

5,28,26 1 Jn. 3:13-24, God's Full Acceptance Of Us

(1 Jn. 3:13-15) Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

As we saw when we studied 1 Cor. 13, the word "love" in the original is agape; it is not a word of emotion, but a word of action. The same form of "love" is the one John uses in 1 Jn. 3:14. How we "feel" about someone is secondary; the important thing is whether we act in a loving way toward them. We also saw this in John 14:21, when Jesus defines what "love" means in relation to Him; "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." It's the willingness on our part to trust that His commandments are worthy of our obedience.

As related to loving "the brethren", it's when we treat them as we would desire others to treat us that expresses the unconditional nature of agape love.

The word for "hate" (miseo) is similar in that its emphasis is on action over feeling. The word implies "persecution" more than *feelings* of hatred or anger. We can see this in Matt. 24:9 also where the same word is used, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The nations may hate us emotionally also, but the point our Lord is making is that it's the expression of their hate as persecution that He's warning about.

One the biggest mistakes we make as Christians is allowing our emotions to govern our thoughts and actions, and we end up thinking that if our emotions don't match our actions, we're hypocrites. We can tell how Jesus *felt* about the Pharisees by the names He called them (snakes, vipers, whitewashed tombstones, children of Satan, etc.), but in His actions, He died for them.

He wasn't being hypocritical; He was a human, being faithful to His purpose. Our calling isn't to attain certain emotions; it's to be faithful to the purpose God has for us. If we have an emotion of love or pity for our enemies, that's frosting on the

cake, but regardless, we can love them by helping them and by praying for them with or without emotional motivation driving our actions.

Now, vs. 14 introduces one of the experiential sides of 'abiding' in Christ; "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."

John is assuring us that the way we treat other Christians is a sign or 'fruit' of whether we are abiding in spiritual life or in spiritual death. And remember, in John's context, life and death are tied to abiding and not abiding; they have nothing to do with being saved or lost.

If we abide in Christ, as the branch abides in the Vine, there are certain things that become both natural and spontaneous for us. We've seen other examples earlier- in 1 Jn 3:6 for example; "Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him."

Those who desire to abide in Christ, but continue in unconfessed sin, are experientially in a state of "not seeing" and "not knowing" the Lord. Our seeing and knowing God increases over time as we abide in Him and His Word abides in us. But if we choose sin over abiding, we forfeit that spiritual advance. But when we *do* sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, so we can confess our sin and remain in fellowship with Him. Abiding keeps our personal spiritual growth in Lord moving forward.

So, in vs. 14, John reminds his readers that another aspect or outcome of abiding in Christ is a growing experience of the life Christ came to give us, as opposed to the 'death' that characterizes those who alienate themselves from the Lord through the neglect of abiding in Him.

And we should keep in mind the definition James gives us of how we can know if a sin has actually occurred, or if what we are struggling with is simply a temptation to sin.

(Jas. 1:12-15) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted

by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

You’ll notice that James also equates “sin” with “death” and it’s not physical death he’s speaking of, it’s the forfeiture of the experience of spiritual life.

It’s extremely important to distinguish the difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is not sin, but it can lead to sin. Sin only occurs when “desire has conceived and gives birth” – in other words, when we give in to the temptation by embracing what’s offered to us.

Satan wants us to feel guilty in temptation, even though temptation is often a natural response to the allurements it presents. At the moment of temptation, the first thing we need to do is recognize it for what it is and then immediately take Paul’s attitude in Rom. 7:17, “It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Paul separates the new man he is in Christ from the old man- the flesh in him that is attracted by Satan’s temptations.

Satan makes his appeal to our flesh; but temptation is only an appeal, it’s not sin. If we recognize its source, we can step back, avoid unnecessary guilt, and walk away from it. We don’t allow it to “conceive and give birth” to actual sin.

That which we’re tempted to do is not sin- until we do it.

In our context in 1 Jn. 3, John is saying basically that “love” is an experience of life and “hate” is an experience of death. We just have to keep in mind that the word “death” has several applications in the Bible, only one of which has to do with the eternal destiny of the lost – called “the second death”.

For example, in Rom. 4:19 Paul talks about the “deadness” of Sarah’s womb. Col. 3:5 exhorts us to “put to death” our sinful practices. Heb. 6:1 tells us to “repent from dead works”. 1 Tim. 5:6 says, the widow “who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives”.

