



STUDY LED BY
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Interlaken Study of First John

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SESSION THREE: CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

In this continuing study of First John we look at the interesting way in which John both advances his thought and at the same time repeats some key ideas put on the table earlier.

FIRST JOHN 3:1-3 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

3.1 Ἴδετε ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ, ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν, καὶ ἐσμέν. διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν. 2 ἀγαπητοί, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῆ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτόν καθὼς ἐστίν. 3 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστίν.

NRSV:

3.1 See what love the Father has given 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. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

LB 1984:

3.1 Seht, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erwiesen, dass wir Gottes Kinder heißen sollen – und wir sind es auch! Darum kennt uns die Welt nicht; denn sie kennt ihn nicht. 2 Meine Lieben, wir sind schon Gottes Kinder; es ist aber noch nicht offenbar geworden, was wir sein werden. Wir wissen aber: wenn es offenbar wird, werden wir ihm gleich sein; denn wir werden ihn sehen, wie er ist. 3 Und ein jeder, der solche Hoffnung auf ihn hat, der reinigt sich, wie auch jener rein ist.

COMMENTS

With this first pericope, John opens with an admonition Ἴδετε in the aorist imperative form from ὁράω. The sense is an admonition to 'see' in the meaning of mentally grasping the meaning of something. That

something is ἀγάπην, *love*, that God has granted to His children. Already John has teased his readers with a couple of unexplained references to ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ. In 2:5, he alluded to this divine love τετελείωται, *is brought to full blossom* in the believer who obeys God's commandments. And this mature presence of God's love in the obedient believer is central to knowing that we know Him, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐσμεν, *by this we know that we are in Him*. But what is God's love? John does not tell us in this first reference. In the second teaser in 2:15 John asserts that if we love the world we do not have the love of God active in our lives: ἐὰν τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν κόσμον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν αὐτῷ, *if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. Thus God's love is exclusive and will not be found where things of this material world stand in high priority for the individual. This 'monopolistic' demand of God's love only serves to arouse curiosity of what it is. In this pericope in chapter three we begin to receive an explanation of the meaning of God's love.

One should not overlook the close connection of ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ with ἡ κοινωνία μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ* (1:3) in the Prologue. God's love is His commitment to establishing and developing that relationship that John defines as κοινωνία. Consequently, this pericope in 3:1-3 comes as an expansion and defining of certain aspect of this κοινωνία that believers enjoy with God.

The relative clause ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ, *what love the Father has given to us*, stands as the direct object of the admonition Ἴδετε. The relative adjective ποταπὴν from ποταπός, -ή, -όν stresses quality derived from origin of some specific source. Usually the English 'what sort of' translates it, but only partially. Sometimes English translations like the NRSV use words suggesting quantity rather than quality, e.g., 'what love,' 'how great a love' etc. This is misleading although the English language is poorly equipped to communicate the idea of ποταπὴν clearly.

The quality emphasis of ποταπὴν is defined by the ἵνα clause functioning in a substantival apposition role

as the antecedent of the relative adjective. That is, the powerful character and nature of God's love is calling us His children: ἵνα τέκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν. The passive voice κληθῶμεν signals that God is the one naming us as His children, not other people.

Repeatedly John has referred to his readers as either Τεκνία μου, *my little ones* (2:1, 12) or παιδιά, *children* (2:14,18). These are terms of pastoral affection and endearment from a spiritual leader. But τέκνα θεοῦ, *God's children*, possesses not only endearment but formal status implications with huge significance. See John 1:12 for the axiomatic declaration of this status. As 1 Jhn 3:10 asserts this status as τέκνα θεοῦ sets up apart from the τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου, *children of the devil*. In 1 Jhn 5:2, τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ are to be objects of our love as well as from God.

This status as τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ comes as a gift from God as a tangible action of the Father's commitment to us in love: ποταπὴν ἀγάπην δέδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ πατήρ. God 'gave' us love powerfully suggest that love is not a warm feeling toward another, not this kind of love. Rather, it is concrete action experienced in God's giving, as John 3:16 so beautifully defines it. This action of giving comes from love as commitment to another. Thus out of His giving we come to enjoy status as His children. And therefore ἡ κοινωνία with the Father equals status as τέκνα θεοῦ.

As an affirmation of this status, John adds καὶ ἐσμέν, *and we are*, at the end of the sentence.¹ Although awkward grammatically, the assertion at this point points to the apostolic validity of the claim of καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *and our fellowship is also with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ*, in the Prologue at 1:3. This stands in opposition to the false teachers claiming special status with God through their supposed possession of the secretive γνῶσις.

What implications does this status with God as His children bring? The first one is διὰ τοῦτο ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν, *because of this the world does not know us, because it did not know*

¹The 'being called' includes the 'being,' but it is not synonymous with it. It lays special stress on the dignity of the Christian title and position. καὶ ἐσμέν] An awkward parenthesis, which scribes naturally dropped, as in the Receptus, or adapted to the sentence, as in the Latin Versions, *et simus*. But it is in the author's style. Cf. the true text of Jn. 1:15, κέκραγεν λέγων—οὗτος ἦν ὁ εἰπὼν—Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, and also Apoc. 1:6; 2 Jn. 2. And it also adds force to the sentence. 'It is no mere empty title. It is a realized fact, though some are in danger of forgetting it.' Justin seems to have known this verse; Dial. c. Try. 123 (353 B), οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ γεννήσαντος ἡμᾶς εἰς θεὸν Χριστοῦ, —καὶ θεοῦ τέκνα ἀληθινὰ καλούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, οἱ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ Χριστοῦ φυλάσσοντες." [Alan England Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912), 80–81.]

Him. Here John brings the topic of ὁ κόσμος back into the foreground from his earlier mentioning of it in 2:15-17. In a writing manner typical of this letter, he weaves these themes in and out of the individual units of text material. This emphasis in 2:15-17 had come out of the faithful of the false teachers to deal with sinful conduct in their lives as professing Christians in 1:8-10, which in itself is a reflection of spiritual darkness (1:5-7). Now ὁ κόσμος resurfaces as the counter point to knowledge of God. Affirmation of true knowledge of God comes with ὁ κόσμος not knowing who you are as τέκνα θεοῦ.

And this is not surprising since ὁ κόσμος did not know Him either. Note the typical Johannine grammar where διὰ τοῦτο, *by this*, at the beginning of the sentence anticipates ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν at the end of the sentence, *because it did not know Him*. If the true identity of a leader is unknown, then the identity of his followers will remain unknown as well -- this is John's assumption. John's criticism of his gnosticizing opponents here is the charge of ignorance, ἀγνωσία, just the opposite of their claimed γνῶσις. These people completely misunderstood who Jesus actually was -- in terms of His nature and character and mission. They interpreted Him within the frame work of their cultural Greco-Roman, θεῖος ἀνὴρ, *divine man*, tradition and thus completely misunderstood Jesus Christ.²

With the vocative ἀγαπητοί, *beloved*, John signals a slight shift in emphasis. In the first sentence of verse two, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν, καὶ οὕτω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα, he begins with a reaffirmation of his readers and himself being true children of God from the beginning declaration in verse one: καὶ ἐσμέν. The addition of the present time adverb νῦν, *now*, underscores the present awareness of being true children of God. This adverb both affirms confidence in his readers as to their present status before God, and also, it helps set up the contrastive tone of the second part of this sentence. Note particularly the present tense ἐσμεν, *we are*, to the future tense ἐσόμεθα, *we will be*. Also to be remembered is that τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν (3:2) is one of the definitions of ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son in the Prologue* (1:3).

