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1 John 3



1 John - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the theme of righteousness and what it means to be a child of God in 1 John 3. He emphasizes the importance of imitating God as children imitate their parents, growing to be like Him but not necessarily perfect replicas. Gregg also touches on the idea of corporate growth, with the whole body of Christ becoming mature. He stresses the significance of walking in love as a proof of being a child of God, rather than externalistic or ritualistic practices.

Transcript

Alright, we're in 1 John 3 now. And verse 29 of the previous chapter introduced for the first time in this book the concept of being born of God. It's a very common concept for Christians.

It's talked about in the Bible, you know, numerous times. We're most familiar, of course, with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter 3 about you have to be born again. But Peter talks about being reborn also, and John does.

And he introduced in 2 John 3, that if we know that Jesus is righteous, or perhaps if you know that God is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. That is, it's not human nature to be righteous, naturally. It's human nature to be self-centered, to look out for oneself.

That doesn't mean we never think of other people, but it's always self-preservation is the strongest human instinct. And therefore, doing righteousness is something we'll do when it really is safe, when it's convenient. I mean, there are times when we know the right thing to do, but we're just not that heroic.

We're just not that selfless. And so, we don't regularly do righteousness by nature. Non-Christians do not follow the laws of God by nature.

They follow their instincts more and their desires. And so would we, except for something that has happened. We are born of God.

The nature of God has been born into us. As Peter tells us, we have become partakers of the divine nature in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 4, so that we have an additional nature that's been added to our human nature. We still have a human nature.

We still have that tendency to be selfish. Paul calls that our flesh. He says the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

And these two are contrary to one another so that you don't do what you want to do. Paul said that in Galatians 5.17. But nonetheless, even though we have flesh, there is something in us born of God, something of God's nature. And John wants to talk about that in the coming chapter.

It's introduced in the final verse of the last chapter we read, and it comes up now to be somewhat more the center of attention for a part of this discussion in chapter 3. He says, Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God. The idea that we are born of God, of course, implies we are his children. And to be called children of God is an incredible privilege.

It's not something by nature that we could claim, but by second nature, by regeneration. It's a great love that God has bestowed upon us that we could be called his children. Therefore, the world does not know us because it did not know him.

Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Now, John said we already are children of God, so we have already been born again. This, of course, means that those people are mistaken who think that rebirth is a reference to the resurrection of the last day. Among those who teach that I've encountered have been the Jehovah's Witnesses.

They don't believe you are born again in this life. But rebirth, they say, is when you're born again in the resurrection, after you've died and when God raises the dead. That's rebirth.

However, we are already children of God. We've already been born of God, and so he says everyone who practices righteousness is born of him. It also says in 1 Peter 1 that we've already been born again.

It's not talking about something in the future. In 1 Peter 1, it says in verses 22 and 23, Now, most evangelicals, people who have come to be called born-again by non-Christians, are familiar with the fact that being born again is something that happens to us at the beginning of our Christian life. It's not at the end of life that this happens.

And because of that, we have a new nature, just like a newborn baby has a new life, we

have a new life. It's a spiritual nature that God has given us, and it leads us to be more like him. Just because children not only imitate their parents, but they grow up into some kind of a replica, not a perfect replica of their parents, but they grow up into the same kind of being as their parents are.

They have the same nature as their parents in them. And so also, if we are practicing righteousness, it shows that we are born of him who is righteous. That righteousness is a supernatural endowment.

Because we're not naturally good people. We're naturally selfish people. But with this nature that he's birthed into us, and Christ is born into us, his nature, well, then we also have that righteousness.

And he's going to talk about that in this chapter, how that those who are born of God don't sin. Now, that's an alarming statement to most of us, but we'll get to it and talk about it in a moment. But at this point, he is simply saying that it's a great privilege that God has given us.

And we should consider what an amazing love that is, that God has chosen to include us as his children, not just as servants, not just as pets, not just as his menagerie, but to be brought into his very family and given all the privileges of sonship. And one of the privileges is that we're going to someday grow up to be like Jesus. Jesus is God's son.

Jesus is God's model son. And in causing us to be born again, God has given us the opportunity, in fact, he's destined us to become like Jesus because he wants more than one son. He wants a big family.

It says that in Romans 8, verse 29. Romans 8, 29 says, For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. God didn't want just one son.

He wanted a lot of children. He wanted there to be many brethren in the family. And that requires that we become like Jesus.

He said he's predestined that we will. Those of us who are Christians, God has a destiny in mind that he's already ordained for us that we will become like Jesus, will be conformed to the image of his son. That's the goal of the Christian life.

The goal of the Christian life is not specifically to live in heaven, although, you know, if we die before Jesus comes back, we will live in heaven. But the destiny of the Christian is to be like Jesus. That's more, should be more thrilling than any particular venue.

It's what we are to become. Like it says in Hebrews chapter 2 on the same subject. In Hebrews 2, in verse 10, it says, For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, that is, into the image of Christ, to

make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

The purpose of God is to bring many sons to glory. Jesus has been brought to glory. And he intends for more of us, more sons, many sons to be brought to the same state, into the image of Christ.

