

I John 3:3–19

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

WHEN men draw near to Christ by faith, a bond is created between them and Christ. This divine act creates a union between the sinner and the Lord. The hope of being united with the Savior and sharing in His heavenly image ultimately purifies the soul.

Whatever a man sets his mind on and journeys toward, directly affects the inside of his soul. This is especially true when the hope is spiritual and the focus is becoming like the Savior. *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly* (I Cor. 15:49).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 15:49) The argument here is, that the connection which is formed between the believer and the Saviour is as close as that which subsisted between him and Adam; and as that connection with Adam involved the certainty that he would be subjected to pain, sin, sickness, and death, so the connection with Christ involves the certainty that he will like him be free from sin, sickness, pain, and death, and like him will have a body that is pure, incorruptible, and immortal.

Even as he is pure. The glory and beauty of the Savior reside in His purity. It is not just that Jesus did not sin¹ and was able to resist the sinful urges of His body,² but rather in Him is no sin. He was sinless, holy, and without blemish or defect. *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens* (Heb. 7:26). It is this purity, this cleanliness of heart and soul, that Christ passes on to those who believe on Him. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you* (John 15:3). What begins on earth with Christ's words cleansing the soul, and the Holy Spirit enlightening the heart,³ will be finished when Jesus returns from heaven to completely transform the saint's body.⁴ In short, the ministry of the Son of God is purposed to bring repentant sinners into Christ's own divine image and purity. Just as *He is pure*, so shall all those who believe upon Him, by His power, share in His own divine, celestial, and eternal holy nature.

I John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Sin is contrary to divine law, and in opposition to God's holy nature. It prompts,

1 I Pet. 2:22 *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:*

2 Heb. 4:15 *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

3 Eph. 1:17–18 *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

4 I Cor. 15:49–52 *And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

⁵⁰*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Phil. 3:21 *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

I John 3:2 *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

leads, influences, and even controls men to do as they desire and not as God wills. If a man remains indifferent to his sin and perceives no harm in breaking God's commandments, you can be sure that Jesus Christ is not his Lord.⁵ One can recognize those born of God and filled with His Spirit, by their obedience and subjection to the gospel, and surely not their rejection and breaking of it.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, 1 John 3:4) It seems evident that the apostle is here combating an opinion which then existed that people might sin, and yet be true Christians, 1 John 3:7;⁶ and he apprehended that there was danger that this opinion would become prevalent. On what ground this opinion was held is unknown. Perhaps it was held that all that was necessary to constitute religion was to embrace the doctrines of Christianity, or to be orthodox in the faith; perhaps that it was not expected that people would become holy in this life, and therefore they might indulge in acts of sin; perhaps that Christ came to modify and relax the law, and that the freedom which he procured for them was freedom to indulge in whatever people chose; perhaps that, since Christians were heirs of all things, they had a right to enjoy all things; perhaps that the passions of people were so strong that they could not be restrained, and that therefore it was not wrong to give indulgence to the propensities with which our Creator has formed us. All

these opinions have been held under various forms of Antinomianism, and it is not at all improbable that some or all of them prevailed in the time of John.

Antinomianism is "the belief that Christians, by virtue of divine grace, are freed not only from biblical law and church-prescribed behavioral norms, but also from all moral law."⁷ Historians have noted, "The ideas of antinomianism had been present in the early church, and some Gnostic heretics believed that freedom from law meant freedom for license."⁸

While it is true that a person is saved by grace through faith,⁹ it is equally true that neither grace nor faith allows men to continue in sin and break divine law. Grace gives no man the right to sin; if it did, it would totally negate the purpose of God imparting to men His Spirit, Who infuses recipients with the strength, power, and ability to flee iniquity in order to keep God's will and statutes. *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. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them* (Ezek. 36:26–27). When a man is truly saved, the Holy Spirit will

5 *Matt. 7:20–23* Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. ²¹Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

²²Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Luke 13:25–27 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: ²⁶Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. ²⁷But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

6 *1 John 3:7* Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

7 "Antinomianism Definition & Meaning." *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/antinomianism>.

8 "Antinomianism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/antinomianism>.