In light of being confident of our present status before God, John goes on to say that the future holds some mysteries: καὶ οὕτω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα, *and not yet is it made clear what we will be*. By this he signals that Christians do not know the precise details of the coming resurrection life we will have with the Father in eternity. In spite of considerable discussion of heaven

²Their failure stands as a sharp warning to every Christian and Christian group tempted to interpret Jesus within the frame work of their own cultural standards, rather than from the Bible and its standards. Jesus defines the mold, not fits into one!

and eternity inside the New Testament, most of the particulars of that life are never mentioned or discussed. This stood in stark contrast to the considerable discussions and debates in first century scribal Judaism over the particulars of heaven for Torah obedient Jews. These debates covered the nature of the resurrection body, exactly where saved Jews would live, how much power they would possess, the foods they would eat etc. Early Christianity refused to engage in such discussions. For them heaven always retains elements of mystery due to its being a trans-earthly experience with no point of real comparison to earthly experience. Rather engaging in speculative theory, eternity and heaven became centered in identification with the real resurrected Christ and a deeper, richer fellowship with Him after death and resurrection; cf. Phil. 3:8-11. Christ's resurrection stood as the foundation expectation of every believer's resurrection. Eternity centered around a presently established relationship with Christ that was unbroken by death.

This is the heart of John's point in the next sentence: οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῆ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστίν, *we know that when He is revealed like Him we will be, because we will see Him just as He is.* Most likely the 'him' with αὐτῷ and αὐτὸν is Christ, rather than the Father even though the general emphasis is on being τέκνα θεοῦ, *children of God.* The very implicit language of resurrection here clearly points this direction.

To be exactly like the resurrected Christ is based upon the assumption of being able to see Him exactly as He is: ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτὸν καθὼς ἐστίν. Some indirect criticism of the gnosticizing opponents is present here. In their ecstatic experiencing of the saving γνῶσις, visionary experiences were often closely linked to this. And in their Greco-Roman version of eternity, they entered into it as bodiless spirits. Resurrection of the body was anathema due to their assumptions of platonic dualism about the utter corruption of anything material. But for John the resurrection of the body is central to being able to see Christ and relate to Him.

Clearly the final sentence in verse three drives home this same point with the use of gnostic language turned on its head: καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτὸν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστίν, *and everyone possessing this expectation in him purifies himself just as That One is pure.* The theology of John's opponents has at least two fatal flaws. First, it does not come to grips with the reality of sin and sinning in the life of the believer (1:8-10). Second, it promotes an elitism that encourages hatred of one's fellow Christian (2:7-11). An additional fatal flaw will be added later, that of a heretically false teaching about Christ. In spite of

these huge mistakes, they laid claim to spiritual purity of the soul. But it was a phony purity based on platonic dualism, and not on biblical revelation beginning with the Old Testament. Judaism got it right about God's utter purity and His demand for purity in the lives of His people. But they miserably failed by thinking that such purity was achievable through Torah obedience.

But Jesus brought an entirely different way of thinking to the table. True purity, the only one that God recognizes and accepts, is achieved not by individual effort but through the redeeming accomplishment of the death of the Lamb of God. The validity of this exclusive path to authentic purity before God was validated in Christ's resurrection.

Now the implementation and intensification of this purity in the life of the believer comes by building one's expectation of acceptable purity before God on the foundation of τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην, *this hope.* In this comes, a healthy realization of the nature of sin that produces confession when needed. In this comes not an elitist attitude toward other believers, but a profound loving commitment to them and to helping them in their spiritual journey. The deeper we go into τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην, the deeper our lives are purified in the purity of the resurrected Christ. The gnosticizing opponents projected a new humanity based on the quicksand of Greek philosophical thinking. John's projection was based on the real human Jesus who at the same time was the divine Son of God who provided the way to overcoming the problems of sinful humanity through His death and resurrection.

Now we are beginning to understand why John took such a strong stand against these false teachers and so pointedly stressed the apostolic Gospel to his readers in late first century Asia Minor.

FIRST JOHN 3:4-6 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

4 Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστίν ἡ ἀνομία. 5 καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη, ἵνα τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἄρῃ, καὶ ἁμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν. 6 πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει· πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν.

NRSV:

4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

LB 1984:

3 Und ein jeder, der solche Hoffnung auf ihn hat, der reinigt sich, wie auch jener rein ist. 4 Wer Sünde tut, der tut auch Unrecht, und die Sünde ist das Unrecht. 5 Und ihr wisst, dass er erschienen ist, damit er die Sünden wegnehme, und in ihm ist keine Sünde. 6 Wer in ihm bleibt, der sündigt nicht; wer sündigt, der hat ihn nicht gesehen und nicht erkannt.

COMMENTS

Once more (cf. 1:8-10) John turns again to the issue of sin that his opponents severely overlooked, ignored, and misunderstood. But this time with slightly different contours to his discussion. Here he defines sin against the false definition of his opponents. Here he affirms the mission of Christ to deal with sin, rather than ignore it. Here he asserts that ἡ κοινωνία with the Father and the Son (1:3) mandates continual vigilance by the believer to avoid sinning.

Thus in small segments John is expanding his core ideas put on the table in the Prologue of this essay. They are not arranged according to a logical progression pattern -- that is a post Enlightenment way of thinking -- but in a manner very typical of ancient Judaism. Small pericopes are 'bundled' together not one after the other primarily, but with strings tied back on to the Prologue and often times also with other small pericopes elsewhere in the essay. This is done through repetitive words and phrase, and sometimes through synonyms and antonyms. At first reading by a modern western reader the essay seems incoherent and disorganized. But when understood against the backdrop of the ancient Jewish mindset, the package of pericopes are brought together in a beautiful kaleidoscopic portrait of Christian understanding.

In vv. 4-6 two sentences are brought together painting two distinct scenarios. John's love for using contrasting scenarios is quite evident throughout the essay. They are set up using different literary forms including the third class protasis with ἔάν and the substantival subject participle phrase (2:29; 3:10; cf. 3:3, 6, 9) -- his two favorite methods -- in order to present his theological principles to his readers. Behind them, and in particular the negative examples, stand a criticism of his opponents who are influencing the thinking of his readers in Asia. In the scenario the criticism is more indirect, but John does not hesitate to take them on directly with intensely blunt languages elsewhere in the essay.

In the two scenarios of vv. 4-6 the first one in vv. 4-5 offers a clear definition of the meaning of sinning that

stands in strong contradiction to that of his opponents. Then in v. 6 he pulls this scenario into a contrastive positive one in order to sharpen his point about the wrongness and the spiritual danger of ignoring sin.

