

I John 3:20–4:12

I John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Men cannot hide or indulge in sin, especially in the heart, and maintain peace and fellowship with God. A condemning heart also does nothing to inspire greater confidence in the Lord; in fact, it does quite the opposite.¹

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:20) For if our heart condemn us—... The general sentiment is, that if they should so live that their own hearts would condemn them for present insincerity and hypocrisy, they could have no hope of peace, for God knows all that is in the heart. In view of the past—when the heart accuses us of what we have done—we may find peace by such evidences of piety as shall allay the troubles of an agitated soul, 1 John 3:9,² but we cannot have such peace if our hearts condemn us for the indulgence of secret sins, now that we profess to be Christians. If our hearts condemn us for present insincerity, and for secret sins, we can never “persuade” or soothe them by any external act of piety. In view of the consciousness of past guilt, we may find peace; we can find none if there is a present purpose to indulge in sin.

I John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

To properly walk with God, our love must be pure, our faith unfeigned, and our conscience free of convicting and condemning sin. The condition of the heart greatly affects men's faith and trust in God. To

properly grow and develop in the Christian faith, we must so live that our heart does not accuse us or condemn of sin, but rather commends us for living rightly before the Lord.³ Though most do not know it, a good conscience is as critical to true piety as love and faith. Possessing these three godly characteristics is the ultimate end of God's will for the Christian. *Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned* (1 Tim. 1:5). If our faith and love are insincere and have no real depth, our conscience will inform us. Hence, the conscience plays a very significant and key role in leading men's souls toward God's salvation, by exposing potential spiritual insincerity or impurity where it exists.

I John 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Here we observe the great result that the pursuit of righteousness, a good conscience, and inward purity will produce. It is that God will answer all prayers that align themselves with His will, teaching us that how a man lives directly affects whether or not God hears and answers his prayers. Therefore, if men choose not to keep God's commandments, then they should not be so presumptuous to believe that God will hear their prayers.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:22) We can have no hope that he will hear us unless we do so live as to please him.

1 II Cor. 7:10 *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

2 I John 3:9 *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.*

3 Rom. 2:15 *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)*

How foolish are men to falsely believe that they can live as they will, and sin as they desire, and that God will still hear them in their time of need! The truth is that God will not hear or come to the aid of anyone who cherishes iniquity in the heart.⁴ *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me* (Ps. 66:18). As long as sinners embrace sin, the Lord will not hear them. One of the fatal consequences of choosing to live a life of sin is that God refuses to hear any who do so.⁵ Sinners, therefore, should never be so naive to believe that God will still hear them in their time of need, if they have continued to resist divine will. Scripture repeatedly confirms that a sinner's plea will not be heard without repentant prayer and acknowledgment of sin, with also no attempt to defend it or hide it from God.⁶ Thus for God to hear men's petitions, they must keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Only by living this way can they be assured that

what is asked of God will be both heard and answered.

God hears and has promised to come to the aid of the righteous,⁷ but not to any who harbor sin in their hearts. The Lord's ears are open to the righteous, but His face is divinely set against any who engage in evil. *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil* (I Pet. 3:12).

A truly righteous man should never fear that God will not hear his prayers or come to his aid in time of need.⁸ What God has declared will be done for the righteous, you can be certain it will be done.

I John 3:23 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 commandment.

4 Isa. 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

5 Ps. 18:41 *They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. Prov. 1:28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: Prov. 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

6 II Chrn. 7:14 *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

Jnh. 3:6-9 *For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? I Sam. 12:13 Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you.*