9 *Eph. 2:8–9* For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.

convict him of sin¹⁰ and surely not give him license to continue living in it. The Holy Spirit gives men the desire, power of will, and inward determination to do God's will in their lives, not the freedom to abandon it. Only this spiritual transformation of the heart proves salvation has been granted and a new son of God has been born.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:4) (a) all sin is a violation of the law of God, 1 John 3:4;

(b) the very object of the coming of Christ was to deliver people from sin, 1 John 3:5;

(c) those who are true Christians do not habitually sin, 1 John 3:6;

(d) those who sin cannot be true Christians, but are of the devil, 1 John 3:8;¹¹ and,

(e) he who is born of God has a germ or principle of true piety in him, and cannot sin, 1 John 3:9.¹²

I John 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

Jesus was manifested to take away sin and free men from its dreadful end,¹³ not to provide the carnal freedom for men to practice it.¹⁴ If men profess to follow the Son of God while excusing themselves of sin, and therefore continue living in it, they never were truly Christ's followers.

In [Christ] is no sin; thus, if a man claims a close relationship with the Savior, yet endorses sin, he only confirms that he never actually possessed true piety. The Lord Jesus came to remove sin from the world,¹⁵ not to provide for any the right to continue living in it. Consequently, if a man gives himself to sin, Christ is certainly not his Lord. There is no ambiguity in this truth, and to think otherwise only proves that one does not know the Son of God, or the real reason and purpose for His sacrifice.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:5) *To take away our sins*—The essential argument here is, that the whole work of Christ was designed to deliver us from the dominion of sin, not to furnish us the means of indulgence in it; and that, therefore, we should be deterred from it by all that Christ has done and suffered for us. He perverts the whole design of the coming of the Saviour who supposes that his work was in any degree designed to procure for his followers the indulgences of sin, or who so interprets the methods of his grace as to suppose that it is now lawful for him to indulge his guilty passions.

(Geneva Study Bible, I John 3:5) An argument taken from the material cause of our salvation: Christ in himself is most pure, and he came to take away our sins, by sanctifying us with the Holy Spirit, therefore whoever is truly a partaker of Christ, does not give himself to sin, and on the contrary, he that gives himself to sin does not know Christ.

10 John 16:8 *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*
11 I John 3:8 *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

12 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.*

13 Rom. 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
Rom. 7:5 *For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*

Jas. 1:15 *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

14 Heb. 9:26 *For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

15 John 1:29 *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

I John 2:2 *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Jesus came into the world to deliver people from their sin. *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins* (Matt. 1:21). No man will be drawn to the Son of God until he first desires forgiveness and spiritual cleansing. And though it is possible to remain in religion and continue in sin, it is impossible to truly abide in Christ, and not despise sin wherever it exists, either in ourselves or the world around us.

I John 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

The language of the apostle's argument could not be any clearer: *Whosoever abideth in him [Jesus Christ] sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him.* One cannot infer from this that true Christians never sin; they do, and they must continually and humbly seek forgiveness for doing so.¹⁶ But although Christians may, and will, stumble and not consistently obey God's will in their lives, as they spiritually mature, an increased walk in holiness will occur. *No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him* (I John 3:6 NIV). It is impossible to truly abide in the Son of God yet continue to sin, impossible to have seen Christ or known Him, if sin remains in control of one's life. Mere professors of Christ, yes; true believers of Christ, never. Whenever men habitually sin while claiming relationship with the Son, they prove themselves false profes-

sors of the faith. He who believes he has the right to sin while practicing his religion, undoubtedly proves the falseness of it. Those who truly abide in the Savior will depart from a life of sin, where those who merely profess His name will not. Ultimately, any who practice sin cannot be true believers of the Son of God, though they will often claim they are.¹⁷

Jesus said He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and He would reprove and convict the world of sin. Hence, none can truly possess God's divine nature, while still making allowances, giving excuses, and providing shallow reasons for continuing in sin. The Spirit of God, Whom the Son of God imparts to true believers, the Holy Spirit, will not allow it. *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment* (John 16:8).

*(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, John 16:8) He will reprove—*The word translated "reprove" means commonly to demonstrate by argument, to prove, to persuade anyone to do a thing by presenting reasons. It hence means also to convince of anything, and particularly to convince of crime. This is its meaning here. He will convince or convict the world of sin. That is, he will so apply the truths of God to men's own minds as to convince them by fair and sufficient arguments that they are sinners, and cause them to feel this. This is the nature of conviction always.

I John 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

¹⁶ Ps. 32:5 *I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

¹⁷ I John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

¹⁸ John 8:39–42 *They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. ⁴¹Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. ⁴²Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*

It is a falsity and a lie that a man can remain in sin and still be a true son of God. The apostle therefore warns his readers not to be deceived by such a perversion of the truth.