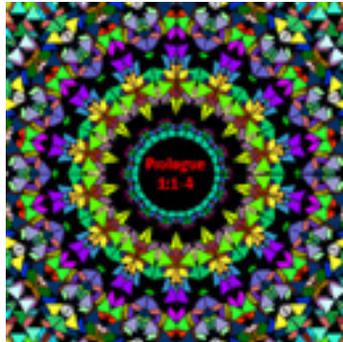
First scenario, vv. 4-5. The central point is made at the beginning: Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, *everyone committing sin commits lawlessness*. Here using verbals to define sin John stresses the action aspect of sin. Notice how he links the two statements together:

Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν
καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ,

His emphasis on action in ποιῶν and ποιεῖ from ποιέω picks up on the earlier use in a criticism of his opponents in 1:6, οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *we are not doing the truth*. In 1:6, the issue is claiming κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατοῦμεν, *we have fellowship with Him and in darkness are walking*. Sin is in no way the passive idea of ignorance as his opponents stressed. Then with his repetition in the second half of this beginning sentence, καὶ ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία, *sin is lawlessness*, he equates the two by using nouns.

What does he mean by the noun, ἀνομία? In a purely Jewish setting it would clearly mean disobeying the Torah in all the levels of meaning of Torah. But John is coming at it from a Christian perspective. Elsewhere inside the NT, some insights into the Christian perspective come from Jesus and the apostles. ἀνομία and hypocrisy go together (Mt. 23:28). It causes a loss of love for God (Mt. 24:12). ἀνομία and righteousness are opposites (2 Cor. 6:14). ἀνομία is a profound evil dynamic especially connected to the last days (2 Thess. 2:3, 7). In the context of First John ἀνομία is defined by his opponents' refusal to consider that they are sinning by their immoral behavior (1:8-10). ἀνομία is the opposite of keeping the commandments of God (2:3-6). Significant in ἀνομία is hating one's brother rather than loving him (2:7-11).

What is the source of the guidelines that Christians are to live by? It is κοινωνία with the Father and the Son (1:3). And it is the earthly life of the Son (1:1-3) that defines the parameters of how God expects His children to live. Yet, this earthly life of Christ is what John's opponents are denying. This is the exact point of the next assertion in verse five: καὶ οἴδατε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη, ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ, καὶ ἀμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν, *and you know that That One was revealed in order to take away sins, and sin does not exist in Him*. Here John picks up the declarations in 2:1-2 with some expansion of idea. Christ indeed is our παράκλητον, *advocate*, who functions as the ἱλασμός, *sin offering*, for περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, *our sins*. Here the emphasis on Christ as ἱλασμός is expanded and defined. In His



first coming to the world in earthly form his mission was to remove the sins of those committing themselves to Him. And He accomplished this as the sinless Lamb of God sacrificed on the cross.

This initial scenario, Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, with its explanatory elements in vv. 4b-5 now is summarized in a compact presentation of the two opposite connected scenarios in v. 6: πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει· πᾶς ὁ ἁμαρτάνων οὐχ ἑώρακεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν αὐτόν, *everyone in Him remaining must not be sinning; everyone sinning not only has never seen Him but also does not know Him*. John once more picks up a theme in 1:5-10, especially vv. 8-10. In 2:10-11 John expanded the first part of 1:5-7 with the images of light and darkness. Now in 3:6 he picks up the second part of vv. 8-10 with its emphasis on sinning. Additionally the concluding admonition to 2:3-6 in verse six is picked up with different terms but identical point: ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν, *the one saying that he remains in Him ought just as That One walked so also himself to walk*. Here the parallel principle to walking in the steps of Jesus is presented as avoiding sinning.

Failure to follow this principle means in 3:6b that the individual neither has seen ever seen Christ nor has come to know Christ. In the strongest possible terms such an individual possesses no κοινωνία with either God or His Son. The images of ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ Christ are spiritual principles containing the essence of possessing a saving κοινωνία with God.³ A certain sarcasm is present here with the opponents who claim a γνῶσις, *knowledge*, of God but have never even gained any understanding of Christ at all.

³“To see Jesus is to discern his real identity and to believe in him (Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 164). This is a common theme in the Gospel of John (1:34; 6:36; 9:40–41; 12:37–46; 14:7, 9; ‘If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on you do know him and have seen him.... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’; 19:35; 20:29: in which the reference is to not seeing physically and yet believing, a different emphasis from the one in 1 John 3:6 and its parallels). To see him, then, is to recognize his true identity as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31), the one who came in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

“To see him accurately in this way is to ‘know him.’ We have observed the repeated use of *ginōskō* in the Gospel and epistles of John to indicate spiritual perception, especially in the claim to have a true understanding and a close relationship with God/Christ (see, for example, 1 John 2:3–5, 13–14; 3:1; 4:6–8; cf. John 1:10; 6:69; 10:14, 38; 14:7, 9, 17; 16:3; 17:3: “this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”). The Elder denies that his opponents, who reject the true identity of Jesus (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:10; 2 John 7, 9), have any authentic knowledge of God/Christ at all.”

[Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 71–72.]

FIRST JOHN 4:7-10 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

7 Παιδιά, μηδεὶς πλανᾷ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ· ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν· 8 ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου. 9 Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται. 10 ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου· πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.

NRSV:

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. 10 The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

LB 1984:

7 Kinder, lasst euch von niemandem verführen! Wer recht tut, der ist gerecht, wie auch jener gerecht ist. 8 Wer Sünde tut, der ist vom Teufel; denn der Teufel sündigt von Anfang an. Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes, dass er die Werke des Teufels zerstöre. 9 Wer aus Gott geboren ist, der tut keine Sünde; denn Gottes Kinder bleiben in ihm und können nicht sündigen; denn sie sind von Gott geboren. 10 Daran wird offenbar, welche die Kinder Gottes und welche die Kinder des Teufels sind: Wer nicht recht tut, der ist nicht von Gott, und wer nicht seinen Bruder lieb hat.

COMMENTS

Here John both continues the general theme of the previous pericope (3:4-6) but picks up earlier themes in 1:5-10 and 2:18-27. These ideas are here integrated into a new emphasis on righteousness and sinning.

He begins with an admonition picking up the warning about being deceived in 2:26: Παιδιά, μηδεὶς πλανᾷ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, *Children, let no one deceive you*. The vocative Παιδιά rather than Τεκνία reaches back to 2:14 as a spiritual foundation for this admonition: ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, παιδιά, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν πατέρα, *I write to you, children, because you know the Father*. The influence of the false teachers was significant and members of the Johannine communities in Asia were being pressured

by these false teachers. The presentation of John's ideas is once more formed around four scenarios expressed in the substantival participle phrase.

First comes a pair of contrasting scenarios:

ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν·

ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἀμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου.

The positive perspective comes first and incorporates terminology commonly found in Hellenistic Jewish literature, as well as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 6:1, Προσέχετε [δὲ] **τὴν δικαιοσύνην** ὑμῶν μὴ **ποιεῖν**, *See to it that you do not practice you piety ...*⁴ When John uses this very Jewish phraseology he is not meaning what the Jewish literature stressed -- Torah obedience -- but rather what Jesus stressed in the Sermon in contrast to the phony piety of the Pharisees of His day. The Sermon on the Mount provides a beautiful portrait of authentic Christianity that was clearly committed to God in the way it lived and behaved itself.

