it will be manifested by obedience to His Word. In fact, perfect obedience is the evidence of perfect love for Him. Obedience to His Word is the measure of our love for Christ and is also the evidence of our fellowship with Him. This is *experiential* knowledge, not saving knowledge; it is something we personally know. It is not a theory, nor a doctrine, nor some theology, but it is a reality in our own life.

We could say that John is “testing” this. Obedience is the evidence of abiding, of fellowship with Christ.

(John 15:4-5) Abide in Me, and I in you . . . He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

“Fruit” seen in obedience, is the outward evidence of abiding in Christ. It’s not a salvation issue; it’s a fellowship issue.

As we know, words can be cheap. Both James and John are writing to Christians, challenging them as to whether their words, their claim of fellowship with Christ, is backed up by their actions. Neither author has any questions or doubts about their salvation.

James was challenging the *health*, not the *existence*, of his reader’s faith. John is challenging the false movements we talked about by challenging his reader’s *profession* of abiding in Christ, of being in fellowship; he’s *not* questioning their salvation.

Both authors are focused on the issue of “source”, not just “evidence”, because that can be faked. For example, 1 Jn. 3:9; “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His *seed* remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”

The flesh isn’t “born of God”, it’s the human spirit that is regenerated at the new birth. (John 3:6) “That which is born of flesh is flesh; that which is born of spirit is spirit”. The quickened human spirit is the seed of Christ planted in us at the new birth – that seed “cannot sin” because it’s source is God. The flesh can do nothing *but* sin, because its source is Satan.

In Rom. 7:17 Paul says, “It is no longer I who do it, but the sin nature that dwells in me.” And in vs. 18, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwells *no* good thing”. Also, Isa. 64:6, “All *our* righteous acts are like filthy rags before the Lord”.

If the source of any action we take is the flesh, it’s sin; it is done in independence from God, which is what sin is. If the source is the spirit, the seed of Christ in me, it is true obedience, and is in accord with our new nature as one born again. Each

day, all day, our soul (which is our mind and decision-making capability) decides whether the flesh or the spirit will govern our actions.

In John's letters, he is saying that everything which has its source in the flesh is "of the devil" and is evidence that abiding in Christ is not happening.

There is something within you and me that springs directly from God through the human spirit, something generated from His own life and nature *to us*. When God looks underneath our behavior what does He see, a righteous nature producing according to its kind, or someone who is an imitation operating in WWJD mode? Christ, and those who see as He sees, look past the appearance and sees the seed, the nature, the true source behind the action.

This is the explanation of verse 10. The distinguishing mark of the *children of God* versus the *children of the Devil* is not simply outward behavior. It's the nature, the source of that behavior, that matters. If the source is the spirit, then it's true righteousness; if the source is the Devil, then no matter how good it may look to others, it's "filthy rags"; it's the flesh, and in the Christian, the flesh is the devil's tool to generate and manifest sin as well as imitation righteousness.

As Hodges puts it;

There is no reason to take this phrase ("the children of the devil"), As a reference to unsaved people. The term "children of the devil" is fundamentally *descriptive* in nature. It does not designate a person as unregenerate, but as a vocal opponent of the truth just as is the devil himself. For example, a Christian who has deviated from sound doctrine about the person and work of Christ, and who vigorously opposes the truth, could be so described. We have seen that the Lord Jesus could address his own disciple, Peter, as Satan in Matthew 16:23. This phrase "child of the devil" could apply to anyone who does the devil's work by opposing the truth.

So, these are the things John is exposing, challenging and hoping his readers will realize that our actions done in the body can have two possible sources- the flesh (under the governance of Satan) or the human spirit (under governance of the Holy

Spirit), and we need to grow to the place where we understand the importance of living in unbroken fellowship with Christ, so we can distinguish between flesh and spirit in the Christian life.