Luke 15:17-24 *And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

7 Ps. 34:17 *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

John 9:31 *Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.*

8 Prov. 15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

I Pet. 3:12 *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

This is *His* (God's) *commandment*, that we should not only believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, but also love one another, as Jesus commanded His followers to do.⁹ Though two things are mentioned, *that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment*, the apostle reveals that God has combined both into one commandment. Therefore, believing in the Son of God and love for the brethren are eternally bound.¹⁰ Obeying one leads to embracing the other, just as disregarding one ensures that there can be no true possession of the other. This teaches us that whenever there is true belief in Jesus Christ, there will also be genuine and sincere love for those born of Him.¹¹ Hence, whenever there is faith in the Savior, there will be a corresponding love for the saved.¹² This is undoubtably true regarding those created in Christ's image, who have been made to share in the same Spirit of God.¹³

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I John 3:23) Summing up of God's commandments under the Gospel dispensation in one commandment.

this is his commandment—singular: for faith and love are not separate commandments, but are indissolubly united. We cannot truly love one another without faith in Christ, nor can we truly believe in Him without love.

I John 3:24 *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.*

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. Those who keep Christ's commandments dwell in Christ, and He in them. Jesus promised His followers that if He was loved and His words were kept, then He and the Father would come and live within their hearts. By the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, the saved are assured and comforted that God in Christ lives within them.¹⁴ *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him* (John 14:23). In the Old Testament, God dwelt among His people.¹⁵ Now Jesus promis-

9 Mark. 12:29–31 *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

10 Col. 1:4 *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,* Eph. 1:15 *Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,*

11 John 13:35 *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

I John 5:1 *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.*

12 I John 2:9–10 *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. ¹⁰He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

I John 5:1 *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.*

13 Rom. 8:29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Col. 3:10 *And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

14 I Cor. 3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

Eph. 2:22 *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Col. 1:27 *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

15 Exod. 29:45–46 *And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. ⁴⁶And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God.*

Lev. 26:11 *And I set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you.*

Num. 35:34 *Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.*

I Kgs. 6:13 *And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.*

es that both the Father and the Son will come and make their abode within them.

Once the Holy Spirit enters a believer's heart, a spiritual oneness is created between the believer, the Father, and the Son. It is this oneness that Jesus possessed with God, that He prayed could also be shared with those who believed upon His name. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me* (John 17:20–21). For the true Christian, God is much more than simply around him; He is in all respects living within him.¹⁶ Consequently, sinners are saved not when they enter churches, but only when the Father and Son, in the presence of the Holy Spirit, come to live, abide, and dwell within them.

(Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, John 17:21) That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; and the meaning is that the union of the Church may be of the same essential nature as that between the Father and the Son; yea, that the union of the Church may result from the union of individual members with the Father through the Son.

And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. The Christian knows that God dwells in him through the Spirit of God living within. Because of the Spirit's inward presence and influence, those saved are brought to know that they are of God, and that God dwells in them. This is directly due to

the Holy Spirit's presence in their hearts, which internally testifies to possessing true relationship with God. The Holy Spirit also allows believers to cry, *Abba, Father*, something slaves, and those still in bondage, were never allowed to do. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father* (Gal. 4:6).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Gal. 4:6) Abba, Father—See the note at Romans 8:15.¹⁷ It is said in the Babylonian Gemara, a Jewish work, that it was not permitted slaves to use the title of Abba in addressing the master of the family to which they belonged. If so, then the language which Christians are here represented as using is the language of freemen, and denotes that they are not under the servitude of sin.

I John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

The warning here is to *believe not every spirit*. This includes every spirit or man who professes to come in God's name. All spirits, and all who present themselves as being sent by God, should be tried, simply because a vast number of *false prophets are gone out* and operate in the world. Not all spirits are holy. Neither are all men who profess to speak by the Spirit of God actually of Him. The apostle seeks to make this essential truth abundantly clear, simply because false ministries in the Christian faith have abounded throughout its inception, and many have been deceived by those who, though they claimed relationship with God, actually had none. Hence, if

¹⁶ Rom. 8:10 *And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

¹⁷ II Cor. 13:5 *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

Gal. 2:20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Col. 1:27 *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