*(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:7) Let no man deceive you—*That is, in the matter under consideration; to wit, by persuading you that a man may live in sinful practices, and yet be a true child of God. From this it is clear that the apostle supposed there were some who would attempt to do this, and it was to counteract their arts that he made these positive statements in regard to the nature of true religion.

Whenever men sin and do not think it is abhorrent to God, sin has deceived them.¹⁸ Moreover, willful sinners, after they have rejected Christ's doctrine, will look for corrupt teachers who will allow them to continue living in error.¹⁹ A false teacher or false prophet is one who has taken on the title of speaking for the Son of God, yet in truth has no real relationship with Him, or His divine ministry to save men. *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 (Jude 1:4).*

*(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Jude 1:4) For there are certain men crept in unawares—*The apostle now gives "reason" for thus defending the truth, to wit, that there were artful and wicked men who had crept into the church, pretending to be religious teachers,

but whose doctrines tended to sap the very foundations of truth. The apostle Peter, describing these same persons, says, "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies." See the notes, 2 Peter 2:1.²⁰ Substantially the same idea is expressed here by saying that they "had crept in unawares;" that is, they had come in "by stealth;" they had not come by a bold and open avowal of their real sentiments. They professed to teach the Christian religion, when in fact they denied some of its fundamental doctrines; they professed to be holy, when in fact they were living most scandalous lives. In all ages there have been men who were willing to do this for base purposes.

The devil is not above wrongly dividing the truth and seeking to pervert it in an attempt to lead people toward spiritual rebellion.²¹ He attempted this with the Savior,²² and he will attempt to do the same with any seeking to do God's will in his life today.

I John 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. How a man walks, not what he says, reveals whom he is of. By continuing in sin, sinners prove themselves to have aligned themselves with the very one who has sinned since the very beginning. The language used is strong, because the truth is certain: *he that committeth sin is of the devil.*

18 Rom. 7:11 *For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.*

19 II Tim. 4:3 *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;*

20 II Pet. 2:1 *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

21 II Tim. 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

22 Matt. 4:6–7 *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.* *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

(*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, I John 3:8) *He that committeth sin is of the devil*—in contrast to “He that doeth righteousness,” 1Jo 3:7. He is a son of the devil (1Jo 3:10; Joh 8:44).²³ John does not, however, say, “born of the devil,” as he does “born of God,” for “the devil begets none, nor does he create any; but whoever imitates the devil becomes a child of the devil by imitating him, not by proper birth” [Augustine, Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily 4.10]. From the devil there is not generation, but corruption [Bengel].

Men who walk in sin may not be directly born of the devil in the way God’s children are born of God, but they are still of his company and move and operate no differently than him. Indeed, imposters of the faith have as much of a relationship with sin, and the devil, as true believers of Jesus Christ have with the Holy Spirit and their Father.

(*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, I John 3:8) (1) That all who commit sin, even true believers, so far as they are imperfect, in this respect resemble Satan, and are under his influence, since sin, just so far as it exists at all, makes us resemble him.

(2) all who habitually and characteristically sin are of the devil. This latter was evidently the principal idea in the mind of the apostle. His object here is to show that those who sinned, in the sense in which it would seem some maintained that the children of God might sin, could have no real evidence of piety, but really belonged to Satan.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. The devil seeks to influence people through subtle spiritual deception to sin against God. This is made visible in Genesis 3:1, where the scripture reveals that *the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field.*²⁴

(*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Gen. 3:1) The woman knew that there were spirits, and did freely and frequently converse with spirits or angels, who also did appear in some visible shape to her, which seems very credible; because in the following ages not only the angels, but even the blessed God himself, did in that manner converse with men. And as they afterwards used to appear in the shape of men, why might not one of them now appear to her, and converse with her, in the shape of a beautiful serpent? And why might she not freely and securely discourse with this which she thought to be one of those good angels, to whose care and tuition both she and her husband were committed? For I suppose the fall of the angels was yet unknown to her; and she thought this to be a good spirit, otherwise she would have declined all conversation with an apostate spirit.

The overall theme of the Bible, beginning in Genesis²⁵ and culminating in the book of Revelation,²⁶ is that God’s true Christ, the promised seed of the woman, will crush Satan’s head. To do so, Christ shall destroy every plan, scheme, and malicious intention emanating from, and worked by the devil.