“Death” in the context of 1 Jn. is directly tied to the lack of experiencing the spiritual life offered to a Christian who remains in fellowship with God.

In vs 15 John reminds us of the seriousness of this. He draws from our Lord’s words in Matt. 5:21-22;

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. . .

Compare that with 1 Jn. 3:15; “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” All of our actions have their source in our thought life. A Christian who justifies mistreatment of a fellow Christian, murders that person in his heart. There are Christians I have known over the last 50 plus years that I have been “angry with”. But if I allow that anger to turn into unloving behavior, and then refuse to confess that as sin, my fellowship with the Lord will be broken until I acknowledge it to Him.

We can’t always control our emotions, but we can acknowledge our thoughts and actions that are contrary to righteousness, and we can appeal to the Lord to work in us to bring our thoughts into alignment with His thoughts; it’s all part of the process of being progressively conformed to His image. We will act like Him, be like Him, when we start thinking like Him. The Bible is God’s thoughts.

Again, don’t miss John’s wording. He doesn’t say, “No murderer has eternal life” (otherwise how did David make it to heaven?). He says, “No murderer has eternal life *abiding in him*”. It’s not the possession of eternal life that is lost; it’s the abiding experience of that life that is temporary lost.

Let me come from another angle on this. We want to hold onto what the Lord wants to accomplish in us, not on what we think might be good for a Christian to be. Psalm 51:6 says, “You desire truth in the inner being.” Listen to this explanation of that passage;

In the course of our spiritual history God deals with us in ever-deepening ways. He goes down until He touches bottom to have things true at our very

depth. He undercuts all our professions, assumptions, pretensions, illusions, and customs.... There is no mere formalism about this; no mere outward observance of customs and ceremonies in this. This has got to go right into the inmost being, in the inward parts. God works toward that. God is ever working toward the most inward parts. Do you understand what He is doing with us? He will meet us with His gracious provision when we transgress and trespass and fail, and do wrong – He will meet us there in grace. But God is going to pursue this matter to the most inward place of our being, and register there His work of grace and redemption.

The Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are characterized by this one feature – Truth! And God desires and has set His heart upon having people who are partakers of the Divine nature, and so He is working ever more deeply toward this end: what is true of Himself shall be true of His children – those begotten of Him – that they should be true sons of God in this sense.

I'm hoping, as we move through 1 Jn., we are recognizing a certain spiritual atmosphere John was attempting to create. It was not an atmosphere of judging or deciding who's lost versus who's saved, or of laying out an expanded and updated set of Old Testament rules and regulations for Church Age believers to obey. It was a focus on the hearts of God's people, on their relationship and communion with their Father and the hidden, inner life they are meant to have with God.

If we interpret what we study staying in that context, we can gain a great deal of valuable knowledge on what it means to be someone who lives in Christ.

In vs 16 John starts pushing for *full reality* in terms of our *personal* expression of what we've been learning;

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

All sacrifice we do for others is measured by, and motivated by, the kind of love that we see expressed in Christ laying down His life for us. Since there has never been a greater expression of unconditional love than what we see at the Cross, and since the Lord's goal for us to be conformed to the image of the His Son, the Cross

is the standard that has been raised up and placed before our eyes. It's not a goal that will be fully reached in this life, for now it's a pursuit; but it does represent what our love, our character, will be like when our transformation is completed at the Lord's return.

As John told us in 1 Jn. 3:2; ". . . we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." From a website called, "Got Questions" I found this description of John's promise in this passage;

A difficulty of our present state of existence is that we cannot fully grasp what it means to be a child of God. We don't have the complete picture yet because God has not shown us all of what we will be like when Jesus Christ returns and we see Him face to face. Until then, we can only take in a dimly lit preview. "We shall see Him as He is" means that our ability to appreciate and understand the depth, breadth, and fullness of Christ—and who we are in Christ—will only be complete when He returns. When we stand before Him, our spiritual eyes will be wide open, expanding our visual field to take in all of Him and to discover His image finally and fully stamped in our souls.