¹⁷ Rom. 8:15 *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

absent the Spirit of Christ¹⁸ and the ability to discern the true nature of both good and evil spirits,¹⁹ those searching for God can easily confuse that which has not been genuinely sent by God, as having come from Him. Sadly, if men listen to and trust these counterfeit spirits, who falsely claim they are of the Lord, even the elect can be deceived. *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ* (II Cor. 11:3). The primary purpose of all spiritual deception in the church, brought by false ministries into her, is separating the believer from the simplicity of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

(Barnes' *Notes on the Bible*, II Cor. 11:3) *But I fear ...* The mention of this seems to have suggested to him the fact that the first woman was deceived and led astray by the tempter, and that the same thing might occur in regard to the church which he was so desirous should be preserved pure. The grounds of his fear were:

(1) That Satan had seduced the first woman, thus demonstrating that the most holy

ones were in danger of being led astray by temptation; and,

(2) That special efforts were made to seduce them from the faith. The persuasive arts of the false teachers; the power of philosophy; and the attractive and corrupting influences of the world, he had reason to suppose might be employed to seduce them from simple attachment to Christ.

The Christian doctrine, which leads to the new birth²⁰ and eternal life,²¹ is a very simple one. It is a call to repent for sin,²² believe in the Son of God,²³ and be baptized by Him with the Holy Spirit. *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38). In contrast to this, false prophets and false teachers often stress what God will do for men, while at the same time completely ignoring what men need to do to be saved by God. In all false religion it is easily observed that man is the real center of it. And this will be seen by men being lovers of self more than lovers of

18 Rom. 8:9 *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

19 I Cor. 12:8–11 *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*

¹⁰*To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: ¹¹But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

20 John 1:12–13 *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: ¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

I Pet. 1:23 *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

21 John 3:15 *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

John 10:28 *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

Rom. 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I John 5:11 *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

22 Mark 1:15 *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

Luke 5:32 *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Acts 3:19 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

23 John 20:31 *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

I John 5:13 *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

God.²⁴ Because also many mere professing believers are ruled by lust, they will seek out false teachers who will allow them to remain in it.²⁵

I John 4:2–3 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: ³And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

A great debate arose among the Jews and early Christians as to the true nature of Jesus Christ: was Jesus actually born of God, and was He, God's promised Messiah? The actual debate centered around not mere doctrines of faith but the genuineness of the gospel's Author.²⁶ To be *antichrist* is to be against God's true Christ. Thus, he who rejects the Son rejects not only the Savior of this world but also the Ruler of the next.²⁷ *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him* (John 1:18). Because Jesus, God's only begotten Son, revealed God to the world, it is impossible to reject Him and not also reject the Father, Who sent Him. Hence, to reject Christ's rule²⁸ and the power God has given His Son is

to reject the divine rule and authority of God Himself.²⁹

(*Benson Commentary*, John 1:18) ... neither Moses, nor any of the Old Testament prophets, were so well qualified to make God and his will known to mankind, as our Lord Jesus Christ was. They never saw, nor perfectly knew the Divine Being, and his eternal counsels, and therefore could not make a full discovery thereof to men. The only person who ever enjoyed this privilege was the only-begotten Son of God, *the Word*, which was in the beginning with him, or, as it is here expressed, was, and is, *in the bosom of the Father*: that is, always was, and is the object of his tenderest, yea, of his infinite affection, complacency, and delight, and the intimate partner of his counsels. And this circumstance recommends Christ's holy religion to us unspeakably before any others; that it was founded by one that had seen God, or that had clear and perfect knowledge of him, and of his mind and will, which no other person ever had, or could have.

