



1 John Chapter Three

II. 1 John 2:18-3:10 - Overcoming Antichrist by Confession of the Son (continues/concludes)

II. b. 1 John 2:28-3:10 - Children of God (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Three

John continues with the theme that believers are genuine children of God, which started at the end of Chapter Two. John's initial comment is to show just what an amazing privilege it is for anyone to be designated in this way, and that it is a primary reason for them to be rejected by the world, for the world does not know Jesus for who he really is.

John notes that, at the Second Coming, believers will be like Christ in terms of the righteousness he gives and the love a believer shows to him and to everyone else. Therefore they need to prepare themselves for that event. Those who have the seed of God in their hearts will do all they can to refrain from further sin and will live their lives for God. Those who are not of God will show this by their lawless and sinful ways.

John then starts a new major section of the letter by returning to the theme of brotherly love, citing the historic case of Cain's fraternal murder to demonstrate the opposite of how a believer should feel and act toward his brother and sister in Christ. He reiterates that it is not a new command but the message that has been there since the beginning.

John also clearly states that such love and faith in Christ are not just a matter of the heart for they have to be demonstrated in the way a believer acts, with a clear demonstration of that love in their actions.

Just as Christ demonstrated his love by laying down his life, believers are to show that same love for others because they have passed through death into life by being in Christ. God knows the heart and if that love is in the heart then a believer not only has eternal life that the unbeliever does not have but will be able to stand in the presence of God without shame.

¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 3:1

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us. This is not a question but a statement of fact, given in awe and amazement, for the love of God is so immense and given so freely, especially to those who deserve it least. In fact, it seems strange that such a holy and righteous God should choose to show such love upon those who by nature are heirs of sin, guilt and the curse of God; those who by practice are children of corruption, disobedience and ingratitude! The statement does not focus so much on the amount of love but the quality of that love that is imparted on believers and truly surpasses anything that a human emotion or action could achieve.

Called children of God. Calling is not so much the naming but the inauguration of a relationship between God and his new child. John continues his expression of awe that God should bestow such a gift on those who have received and recognised his Son. John will speak of this again in his Gospel: <<***He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God***>> (John 1:10-13).

God has adopted the children of his Son, for it was Christ who called them, first as servants, then as friends and finally as brothers, heirs of the promises God has made to him but with a proviso as Paul explains: <<***Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory***>> (Romans 8:17).

It should be recognised that just as a new born human baby has no say in who its parents are, so too those who are called children of God do not have the right to choose to be so. They can however choose not to have that privilege. The analogy of a newborn baby shows us that it is not the birth that is the ultimate objective but the potential of what the child will grow to become that is significant to both the parents and the child.

The world does not know us. There is built-in friction between those who know and serve Christ, and those who do not. There is much debate about those who did not know him by failing to accept him as the long-awaited Messiah of God. It may seem amazing to those who have read the history of Israel to wonder why that generation failed to grasp that God had fulfilled his promises to his people by sending his Son to reconcile them back to himself. It seems even more amazing that 2,000 years later, given all the evidence that exists to show that Jesus is the living Creator God, that so many still choose to be the god of their own lives and continue to choose not to know him.

The world does not know us. Another aspect of this is the failure of the world to understand just what it is a believer has in Christ, for they still have to participate

in life on earth, with its pleasures and ills. Just as many Christians suffer the ills of life, and it seems at times they are called to suffer more than most others, yet they can or should be able to sustain themselves through Christ, and persevere with joy, something the world just cannot grasp. This could be understood perhaps if this joy went no further than this life, as Paul notes: **<<If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men>>** (1 Corinthians 15:19). But a believer knows there is so much more to come that so many others have failed to comprehend: **<<for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory>>** (1 Corinthians 2:8b). There are so many people in each generation who continue to crucify again and again, especially those described by John who were in church but left: **<<And then they abandoned their faith! It is impossible to bring them back to repent again, because they are again crucifying the Son of God and exposing him to public shame>>** (Hebrews 6:6).

² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:2

What we will be means having glorified bodies that will never be sick, decay or die, and most importantly, being completely free from the pollution of sin. No one like that has yet appeared on earth, except Christ himself after his resurrection.