23 I John 3:10 *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

John 8:44 *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

24 Gen. 3:1 *Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

25 Gen. 3:15 *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

26 Rev. 20:10 *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

He who is bound by sin cannot serve God. Thus, to truly serve the Lord, the power of sin must be broken by a greater power than it. Moses' act of delivering Israel from Egypt's Pharaoh foreshadowed Christ freeing men from sin. Just as Moses emancipated and liberated the Israelites from Pharaoh's power so they could serve the Lord,²⁷ Jesus frees His people from sin's power, enabling them the spiritual freedom to both worship and serve their heavenly Father. *And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it* (Col. 2:15).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Col. 2:15) The Christian is a freeman. His great Captain has subdued all his enemies, and we should not allow them again to set up their dark empire over our souls.

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.

No one, not one man, woman, or child, can continue practicing and living in sin, if they are truly born of God.²⁸ This is a practical impossibility and the apostle seeks to make this very important revelation abundantly clear. Once someone is born again,²⁹ has been filled with God's

Holy Spirit, and has made Jesus Christ their Lord, then he cannot, and will not, continue in sin. This is because God's spiritual seed has regenerated and transformed the heart, and now righteousness is more preferred to be walked in, than either sin or unrighteousness. *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you* (John 14:17). This seed of God, the Holy Spirit, is the very nature of God.³⁰ Because God is eternal, the Spirit He imparts to those who believe upon Him is eternal. *For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God* (I Pet. 1:23 NLT). Ultimately men receive regeneration and the new birth through faith in the living and written Word of God.³¹ Through God's Holy Word and through His resurrected Son, the Lord gives to men His own divine and eternal spiritual nature. Thus, saints and sinners are easily distinguishable by whether sin still retains power over their lives, or the Holy Spirit leads them to fulfill God's will for their lives. *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace* (Rom. 8:6). For true Christians, continuing in sin is infeasible, undesirable, and loathsome. They cannot continue to sin once God and

27 Exod. 8:1 *And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me.*

28 I John 5:18 *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

29 John 3:3-8 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁴Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? ⁵Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. ⁸The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

30 John 4:24 *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

31 Jas. 1:21 *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Heb. 4:12 *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Christ have come and made their abode in the heart. Once regeneration occurs, sin's power is broken, and a new holy energy is imparted to the Christian, enabling a successful pursuit of first gaining and then maintaining personal communion and fellowship with the Lord.

I John 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

There are but two camps of people: those born of God, and those still the property of the god of this world.³² To distinguish who is who, we need only observe if men pursue God's righteousness, or remain content to live a life governed by fleshly lusts.³³ He who pursues not righteousness is not of God; neither is he who continues in sin. Every tree is known by its fruit;³⁴ therefore, how a man lives, and what he pursues, reveal who he truly is.

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I John 3:9) To be begotten of God and to sin, are states mutually excluding one another. In so far as one sins, he makes it doubtful whether he be born of God.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:10) In this the children of God are manifest...—That is, this furnishes a test of their true character. The test is found in doing righteousness,

and in the love of the brethren. The former he had illustrated; the latter he now proceeds to illustrate. The general idea is, that if a person is not truly a righteous person, and does not love the brethren, he cannot be a child of God.

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? (I John 4:20). It is impossible for men to claim that they love God, Whom they cannot see, if they do not love those born of God, whom they can see.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:10) The general sense is, that brotherly love is essential to the Christian character, and that he who does not possess it cannot be a Christian.

Love, specifically love for the brethren, reveals if a man has been truly saved by the Son of God, or if he merely walks in the company of those who are.

I John 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

From the very first moment John was exposed to the ministry of God's Son, Jesus taught him to love. Jesus condensed the entire law of God into two great commandments: love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,³⁵ and love your neighbor as yourself.³⁶ On these two com-

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 II Pet. 2:10 *But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

Jude 1:16 *These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.*

Jude 1:18 *How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.*

34 Matt. 7:20 *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

35 Mark 12:30 *And 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.*

36 Mark 12:31 *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

mandments, the Lord states, hang the entirety of God's will for man. It was also this message—that followers of Jesus should love one another—that John heard Him speak from the beginning. It was Jesus Who taught John to love, and Jesus Who spoke this divine message from the beginning. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* (Matt. 22:40).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Matt. 22:40) Love to God and man comprehends the whole of religion, and to produce this has been the design of Moses, the prophets, the Saviour, and the apostles.

I John 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

The opposites of love are envy and hate, the very same devilish qualities that led Cain to murder and slay his natural-born brother, Abel. The evil spiritual influence that led Cain to envy Abel, and then murder him, originated in the devil.³⁷ *And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him* (Gen. 4:8).