I John 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

The ones who have been *overcome* are those listed as of *antichrist* in the previous verse. It is tempting to believe that because of the vast number of sinners who

24 II Tim. 3:2 *For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

25 II Tim. 4:3–4 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

26 Heb. 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

27 Eph. 1:21 *Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

28 I John 2:22 *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.*

Jude 1:4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

29 Matt. 28:18 *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Matt. 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

John 3:31 *He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.*

reject God, and the positions of power in the world they hold, that true saints are inferior to the evil forces around them. This is not true, simply because the Son of God lives within His people, and through Him they have been made more than conquerors.³⁰ Greater is Christ in the true believer, than the hosts of antichrists in the world. So powerful is the Spirit of God's Son, imparted to the saved, that by this Spirit they have been made greater³¹ than even him who presently rules this world.³²

(Benson Commentary, I John 4:4) Because greater is he that is in you—Namely, the Spirit of Christ; than he—The spirit of antichrist; that is in the world—The Son of God, who stands at the head of that interest in which you are embarked, and who aids you by the mighty communications of his Spirit, is infinitely too strong for Satan, the great head of the apostasy, and for all his confederates. Thus, the issue of the divine government will be, that truth and virtue shall be finally victorious over error and wickedness, because God, the Patron of truth and virtue, possesseth far greater power and wisdom than the evil spirits who promote error and wickedness.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 4:4) Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world—God, who dwells in your hearts, and by whose strength and grace alone you have been enabled to achieve this victory, is more mighty than Satan, who rules in the hearts of the people of this world, and whose seductive arts are seen in the efforts of these false teachers. The apostle meant to say that it was by no power of their own that they achieved this victory, but it was to be traced solely to the fact that God dwelt among them, and had preserved them by his grace.

The Christian is not made victorious by his own power. This could never be the case, since this would only lead to greater trust and confidence in self.³³ Rather, that which causes God's new sons to overcome the world lies in the strength of their Savior. This is a reality that every true Christian can attest to through personal experience, that because of God's presence in their lives, things that should have overcome and defeated them, in the end, neither did nor could.

A treasure, a very precious treasure, lives in the people of God. This treasure is the Holy Spirit, Who enables God to unleash His power in and for the Christian. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us* (I Cor. 4:7). The excellency of the power manifested in the saint of God is vastly superior to any opposing evil power assembled against him. Victory is the Lord's, and due to God's own spiritual power, His people are themselves made to become victorious.³⁴ The believer's strength lies not in himself, but in the Lord. And though God's hands which deliver His people remain invisible, His power to deliver cannot be denied. The Lord is indeed the strength of His people. For this reason they need not to rely on their own strength and ability, but rather on He, Who is so much stronger than them. *The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed. Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever* (Ps. 28:8–9).

(Benson Commentary, Ps. 28:8) The Lord is their strength—That is, the strength of his people, mentioned in the next verse. He is

30 Rom. 8:37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

31 I John 4:4 *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

32 II Cor. 4:4 *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

33 Prov. 28:26 *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. Isa. 5:21 Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!*

34 Rom. 8:37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

the saving strength—Hebrews *ישועות מעון*, *the strength of the preservations, deliverances, or salvations; of his anointed*—Of me, whom he hath anointed to be king, and whom therefore he will defend. He signifies that it was by God's strength alone that his victories, deliverances, and preservations were wrought.

I John 4:5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

One of the distinguishing marks of antichrists is that this world is their true home. It is the world that they are most comfortable in, and they inwardly seek nothing beyond it. Just as Christ's people hear His voice,³⁵ so do those of the world hear all the various voices of antichrists. And like with Israel of old,³⁶ sinners will often look for weak and compromising leaders, who will allow them to do as they will.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, I John 4:5) *They are of the world*—This was one of the marks by which those who had the spirit of antichrist might be known. They belonged not to the church of God, but to the world. They had its spirit; they acted on its principles; they lived for it.

Whomever a man listens to or enjoys the company of reveals who he really is. If it is the world, then he is of it; if it is God,

then he is of Him. By this simple criterion the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Observe also that if any have made themselves friends with this world, they have by choice become God's enemy. *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God* (Jas. 4:4). When a man is a friend of anything, especially that which is evil and rebellious toward the Lord, he reveals kinship with it. This devilish friendship provides evidence that all antichrists are worthy of divine judgment. Because of their choosing and loving a sinful and evil world more than their Creator, they are promised to suffer the same dreadful fate as it.