So that in Romans he says that Jesus is to be the firstborn among many brethren. And we are to be brought into conformity to his image. Here, he says the same thing in slight different words.

Many children are being brought into glory. Now, in 1 John, our present passage, he says, It does not yet appear what we shall be. We know we are already God's children, but we are not mature yet.

We are not grown up yet. We haven't become just like Christ yet. But we know that when he will appear, we will be like him.

For we will see him as he is. This is the maturity of the sons of God, to become like Jesus. And interestingly, when Paul talks about us becoming like Christ, he speaks of it not only as an individual matter, but also as a corporate matter, the whole body of Christ becoming mature.

At one level, we are individual children of God. But at another level, combined, we are like cells of a body. We are members of the body of Christ.

And that body itself is maturing. And the Bible talks about that, too. For example, Paul does in Ephesians 4. In Ephesians 4, in verse 11 and following, Paul said, And he himself gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying, or the building up, of the body of Christ, until we all come, in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man.

And the New King James says, perfect man. The Greek word means mature. And he is talking about the maturity of the body of Christ.

Until we all, plural, become one mature body, one man. It is a corporate maturity he is talking about here. And we know that the new man, the man he is talking about here, is the body of Christ, because two chapters earlier, in chapter 2 and verses 14 and 15, Paul said, he is talking about the Jews and the Gentiles, how the Jews and Gentiles used to be hostile toward each other, but in Christ were reconciled with the Jewish brethren.

He says, For he himself is our peace, who has made both, meaning the Jew and the Gentile, one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in his flesh, that is in the body of Christ, the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from

the two, thus making peace. The one new man is the body of Christ, made of the two, the Jew and the Gentile, believing communities, are merged into one new man, the body of Christ. And so two chapters later he says, we are all going to come to a mature man.

We are going to grow up as a group into a mature body of Christ. And he says there in verse 13 of Ephesians 4, Till we come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So the body of Christ is to mature to be like Christ also.

Each of us individually and the body corporately. God has some, God is working at several levels. The maturity of the body of Christ, Paul indicates, is measured on the scale of unity.

Till we come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a mature man. It seems like the unity of the body is one of the measures of maturity, because Paul told the Corinthians, he said, I couldn't treat you as spiritual men, but had to speak to you like your carnal, like your babes in Christ, because you are saying I am of Paul and I am of Cephas and I am of Apollos. He said, you are babes when you talk that way.

That is immaturity. When the church divides, it is an immature church. When it comes to a unity of the faith and maintains the unity of the spirit, which he talks about in verse 3 of this chapter, that is when the church is growing up.

And when we come to a place where we actually can agree to see things the same way, and that is the work of God. But it only will happen as we continue to, of course, communicate across the aisle with people who might see some things differently. They can come over our way some, and maybe we have to go their way a little bit, but eventually through communication and love, God will bring us to a unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, Paul said.

That is what he is expecting. Now, therefore, we don't know what we shall be. Will I be an individual person in the resurrection merely, or will I be connected to other people like a body? Who knows what it is going to be like.

We don't know what we shall be. We only know that when He shall appear, we will be like Him. The body of Christ will be like Him, and our individual bodies, too, will be transformed into the likeness of His glorious body.

That is what Paul said in Philippians. In Philippians 3, verse 21, it says that Christ will transform when He comes. He will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Our bodies are going to be changed into the likeness of His, not in the sense that we will all look like He looked, but our new bodies will have the character of His glorified body,

that supernatural body that emerged from the grave in the resurrection. We will have bodies like His. Individually, we will have bodies like His resurrection body.

Corporately, the body of Christ will be coming to the fullness of the stature of the measure of Christ. This is what God is working on, maturity. Now, He says we will be like Him, 1 John 3, 2, because we will see Him as He is.

It appears that our being made like Him depends on our seeing Him accurately. You know, people do become, by nature, like the gods they worship. If you worship rock stars, if you worship video game heroes, if you worship models or whatever, you're going to become more like them.

You're going to try to conform yourself to them more. The people that you admire and look up to, they're going to shape the way you shape yourself. In the Old Testament, it says that the heathen worship stone statues.

It says they have eyes to see, but they can't see. They have ears to hear, but they can't hear. They have mouths, but they can't speak.

It says those who make them are like them. That is, the people who worship these blind and deaf and dumb idols, the gods they worship are like themselves. They're spiritually blind.

They're spiritually deaf. They are not, I mean, people are like the gods they worship. In fact, many times they create gods after their own image.

But God is shaping us into his image. And the more we see him clearly, the more we will be brought to be like him. And I suppose in the areas where we are not very much like him still, it's because we still have our ideas about him that are inaccurate, perhaps.

We see him through a glass darkly. Then we'll see face to face, Paul said. We still have a hazy view of Jesus.