(*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Gen. 4:8) *And Cain talked with Abel*

³⁷ *John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

John 10:10a The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy ...

³⁸ *I John 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

Jude 11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

³⁹ *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

⁴⁰ *Gen. 4:10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.*

⁴¹ *Rom. 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

⁴² *Matt. 22:36–39 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? ³⁷Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

Luke 10:27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

his brother—Under the guise of brotherly familiarity, he concealed his premeditated purpose till a convenient time and place occurred for the murder (1Jo 3:12; Jude 11).³⁸

When men have no love for God and their fellow man, they will often resort to deceptive words to conceal their true inward condition. After Cain led his unsuspecting brother into a field, far away from where anyone could see his intentions, he then rose up and attacked him. Like Satan, Cain was subtle, appearing innocent and unthreatening, until he arose with vengeance to murder one better than himself. The Hebrew word for *slew* is #2026 *herag*, defined as “kill, slay, implying ruthless violence, especially private violence.”³⁹ No doubt the crime scene, which screamed of Abel's blood being shed,⁴⁰ revealed the true character of his murderer. There existed no divine love in Cain, and this left the door wide open for envy and hate to fill his soul. Love will ultimately prevent sin,⁴¹ but in its absence, sin will often continue to grow until violence is the end result. When men do not obey Christ's command to love,⁴² there is no other path for them to follow, than that which is harmful not only to themselves, but, sadly, eventually to others as well.

Who was of that wicked one. There was no neutrality in Cain's heart, no mere indifference to either good or evil. Instead,

he fully and willingly consented to be led by his hate and to carry out the ultimate purpose of the wicked one.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:12) Who was of that wicked one—Of the devil; that is, he was under his influence, and acted from his instigation.

The cause of Cain's hate lay in the fruitlessness and shallowness of his own corrupt and defective character. Such deficits of character often foster envy and hate towards the righteous, when men sense the absence of true goodness and virtue within themselves. Therefore, he who is unrighteous will often despise and hate those who are. In truth, when an evil man compares himself to a good man, it is difficult for him not to see his own lack of spiritual integrity. We observe this in the story of Saul, who envied David and sought to take his life.⁴³ In Abel, Cain's lack of genuine spirituality, love, and respect for God was exposed. Consequently, Cain hated Abel, and the fact that Abel's offering was accepted by the Lord, while his own was not. *And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell* (Gen. 4:4–5).

I John 3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

It should not be surprising that the world hates those called to Christ, since it also hated Christ before them.⁴⁴ Christians therefore should never think it an unnatural thing that an evil world that has

rejected both the Father and the Son will not also despise those now born of them. *To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?* (II Cor. 2:16).

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, II Cor. 2:16) We are the savour of death unto death—We are the occasion of deepening their condemnation, and of sinking them lower into ruin. The expression used here means literally, "to the one class we bear a death-conveying odor leading to their death"—a savor, a smell which, under the circumstances, is destructive to life, and which leads to death. Mr. Locke renders this: "To the one my preaching is of ill savor, unacceptable and offensive, by their rejecting whereof they draw death on themselves." Grateful as would be their efforts, whatever might be the results, yet Paul could not be ignorant that the gospel would in fact be the means of greater condemnation to many; see the notes on 2 Corinthians 2:15.⁴⁵ It was indeed by their own fault; yet wherever the gospel was preached, it would to many have this result.

I John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Divine love appearing in the Christian's heart is proof that he has passed from death unto life. However, where divine love does not reside, neither does God's salvation. It is also worthy of note that love for the brethren confirms that a man has been declared righteous before God. Ultimately, no one can enter heaven, or be given eternal life, without first being made righteous.⁴⁶ The presence of divine

⁴³ *I Sam. 18:6–16*

⁴⁴ *John 15:18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

⁴⁵ *II Cor. 2:15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:*

⁴⁶ *I Cor. 6:9–10 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*

¹⁰*Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

love in the Christian, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, proves that righteousness has been imparted, and God's eternal life is now possessed.

(Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, I John 3:14) because we love the brethren— the ground, not of our passing over out of death into life, but of our knowing that we have so. Love, on our part, is the evidence of our justification and regeneration, not the cause of them. Let each go to his own heart; if he find there love to the brethren, let him feel assured that he has passed from death unto life.

The divine qualities of love, joy, and peace, as well as the other fruits of the Spirit,⁴⁷ cannot exist in an unsaved man. These fruits of the Spirit, thus cannot either be experienced, or enjoyed by those who have not the Spirit.