Along with that, I wanted to reassure us that this is not something that has been laid on our shoulders to accomplish. Here's an explanation by Sparks on this;

There is such a difference between assuming responsibility for ourselves and recognizing that God has assumed that responsibility. And because God has assumed the responsibility we should cooperate with God. There is all the difference between trying to work for our justification, and working because we are justified; between trying to work for our perfection, and working because our perfection is secured in Christ. The difference is not merely technical, it is practical, and of immense value. As an example, sometimes it is necessary for the Lord to say to us: "You are making far too much of your own praying, you are unconsciously coming to think that everything depends upon how much and how fervently you pray." And then you go out and talk to other people about your prayer life. You do not mean it, but the implication is that this is what accounts for your growth. But the Lord says, 'The cause, the secret, the spring of everything is Myself, and sometimes you

will just have to cease straining, and rest back in Me, in loving trust. Learn to do that a little more, and then you will pray better, and I shall be able to do something more in you.'

Hold on to these familiar passages;

(Phil. 2:13) It is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

(Phil. 1:6) Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

We want our lives to match what we read in vs. 16; "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." And to the extent we continue to abide and grow in Christ, to some measure they *will* match. But our part is faith and cooperation, not self-initiated strain and struggle to imitate what we've seen in Christ; only God can transform us into His image.

Then in vs's 17 & 18 John gets very practical on the part we play in cooperating with the Lord regarding what our developing inward nature is moving us toward;

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

As I mentioned earlier, these are the things that can happen naturally, not religiously, but only to the extent that we have grown in our knowledge of Christ; because that growing revelation of the Son of God is what the Spirit uses to shape our desires into something that matches the Lord's desires. It's relationship, not religion, that ultimately causes us to "love in deed and in truth".

What we do will be the outcome of who we are becoming. And when that happens, it's real; it's personal; and it reflects the image of the indwelling Christ. It's not just a program or a religious duty; it's a child of God being and acting according to the nature of that child's Father.

We can religiously obey and do these things, or they can be the spontaneous actions of a person who is becoming like his Master – the first is a burden placed

on our shoulders; the second is a restful expression of an inward work of the Spirit molding us as the Potter molds the clay. God is not just laying out activities we should do that appear 'Christlike'; He is creating a new race of humanity who act according to their new nature, and that is how Christ is seen through our mortal flesh. It's the outward manifestation of "truth in the inward parts", not the imitation produced by committed religionists.

These acts of compassion of meeting the needs of others may look the same to the casual observer; but one is a man or woman doing what their heart desires and the other is doing what Heb. 6:1 calls "dead works". One glorifies man; the other glorifies God, because one has its source in the religious spirit of Man trying to be like Christ, and the other has its source in the renewed mind of someone who actually *is* becoming like Christ.

To the recipient of the sacrifice, and to those who observe it happening, the source is invisible, but eternity will reveal the truth.

Now, in vs 19 John gives another practical principle related to the outward evidence of an inward faithfulness to God; "By this we know that we are of the truth, and shall set at rest our hearts before Him".

This vs. draws from 17 & 18. We know we are of the truth (walking in the truth) if our actions toward other believers demonstrates that we recognize them as family and share what we have with them when we see they are "in need". We don't close our hearts to them.

Another reality tied to this is shown in Matt. 25:40;

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me.

We have to never forget that all Christians are part of the same body, the same family, as our Lord, and how we treat the members of the body of Christ is, from God's viewpoint, how we are treating Him. John is saying that those acts of kindness and sacrifice show that we are "of the truth" - that Christ is increasingly free to express Himself through us.

Vs's 20 and 21 move us to something deeper within us;

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

We know that our heart can sometimes affirm us and at other times, it can condemn us. When our hearts are controlled by the Spirit, they are communicating truth; but when the flesh is in control, guilt tends to govern our thoughts and lock us into self-condemnation; the Spirit's conviction always offers the way of forgiveness and restoration.

Here are a couple explanations that might help clarify this; the first is from R.C.H. Lenski;

To be sure, God knows all our failures, all that our own heart finds against us; but He knows vastly more, namely all about our real spiritual state, that the measure of love we *do* have shows that we have stepped over from the death into life (1 Jn 3:14), that although we are as yet imperfect in love, and our own hearts penitently acknowledge it, we have been born from Him and are his children.