We want to be like him. And when Paul said, we behold as in a mirror or as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are being changed from glory to glory into that same image. In 2 Corinthians 3.18, he implies that as we look upon Jesus, that draws our inner character in the direction of being like him, into that image.

So here also, when we see him as he is, we'll be all the way like him. And so that's all we know. We don't know what it'll be like, but we know that we'll be like him.

For we'll see him as he is. He said, everyone who has this hope in him, 1 John 3.3, everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure. You want to be like him, you know he's pure, you begin to purify yourself.

You start to give up on those things that are defects and corruption in your own nature.

You repent of them. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul said, Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We have promises from God. What are those promises? Well, he quotes them in the end of chapter 6 there, 2 Corinthians 6. God said, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.

I will be a father to you. You shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. So you want to be a son or a daughter of God, that's a great promise.

Well then, if we have those promises, then we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Flesh and spirit, I'm not sure exactly where the perimeters of these categories are in terms of filthiness. Probably fleshly behavior and behavior of the heart that is unclean needs to both be cleansed.

Perfecting holiness in the fear of God. This is what people do when they have this hope of being like Jesus in them. Anyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Now, if you don't find people purifying themselves, then they must not have that hope in them of being like Jesus. A lot of Christians believe that they're going to be like Jesus when he comes back. But it's not particularly so much a hope, it's just a basic expectation.

They've heard that that's theologically true. Being like Jesus isn't really that attractive to them. But hey, it beats going to hell.

So they're looking forward to that only for that reason. If they wanted to be like Jesus because they were really enamored by him, they would be working at it now. They'd be purifying themselves, John says.

If they're really hoping to be like him, if that's their goal, if that's what they value, then those people would be working at giving up all that filthiness of flesh and spirit and perfecting holiness in the fear of God, as Paul said, or purifying ourselves. This motivation to be pure comes from recognizing that this is what God has in mind for us ultimately. And instead of just saying, well, I'll just stay around and remain the same as I am until Jesus comes in, he'll just make me like himself.

That's not, maybe he won't, if you don't really have any more interest in it than that. Those who hope in it will be made to be like him, I'm sure. And those who do have that hope, that's their goal even now, even in this life, to be like him, to reflect him to the world.

In verse 4 it says, He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him.

God's seed, no doubt Christ, remains in that person and he cannot sin because he's been born of God. These are some of the more uncomfortable verses in 1 John because it talks about how real Christians don't sin, but all the Christians I know do, including me. And so, what are we to do with verses like this? This is in the Bible.

Well, first of all, the word commits sin here. For example, in verse 4, whoever commits sin is the same verb that you find in chapter 2, verse 29, which is translated practices. In chapter 2, in verse 29, John said, Everyone who practices righteousness is born of God.

And you could translate it this way, whoever practices sin practices lawlessness. And likewise, where it says, you know, whoever abides in him, verse 6, does not sin. And similar statements to that.

When it says, does not sin or does sin, these words are in an imperfect tense in the Greek, which means it's a continuing action. It's a habitual thing. It's not talking about a person occasionally committing an act of sin.

Obviously, even unbelievers commit occasional acts of righteousness. And yet, he says, whoever practices righteousness is born of God. It's the practice of your life that determines whether you have been born of God or not.

And John is perhaps saying all this because there were Gnostic teachers who made light of sin. They might have even said that they were above sin because they were saved by the esoteric knowledge that they had reached through the mystery cults that they'd been in. And they didn't think sin was that important.

You can sin if you want to. It's not an issue. Well, John says it is an issue because whoever's sinning is committing lawlessness.

Now, lawlessness means acting as if there's no law. Interestingly, many Christians believe that the New Testament teaches that there is no law. That actually, you know, there's no rules.

There's actually no requirements on Christians. We're just saved by grace and there's no law. Well, John said that's sin, isn't it? Isn't it sinning when you're lawless? Lawlessness and sin are the same thing because God's law is what defines righteous behavior and violation of that law is what defines sin.

So, sin is neglect of God's law. And that suggests that that's not okay because sin is never treated as an okay thing in the Bible. Look what Paul said over in 1 Corinthians 9. He's talking about his freedom from the law of Moses.

Even though he's Jewish, he does not have to keep the law of Moses because he's a Christian now. However, when he's around Jewish people, he'll go ahead and conform to the Jewish rules and regulations of the household because he doesn't want to offend them and he wants them to listen to him so he can lead them to Christ. But he said when he's with Gentiles who don't have these Jewish rules, even though he's Jewish, he doesn't have to keep them because he's not under that law.

And he says in verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 9, verse 20, he said, To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews. To those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without law, he means the Gentiles who don't have the Jewish law, I become as one without law.

But know what he says in parentheses, not being without law toward God, but under the law toward Christ, that I might win those who are without law. Now he's saying I'll keep a kosher diet when I'm in a kosher home. When I'm in a Gentile's home, I won't bother to keep a kosher diet.

