

1 John 3 – Part M

1 John 3:10

^{1Jn 3:10}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.

In [1 John 3:10](#) John finalizes all that he has been saying up to this point relative to those who are saved and those who are not saved. He has dealt extensively with a person saying one thing, but living completely different from that confession and he has dealt extensively with the person who lives in habitual sin. By using the word “**manifest**” in this verse, John is boldly affirming that the difference between the person who is saved and the person who is lost should be obvious. The word for “**manifest**” means to be apparent, readily visible, and observable. The Greek word is “*phaneros*” and comes from a root word that means “shining”.¹ I.e., what John is saying is that the difference between someone who is saved and someone who is lost should be so obvious and so apparent that it never even comes into question. Unfortunately, the church has done such a good job of misdefining and misrepresenting what genuine salvation actually is and how to recognize it that the obvious distinctions between the saved and the lost that should be clearly evident have become critically blurred. The lines are no longer distinct, but have become so unclear and scripturally distorted that it is difficult for many Christians to discern who is saved and who is not. Certainly the New Testament’s definition of a committed follower and disciple of Christ has been severely clouded by the church’s cultural interpretation of what it means to be a believer. We have everything from infant baptism to seeker sensitive churches to losing your salvation, and everything in between. John simply says that the differences between the lost and the saved should be unmistakably obvious.

Now, in this verse John provides two distinctions and clarifications of how to properly identify someone who is lost. The first clarification is the person who “**does not practice righteousness**”. We have studied this over and over, so we will not rehearse it again at this point. However, the second clarification, is something new. John adds another evidence to his continuing instruction on being able to identify the individual who is or is not saved. The second clarification is that the person “**does not love his brother**”. John will begin to explain how these attributes help identify someone who is saved and someone who is not. As you might guess, both of these verbs are in the present tense. We cannot lose sight of the fact that what John is addressing are the characteristics which clearly identify and define who is and who is not a true believer. Obviously for all of the verses that John has dealt with this issue, it should be evident that this is a critical concern to him. He will spend nearly as much time demarcating the issue of love as he did the issue of habitual sin or false confessions.

Just to reiterate the point, the word “**love**” or a version of the word is used 46 times in [1 John](#), and 40 of those times occur from [1 John 3:10 – 1 John 5:3](#). This is the most concentrated use of the word “**love**” anywhere in the New Testament. John actually uses this word 40 times in less than two chapters. Just for a comparative analysis, the [Gospel of John](#) uses the word 57 times. It uses the word “**love**” more than any other book in the New Testament, but that is in 21 chapters – not 2 chapters. [1 Corinthians 13](#) is considered the great “**love**” chapter in the New Testament, but it only uses the word on 9 different occasions. So it should be obvious that this is the most extensive and exhaustive use of the word “**love**” and its implications anywhere in the Bible. For instance, [1 John 3:10](#) says that if we

do not love one another that we are “**not of God**”. [1 John 3:14](#) says that “**we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren**”. [1 John 4:8](#) is emphatic and says that the person “**who does not love does not know God**”.

Now, at this initial entry point into this section of [1 John](#), it is important to make what we could consider to be a critical observation. We have to ask the question as to why would John make such an issue of “**love**”? First of all, we have not properly handled the Scriptures if we do not recognize the emphasis that John places on the word “**love**”. Much of what he says is positive, but then much of what he says has a negative tone to it. However, no matter how we approach these next couple of chapters, we have to recognize that the issue of “**love**” completely dominates the passage. Secondly, what appears to be one of the obvious reasons is that the false teaching that had saturated the young churches made allowances for sin, and the result was that the believer’s had lost sight of what was important both to God and to one another. For instance, in [1 John 2:9–11](#), John says the following,

1Jn 2:9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Here, John is contrasting what it means to truly care for other Christians and what it means to not care for other Christians. On the negative side John says that the person who has not figured out what biblical love actually entails is in a state of “**darkness**” and is actually walking “**in darkness**”. He says in v11 that the individual has no idea “**where he is going**”. In other words, the individual who does not demonstrate biblical love for other believers is abiding in “**darkness**”. The Greek word for “**darkness**” simply refers to a condition of both moral and spiritual depravity.² It is the idea that if someone is constantly demeaning, criticizing, and slandering legitimate believers, then there is a moral and spiritual corruption that is prevailing over their life. I am sure that all of us have often found ourselves being overly critical of other believers simply because they may not adhere to and agree with us personally. Normally what that tendency often reveals is that we are the ones lacking a certain godly characteristic that God wants to work into our life through the individual who may be irritating to us. We see them as a nuisance, but God sees them as a tool to help develop character, spiritual endurance, and genuine godly love in our life. Obviously, Christ did this on the cross when he genuinely asked God to forgive those people who were actually taking his life. [1 John 3:16](#) expresses this truth as follows,