In this way John's use of ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην becomes another defining perspective of κοινωνία with the Father and the Son and picks up the previous ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν in 3:4 but from the opposite view. Additionally it plays off the principle expressed in 2:29, ἐὰν εἰδῆτε ὅτι **δίκαιός ἐστιν**, γινώσκετε ὅτι καὶ πᾶς **ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην** ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται, *if you know that He is righteous, you understand that also everyone practicing piety has been born of Him.*

Thus when the believer is clearly living his commitment to Christ (**ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην**) he stands before God as δίκαιός, righteous. The model of Jesus is being followed (cf. 2:29). How this works and how important it is stands clear from Jesus' words in the Sermon (7:21b): ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, *but the one doing the will of My Father in Heaven.* Only this person enters the Kingdom of Heaven in final judgment! Even those claiming to have done the Father's will have no chance at entering Heaven on the Day of Judgment (cf. 7:22-23). Only those authentically doing it will enter in. And the standards of authentic doing God's will are set forth in the Sermon.

John's comparative clause καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστιν, *just as That One is righteous*, links up the righteousness of Jesus to the believer. Again this grows out of the declaration in 2:29, and encompasses the emphasis of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

The opposite scenario is presented next in verse eight: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἀμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου, *the one*

⁴For an in depth analysis of this, see my [Lesson 13](#) on the Sermon on the Mount in [Bible Studies at cranfordville.com](#).

*practicing sin is of the devil, because from the beginning the devil sins. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed into order to destroy the works of the devil. Once again but with slightly differing terms, John condemns the person claiming Christianity but living in sin as being a child of the devil, not of God: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν. Note the same theme in ἐν τῷ σκότει περιπατῶμεν, *we walk in darkness* (1:6); τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, *not keeping His commandments* (2:4); τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν, *hating his brother* (2:9); πᾶς ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν υἱὸν, *everyone denying the Son* (2:23); ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν, *everyone practicing sin* (3:4). Collectively these provide a clear picture of what John means by ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν.*

The conclusion of these various scenarios depicting ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν are especially direct and blunt: ψευδόμεθα καὶ οὐ ποιοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, *we are lying and not doing Truth* (1:6); ψεύστης ἐστίν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν, *is a liar and in this one is not the Truth* (2:4); ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστίν ἕως ἄρτι, *is in darkness until now* (2:9); οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει, *neither has the Father* (2:23); καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, *indeed practices lawlessness* (3:4). All of these conclusions provide a perspective of what it means to be a child of the devil.

The foundation of this assertion in the negative scenario is given in the ὅτι clause and followed by the next declaration: ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἀμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου, *because from the beginning the devil is sinning. For this was revealed the Son of God: to destroy the works of the devil.* First is the nature of the devil as a perpetual sinner. The new dimension added here is the role of the devil who is mentioned only in 3:8 and 3:10 in this essay. This has some affinity with Jesus' words in John 8:44 reported by the same author:

ὁμοίως ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστέ καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν. ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ. ὅταν λαλῇ τὸ ψεῦδος,

You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Since John's opponents are living in darkness and sin, it becomes clear that they are children of the devil who lives in sin.

Furthermore, this is completely counter to Christ who both ἐφανερώθη, ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ, *was manifested to take away sins* (3:5) and now ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου, *was manifest-*

ed the Son of God to destroy the works of the devil (3:8b). To τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρη, *take away sins*, is not far from λύση τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου, *to render completely impotent the works of the devil*. Christ's mission on earth is to redeem sinful humanity which viewed negatively means to 'throw a monkey wrench' into the devil's actions in trying to destroy people.

This is the first, but not the last, mention of the full title ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Son of God.⁵ The full deity of Christ is underscored by this in order to stress who it is that destroys the works of the devil.

This stress on deity would have registered with John's gnosticizing opponents but not in the way he presents Christ here. They, by their lifestyle, are the products of the devil, and Christ's incarnation on earth is intended to destroy everything that the devil produces.

John moves on to the next scenario in v. 9 presented in a positive manner: Πᾶς ὁ **γεγεννημένος** ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἀμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ **γεγέννηται**, *Everyone born of God does not practice sinning, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot continue sinning because he is born of God*. Notice how the phrase γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ / ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται sets a boundary for the expression. Again this builds off the earlier ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται, *of Him is born*, in 2:29. This axiom here in 3:9 throws defining light on the early declaration in 2:19,

ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν· εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἦσαν, μεμενήκεισαν ἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν· ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν. 20 καὶ ὑμεῖς χρῆσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ οἴδατε πάντες.

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.

The use of the preposition ἐκ -- ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ / ἐξ αὐτοῦ / ἐξ ἡμῶν -- signals source or point of origin. These false teachers separated themselves from the Johannine communities (2:19) -- but continued trying to influence members of those communities -- because they did not share the same spiritual origin from God. Their continued practice of sinning clearly signals they do not

have their spiritual origin in God (3:8). Now John in 3:9 underscores the reason for this. The one born of God does not continue sinning. This does not in any way imply that individual acts of sin may happen in the believer's life as 1:8-2:1 clearly affirms. But it does clearly mean that a pattern of sinful practice comes to an end with conversion of the believer, unlike with the false teachers. Note the clear expressions of this: ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν (1:8), οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν (1:10), and ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν (3:8) in contrast to ἀμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ and οὐ δύναται ἀμαρτάνειν (3:9). The clear picture of committing sin in isolated instances by the believer is to confession of these sins ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν (1:8) and the intermediary work of Christ as παράκλητον and ἰλασμός in 2:1-2.

What John is zeroing in on here in 3:9 is a contrast to his opponents who as professing Christians continued living a sinful lifestyle. John's adamant point in 3:9 is that a true Christian both won't do that and indeed can't do that because of profound changes that have taken place inside his life at conversion.

The 'won't' side is presented in ἀμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ in contrast to the children of the devil who ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν. The Christian lifestyle is a way of living committed to avoid sinning.

The 'can't' side then comes as a part of the ὅτι clause as the foundation for the main clause declaration. Central to the reason for the 'won't' and also the 'can't' aspects is σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει. This highly blunt declaration is seldom ever translated literally. Its basic meaning makes it very clear what John is saying. God as Father has His sperm planted in us through having sinned us. This means we possess His character and follow His values. This means no sinning! This is true just as of the Son who δίκαιός ἐστιν, *is righteous* (2:29; 3:7), ἁγνός ἐστιν, *is pure* (3:3); and ἀμαρτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν, *sin is not in Him* (3:5).

The concept of σπέρμα αὐτοῦ (3:9) is not much different from χρῆσμα...ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, *the grace expression from the Holy One* (2:20). Both images focus on the believer's conversion and the life transformation coming with that moment. John's use of σπέρμα αὐτοῦ here most likely was offensive to his opponents who advocated a non-earthly kind of religious conversion centered in the impact of an abstract γνώσις upon them in conversion. To speak of salvation as God implanting His seed into the life of the convert was far too material and earthy!