I'll eat whatever they serve me, even if it would be against my Jewish upbringing because I'm not under those kosher laws. I'm not under the law of Moses as a Christian. But he says I'm not without law.

I'm not lawless. I'm under the law to Christ, he said. In other words, while I don't have to keep the law of Moses, I'm not at liberty to violate the law of Christ.

We're not lawless people. Remember what James said to his readers. In James chapter 2, James 2.8, James said, if you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well.

If you fulfill the royal law, which is you shall love your neighbors as yourself, that's the king's law. That's royal. It's the king Jesus' law.

He says in chapter 1 of James, it says in verse 23 through 25, for if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer of the word, he's like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself and goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was, but he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does. This is New Testament teaching. You continue in the perfect law of liberty, the royal law, which is love your neighbor as yourself.

Why is that the law of liberty? Because if you love people, then doing what the law requires you to do is not a bondage to you. If you want to kill people and the law says you should not kill, well, then you feel restrained. You feel like you're bound by the law from doing something you really want to do.

If you want to steal or commit adultery or any of those, if you want to dishonor your

parents, if that's what's in your heart and the law says you can't do it, you're not at liberty. You are bound. But if the law is written in your heart and you love those people, you're not going to want to dishonor your parents.

You're not going to want to murder or commit adultery or steal. You're not going to want to do it because you love the people. You don't do those things to people you love.

The law of love is the law of liberty. You still keep the rules, but you don't do it out of bondage. You do it as a free person doing exactly what you want to do because what you want to do is the loving thing.

That's the fruit of the Spirit, is love, and that's the law. Now, if a person commits sin, they commit lawlessness, and John is not talking about the law of Moses. He's saying the same thing that James is saying.

We have to keep the law of liberty, the royal law, the king's law. We're in a kingdom, after all. We have a king.

He has laws, but his law is this. Jesus said, In a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you. In John 13, 34.

So that's the law. A person who commits sin is breaking that law. A person who commits sin is not loving God and not loving his neighbor, and that's not okay.

And a person who practices sin as a way of life is a habitual lawbreaker and is not, apparently, in submission to the king. And so, Christians don't do that. When a person is not a Christian, they have no interest in obeying God, but when you are a Christian, you want to obey God, and that makes a difference, of course, in the way you live your life.

There's all kinds of things that an unbeliever does, which God would not say is okay, but they don't give it any thought because they haven't made it their goal to live their life in obedience to God. And so, the person who is not born of God lives according to whatever they want to live according to, not the law of God. The true Christian, though, has submitted to God, has repented of that lawless life, repented of his sin, and is desirous to please God in all things.

And that desire translates into a different course of life, getting rid of the stuff in one's life that they know is displeasing to God, adopting those things in their life that they know would please God more, because that's what they want to do, not because they're under bondage to some law, but because they have a law written in their hearts. They love God. They love people.

They want to do the loving thing, and that's what God wants them to do. So, obeying God becomes the nature of the believer, becomes a second nature. And that's why he can say that whoever abides in him, verse 6, does not sin.

It means he doesn't practice sin. It goes against his nature to sin. He may do it sometimes, but he doesn't like it when it happens.

He may fall out of weakness or inattention, carelessness. He may succumb to a temptation that he doesn't really... He shouldn't have succumbed to, and he knows it afterwards, and he doesn't want to do that, and so he doesn't do it. I usually, when I'm talking about these kinds of verses, about how Christians don't sin and so forth, that William Law, a Christian Puritan writer back in the 1700s, he was talking about these verses.

He said that it can be said that a Christian doesn't sin the same as it can be said a miser doesn't waste his money. A miser is a person who's greedy and wants to hold on to what he has, so he doesn't waste... He's not a spendthrift. He doesn't waste his money.

Now, of course, a miser might occasionally find that he's wasted his money because he made a poor investment and he lost money on it. He bought something that he thought was better than it was. He paid more than he should have for it, and he's disappointed, but when he finds that he's wasted his money because he is a miser, he grieves over the waste, and he determines not to do that again.

In other words, although he may succumb at a weak moment to wasting his money, it goes against his nature because he's a miser, and as Christians sometimes succumb to the temptation to sin, they don't like it when they did it. They're attracted to it. That's why they do it, but after they've done it, they're unhappy that they did it and don't want to do that anymore, and so they take measures not to succumb the next time, so that the Christian life is one of increasingly being obedient to God.

Yeah, there's defects because we're human, but those defects do not define our course. They do define the course of somebody who's not concerned about obeying God, of course. If you're not concerned about obeying God, why would you put out the effort to do so? Now, it says in verse 5, you know that he was manifested to take away our sins, to take away our sins from us, that these sins, these patterns of sin, would be removed from our lives.

That's what he was manifested for, and in him there's no sin. Whoever abides in him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him.

Now remember, it said that when we see him as he is, we will be like him. If we're sinning, we haven't seen him as he is. We haven't seen him entirely clearly.

We haven't seen him as we will see him. We haven't known him as we will know him. Paul said we know in part, and we see through a glass darkly, but when that which is perfect is come, we will know as we have been known.