1Jn 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

Obviously, there are many verses in the New Testament that talk to us about what it means to love. For instance, [Romans 5:5](#) says,

Ro 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The phrase “**has been poured out**” is actually just one Greek verb – “*ekcheo*”, and it means to gush out and to give generously to someone.³ What this verse clearly says is that God himself has taken His

own love and has generously and liberally poured it into our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is something that God has done both in us and for us. [1 Thessalonians 4:9](#) adds some additional information to our understanding as well,

1Th 4:9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

So not only has God lavishly placed his love in us (“poured” it out), but he has also “taught” us that we should “love one another”. This is something that God ensures is innate and inborn within the believer. Over and over again in the New Testament believers are constantly reminded of how important it is in the Christian life to have a genuine love for other believers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus actually taught that we are to love our enemies and those who persecute us and spitefully use us. So, up to this point in his letter, John has made the argument that genuine believers do not and cannot live in habitual sin in their life. However, beginning in v10ff, he gives another evidence of genuine biblical salvation when he addresses the issue of loving other Christians. In the terminology that has been used up to this point, we could easily say that John is giving believers another test. The conclusion that he will arrive at very quickly is that the person who does not love his fellow Christians is not one of God’s children. This is a dramatically blunt point that John is making. The point is that what we truly are will inevitably reveal itself in our life. The reason why we can actually love other believers who may seem somewhat unlovable at times is because we are children of God.⁴ Every believer has within them this supernatural urging and divine teaching that compels them to love. It is part and parcel of what it actually means to be a Christian.

Now, before we take on these next two chapters I want to make some comments about what John has already said and will say in this section. Just as a general observation, the simple fact that John talks so much about this idea of “love” seems to indicate that there was a general misunderstanding about the whole subject. We have all met people who were very orthodox in their beliefs, but there was something vital that was missing in their relationship with other people. What was missing was that there was no love. The Pharisees were the obvious New Testament example of this. I am reminded of how caustically and cruelly that my interpreter in Romania was treated. The people were very orthodox in their faith, but they demonstrated nothing relative to Christian love and kindness. It was “our way or the highway” and nothing in between. So in reality what they said that they believed had no meaningful substance to it whatsoever - none. They were cruel, vicious, and brutally unchristian in their attacks on someone whose only interest was fulfilling the Great Commission. They took away his church and his ordination and were so intent on doing what they wanted do that they became the attraction, not Christ. He was viewed as a threat and a hindrance to their personal aspirations. [Galatians 2:20](#) says that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”. That is always the goal – to live and respond to life in a manner that demonstrates that it is not about me and what I want, but about Christ and letting His life live in me. In John’s terms, they lacked a genuine love for other people. They were certainly traditional and mainstream in what they said they believed, but they had nothing that approximated the kind of love that John is addressing. They were actually hateful! They were so absorbed in their personal aspirations and ideas that they literally forget the most important and critical aspect of the Christian life.

The second thing that we want to observe are two critical qualities that John says are characteristic of people who are truly “**born of God**”. The first characteristic is in [1 John 3:14](#) where he says that “**we have passed from death to life**”. Now I want you to think for just a minute about what this means - this idea of being spiritually dead. [Ephesians 2:1](#) provides a description of this when it says,