But this is just John's point. Salvation is a real transformation of a life lived out in a very earthy world and facing temptation to sin and to give in to the fleshly (cf. 2:15-17). God's redemption is the redemption of this very kind of life. And through putting His presence into

⁵“This is the first use of the full title, the Son of God, in the letters of John (4:15; 5:5, 10, 12–13, 20). ‘His Son’ occurs in 1:3, 7; 3:23; 4:9–10, 14; 5:9–11, 20, while ‘the Son’ appears in 2:22–24; 5:12; 2 John 9. Second John 3 has the more formal expression ‘the Father’s Son.’ ‘Son of God’ is a favorite Johannine title for Jesus; it is common in the Gospel of John as well. ‘The Son,’ ‘the Son of God,’ and ‘his Son,’ as references to Jesus, occur 29 times in the Fourth Gospel, more than in all of Paul’s letters. They express the unique and intimate relationship between Jesus and God.” [Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 73–74.]

this sinful body of flesh, He transforms it and makes it acceptable to Himself in His holy presence. Elsewhere in both the Gospel and this essay this concept is that of the presence of the Holy Spirit: 1 John 2:27; 3:24; 4:13; John 3:5, 8; 6:63a; 14:16–17; 16:7–8; 20:22.

Thus in verse ten John comes back to summarize in more compact expression: ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου· πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, *In this is clear the children of God and the children of the devil: everyone not practicing piety is not from God and the one not loving his brother.*

With these two scenarios John pulls together discussions in 3:1-10 and 2:7-11. The foundational declaration comes first with the summation of two scenarios presented above following and based upon the foundational declaration.

There is a way to distinguish between God's children and the devil's children: ἐν τούτῳ φανερά ἐστιν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου. Repeatedly in the elaboration of the Prologue beginning in 1:5 John has been amplifying the noticeable differences between those belonging to God and those belonging to the devil. Here he asserts this and provides the distinguishing marks developed in detail up to this point in short concise summation.

In the declaration of identification traits he focuses only on the negative side: πᾶς ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ. The positive side that stands opposite to these is implied quite clearly by the manner of his framing of the statement.

Two failures reveal a false claim to God and reflect that such a person is in actuality τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου. These failures are ὁ μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην, *not practicing piety*, and ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, *not loving his brother*. In typical NT fashion, outward actions reflect the true condition of one's life, rather than mere verbal claims. If one is a child of God, it means without fail that this person lives that devotion to God consistently in behavior (cf. 2:29; 3:4, 7, 8-9) and in relationships with others (2:9, 11).

In the previous material being a τέκνον τοῦ θεοῦ means ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, *we walk in the light as He is in the light* (1:7); ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, *we are confessing our sins* (1:9); ὃς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, *keeping His Word* (2:5); καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν, *just as That One walked also we so walk* (2:6); ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, *loving his brother* (2:10); ὁμολογῶν τὸν υἱὸν, *confessing the Son* (2:23); ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην, *practicing piety* (2:29; 3:7); οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, *is not sinning* (3:6). In these positive scenarios developed by John up to 3:10 we find John's defini-

tion of being a child of God. Being a child of the devil is defined in the numerous negative scenarios in parallel as the opposite of being a child of God.

FIRST JOHN 3:11-12 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

11 Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, 12 οὐ καθὼς Κάιν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια.

NRSV:

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

LB 1984:

11 Denn das ist die Botschaft, die ihr gehört habt von Anfang an, dass wir uns untereinander lieben sollen, 12 nicht wie Kain, der von dem Bösen stammte und seinen Bruder umbrachte. Und warum brachte er ihn um? Weil seine Werke böse waren und die seines Bruders gerecht.

COMMENTS

Playing off the final comment in 3:10, ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, John returns to the theme of loving one's brother. Some discussion of this already was given in 1:7, κοινωvίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων, *we have fellowship with one another*, and more in 2:7-11. Having already given considerable attention to the ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην, *practicing piety*, side, John now expands the brotherly love theme with more details and new emphases. He further signals a connecting link to 2:7-11 with ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, *the message which you have heard from the beginning* (3:11) to ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, *an old commandment which you have had from the beginning*.⁶ When these churches were planted at the start,⁷ a full apostolic

⁶Additionally, the similarity of 3:11, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, to ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἀκηκόαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, in 1:5, could possibly suggest a major dividing line in the essay. Clearly the defined content of ἀγγελία is different. In 1:5 it is ὅτι ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστὶν καὶ σκοτία ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν σὺδεμία, *that God is light and darkness is absolutely not in Him*. While in 3:11 it is ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, *that we must love one another*. But against this understanding is 2:7-11 that discusses the same theme of brotherly love. The better understanding is that 3:11 signals a shift in emphasis in the stringing together of various themes as we have observed thus far in the essay.

⁷Incidentally by the apostle Paul on the third missionary journey in the 50s of the first century, some 40 plus years earlier than

Gospel was proclaimed to the new converts in order to help them understand the basics of their new Christian faith.

As was stressed in 2:7-11, loving one another with ἀγάπη love primarily means a profound commitment to the welfare of a fellow Christian. Self sacrifice is significant in this commitment. Positive feelings toward the other person are very secondary.

John elaborates on what ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, **we must love one another**, means in verse 12 with the negative example of Cain who murdered his brother Able in the early chapters of Genesis. Interestingly Cain is mentioned only three times in the NT: Heb. 11:4; 1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11. In Hebrews, the focus is on Able who offered a more acceptable sacrifice to God than did Cain. In Jude 11, 'the way of Cain' is seen as a path of violence leading to murder and thus to be avoided by righteous people. Here John alludes to Cain killing his brother and the supplies a reason -- one not found in the Genesis account but highly speculated on in the non-biblical Jewish literature.⁸ That Cain wasn't in right relationship with God is clear from the Genesis 4:1-16 account. But beyond jealousy of God's acceptance of Abel's offering nothing is said about Cain's motivation behind his killing Able. John places the blame on Cain's

when John writes to them. Now, long after Paul had been martyred, John is ministering to these Christian communities.

⁸“Opinions vary as to the exact nature of his heinousness. Philo thinks Cain's sin lay in his focus on 'earthly and inanimate things,' his love for himself, and his offhand attitude toward God's standards of acceptable sacrifices (QG 1.59–60). For Philo, virtue lies in attention to the things of the soul, not of the earth.

“Josephus (Ant. 1.54) accuses Cain of greed and of impropriety in plowing the earth; this meant that the sacrifice he offered to God was 'forced from nature by the ingenuity of grasping man.' He introduced great evil into the world by 'rapine and violence'; further, he corrupted 'that simplicity in which men lived before by the invention of weights and measures: the guileless and generous existence which they had enjoyed in ignorance of these things he converted into a life of craftiness' (1.61). Josephus continues (1.66): 'Even while Adam was alive, it came to pass that the posterity of Cain became exceeding wicked, every one successively dying one after another more wicked than the former. They were intolerable in war, and vehement in robberies; and if anyone were slow to murder people, yet was he bold in his profligate behavior, in acting unjustly and doing injuries for gain.'¹⁰

“Other sources suggest that Cain was 'led by the adversary' (Apocalypse of Abraham 24.5), largely agreeing with John's assertion in 1 John 3:12 that he was ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ (*ek tou ponērou*, from the evil one). He is 'a son of wrath' (Apocalypse of Moses 3.2). 'Cain's seed' (1 Enoch 22.7) comprises a social force analogous to 'the children of the devil' in 1 John 3:10. 'Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished' (Testament of Benjamin 7.5).”

[Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 198–199.]

deeds: ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν, **because his deeds were evil**. This is the expected outcome, since -- in John's view -- ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν, **he was of the devil**. The use of this Jewish traditional interpretation of Genesis 4 affirms John's point that sinning suggests an evil origin. Whether or not John fully adopts this interpretive view about Cain may be another issue.

One question it does raise is why the use of this reference. Was this a point of discussion and debate in the synagogues where the readers lived in Asia. Given the amount of mystical writings that originated from Hellenistic Judaism located in Asia during the first before and the first one after Christ's birth, one wonders whether questions about Cain had crept somehow in the conversations taking place in the Christian communities. I strongly suspect that discussions about Cain in the background prompted John's reference to him.

Clearly this interpretive understanding of Genesis 4 serves to advance John's point about the source of a pattern of sinning against God being revealed by one's actions.

FIRST JOHN 3:13-17 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

13 [Καὶ] μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος. 14 ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς· ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ. 15 πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἐστίν, καὶ οἶδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν. 16 ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι. 17 ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ; 18 Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μὴδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλ' ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

NRSV:

13 Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

LB 1984:

13 Wundert euch nicht, meine Brüder, wenn euch die

Welt hasst. 14 Wir wissen, dass wir aus dem Tod in das Leben gekommen sind; denn wir lieben die Brüder. Wer nicht liebt, der bleibt im Tod. 15 Wer seinen Bruder hasst, der ist ein Totschläger, und ihr wisst, dass kein Totschläger das ewige Leben bleibend in sich hat. 16 Daran haben wir die Liebe erkannt, dass er sein Leben für uns gelassen hat; und wir sollen auch das Leben für die Brüder lassen. 17 Wenn aber jemand dieser Welt Güter hat und sieht seinen Bruder darben und schließt sein Herz vor ihm zu, wie bleibt dann die Liebe Gottes in ihm?

COMMENTS

In a pattern somewhat similar to 2:15-17, John follows a set of affirmations with an admonition containing elaboration. A loose conceptual link exists between the pair of pericopes. In 2:15-17, the series of quasi-poetic affirmations of the spiritual commitment of John's readers in 2:12-14 provides the conceptual basis for the admonition to stop loving the world in vv. 15-17. In our present passage the affirmation about sinning indicating origin from the devil rather than from God provides the conceptual basis for the admonition to cease being amazed at the hatred of the world.

The core admonition is [Καὶ] μὴ θαυμάζετε, ἀδελφοί, εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος, and stop being amazed, brothers, if the world hates you. In 3:1, John asserted that the world does not know the believer: ὁ κόσμος οὐ γινώσκει ἡμᾶς. This because it did not know Christ: ὅτι οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτόν. The sense of γινώσκω is of understanding who believers are spiritually. This comes in this verse under the umbrella theme of being τέκνα θεοῦ, children of God.

Now John resumes this briefly mentioned theme in 3:1 with more detail, but not much more. He admonishes his readers to stop being surprised by the hatred of the world against them. If the world doesn't have a clue that we indeed are God's children, it should not come as a surprise that it will hate us as we live out our Christian commitment in its presence. Additionally Jesus had predicted such in John 15:18-25; 16:1-4; 17:14.

The expansion elements in vv. 14-17 seem to go in a strange direction with a strong emphasis on brotherly love. What does loving one's fellow believer have to do with the world hating him? Among John's initial readers, a great deal!

The discussion of vv. 14-17 with a strong emphasis on hating one's brother develops a strong base of accusation that the false brothers hating the rest of the community in these churches reflected their nature of being a part of the world and not authentic believers.

In 2:7-11, John developed the theme of hating one's fellow Christian reflecting an existence ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ with powerful accusations leveled against such a person in

vv. 9, 11. Just as John has done with other motifs, he first develops ideas around the light / darkness theme. Then later he returns to develop a similar theme off the foundation of spiritual origin from God / devil. He does this here in vv. 14-17 somewhat. But first the focus is on being ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, in death / μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, having passed out of death into life. The pairs of contrast -- light / darkness, of God / of the devil, and life / death -- reflect strong criticism of his opponents whose claim to being in the light and thus in life was based solely on possession of γνῶσις in a conversion experience with no moral or spiritual obligations to live by the standards of God's holy character. Failure to adopt patterns of holy living and brotherly love signal that one is still in darkness and thus in death.

What must have been surprising to these initial readers was the attitude of this 'separatist' group who had been a part of the community but under the influence of the false teachers had withdrawn fellowship (2:19) and began reflecting hostile attitudes much in the same way the pagan world around them expressed. This group continued to claim to be Christian but it was a puzzling, mysterious brand of Christianity that didn't seem correct.⁹ Here John speaks to this situation.

He first asserts the spiritual genuineness of his readers: ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς, we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers (v. 14a). Loving the brothers early signaled being in the light: ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν, the one loving his brother continues in the light and no offense is in him (2:10). Here in 3:14 to be in the light equals having passed into life out of death: μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν. That which validates both is loving the brothers: ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, the one loving his brother / ἀγαπῶμεν τοὺς ἀδελφούς, we love the brothers.

The opposite is equally true: ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἔστιν, the one hating his brother is in darkness (2:11a; cf. 2:9, 11b for expansions) in comparison to ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν μένει ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, the one not loving continues in death (3:14b). Darkness equals spiritual death, and everyone claiming to be Christian but not loving his brother has his existence in the darkness / spiritual death. Also note that hating one's brother is defined in part as not loving one's brother.

Further definition of hating one's brother (πᾶς ὁ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ; 3:15a) is given in the very

⁹For readers of this commentary who have endured a hostile church split with the 'splinter' group leaving and establishing an alternative congregation, the tones and contours of a hostile attitude toward the 'mother church' group have a similar tone to what happened among John's communities in Asia.

blunt accusation of him being an ἀνθρωποκτόνος, *man killer*.

The only other place where this term ἀνθρωποκτόνος is used in the NT is John 8:44 where Jesus asserts that the devil ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ, *that one has been a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in Truth, because Truth is not in him*. The first part of this statement is ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν, *you are of your father the devil and you desire to do the passions of your father*. Quite interesting out of the larger context this accusation by Jesus was directed πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους, *to the Jews who believed in Him* (8:31). In the series of rebuttals to Jesus' words by this group (cf. 8:33, 39, 41b), it becomes clear that this professed faith in Jesus was not sincere. Very likely out of this encounter with phony disciples by Christ, which John had recorded in his gospel writing,¹⁰ he understood the falseness of the claims of the false teachers and their followers in the Johannine communities of Asia almost 70 years later.

With the accusation that one hating his brother is an ἀνθρωποκτόνος then comes the follow up declaration: καὶ οἴδατε ὅτι πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν, *and you know that every murderer does not possess life eternal abiding in him*. This is an axiomatic principle kind of statement. The murderer in unconfessed sin and without commitment to God is not a possessor of eternal life. John assumes that his readers clearly understand this fundamental principle.