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Jas. 4:4) *Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*—i.e., the state of being an enemy to God, not one of simpler enmity with Him. There cannot be a passive condition to the faith of Christ: "he that is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Renunciation of the world, in the Christian promise, is not forsaking it when tired and clogged with its delights, but the earliest severance from it; to break this vow, or not to have made it, is to belong to the foes of God, and not merely to be out of covenant with Him. The forces of good and evil divide the land so sharply that there is no debatable ground, nor even halting-place between.

³⁵ John 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*

³⁶ Exod. 32:1–9 *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

² *And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. ³And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. ⁴And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. ⁵And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. ⁶And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. ⁷And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: ⁸They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. ⁹And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:*

The Christian's call, given by God through Jesus Christ, is a call to separate himself from all things worldly.³⁷ *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (I John 2:15). No man can serve two masters,³⁸ just as no man can love an evil and sinful world that rejects divine rule, and at the very same time hold any true affection for a divine Being Who demands it.

I John 4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

By observing who hears the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error are made visible. No man can turn a deaf ear to the truth, and still be of God, which means that those who are truly of the Lord will readily, and with great joy, hear the gospel of Christ once it is presented to them. The primary means by which this gospel is spread and proclaimed to the world is through the gift ministries that the Son of God has both given to and placed in the church. *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto*

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13).

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Eph. 4:11) *He gave*.—In the original “He” is emphatic—He and He alone, as the ascended Head of humanity. The word “gave,” instead of the more obvious word *set*, or *appointed* (used in 1 Corinthians 12:28),³⁹ is, of course, suggested by Ephesians 4:8.⁴⁰ They who are ministers of His gifts are themselves gifts from Him to the Church.

It is Christ's will that He be made more fully known to the church. In the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, this knowledge of Christ is spread to those called to heaven through Christ.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, I John 4:6) *Know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*—We can distinguish those who embrace the truth from those who do not. Whatever pretensions they might set up for piety, it was clear that if they did not embrace the doctrines taught by the true apostles of God, they could not be regarded as his friends; that is, as true Christians. It may be added that the same test is applicable now. They who do not receive the plain doctrines laid down in the word of God, whatever pretensions they may make to piety, or whatever zeal they may evince in the cause which they have espoused, can have no well-founded claims to the name Christian. One of the clearest evidences of true piety is a readiness to receive all that God has taught. Compare Matthew 18:1–3; Mark 10:15; James 1:19–21.⁴¹

37 Rom. 12:2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Jas. 1:27 *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Jas. 4:4 *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

38 Matt. 6:24 *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

39 I Cor. 12:28 *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*

40 Eph 4:8 *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

41 Matt. 18:1–3 *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Born of God

Whether a man will hear the true gospel of Jesus Christ or not reveals what spirit or spirits are influencing him.

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

The apostle places great importance on love because of its direct relationship to God. *Love is of God* reveals that all love has its source in Him. From the Father flows all the love experienced and present in creation. Divine love, therefore, is the primary test to determine whom God has saved and made His true sons, and those He has not. There is no such thing as a true Christian who lacks divine love, simply because once born of God, believers are taught by Him to love. *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another* (I Thess. 4:9). So natural will love be in the true Christian's heart, that there will be found no great need to teach him to love. Because God is love,⁴² He births spiritual children, in His own image, whose main desire is to love. Nothing also gives a man more confidence that he is of the truth, than when God's love abounds in his heart. By this he is assured that he is born of God and has accurately come to know Him.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 4:7) And everyone that loveth, is born of God—Is a regenerated man. That is, everyone who has true love to Christians as such, or true brotherly love, is a true Christian. This cannot mean that everyone that loves his wife and children, his classmate, his partner in business, or his friend—his house, or his farms, or his horses, or his hounds, is a child of God; it must be understood as referring to

the point under discussion. A man may have a great deal of natural affection toward his kindred; a great deal of benevolence in his character toward the poor and needy, and still he may have none of the love to which John refers. He may have no real love to God, to the Saviour, or to the children of God as such; and it would be absurd for such a one to argue because he loves his wife and children that therefore he loves God, or is born again.