And from John Phillips;

At times our own hearts make us feel guilty, so John lifts us above subjective feelings to solid facts—God is infinitely greater than our hearts. On occasion, we let ourselves down, that is, we do not come up to even our own expectations, let alone God's. We discover afresh and with sorrow and shame that the human heart is, indeed, "deceitful above all things," as God declares. We find our hearts full of pride, anger, bitterness, resentment, lust, and we are tempted at times to wonder if we are saved at all. At such times it is comforting to know that God is greater than our hearts and that our salvation does not depend upon how we feel, but upon God's grace. The unalterable facts of history are that God has provided salvation—full, free, and forever—in Christ. Faith appropriates those facts, making them no longer merely abstract statements of truth but integrating them as part and

parcel of our lives. The feelings may follow, and we enter into the joy of our salvation. So, even when we have a condemning heart, God is greater. His salvation takes care of all our sins, including those regrettable lapses from that higher and holier life to which we have been called.

Finally, Warren Wiersbe adds this;

No Christian should treat sin lightly, but no Christian should be harder on himself than God is. There is a morbid kind of self-examination and self-condemnation that is not spiritual.

Now, in the last part of chapter 3 (vs's 22-24) John connects prayer and obedience to the experience of living in Christ;

. . . if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

You'll notice right away that John doesn't start listing all the things we are supposed to do in order to please God. John's point in this whole letter is not to put us back under some system of Law, but to simply solidify the spiritual foundation of our relationship and fellowship with our Lord. So, he reduces everything down to two "commandments" that cover everything we will need to know to please God; "And this is His command – believe in the Name of the Son and love one another."

We live and walk by faith in Christ (which, as we've seen before in Heb. 11, is the one thing above all that pleases God) and our relationship with one another is to have love as it's foundation and motivation.

It's not complex; it's not a list of religious thou shalts and thou shalt nots – its dependence on Christ for everything coupled with helping those who need our help.

If that's our focus; then we are getting a solid glimpse of true Christianity. This is exactly how Jesus lived His life in the days of His flesh – surrendered to, and dependent on His Father, and offering all He was and all He had to those around Him.

Like Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 11:3; “Let no one corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ.” When waves of theological confusion on what matters most floods your thoughts, take a deep breath and set your heart on trusting God and loving those He brings into your life. Whatever else is needed as to the specifics of daily life, God will make that clear as He guides you one day at a time.

The whole idea of giving everything we're struggling with to God, especially when our hearts condemn us, is one of the most difficult things Christians face in this warfare we're engaged in. Since Satan, by nature, is “the accuser of the brethren”, guilt, fear and self-condemnation is not a rare or random approach to us – the enemy drills this into us more deeply and more frequently than anything else.

I don't want to move into chapter 4 tonight, but I do want to make sure we are able to bring what we've just looked at to ourselves in as personal a way as possible because of how difficult accepting our acceptance can be when the enemy is raining guilt and shame down on us. So, I'm going to read something I found by William MacDonald who was writing about how the Omniscience of God is actually a place of immense comfort for us if we are willing to believe in what God, in grace, has provided us;

The omniscience of God means that He has perfect knowledge of everything. He has never learned and can never learn. One of the great passages on the subject is Psalm 139:1-6, where David wrote:

“O Lord, thou has searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising; You understand my thoughts afar off. You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand

upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”

In Psalm 147:4, we learn that God counts the number of the stars and calls them all by name. The wonder of this increases when we realize that the total number of stars in the universe is greater than the number of grains of sand on all the sea shores of the world.

When I first read that, it reminded me of something my son showed me on what astronomers are discovering. The number of galaxies in this universe are immeasurable and their number is expanding at light speed.

Which means that God *has* never, and *will* never, cease to create – it’s His nature and desire to have all things in Christ be infinite in number, beauty and power. His creation reflects Who He is. And for reasons only God fully understands, the crown of His creation is the Bride of Christ.

Ok, back to MacDonald;

It is clear then that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13), causing us to join with Paul in saying “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

The omniscience of God is filled with practical meaning for every one of us. There is warning. God sees everything we do. We can’t keep anything secret from Him.

But there is comfort. He knows what we are going through. As Job said, “He knows the way that I take” (Job 23:10). He numbers our tears in His bottle (Psa. 56:8).

And there is encouragement. He knew all about us and yet He saved us anyway. He knows what we feel in worship and prayer but cannot express. There is wonder. Although God is omniscient, yet He can forget the sins He

has forgiven. As David Seamands once said, "I don't know how divine omniscience can forget- but it does."