We will see face to face. And so seeing and knowing him is a matter of degree, of course,

but we don't see him entirely clearly yet. And this is, you know, the more a person sins, the more it's clear that they don't really, they don't perceive who Jesus is.

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who sins, and we can take this meaning, he who practices sin, is of the devil.

For the devil has sinned from the beginning. Now that's, this is an interesting verse, because Jesus said something similar in John 8, 44, where he said to his critics, you are of your father the devil. He was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth.

Jesus said the devil is a murderer from the beginning. John said the devil has sinned from the beginning. These verses are among those that make you wonder.

Was the devil good and he went bad? If so, why does it say he was bad from the beginning? Wasn't he good at the beginning and then he went bad? It's unclear what is meant by the beginning, because it could mean, of course, the beginning of recorded history. There is the possibility that Satan was once good and he went bad, and this happened before the beginning of recorded history, and therefore from the beginning, as we speak of the beginning, he's been bad. That's a possibility.

But a more natural way of understanding he was bad from the beginning is usually to say he never was any good, that he was always bad. And so, verses like these raise questions about the traditional view. We don't know.

We don't know if Satan was an angel who fell. That's the traditional view. The Bible doesn't clearly say it in any passage.

There's not any verse in the Bible that says the devil is an angel. There are passages that say that angels have fallen, some angels. Whether he's one of them or not is not mentioned.

He is called a spirit. He is called... It says he takes on the form of an angel of light, but he isn't one. But some people, of course most people, seem to believe that Satan was an angel, a good angel, and he rebelled and went bad.

This is a possibility, but it's not stated in Scripture. And verses like this make you wonder. He was a sinner from the beginning.

For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Now, this word destroy is the Greek word *luo*, which is actually to loose or to untie or undo. It's like the devil has tangled up the world.

He's tangled up human society. He's tangled up our relationships. He's tangled up our

inner lives.

We're all tangled up, and Jesus came to untangle all that. He came to undo those knots and straighten things out. He came to undo the works of the devil.

Now, that means, of course, that the sins and the sinful patterns in our past lives, which are the works of the devil in our lives, those are to be undone. He wants to change our lives. I mean, he said earlier, in verse 5, you know that Jesus was manifested to take away our sins.

And now he says he was manifested to undo the works of the devil. These are two ways of saying the same thing. Why was Jesus manifested? To undo the works of the devil and take away our sins.

So we'd be righteous. We'd live better lives than we did. Verse 9. Whoever has been born of God does not sin.

And once again, he means does not practice sin as a way of life. For his seed remains in him. Because God has put something in us that remains in us.

God's seed, God's life is implanted in us. And that life imparts to us his nature, which makes us not like the idea of sin. Sin goes against our grain now.

There's still another part of us that's like sin. That's our flesh. And so the flesh and the spirit war against each other.

But if we walk in the spirit, Paul said, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. So we do, as Christians, walk in the spirit. And we do, more often than not, do what God says to do.

Sometimes not perfectly. Verse 10. He continues to talk about those who are born of God or the children of God along the same lines.

He said, in this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. Nor is he who does not love his brother.

Now these are two of the tests of genuine salvation that we've cataloged when we were looking at the introduction of this book. Doing righteous, living a righteous life and loving. Those are the two things, two of the four, that tell us that we really are Christians.

And he says we can tell if we're children of God or children of the devil. Now the idea of being children of the devil comes from Jesus' words in John 8, 44. He said, you are of your father, the devil.

Now the father hasn't really, I mean the devil hasn't fathered any children. No one's a literal child of the devil. And that's important to note because there are some weird cultic groups that want to make certain races children of the devil.

Especially the Jews. I mean they want to make the Jews children of the devil. The white supremacist groups, the so-called Christian identity movement, the neo-Nazis, they typically will say, well, the Jews, or the people that are called Jews, they're really the devil's children.

Literally. They will actually say that Eve and the devil had relations. And the result was Cain.

And Cain then gave rise to whatever race they're against. Usually it's the Jews. So they say that they are literally the children of the devil.

So when Jesus said to the Jews, you're of your father, the devil, he meant it literally. And likewise, it says, as we read on further here, that Cain was of his father, the devil. So they say, well, see there? Cain is the result of a union between the devil and Eve.

And the Jews derived from him somehow. Now, these people are not really intellectuals. And they don't think very hard or clearly about what they say.

They don't realize that all of Cain's descendants were killed in the flood. And the Jews came up later than that. And so the Jews can't be descended from Cain.

And neither can the black people, as the Mormons used to say. They came from Cain and had the mark of Cain on them. It's amazing how many racist groups like to somehow make the race of choice, the race that they want to attack, descended from Cain.

There's no living people on the planet descended from Cain. The flood wiped out that family entirely. Only Noah's family survived there.

But what does it mean, then, to say that Cain was a child of the devil? Or even when Jesus said to the Jews, you're of your father, the devil. Well, he didn't mean it any more literally. He wasn't talking about a biological relationship any more than when he said, we're children of God.