This is from Matthew Henry,

To be born of God is to be inwardly renewed by the power of the Spirit of God. And that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit; The spiritual principle of holiness remains in him. Renewing grace is an abiding principle. True Christianity is not an art, an acquired dexterity and skill, but a new nature being expressed.

And as we've seen in Heb. 5 and 1 Cor. 2, we need to develop the discernment necessary to tell the difference. God has provided this ability for our protection, but we have to decide whether we will ". . . have our spiritual senses exercised to discern the true from the false."

As we saw last week, John makes it crystal clear *why* he's going into such extensive detail on this;

(1 Jn. 2:26 & 3:7) These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. Little children, let no one deceive you. . .

I realize that most believers tend to think that this deception which is centered around our two natures vying for control of our behavior is interesting, but it doesn't really apply to us because we have all this down pat. It's always the 'other church' or the 'other Christian' who's in danger- not us.

But when you consider that our whole purpose for existence in this life is to be vessels through whom the Holy Spirit can express the nature of Christ; and that Satan's goal is to have the Church express the *imitation* righteousness of the flesh, it's not too difficult to see why John was so emphatic that this should be learned, tested and set right for all of us.

It's not just a Bible study with new information to learn, it's a direct challenge to all of us to grow to a place where abiding in Christ, living *by* Christ and walking in the

Spirit describes the normal Christian life; even if no one else seems to care about any of this.

There is one other verse in 1 Jn. 3 that we didn't touch on directly, but based on what we know so far, it shouldn't be too hard to interpret. It was vs. 6; "Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him."

As we saw in 1 Jn. 1:8-10, *everyone* who knows the Lord sins from time to time, and 1 Jn. 3:6 can't contradict that. This is from Hodges;

If we were to paraphrase this verse based on the Greek words used, it would sound like this; "whoever sins is in a not-seeing and not-knowing condition with reference to God."

Again, what this author is doing is staying in the context of John's letter as being a challenge to the readers' claim of being faithful of abiding in Christ. John is saying that their sin shows they are not abiding, and the result of that is a combination of 'blindness' and a lack of truly "knowing the Lord" while their fellowship is broken.

This is another clarification I found;

The commission of sin shows that the sinner has been overtaken by blindness and ignorance of God. The perfect tense here is not intended to categorize a person as either saved or unsaved, since even believers sin. Instead, the statement is intended to stigmatize all sin as the product, not only of *not* abiding, but also of ignorance and blindness toward God.

And John includes an historical illustration of "source", "action" and "motive" in vs's 10-12;

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Cain's motive for the "evil" he did was jealousy because Able's sacrifice to God was accepted and Cain's was rejected, just like Jacob's sons when they abandoned Joseph.

Ok, we'll need to close soon, but let me do a quick summary of a couple of the major points John is making.

Whatever is born of God cannot sin. The new nature that has been placed in us can't sin. That new nature is not mature when we are first reborn, and our souls and minds are also spiritually young, but the human spirit, which is the embodiment of our new nature, sometimes called the inner man, can't be a source of sin.

When we were born again, and God put that new nature within us, He would not have put a nature in us that also contained the DNA of the flesh, which is the Adamic nature that the Lord is in the process of removing. Our new nature, which is in the likeness of Christ, is intended to govern our actions. It was not given to us to become another inner enemy to deal with.

If we abide in Christ through transparency, honesty and (when necessary), confession of sin; the Lord says this is living in unbroken fellowship with Him – abiding in Him, with the goal of continued spiritual advance and the prospect of bearing much fruit.

Eventually, the new nature, the inner man, coupled with our soul and a glorified body, will be what we are. There won't be any flesh; Satan will be defeated; and the world will have no attraction to us at all.

The inner and outer wars will end; we will finally be free from all our enemies and we will be entering eternity in a state of "joy unspeakable and full of glory".

Being completely free from the constant condemning influence of the flesh may be the greatest freedom we experience when we finally arrive at the place Christ is preparing for us.