By this point, John senses that his readers will be wondering just what loving one's brother means. In vv. 16-17 he provides two clear concrete expressions of authentic love for one's brother: Christ's love; and our reaching out to fellow Christians in their needs.

First Christ's example in v. 16a: ἐν τούτῳ ἐγνώκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην, ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν, *By this we have come to know love: that That One laid down His life for us*. Here John picks up on the earlier reference to Christ as αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, *He is sin offering for our sins* (2:2a). In this initial reference Christ's death is atoning for the sinner who comes to Him in faith commitment. But in 3:16, Christ's death is exemplary and sets a standard for us to follow.¹¹

¹⁰Additionally, the likelihood that the gospel and the letters shared a common readership in the province of Asia is very substantial. In this case, his initial readers had already read the gospel account before receiving this essay from the apostle.

¹¹Unfortunately, much of modern theology especially has not been able to hold both these aspects in proper balance. Thus the modern 'social gospel' emphasis stresses the exemplary aspect to the neglect of the atoning aspect. Fundamentalism, on the other hand, stresses the atoning side with disdain for the exemplary side.

Out of Christ's example then comes an obligation for believers: καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι, *and we personally ought to lay down our lives in behalf of the brothers* (v. 16b). Those following Christ must be willing to do the same thing that Christ did. Nothing less than this is acceptable.

But John is quite aware that rarely would a Christian be called upon to become a martyr in behalf of a fellow believer. But this example of Christ only sets martyrdom at the top of the list of obligation. Most of that obligation will be expressed in other smaller less demanding ways.

Out of John's Jewish heritage came a principle of almsgiving as a major expression of devotion to God. Jesus both affirmed this and modified its expression in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 6:2-4. The Greco-Roman heritage of many of John's initial readers had no such orientation, and clearly no pattern of helping others as devotion to deity. Their exposure to this idea of almsgiving would have come about had they first been God-fearers attending the local Jewish synagogue prior to becoming Christians. As some of the ancient literature suggests, this tradition was one of several distinctives of the Jews that attracted non-Jews to the synagogue. How many of them had this experience is unknown. But belonging to a Christian community that included slaves, peasants, and others at the bottom end of the economic scale meant the existence of much physical needs within the community. Add to that periodic expressions of persecution, especially economic persecution, that meant confiscation of property etc. by the authorities and additional needs would surface inside the communities.

Thus John in v. 17 lays down the principle of Christian generosity to brothers in need: ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ; *And whoever may have a life from this world (= material possessions) and sees his brother having need and refuses his things (possessions) from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

A couple of points of clarification with the Greek terminology. First τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου refers to a life within the framework of material things. Normally this is viewed negatively inside the NT, but here it refers to those who possess an adequate or bountiful material existence. Next, χρεῖαν ἔχοντα defines a Christian brother in a state of substantial physical need. Normally it

The consequences of both distortions has been a phony gospel without the presence of God in either. Along with this has come countless theological battles and condemnations of the opposite side of the issue. To pose the issue as an either / or question is to doom the answer to falseness and complete distortion of the Gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles.

would imply the absence of the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothes. Third, the very interesting κλειση τὰ σπλάγγνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ literally means ‘he shuts off his guts from him. The lower digestive track was the location of feeling and emotion in the ancient world’s view of human existence. To close off one’s bowels was a graphic expression of unwillingness to show compassion for the needs of another.¹²

Not loving a brother then functionally is defined by actions such as sharing one’s material possession with a fellow Christian in need. In certain ways, this may be more challenging than being willing to become a martyr for the sake of a fellow Christian.

The core clause cast in the form of a rhetorical question, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ;, *how does the love of God reside in him?*, raises again the principle of God’s love as a transforming dynamic in the life of the believer. John has raised this perspective several times already. In 2:5 ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ comes to maturity in the believer obeying the commands of God. In 2:15 ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ does not reside in those who love the world. In 3:1 ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ in its greatness is revealed in God’s willingness to call us His children. In 3:16 the ultimate expression of ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ is seen in Christ’s love leading Him to die for us. In the pericopes of chapter four much more detail about ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ will surface.

What ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ means clearly in 3:17 is that love is self-sacrificing commitment to the betterment of others. But also note that it is God’s love activated inside us as believers that pushes us to reach out to brothers in need. Our love falls miserably short of this standard. But God’s love moves us. Thus if we refuse to help our brother, this is a clear signal that God’s love is not present in us.

FIRST JOHN 3:18-22 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

18 Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλ’ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

19 [Καὶ] ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν, καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν, 20 ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα. 21 Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία [ἡμῶν] μὴ καταγινώσκῃ, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν 22 καὶ ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν.

¹²Here is where the translation of this figure of speech with a literal comparative figure of speech would produce the rather offensive expression ‘he refuses to shit on him.’ But this modern idiom would actually be opposite in meaning to what John intended to communicate.

NRSV:

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

LB 1984:

18 Meine Kinder, lasst uns nicht lieben mit Worten noch mit der Zunge, sondern mit der Tat und mit der Wahrheit.

19 Daran erkennen wir, dass wir aus der Wahrheit sind, und können unser Herz vor ihm damit zum Schweigen bringen, 20 dass, wenn uns unser Herz verdammt, Gott größer ist als unser Herz und erkennt alle Dinge. 21 Ihr Lieben, wenn uns unser Herz nicht verdammt, so haben wir Zuversicht zu Gott, 22 und was wir bitten, werden wir von ihm empfangen; denn wir halten seine Gebote und tun, was vor ihm wohlgefällig ist.

COMMENTS

This pericope, especially v. 18, continues the preceding theme of loving a brother but with a new definitional thrust.¹³ Verses 19-22 then picks up the theme of ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας, from Truth, with the emphasis on confidence of κοινωνία with God, Christ, and the apostolic community of believers (1:3).

The initial statement in v. 18 carries John’s point in vv. 13-17 to a logical conclusion but flips the issue over to the positive perspective rather than the consistently negative one in vv. 15-17. It states an axiomatic principle in the form of an double pronged admonition with a negative / positive thrust. The negative side comes first out of its proximity to the negative oriented rhetorical question in v. 17.

What John strongly advocates is that verbal expressions of concern for a needy brother are worthless unless validated by concrete action of helping. The divine love was concretized in action by the Father (3:1) and by the Son (3:16). Thus it must be the same among those called the children of God. This admonition builds

¹³A comparison of the paragraph divisions across numerous printed Greek New Testaments along with several translations reflects the dilemma faced by both the editors of the Greek New Testaments and the Bible translators. Some link it as the last statement in a paragraph containing vv. 13-18, while others place it with the material that follows in a paragraph containing vv. 18-22. Very rarely is it left to stand alone as a separate unit between these other two units of material. Clearly it is a transitional declaration, but the presence of Τεκνία signals a topic shift here in line with the consistent use of the vocative forms throughout the essay.

off the expressions of divine love being implanted into the life of believers in conversion: 3:14b; 4:7b, 8, 19a.