When he appears. This refers to his Parousia or Second Coming, which will not be a secret visit but a spectacular appearing that will be seen simultaneously throughout the entire world and beyond: **<<For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever>>** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

We shall be like him. In eternity, Christians will be morally without sin, intellectually without falsehood or error, physically without weakness or imperfections, and filled continually with the Holy Spirit. However, like does not mean 'identical to', something believers will never be for they can never become like God, e.g. omniscient or omnipotent as Christ is, since he is both man and God. This is something that no human should aspire to as it was the promise of the serpent that had led to the fall in the first place: **<<“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”>>** (Genesis 3:4-5).

For we shall see him as he is. This phrase in no way implies that believers have been misled in understanding the nature or character of God. No one knows for sure the exact appearance of Christ although there are indications that he will have a glorified body but in human likeness: **<<They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come**

back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”>> (Acts 1:10-11). Some years after writing this letter, John would have a vision of the Risen Lord: <<I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance>> (Revelation 1:12-16). What believers can be sure of is that, when the time comes, they will know God more fully and intimately than is possible for them now.

³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:3

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself. The issue of personal purification was well embedded in Jewish culture and there are numerous laws and rituals recorded in the books of Moses explaining what was required and how it was achieved. This continued on through the generations that followed including those who had returned from Babylonian exile: <<*The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their brothers the priests and for themselves*>> (Ezra 6:20), and: <<*When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall*>> (Nehemiah 12:30). This continued among many of the Jewish Christians: <<*The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them*>> (Acts 21:26). However, it remains a requirement for Gentile Christians too, although the process is very different. Speaking of the Gentile members of Cornelius’ household, Peter said: <<*God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith*>> (Acts 15:8-9), and: <<*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart*>> (1 Peter 1:22). The first act towards purification is the personal recognition of the sin and decay that is within them due to their imputed sinful nature. Although it is a command from the Lord to be purified, believers will find that their transformed nature requires them to do all they can to purify their own hearts.

Just as he is pure. God is the only one who has total purity for he is not created: <<*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*>> (Habakkuk 1:13); man cannot achieve God’s standard of purity: <<*Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?*>> (Job 4:17).

Jesus was pure for he reflects the Father who is pure. It is a privilege that believers should never neglect that they have a pure template to be copied

from, for it is through his nature and work that believers can start to become more pure than they once were. There will come a time too when they will be in his likeness and will share in the same purity, for Christ removes all impurity from a believer's heart and mind.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

This verse starts two parallel passages: vv.4-6 and vv.8-10. The first subsection draws a contrast between Jesus' sinlessness and human sinfulness.

Everyone who sins breaks the law. Since everyone is a sinner by nature then all have transgressed God's law, whether that be the written code given through Moses, or God's moral and divine law that has always existed, i.e. the one that Adam and Eve transgressed through their disobedience. Those who break God's laws are in fact rejecting not just the law but the Lawmaker and the Lawgiver; that is, they are rejecting God. That is why believers who continue to sin have to come back to God in repentance and do all they can not to continue to sin. Being a disciple of Christ is a tough call. If anyone reading this letter has an indifferent attitude to the reality and importance of sin, John will now do all he can to dissuade them from that misguided view.

Lawlessness, or iniquity (Greek anomia), is any activity bereft of God's guidance and in violation of his law or moral requirements. It is implying the ultimate rejection of God's truth to be manifested in false teaching and immorality that are expected in the last days before Christ returns: <<*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil*>> (Matthew 13:41), <<*At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*>> (Matthew 24:10-14), and: <<*Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Sin is lawlessness. Most Christians continue to sin: <<*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*>> (1 John 1:9), and: <<*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One*>> (1 John 2:1), so it may seem like a trivial matter. However, to disregard sin's grave implications is disastrous. John picks up again on this theme later in the chapter.

⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

1 John 3:5

Jesus appeared so that he might take away our sins, not only so that sin might be forgiven, but also so that it might cease to exercise its tyrannical bondage. The weight of sin is so great that people cannot operate in the way they were created to do, that is to worship God and bring glory to his name. Those who have come to Christ now have freedom and release from that oppression in order to be in communion with God through Christ, but they are only work in progress.