Eph 2:1 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

People who are dead have absolutely no power to do anything. They have absolutely no power to change anything about their life. Everyone is born physically alive, but spiritually dead. Then to make it worse, the lost man lives in a world that is spiritually dead. The Bible says that the world is “**darkness**”. So the lost man is spiritually dead and is living in a world that is completely opposed to God and devoid of any spiritual life or understanding. The world does not know God, they live outside of the very life of God itself, and they have no interest in the things of God. The world hates God and [1 John 3:13](#) will tell us that the world actually hates Christians. They hate what we stand for and they hate what we believe. They hate the One whom we follow. So the lost man is completely dead to the very thing that he needs the most. He is utterly oblivious and ignorant of what actually awaits him if he dies without Christ. It has no value to him and so he just goes on eating and drinking and living life however he chooses. Yet in the end, he will stand before God naked and utterly destitute, and without any hope or help. On top of all of that, there are spiritual principalities and powers that are unseen, but they are quite powerful and are working diligently to deceive the lost man by convincing him that there is no God and that in the end that everything will work out fine. Day by day passes by and they have no concept whatsoever that they are moving swiftly along the enemy’s path to destruction and eternal death. The further along that life takes them, the deader they become.⁵

However, we as Christians have passed out of that spiritual death. We do not live in that realm. Listen to how [Colossians 1:13](#) describes this,

Col 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

It is not that we as Christians simply decided that we were going to live a much better life than we were living prior to our salvation, or that we were going to adopt some new principles to live by in the future. It is not that we decided that we would start going to church and even read our Bible every once in a while. None of that has anything whatsoever to do with genuine salvation. As believers, God implanted His very Spirit into our being, and supernaturally birthed us into His family. [1 Peter 2:9](#) says,

1Pe 2:9 But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Now the question that we have to ask is whether or not we know beyond any shadow of a doubt that we are a part of the kingdom of God? The issue is not whether or not we believe or agree intellectually with certain spiritual ideas, but whether or not we actually have experienced this new birth, or in the words of this passage, whether or not we have passed from “**death to life**”. If you have experienced it, then you know it. Why? It is because you have passed out of spiritual death and into the very spiritual

life of God Himself. In [1 John 2:9](#), John said that God's "**seed**" had been planted in us. In other words the very life of God is now in the believer and it is so different from anything that he has ever previously experienced, that it would be impossible not to know that he was saved. The believer can simply look at his life and know that now he thinks differently, acts differently, and lives differently. Both he and other people recognize that he is growing in his Christian life and maturing in his understanding and his commitment to Christ. Why? It is because he is a new creature in Christ and he has God's seed working deeply to conform him to the image of Jesus Christ.

Now, at this point, I want to mention something that is important for our understanding of this truth of passing from spiritual death into spiritual life. The unbeliever cannot pass from spiritual death to spiritual life on their own. An individual who is "**dead in their trespasses and sins**" cannot do one single thing to make themselves a part of God's kingdom. They can try to imitate Christ, they can try to create and reproduce godly characteristics in their life, and they can mimic and impersonate what they think it means to live as a Christian, but they can never produce God's divine life in their dead life. The reason that Christians live as Christians and reflect Christ in their life is because they have been "**born of God**". It is something that God has done in their life and to their life. So the question is whether or not this is the way that we think when we see ourselves. If we think that we are a Christian because of any other reason, then most likely we are not.

The second thing that John says is that we are a part of God's family. He says it in two different ways. John has called us "**children of God**" and has said that we are "**born of God**". We have to appreciate that God's children are much different than other children simply because God is a much different father. His standards and expectations are much higher, so that is exactly why He had to place His nature into our fallen and spiritually corrupt nature. If He had not done that, then no one could actually live out the Christian life. It is not that Christians are now "better" people. That is an utter delusion. Christians are "new people", a new creation in Christ, and we have a new heart that has been given to us by God.

This thing of believers passing from "**death to life**" and becoming "**children of God**" is enormous. It is the very thing that marks off our life. It is always there and it is always working in every single believer. It is God's life being manifested in the believer's life. It is always compelling us, stirring us, challenging us, and moving us toward Christ in every area of our life. It is something that convicts us and constrains us to be like Christ in everything that we do. Now, I say this graciously, so please receive it that way, but if these things are not actually in your life in a compelling way, then you have not passed from "**death to life**" and have not become one of God's children. That simply has not happened in your life if your life is void of these things. If you are a Christian, you know that you are a Christian. You know that you are of God. It is not something that you have to tell people. Why? It is because your life demonstrates that you are one of God's children. It is what we are, and it is what we have become, and it is how we will always live. This is incredible – this work of God to make us a part of his family.

ENDNOTES

¹ Strong, 1434-1435.

² Vine, 260.

³ Zodhiates, 559.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, 335-336.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, 339-341.

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