People who are children of God have the spirit of God animating them. And they have God's sentiments. They have a heart like God's heart.

It's their, what should we say, they are like God. They bear the family resemblance to God in their attitudes and in their emotions and so forth. If they love one another, that's a proof they're children of God because God loves people.

Now, people who are children of the devil, they're not biologically related to the devil any more than we're biologically related to God in that sense. But people have the devil's orientation. They have his spirit animating them.

And Jesus said, you're of your father, the devil, because he is a murderer and you want to murder me, he said. So you have the same concerns and desires that your father has.

It's a spiritual kinship.

It's a spiritual affinity that makes a person a child of the devil. It's not a physical, biological thing. Likewise, to be a child of God is a spiritual affinity of God.

And so he says, in this the children of God, verse 10, and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother, for this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that you should love, we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, spiritually, not biologically, and who murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brothers were righteous.

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. So the life of God, eternal life, which is in us, is manifested by having the love of God in us, having God's nature in us, the fruit of the Spirit. Now, if a person doesn't love his brother, he abides in death.

That means he hasn't passed from death into life. He's remaining in the original state. He hasn't been born again.

If a person goes further than that and hates his brother, he's a murderer. And he certainly can't have eternal life abiding in him. Hatred, even lack of love, are marks that a person is not really born of God.

And he's making it very clear, being born of God is proof that you're born again. We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. Now, Cain was not of God because he hated his brother and murdered his brother.

No murderer has eternal life abiding in him. So Cain was lost. And he hated his brother because his brother was righteous, not because of something his brother had done wrong, but what his brother had done right.

He said, so don't marvel if you're doing the right thing and the world hates you for it. Why would the world hate you for doing what's right? Because if everyone does what's wrong, no one can feel bad about doing what's wrong. It's when someone who does what's right comes into the picture that those who are doing what's wrong somehow feel exposed and they don't like it.

And so, you know, they want to put down, they want to destroy, they want to obliterate the righteous testimony of somebody who breaks the curve by being different. Verse 16, by this we know love because he laid down his life for us and we ought also to lay down

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

Now, he has just said that we know we've passed from death and life because we love, but how do I know if I love or not? Do I always feel warm and affectionate feelings toward all my brethren? Probably not. Is that what love is? Am I saved sometimes and not others? When I'm feeling it, I'm saved, and when I don't feel it, I'm not saved? Love is not, strictly speaking, your feelings, and that's what John brings out here. This is how we know love.

You want to know if you have love or not? Here's what it looks like. Verse 16, God laid down his life for us. Christ laid down his life for us.

That's love. So, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. That's love.

We know we love if we lay down our lives. Jesus said that in the upper room. In John chapter 15, he said, Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Now, laying down your life, that sounds pretty heroic. Sounds like being a martyr. Certainly, Jesus died physically, laid down his life for us in that respect, but how can I lay my life down for you if no one's threatening to kill me? How can I love my brother if it amounts to laying down my life, and I never have the opportunity to be a martyr? Most people don't.

Even very loving people don't usually have the opportunity to die for somebody else, even if they'd be willing to. So, how do I lay down my life? Well, he puts it this way in verse 17, Whoever has this world's goods, let's bring it down to a practical level, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? Loving your brother, laying down your life for someone, doesn't have to be at the point of death, although it may come to that. For most of us, it never will.

For most of us, we'll probably never have a chance to die heroically for somebody else. And that doesn't mean we can't lay down our lives. We lay down our preferences.

We lay down our prerogatives. We lay down our rights to benefit somebody else. And he gives the example of money, and money's a good example of this, because money is earned, and we have a particular sense of ownership of it, because we work for it.

And we have every right to think of it as ours to distribute, or to use, or whatever. It was the time that we spent that generated that money. And so we have a right, in a sense, to use it as we wish.

But then there's somebody who didn't earn very much, and it may be because they

couldn't. In biblical times, it might be a handicapped person, a beggar, blind, or lame, or something like that, and they couldn't work. And you see someone in need, and you've got the money, and you have plans for your money.

You know what you want with that money. You've been saving up for it, or whatever. And now you see someone who's in genuine need, and genuinely can't help himself.

And when you help that person instead of yourself, you're laying down your life. You're laying down your preferences, your prerogatives. You're laying down your right to spend that on what you wanted, and you're giving him the right to spend on what he needs, or what he wants.

You're giving away your rights. This is laying down your life. In a practical way, day by day.

Just serving somebody else. When you'd rather be in a hurry to do what you want to do, than stopping to do something for someone else. Remember Jesus said, in Matthew 25, that those who are saved, on the Day of Judgment, He'll say, I was hungry, and you fed me.

And I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and in prison, you visited me. And they'll say, when did we see you like that? He'll say, when you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me.

So, if I'm serving my brother, I'm serving Jesus. And so, every time I look around, and see something that my brother needs, or maybe some work that my brother needs to do, and I could take some of that burden off his hands, I'm serving Christ that way. Because that person's, his body.