However, Jesus did more than just provide forgiveness for sin and to take away the consequences of that sin in terms of the guilt, shame and bondage. He has actually abolished sin. Therefore, anyone who continues to sin, or indeed anyone who does not actively oppose sin is denying the life, work and death of Christ.

In him there is no sin. A reminder that: <<God is light>> (1 John 1:5), and his Son embodies his sinlessness. The purity of Christ is a template for the new creation that will one day exist.

⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

1 John 3:6-7

At first it may seem that this language does not sit with what has gone before, as John has acknowledged that believers still sin and that Christ has atoned for that sin. Is he now saying that anyone who commits a sin has not come to salvation? Not at all, for implicit in this section are two important poles in John's thought.

On the one hand, he makes repeated references to Christ's role in taking away a believer's sins, thereby stressing the difference between the purity and righteousness of Christ and the sinfulness of the believer.

On the other hand, though, his emphasis on the present likeness between Christ and the Christian cannot be ignored. Both of these must be held together: it is Christ's death alone that purifies (1 John 1:7-9), forgives (1:9), and atones (2:1), for their sin. Thus the statement no one who lives in him keeps on sinning depends more on an understanding of what Christ has done for all mankind than it does on what believers are able or commanded to do. John's understanding of the Christian life was not developed in observation of the Christian but in perceiving the nature of Christ's life and work.

It follows that the nature of Jesus' work gives shape to the responsibility laid upon his followers, God's children. What is meant, then, by the statement no one who lives in him keeps on sinning is quite simple: sin is not the identifying characteristic of those who live in him.

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. True followers of Christ do not recklessly and habitually violate what their anointing has planted within them, where anointing means being marked out for God's service: <<But you have an

anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth>> (1 John 2:20), and: <<As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him>> (1 John 2:27). Those who do habitually sin have neither seen him nor known him. They do not have genuine saving faith and should not really call themselves Christians.

That God still tolerates sin in believers is a gift of pure grace but believers must refrain from habitual sin, for the need to do so is broken for those who live in Christ. In the early days there were some who appeared to believe that sin wasn't that bad as it demonstrated God's forgiveness, grace and mercy. Paul's response was clear: *<<What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?>> (Romans 6:1-3).*

Lives in or abides in Jesus is a recurring theme for John as previously discussed. It draws on the imagery of Christ being the vine and the believers being the branches. If a branch becomes detached from the nourishing root provided through the vine then it will not only fail to produce fruit but will wither and die: *<<such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned>> (John 15:6b).*

He who does what is right is righteous. Righteousness is about doing what is right in the sight of God and is not a plateau state to be strived for. It is an attribute that a believer attains and continues to maintain as they walk with Christ. There is a cost in attaining it and it receives its own rewards: *<<Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven>> (Matthew 5:10), and: <<But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled>> (1 Peter 3:14 NASB). Righteousness can be attained through hearing and doing the Word of God: <<All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness>> (2 Timothy 3:16).*

It is possible for a believer to 'do' righteousness as opposed to doing sin! Sin may seem like a tough nut to crack but it is more a state of mind. Doing what is righteous is a natural outworking of faith that is in evidence throughout the letter: being part of a fellowship, showing love to one another and for neighbour, helping the sick, giving to the poor, feeding the hungry and reaching out to the lost are all actions that show righteousness but it must be from the heart and not an action undertaken with the aim of attaining righteousness.

⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

1 John 3:8

The next three verses parallel John's arguments in vv.4-6 although he approaches them from a slightly different angle. Behaviour is the key test to how a person's life orientation can be assessed.

The reason the Son of God appeared restates v.5, but here specifies the connection of sin to the devil. Knowing Christ means becoming involved in the all-out war against the devil's work, that is, the practice of sinning rather than an active involvement in spiritual warfare that some are called to.

The devil is the author of all sin and to draw others into his kingdom he lures them into a trap where they are captivated by its power and what it has to offer them. That is his life's work. Those who are under his dominion are in a hopeless state but Christ brings eternal hope for those who make the switch, destroying what the devil has instilled in them even if only subconsciously.

⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:9-10

No one who is born of God will continue to sin. Nowhere does John make the reverse assumption, i.e. anyone who sins is born of the devil, for in John's thinking the opposite of born of God is to be born of the flesh, which is similar to that Paul argues as Adamic man. Therefore, there is no one who cannot escape the devil's clutches by repudiating a life of sin and turning to God through Jesus Christ.

In short, the statement no one who is born of God will continue to sin, and others like it, ought to be heard simultaneously at several levels:

1. It orients believers to their future hope; a hope that, as the children of God, they shall yet become more like God.
2. In directing their gaze to their future hope, the statement also assumes that the same power that will remake them at that time is already at work in them.
3. That power is now active in the world because it was manifested by Jesus himself in his work of breaking the grip of sin on believers.
4. In his own life, Jesus exemplified the self-giving love and obedience to God that is also the responsibility of God's children as well. If John's statement seems hyperbolic, it is because of his eager anticipation of the blessings of the future age, now being realised through the ministry of Jesus among his followers.

Born of God. Jesus, speaking with the Pharisaic leader Nicodemus, gave one of the clearest explanations for this statement: *<<In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How*

can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit”>> (John 3:3-8).

God’s seed. Some take this to be the Word of God that brings about the new birth: <<*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created*>> (James 1:18), <<*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says*>> (James 1:22), and: <<*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you*>> (1 Peter 1:23-25). Others see it as a way of speaking of the Holy Spirit in his regenerating and transforming presence within the believer. Since the Holy Spirit works through the Word in his work of regeneration, it is probable that both of these ideas are intended here.

In other words, because the Word is present in the believer’s heart through the work of the Spirit, the believer **cannot go on sinning**. Thus the hearts of genuine Christians, those who are truly children of God, have been so transformed that they cannot live in a pattern of continual sin; although this does not mean that Christians are ever completely free from sin in this life, because of their inherent sinful nature: <<*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out*>> (Romans 7:18), and: <<*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives*>> (1 John 1:8-10). Believers do sin as John has already acknowledged and worth repeating for emphasis: <<*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*>> (1 John 1:9). The difference is the attitude of a believer toward their sin for, although they know it will be forgiven when they repent, they should also know and reflect upon the true cost of their sin. If they continue to remain in Christ then their walk with him will eventually lead them to a sin free existence. Joseph was a man who knew that the Lord was a forgiving God, who had cared for him throughout times of trouble. When he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, his response was true: <<*No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*>> (Genesis 39:9).

This is how we know. True believers will be recognised by their fruit: <<*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name*>> (John 15:16), and: <<*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,*

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires>> (Galatians 5:22-24). Or the converse, as Jesus said of false prophets: *<<By their fruit you will recognise them>>* (Matthew 7:16a), i.e. their fruit will not be of God's Spirit.

Not a child of God. Some commentators claim there are only two types of humans: those who are the children of God and those who are the seed of the serpent. The first are called to do what is right in God's sight, while the others tend to go their own way in life and show little regard for others. However, a third category may be clearly seen in that there are many people who do not know God and yet do what is right. This is not surprising as they are created in the image of their creator God and the hope is that they will come to know him through Christ before their life on earth is over. For those who do not explicitly serve God implicitly serve Satan, no matter what they may believe to be true.

Does not love his brother. John returns to the ethical dimension, the true barometer of what people really believe, whatever they may say. John writes of just such a man in his third letter: *<<I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church>>* (3 John 9-10).

The conclusion of this verse may have been directed at those who had left the church and whom John has intimated where never saved to start with, see 1 John 2:19. However, John's words equally apply to anyone who is not a believer, whether they attend church or not.

The key point to this passage is to understand John's emphasis on Christ's absolute righteousness. He destroys all unrighteousness and sin, which is attributed to the work of the devil but can include sins of omission that are committed by those who have never understood or accepted Christ. The work that Christ has commenced in dying to and for sin has had a profound impact on the hearts, lives and actions of those who have come to God through his name, but they are still a work in progress. Although it is not a licence to continue sinning, believers would do well not to focus so much on how far they still have to go but to reflect on just how far Jesus has brought them from where they once were and would still have been. The true likeness of Christ will only be attained when he returns to complete what he has started.