I John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I John 4:8) knoweth not—Greek aorist: not only knoweth not now, but never knew, has not once for all known God.

Love is that standard that reveals who in this world actually knows the Lord and who does not—who is born again, and has been regenerated by the Christ Spirit, and who has not. Thus, neither religious attendance nor biblical study provides insight as to who possesses a true knowledge of the Lord; only His own divine love can prove this.

A man could live his entire life, give to the poor every possession he possessed, manifest the gift of prophecy, and even perform miracles and wonders in Christ's name—yet without love he will be both judged and accounted by God as nothing. *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing* (I Cor. 13:2). It is love that determines a man's true worth, and if a man does not have this divine fruit both in his heart, and in his life, he is by all heavenly standards viewed and accounted by God as nothing.

Mark 10:15 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Jas. 1:19–21 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: ²⁰For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. ²¹Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. ⁴² I John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

I John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

There is not anything more precious than life, and nothing reveals divine generosity and goodness more, than when eternal life is imparted to the sinner. By this act of compassion and mercy, the true benevolent nature of God is made known to the world. Thus, whenever repentant sinners are forgiven and spiritual regeneration occurs,⁴³ divine love is both seen and manifested in the world.

I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

It is one thing to possess love for those who love us, or have done something to merit good being done for them. It is quite another thing when God's love and the gift of salvation⁴⁴ are given to sinners unworthy of love. *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8).

Long before men loved God, He loved them. Many also have wondered why God would absolve men of sin. The answer lies in the divine goodness and spiritual generosity of a loving God. Thus, transgressors are forgiven of sin,⁴⁵ saved, and made righteous before God,⁴⁶ simply because God is love. There is no other reason for these acts of grace beyond the reality that it is because of divine love that sinners are cleansed from their sin, and given a new heavenly standing before God.

I John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Once we have been made partakers of divine love, and God's love has been shown to us, then it should be very easy to share this love with others. Freely we have received, and just as freely we should give.⁴⁷ Because God's love was freely given to us, we should likewise freely love, as He has loved us.

I John 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

43 Tit. 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Ezek. 36:26–27 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. ⁴⁵And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

II Cor. 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

44 II Cor. 9:15 Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

45 Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Eph. 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Col. 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

46 Rom. 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

II Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

47 Matt. 10:8b ... freely ye have received, freely give.

Born of God

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 4:12) If we love one another, God dwelleth in us— Though we cannot see him, yet there is a way by which we may be assured that he is near us, and that he even dwells in us. That way is by the exercise of love.

No man is more assured that God truly dwells within him, than he who has inward spiritual proof that God's love is being perfected in him. It is thus by loving one another that God's love is perfected in Christians, and they are made to know that God actually dwells in them.

(Matthew Poole's Commentary, I John 4:12) The essence of God is to our eyes invisible,

incomprehensible to our minds; but by yielding ourselves to the power of his love, so as to be transformed by it, and habituated to the exercise of mutual love, we come to know him by the most pleasant and most apprehensible effects, experiencing his indwelling, vital, operative presence and influences, whereby he is daily perfecting this his own likeness and image in us. This is the most desirable way of knowing God, when, though we cannot behold him at a distance, we may feelingly apprehend him nigh us, and in us.

Love is meant to increase in the believer,⁴⁸ and as it does, faith in God's existence will likewise increase. By manifesting divine love to the world, it is proven that God's holy presence remains in it.

⁴⁸ *I Thess. 3:12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*