If I love God, I need to love my brother, because loving my brother is loving God. When I see my brother in need, I'm seeing Jesus there in need. And if I don't extend some kind of practical assistance when I can, then it can't really very well be said that I love him or love God.

And he said, we need to, little children, let us not love in word only, or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Let's not talk about love only. We all talk about it.

But let's do it. Let's love in deed. That is, in our actions, and in truth.

In reality. He said, by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. Now, being able to assure ourselves before God that we're okay, that we're okay with him, that we're his children, is a very important thing.

It's very important for us to have some measure of confidence that God accepts us. And he says, we can assure our hearts before him in this way, if we find that we love in deed

and in truth. In other words, if our life is loving, if we are sacrificing for the benefit of other people, that's what love is, laying down our lives for others, then that will give us assurance before God.

He says, by this we know that we are of the truth, that's a proof that we're real Christians, and we shall assure our hearts before him. For, if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

And whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave his commandment. Now, he who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him.

And by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us. Now, this passage about assuring our hearts is very confusing. Different manuscripts read differently, and different translators have different opinions as to what especially verse 19 and verse 20 mean.

Most would agree, against the New King James, that verse 20 does not start another sentence. Verse 20 is a continuation of the previous sentence. The New King James puts a period at the end of verse 19 and makes a new sentence.

And remember, the punctuation marks are not found in the Greek text. Those are added by translators where they think they belong. Most modern translators believe that it's all one sentence, and it should read something like this.

There's quite a few different renderings in different translations. The New King James is not necessarily the most authoritative, but the Revised Standard Version, those kind of versions, as well as other new translations, they make it all one sentence. They say, by this we know that we're of the truth.

We'll assure our hearts before him whenever our heart condemns us. That is, on the occasions when our heart condemns us, we'll have assurance when we recognize that we are loving our brethren. The love we have for our brethren, in deed and in truth, is the assurance we'll have even at times when we're aware of our own failures, even at times when our hearts are condemning us because we know of some defect, some failure, some neglect, of some duty.

Remember, he's been saying, those who are born of God don't sin. Well, who can read that and not feel some kind of sense of failure? Well, I've sinned. I don't like to sin.

I don't sin all the time, but I have sinned. My heart condemns me for that. Well, whenever my heart condemns me, I have to ask, am I really a child of God? Could a real child of God really succumb to that kind of sin? Well, let me stand back and look at

myself.

Do I love the brethren? I remember back when I was a teenager, whenever I'd have questions about whether I was really a Christian or not because I saw all kinds of defects in myself, I'd stand back and say, well, do I love the brethren? Is there anyone I know that I wouldn't lay my life down for if it came down to it? And I could honestly say, I do love the brethren. I would give my life for anyone I know. And that was, I mean, I was just being honest with myself.

I wasn't talking to anyone else. I had nothing to gain by fooling myself. But I really believed.

I do love the brethren, and by this we know that we've passed from death into life. By this we have assurance in our hearts. Even when our hearts tell us that we're not perfect.

Love covers a multitude of sins. And if we love the brethren, then even when our hearts condemn us, we realize that God knows our hearts. He knows all things.

And He's greater than our heart. Our heart may be condemning us, but someone greater than our heart is not condemning us. God.

Because He knows. He knows our weakness. The Bible says in Psalm 103, He knows our frame.

He remembers we're dust. He's not surprised when we fail. But He knows His own children by the fact that they have His Spirit in them.

That Spirit convicts us when we sin. But our heart cannot successfully condemn us if God is for us, who can be against us? Remember what it says in Romans Chapter 8 on that very point? Paul is talking about this matter of condemnation. And in Romans Chapter 8 he says in verse 33, Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? That means us.

It is God who justifies. Who is He who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Now, who can condemn us if it's God who's justifying us? God is greater than our hearts.

Our hearts sometimes do condemn us. Our conscience tells us we did the wrong thing. And it's right, we did.

Because we do the wrong thing sometimes. But God is greater than our heart. The heart stands in condemnation against us.

Our conscience tells us we did the wrong thing. But God says, Hey, who's going to condemn you when I'm justifying you? God is greater than our heart. And He knows all

things.

So we can have assurance before Him, even when we don't have an entirely perfect record. And our conscience tells us we've fallen short of the glory of God. If we are generally walking in love toward our brethren, that's the proof that we're the children of God, even despite other defects that may accrue from time to time in our lives.

He says, Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, verse 21, we have confidence toward God. Now, this is one reason, no doubt, that the devil wants to bring condemnation to you all the time. Because he doesn't want you to have confidence toward God.

What is confidence toward God? It's faith, isn't it? Isn't that what faith is? Faith is confidence in God. Now, if you have faith, you're a heap of trouble to the devil. Because if you have faith, anything is possible to him who has faith.

And so the devil would like to evaporate your faith. He wants you to feel condemnation. Because if you feel condemned, you don't feel confident toward God.