III. 1 John 3:11-4:6 - Overcoming Evil by Listening to the Apostle

The beginning of this section this is the message (v.11), and its summary: *<<Whoever knows God listens to us>>* (1 John 4:6b), mark these verses as describing how believers can avoid the practice of sinning and lawlessness (v.4).

III.a 1 John 3:11-24 - Love One Another

In John 8:44 Jesus points to the devil as the arch liar and murderer: *<<You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He*

was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies>>. John still has in mind that part of his purpose of writing this letter is to potentially heal a rift in the church family that may have caused others to leave. Here John uses a well known story of the worst type of dissent that occurred in man's first family, which ended in fratricide. He does so to introduce discussion of what Christians must both avoid and pursue. Refer to Genesis 4:1-16 for the full account of what transpired between Cain, his brother Abel and God. Cain represents those of the Devil (v.8), while righteous Abel represents the children of God (v.10).

¹¹ This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

1 John 3:11

Heard from the beginning refers to the Gospel message brought faithfully to John's readers, most likely by Paul or those who worked with him a decade or two earlier. It is also the message that permeates God's story, as it was told in Scripture from the time of creation.

We should love one another. John returns again to this key theme that should mark out the heart of the true believer for it is the heart of God. It was also given as a command and not a suggestion or request by Jesus.

¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

1 John 3:12

Cain murdered his brother Abel, which was the first instance of such criminality between humans recorded in the Scriptures: <<*Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him*>> (Genesis 4:8). His actions show that he was probably the first born of the serpent's seed, i.e. belonged to the evil one, although in reality it is the potential action of anyone who walks in darkness.

John gives the reason for his stating that Cain's actions were evil. The bible tells us that: <<*In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord*>> (Genesis 4:3), which may not seem evil although it may have been that the crops he presented were not the best, as would have been expected by God. What seems to be more likely was the attitude of his heart towards God when he presented his offering: <<*But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast*>> (Genesis 4:4-5), showing that Abel had given God the best of what he had, demonstrating his heart was right for God and bringing God's favour on him that resulted in such a jealous rage within Cain's heart. Abel was righteous in God's sight and Cain should have sought to emulate this, not envy and hate it. Those who wish to follow Christ cannot have

impure hearts, something that King David recognised: <<*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*>> (Psalm 51:10).

This account does not claim that everything Abel did was good or that everything Cain did was unrighteous. It contrasts the difference between those living in the light and those living in darkness.

God had cursed the serpent: <<*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*>> (Genesis 3:15). Cain's actions were the first example of a strike at the heel of the church and there have been many more since. The devil is the ruler of this world and it is no wonder that his followers will hiss and strike out at those who are children of God Almighty.

¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

1 John 3:13

Do not be surprised. Abel did the right thing and was bitterly opposed (v.12). John knows this dynamic is at work in every age, which Jesus had predicted would happen: <<*They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me*>> (John 16:2-3), but he offered them comfort: <<*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"*>> (John 16:33).

The world hates you. Jesus knew that it would but also reminded his disciples that: <<*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first*>> (John 15:18). However, it does not follow that the more obedient to God and the more love the church reflects then the more persecution it will face. It is not a qualitative or quantitative issue. It is simply a fact that the world will try to turn believers away from their faith, but will only do so if believers are of the mindset to be turned. If a disciple of Christ encounters opposition, they are called to stand firm in defence of their faith and offer love in the face of such hatred and opposition.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

1 John 3:14

We know, because we love. An assurance of salvation is the inner drive that leads one to care for fellow believers. Refer to comments made on 1 John 2:3.

Passed from death to life. Due to original sin, all humans are born spiritually dead and their bodies start to decay from birth onwards. Those in Christ will receive full spiritual life here on earth but will not be freed from physical death until after Christ has returned. This is part of the now but not yet of the Kingdom of God. Paul teaches on this aspect of a believer's life as well: <<*Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves*>>

to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness>> (Romans 6:13).

We love our brothers shows that believer's have come to understand the true nature of God and are modelling themselves on Christ who taught them how to love. Those who do not love remained locked in darkness for they do not know God and therefore are subjected to spiritual death.

¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

1 John 3:15

Is a murderer. John agrees with the teaching of Jesus: <<*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell>> (Matthew 5:21-22), which shows that outward conformity to God's commandment: <<*You shall not murder*>> (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17), is not enough, for even a heartfelt desire to break the command violates it. Note the command about inward desires in Exodus 20:17 <<*"You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour"*>>.

Today that would extend to include a neighbour's job, car, iPad, foreign holidays, or any other aspect of their life!

No murderer has eternal life in him. This must not be read that murders cannot receive forgiveness. If they truly repent and come to God through Christ, they will be forgiven. God does not grade sin as humans do so even those who commit the worst of atrocities could still find salvation for their eternal soul.

Those who choose to murder do so not so much for the hatred of an individual but for hatred of life and all it stands for. Hatred is the antithesis of love, therefore is alien to God and anyone who is of God. Scripture gives us further insight: <<*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God*>> (Romans 8:6-8).

In this passage John has likened Cain to those of the world or more likely those who had tried to bring schism and false teaching to the church, operating outside of the family of the church, whereas the righteous one, not Abel but Jesus, represents light, love, purity and above all else life, not just a good family life but a full life throughout all eternity.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

1 John 3:16

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Jesus' path to the Cross marks the selfless, self-giving way of life to which his followers are called. He spoke to the eleven apostles about this on the night the twelfth betrayed him: <<*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command*>> (John 15:12-14).

We ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. For many believers this has been a reality throughout the generations but not so for most. However, a disciple's life is supposed to be sacrificial and they need to reflect this, especially when it comes to giving of their time, resources or money. However, a disciple's life is not meant to be a guilt trip either!

Jesus shows believers that true love is concrete and active, not merely felt or thought, but lived out. As a revelation of God's love, Jesus shows us that God was active in sending the Son so that they might know God, have life and live within the circle of love. But in saying that the sending of the Son is a revelation of God's love, it is not meant that believers are to admire it as they might a display in a museum or art gallery. Nor does God put the Son on parade as might be done to celebrate a winning sports team, so that the crowd can cheer and applaud. God's love is not simply a thing to be admired. It is, rather, the power that transfers those who have faith from death to life, from darkness to light, from the realm of hatred to love.

¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

1 John 3:17

John had touched on the idea of how worldly possessions can lead people away from the proper response of a believer in the previous chapter: <<*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*>> (1 John 2:15).

James had written an almost identical statement to the recipients of his letter some twenty or so years earlier: <<*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*>> (James 2:14-17).

Jesus had taught on both the rewards and the punishment that awaits for those who neither act appropriately, nor choose to do anything to help someone in need: <<*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*" Then the righteous will

answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life">> (Matthew 25:34-46).

¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:18

Faith in Christ is not a passive emotion, but is heartfelt, with true faith being demonstrated by the actions that naturally follow: <<***But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do***>> (James 2:18).

With actions and in truth. There are many disciples who think this means that serving in ministry demonstrates their love which, if done with the right heart motivation, it does. However, believers are also called to forgive those that cause them harm or damage, and such forgiveness is also a sign of brotherly love. This is how Paul wanted Philemon to demonstrate his love for a brother who was also his slave, who had abandoned his service, thus making himself liable to severe punishment under Roman law: <<***Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord***>> (Philemon 15-16).

Those that had been part of the fellowship but went out from it as referred to 1 John 2:19 claimed to do so in truth but in fact did not because they were not of God. Whether their actions were misguided or undertaken for more sinister reasons, which may be the case for they had caused dissention and schism in the church, they will pay the appropriate price when judgement comes. The church's response is to reach out in love and reconciliation to bring them into the light.

¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence

1 John 3:19

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth. The Gospel message is the truth as given to the world by Jesus: <<“*You are a king, then!*” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “*You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me*”>> (John 18:37). Those who abide by the Gospel will live in truth and will know they belong to Christ: <<*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*”>> (John 8:31-32).

Rest in his presence. Anyone who comes into the presence of God with a heart to worship him will know peace and tranquillity in their soul: <<*Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you*>> (Job 22:21), and: <<*Be still, and know that I am God*>> (Psalm 46:10a). God can also bring peace to the whole land: <<*And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side*>> (2 Chronicles 20:30). They can also have peace in his presence for there is nothing that can take them away from God: <<*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand*>> (John 10:29), and: <<*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*>> (Romans 8:35).