I John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Though hate may not initially manifest itself on the outside, it is always seen by God on the inside.

(Benson Commentary, I John 3:15) Every degree of hatred being a degree of the same temper which moved Cain to murder his brother.

(Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 3:15) Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer ... The private malice, the secret grudge, the envy which is cherished in the heart, is murderous in its tendency, and were it not for the outward restraints of human laws, and the dread of punishment, it would often lead to

the act of murder. The apostle does not say that he who hates his brother, though he does not in fact commit murder, is guilty to the same degree as if he had actually done it; but he evidently means to say that the spirit which would lead to murder is there, and that God will hold him responsible for it.

The ministry of the Son of God is purposed to reveal the secret things in men's hearts, and ultimately, to judge them whether they be found good or evil. *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel* (Rom. 2:16).

*(Benson Commentary, Rom. 2:16) when God shall judge the secrets of men—*Not only their outward actions, good and evil, which are manifest to all men, but their most secret and hidden ones, with their internal desires and designs, their intentions, purposes, schemes, contrivances, with the various workings of their passions, imaginations, and thoughts; for he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, Ecclesiastes 12:14;⁴⁸ will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, 1 Corinthians 4:5.⁴⁹

Jesus considers hating one's brother the same as murder. Just as eternal life does not abide in any murderer, so it cannot abide in anyone who hates the brethren. While love proves the presence of eternal life, hate establishes its absence. Practically, there are but two base emotions at the core of what men think of the brethren: love or hate. No murderer has eternal life, and those who hate are considered by the Lord to be completely estranged from Him.

⁴⁷ Gal. 5:22–23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

⁴⁸ Eccl. 12:14 *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

⁴⁹ I Cor. 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

I John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The love found in Jesus Christ stands in direct contrast to a hate-filled world. Cain's hate prompted him to take the life of his brother, while Christ's love motivated Him to sacrifice His own life for others. Cain and Jesus Christ are therefore contrasting examples of what hate will result in, and what true love will ultimately produce. Through Christ laying down His life for the brethren, divine love became visible. In Jesus Christ we have the very essence of God's love. This is why a man manifests Jesus' love when he is willing to give his life to God, as Jesus first did,⁵⁰ for the benefit of others.⁵¹ This is the standard of true discipleship, to both love and lay down our lives for the brethren, even as our Savior has done for us. By laying down our lives in service to God and for those also born of Him, believers manifest the love of Christ, and Christ's own sacrifice is revealed in them.

I John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

One of the chief signs that men love is their willingness to give up their earth-

ly possessions when a brother is in need. All love gives, and no true love can ignore those in need. If our hearts remain closed to the lack of those around us, especially the brethren, it is certain that God's love has no real place in us. Where true need is, love responds,⁵² especially when those in need, are born of God.

I John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

(Geneva Study Bible, I John 3:18) Christian charity stands not in word but in deed, and proceeds from a sincere affection.

If a man says he loves, it means little to nothing if he is unwilling to sacrifice for that love. True love therefore will be evidenced by deed. And it is this form of divine love that reveals if the love professed is genuine and true—simply because if there are no good deeds, then it is certain that there is no true love held.

(Matthew Poole's Commentary, I John 3:18) It is a vain thing to make verbal pretences of love, without any real proof of it.

I John 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Only by sincerely walking in love can the believer prove to himself and oth-

50 Rom. 5:7-8 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. ⁸But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. I Pet. 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

51 John 10:11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

52 Matt. 14:14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Matt. 15:32, 36-37 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. ... And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. ³⁷And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

Mark 6:34 And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

ers that he abides in the truth. Whereas a hypocrite has no assurance that he is of God and has been saved by Him, the man who genuinely loves does. It is also only by doing the Word, not merely hearing it,⁵³ that the internal conscience is quieted and the assurance that we are God's children is confirmed. By walking in divine love our own hearts are assured that we have become the true children of God. By Christ's love being manifest in us, the world will come to know that

we are genuinely true followers of the Son of God.⁵⁴ It is love that characterized His earthly walk and will be manifested in those truly saved by Him. To love as Christ loved, brings assurance to the heart, and confidence that we are born of Him.

(Matthew Poole's Commentary, I John 3:19)
And shall assure our hearts before him; so shall our hearts be quieted, and well satisfied concerning our states God-ward.

⁵³ *Jas. 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

⁵⁴ *John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