But if your heart isn't condemning you, then he says, we have that confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive from Him. Because we keep His commandments and do those things pleasing His sight.

Now, obviously, keeping His commandments and doing what's pleasing His sight is the best way to keep from feeling condemned. You don't do anything that your heart can condemn you for. But if our heart does condemn us, whenever our heart does condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

And we can know if we're really saved not by whether we have a nagging conscience, necessarily, about something or another that we have failed to do, but whether we are walking in love. That covers a multitude of sins. And we can have confidence toward God, it says, if we love our brethren.

And when we have confidence, then what we ask Him, we get. Why? Because we pray in faith. We have faith.

We have confidence toward God. We really believe God's interested in hearing and answering our prayers. When we feel condemned, we don't feel like that.

So the devil would love you to feel condemned. And he's the accuser of the brethren. And what does an accuser do? Try to heap condemnation.

But when our heart isn't condemning us, when we have justification by faith, when we have, when we're walking in the way God wants us to, when the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sins and all that that John has talked about earlier, we have a confidence that

allows us to come boldly before the throne of grace and make our requests and we receive the answers. Because we come with faith or confidence in God. He says, now he who keeps his commandments abides in him and he in him.

And by this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us. That's the last verse in chapter 3. We know that he abides in us because we have his spirit in us. Well, how do we know we have his spirit in us? That's the hardest of the tests of the three tests, or the four tests.

Three of them are fairly easy. Do I believe Jesus is who he said he is? Yeah, I do. Okay, I pass that test.

Do I keep the commandments of God? Well, you know, generally, as a rule, that's the path I'm walking. For the most part, I do keep the commandments of God. That's my commitment.

How about do I love people? Yeah, I think I do love people. Well, do I have his spirit? Well, how can I tell? How can I tell if I have his spirit? Well, frankly, I can tell if I have his spirit because all these other things are going on and they're coming from inside rather than something I'm putting on outside. When Jesus said in John chapter 4 that God's looking for those who worship him in spirit and in truth, when he told the woman of the well that God's looking for people who worship him in spirit and truth, I think he means internally and honestly as opposed to the Pharisees who were externalistic and ritualistic and hypocritical in their worship.

They weren't honest. They weren't in truth. They were in falsehood.

They worshiped God fakely but he wants people to worship him genuinely in truth. They were externalistic and ritualistic but he wants people to worship from inside. And we, if we are loving our brethren from inside, that's the fruit of the spirit.

If we're walking in obedience to God out of love for him, that's the fruit of the spirit. That we know we have his spirit because these things are coming from inside us. They're not things we're forcing on ourselves.

They're things that God is creating in us. That's how we know we have his spirit. And the spirit of Christ is not too hard to discern in another person.

I think sometimes people who have the spirit of Christ don't know they do as much as other people know that they do. Because it's refreshing to be around someone who's Christ like in their spirit. But of course, even when you have the spirit of Christ, you're convicted of your sins and things like that and you may be, you may not be so sure yourself as other people can be of you.

They know you have the spirit of Christ. But you can know it too if you know how to test

it. Okay, do I have the fruit of the spirit? Is this coming from inside? Am I faking this love? Am I faking this good behavior? Or is it genuine? If it's coming from inside, it's coming from the Holy Spirit.

And that his spirit is in me and makes me want to do these things is proof that I'm, that he's in me. Look at, in the same book, chapter 5, verse 3. 1 John 5, 3 says, For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. You know, the Pharisees kept the commandments of God for the most part, but it was burdensome to them.

It wasn't coming from inside. It was a burden they imposed on themselves and on others. But, if you love God, keeping his commandments isn't burdensome.

It's easy. His burden is light. His yoke is easy.

Because the spirit of Christ inside of you generates this love for God and for others. It makes obedience to God a natural and not at all a burdensome thing to do. It's harder, I would think, once you've got the spirit of Christ, it would be harder to live a worldly life than a Christian life.

I think having God's spirit in you spoils you for sinning. I don't think Christians, when they really get saved and they have the spirit of God in them, can ever enjoy a life of sin anymore. They can be attracted to sin, obviously.

Christians are attracted to sin quite a bit. The flesh is attracted. But there's another part of you that's inside saying, I don't agree with this.

And if you actually succumb to the temptation, then the part inside that doesn't agree really doesn't agree. It really feels convicted. It really ruins you for living a self-centered sinful life, to have the spirit of God in you.

And if you've got this spirit bearing witness inside you, then you know you're his. And in chapter 5, he's going to say some more things about that, like he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself, the witness of the spirit. So we come, at that point, to even the fourth of the four tests.

They've all been introduced now at this point in 1 John. In chapter 4, he begins to say, don't trust every spirit. You've got to discern what's the spirit of God and what's not.

We know he abides in us if his spirit is in us. But some spirits aren't his spirit. And you need to test the spirits to see if they're of God or not.

There are false spirits. And so that's what he gets into in chapter 4, but that's another night's material.