²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

1 John 3:20

Whenever our heart condemns us, which will occur whenever a person has an inward conviction of sin. It is vital in such times to have a living faith; the proposition that God is greater than our hearts grants believers assurance that he has forgiven them through the atoning work of Christ. For those who do not have that assurance because they have not turned to God through Christ, will know that God knows everything about them. He is a greater judge than a human heart or conscience for he is supreme and his judgement will be just and righteous.

²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

1 John 3:21

A clear conscience before God leads to boldness and confidence before God in prayer. However, a clear conscience is not the same as innocence as Paul explains: <<*I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me*>> (1 Corinthians 4:3-4), and it was something to be constantly worked at: <<*So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*>> (Acts 24:16). Peter too speaks of a clear conscience before God: <<*In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also –*

not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him>> (1 Peter 3:20b-22).

Our hearts do not condemn us. There are no doubt many people living there lives without a thought for God and whose own hearts are not troubling them by what they do. This does not mean they can stand in confidence before God as ignorance is no excuse: <<*No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse*>> (Psalm 25:3), and: <<*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse*>> (Romans 1:20).

²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 John 3:22

Receive from him anything we ask. Jesus had promised that believers would receive everything they asked for in his name: <<*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it*>> (John 14:12-14). However, God is not Father Christmas who will bring gifts according to a person's wish list. A believer needs to have his spirit tuned in to the Holy Spirit in order to ask for that which is in accordance with God's will and then he will see his prayers answered: <<*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*>> (Romans 8:26). It should be recognised just how far a believer has come, to know that God will even listen to the prayers that are brought before him, let alone answered by him in whichever way he deems best. Without an intercessor that could never have happened.

Because we obey his commands implies a direct connection between obeying God and receiving answers to prayer. A believer has a commitment to listen to God and obey him: <<*If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable*>> (Proverbs 28:9), and therefore will not be answered.

Do what pleases him implies it is possible to do things each day that actually brings pleasure to God.

²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

1 John 3:23

'Commands' in v.22 becomes the singular command here but with a double aspect to it. His command is that all people should believe in the name of his Son,

which also implies that those who do are to love one another. Personal trust in Jesus Christ is just as important as the ethical behaviour stressed in vv.11-22. Those who accept the Son will be rewarded by the Father: <<*For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*>> (John 6:40).

To believe in the name is to accept and trust in all the attributes and character of that person, in this case Jesus as the Christ of God: <<*Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you*>> (Psalm 9:10), and: <<*That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*>> (2 Timothy 1:12).

To love one another as he commanded us refers again to the call from Christ for all believers to love each other irrespective of race, colour, social status or any human failings. If Christ has accepted a person as his brother then all other believers are obliged to do the same.

54.32 To love one another often requires reconciliation if a relationship does happen to breakdown as is often the case in church or any other aspect of human life: <<*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift*>> (Matthew 5:23-24).

²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

1 John 3:24

Those who obey his commands live in him. This is the ideal for a believer's life. In order to live a Gospel-centred life a person must have Christ in focus at all times, remain in constant communion with the Father through Jesus and demonstrate the love of God in all their daily deeds and thoughts.

The Spirit. This is the letter's first explicit mention of the third person of the Trinity. John will refer to him on four more occasions; see 1 John 4:2, 4:6, 4:13, and 5:6-8. However, as author of the Fourth Gospel, John would have presupposed from the start of this letter the existence and importance of the Counsellor, the Spirit of truth, whom Jesus promised to send: <<*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you*>> (John 14:16-18), and: <<*But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he,*

the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you>> (John 16:7-14).

We know it by the Spirit he gave us. When a person is in full communion with God and is living at peace with his neighbour then that person knows they have the Spirit of God dwelling in them and that they have given their lives over to his direction. This is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, for those who have left the church could probably claim the same. John's way of writing implies that the Christian belief that God dwells in them can be verified. As always in 1 John, the author points to the tangible manifestation and visible expression of claims to know God. As will become clear in the following chapter, a believer knows that they have the Spirit because only God's spirit inspires true confession of Christ (1 John 4:1-6), and empowers them to love one another (1 John 4:7-21).