We'll need to close in a few minutes, so I want to provide an overview of the personal implications of what we've been talking about. We've seen that for John; everything boils down to us going as far as we are willing to have the Lord take us in His ultimate purpose of recovering His original plan which is to call out from the nations a race of people that God will bring into conformity to Christ – "Let us make man in our image. . . "

God is recovering what was lost in the Garden, and He is doing this by moving us from where we are, to where we will ultimately be in perfect likeness to His Son.

So, what I'm going to leave you with is a couple of summary observations by Sparks on *how* the Lord is doing this, which, as we've seen in 1st. John, is intrinsically tied to our *relational* union (not just positional union) with Him, of abiding in Christ.

I'll start with the issue of "recovery".

If you look into the history of God's people at any time you will find that the cause of the times of declension is the same. Wherever there has arisen a state like that which we find in the book of Judges (spiritual stagnation or departure from God's original purpose) it can be traced to this, at some point those concerned ceased to go on into all that the Lord had set before them as His will for them. It is always a most perilous thing not to go on into anything that has been presented to us by the Lord as concerning what He made possible for us, because it will not be long before other forces take advantage of that stopping short to press in, and then it becomes a question as to whether we can go on when we want to. That which at one time was a clear way- while always fraught with a measure of conflict, but with a knowledge that the Lord was there and was committed to this on our behalf- has now become marked by struggle and a conflict which is not characterized by the Lord being fully engaged in it as He was before. There is a sense of having given the enemy an opportunity. There is all the difference between the kind of conflict and progress which is straight on with the Lord

in the light, as the enemy battles against us to withstand us, and that kind of conflict which is the result of our being stopped short somewhere.

When I first read that, it dawned on me that one of the characteristics of the Lord we seem to either overlook or take for granted is that He is always in motion, and always with the positive intention of taking us further so we can have everything that the Cross, the resurrection and the indwelling of Christ can mean for us.

As we saw in the Gospels, those who responded continued to journey with Him even if they were massively confused as to why He was doing some of the things He did. Others followed for a while, but at some point, they moved away. And when those times happened, the Lord sometimes appealed to them, but ultimately, He had to move forward with those who would go with Him and leave the others behind. Christ is a perfect gentleman; He honors our decisions even if those decisions break His heart.

Ok, finally, some closing comments which I hope can help tie all this together;

No one who knows anything about the present conditions will disagree with the statement that the Church is in desperate need of men with a message, but our point is that what is needed is the knowledge of what the message is for *our* time. That message must come from God to men chosen for that purpose. No one can do anything in the making of such vessels. This is God's work alone, and they have to be left in His hands....

They must be men of vision and courage! And more courage will be required here than in any other realm of which we know. A specific revelation will be set to establish, and make apparent, a distance between such as have it and such as have not that specific understanding. This will give rise to many possibilities. Even the best servants of God who have not seen God's purpose spiritually revealed will probably stand back. It will mean loneliness, and going on alone perhaps for quite a time. It will mean ostracism, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, suspicion, closed doors.

No revelation from God is ever just verbal truth, it always involves practical issues. God is telling such men the truth, and those who obey it will become

marked people. This raises a new set of opposing elements. If God has given a revelation concerning His purpose in Christ which is of such vital importance as to have called for all this personal history of learning, suffering and preparation, we must realize that it is of very great interest to Satan's plans, and he will leave nothing unused to make its course impossible.... If the greatest need of the hour is that of men and women of vision, then along with that need will go the need for a willingness to pay the price. But there is another side, and that is God's side, and the compensations are great. It is a great thing to be in possession of a mandate from God.

We can do these studies and hopefully learn a great deal from every verse we dissect; there is nothing in God's Word that is irreverent or trivial. But throughout history, there have been men and women of God who have, by God's grace, seen what we might call "the big picture" – they've been shown not only what all of this has been about, but they've also seen *the* singular message for *their* generation. Like the 'sons of Isachaar', they had understanding of the time, and because of that, they knew exactly what God's people should do.

They've been able to take that *big-picture-vision* of God's ultimate intention, and bring it down to the specific need of hour; to *the* message the Church needs most to hear.

God's goal is glorious, but costly, and those who faithfully proclaim and explain that goal are almost always very unpopular among the majority of the Lord's people. Like we saw in John 1:11, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." But to those who stayed with Him, who stayed on the path He was walking, whether they understood His ways or not, the outcome was always something wonderful beyond anything they could have imagined or hoped for.