Negatively the expression of love is not to be limited to λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλῶσση, *by word or tongue*. John does not place much value in mere verbal claims as is seen in Ἐὰν εἴπωμεν ὅτι, *if we say that...* (1:6, 8, 10); ὁ λέγων ὅτι, *the one saying that...* (2:4, 6); Ὁ λέγων + infinitive, *the one saying...* (2:9). In each of these examples there is a claim to being Christian that is not backed up by concrete actions of obedience to God. John condemns such as being utterly false claims with no spiritual validity.

In this stance John is in full agreement with both Jesus and the other apostles. Note Jesus' declaration in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:21): Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι· κύριε κύριε, εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, *Not everyone saying to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven; rather the one doing the will of My Father in Heaven*. James led off a discourse on this in 2:14-26 with Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγη τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Such faith is not able to save, is it?* The many statements of Paul are exemplified by Eph. 2:10, αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν, *For His workmanship we are, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God set up ahead of time for us to walk in them*.

The action obligation in 3:18 is defined as ἀλλ' ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, *but in deed and Truth*. A self-sacrificing commitment to our fellow Christians (ἀγαπῶμεν) centers in action, not just empty words of concern. The focus on ἐν ἔργῳ is easy to understand, especially in light of the consistent emphasis on actions in the essay. But what does ἀληθεία mean? If one remembers the biblical definition of Truth set forth by Jesus in Jhn 14:6 and also recorded by John, the meaning is clear: λέγει αὐτῷ [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς· ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ, *Jesus says to him, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life."* To love in Truth clearly means to love in Him who is the very expression of divine Truth. This Johannine definition of ἀλήθεια is found throughout this essay: 1:8; 2:4, 21; 3:18, 19; 4:6; 5:6. Truth is not a static abstraction as the Greeks thought it to be. Biblically, Truth is God and whatever stands within the framework of who God is reflects this Truth. Thus John has already asserted that God's love is action (3:1) and also that of Christ (3:16). For love to be genuine in us, it must become God's love expressing itself through our actions of helping our fellow Christians.

With this fundamental principle of love expressed in

tangible action of helping others, John now can pick up on the theme of ἀλήθεια in verse 19ff.

He begins with a header declaration: [Καὶ] ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν, καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν, ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα *And by this we are knowing that we are of the Truth, and that before Him we reassure our heart: that if our heart condemns us God is greater than our hearts and He knows everything*.

This rather complicated sentence (vv. 19-20) grammatically is not easy to translate into a modern language.¹⁴ The core expression is ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐσμέν, *by this we know that we are of the Truth*, speaks of a way in which a believer can know that he is a child of Truth, i.e., of God. Once again this has echoes back to 3:3-6, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγγώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν, *by this we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments*. In 3:6 the key to confidence in a saving relationship with God is obedience. The antecedent to the demonstrative pronoun τούτῳ is clear: ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν.

But the antecedent of the very same demonstrative pronoun ἐν τούτῳ is more complex and is the ὅτι clause encompassing all of verse twenty: ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα.¹⁵ The challenge here is unraveling

¹⁴These two vv, in which John begins to discuss the result of obedience, can be properly interpreted only if they are taken together. Indeed, the passage 19-24 as a whole may be regarded as a unity, governed by the thought in v 19a ('this is how we can be sure that we belong to the truth'; cf. Malatesta, Interiority, 266). The general sense of vv 19-24 is clear enough, even if the Gr. expression occasionally presents problems. Six points are made: (a) the practice of love is a guarantee of Christian sonship; (b) so is God's knowledge of the believer; (c) a clear conscience enables the Christian to enjoy a confident spiritual relationship with God; (d) faith and love are the summary of God's commands; (e) obedience to those demands is the basis for living in God through Christ; (f) the gift of the Spirit assures the Christian of God's presence in his daily life. Cf. Dodd, 87-88, who (however) regards these points as 'a series of loosely connected statements.' [Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 199.]

¹⁵The prepositional phrase ἐν τούτῳ, via the understood antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun τούτῳ, can look backward to previously stated ideas, which would in Greek be referenced by the neuter gender singular form found here. This provides something a simplified understanding that the basis of γνωσόμεθα in 3:19 rests on the principles about obedience set forth in vv. 13-18, and v. 18 especially.

But the problem with this is that ἐν τούτῳ in First John consistently looks forward rather than backward, as clearly illustrated in 3:6. John is very consistent in how he uses Greek grammar and thus looking backward here would be a clear exception to the nor-

this complex expression. At the heart of the difficulty are three *ὅτι* clause statements: *ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἢ καρδία, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα*, and *ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα*. The first and the third ones are relatively clear in meaning: they express a causal idea and thus are translated as ‘because.’ The second one is the problem; it has another subordinate clause embedded in it, *ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἢ καρδία*, but the *ὅτι* clause doesn’t have its own verbal expression. It just hangs there incomplete.¹⁶ That is unless this *ὅτι* isn’t a subordinate conjunction. The same spelling *ὅτι* (only in lexicons presented as *ὄ τι* to distinguish it from the conjunction) can be the neuter singular form of the indefinite pronoun ‘what ever’ (*ὅστις, ἥτις, ὄ τι*) and is often found in combination with *ἐὰν* to create a stronger indefinite clause expression. The translation of *ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη ἡμῶν ἢ καρδία* would become *whenever our heart might condemn us*. The entire clause can be translated: *because we are of the Truth and we reassure our heart before God when ever our heart condemns us because God is greater than our hearts and knows everything*. This becomes clear and easily understandable.

Thus the foundation for knowing that one belongs to God and then being able to feel confident about it rests on the greatness of God and His full knowledge of things in contrast to the limited knowledge and often uncertain confidence individual believers may possess. In 2:3, that confidence of knowing God and of His knowledge of us was grounded in the believers’ obedience to God. Here another dimension is added to that confidence: the superiority of God and His knowledge to ours. Remember that the figurative use of *καρδία* is not connected to feelings and emotions. Those are connected to *τὰ σπλάγχνα* (guts) in 3:17 makes clear. Instead, the *καρδία* is a symbol of the choosing, deciding part of a person, not the thinking or feeling sides.

The *καρδία* can *καταγινώσκη*, *condemn*, through questioning whether or not we are making the correct choices as a believer. It’s not a question of whether or not we ‘feel like a Christian!’ That’s not in the picture here. Rather, uncertainty is derived from questioning if we have made the right choices in Christian commitment. In the context of First John and the communities being addressed, this had to do with the influence of the false teachers and the alternative gospel they had presented. Notice clearly that John presents this uncertainty in a third class conditional protasis with *ἐὰν*. This means that he treats it as a hypothetical possibility

throughout the essay. Although this is not impossible, it would be highly unlikely here. Additionally when John picks up a previously treated theme he normally does it to advance the idea with new elements, not just repeat already stated ideas.

¹⁶This bothered some later copyists of this text and led them to drop this *ὅτι* in their newly produced text of this passage.

ty, and not as an assumed fact among his readers. The addition of *ὅτι* to create the prepositional phrase *ὅτι ἐὰν* simply boosts the level of the hypothetical to greater heights.

The heart then of confidence in belonging to God comes from God Himself. Unquestionably He is bigger than our hearts and knows everything. He then is the bottom line for assurance of belonging to Him.

The second sentence in vv. 21-22 applies this principle in a couple of ways. First, *Ἀγαπητοί, ἐὰν ἡ καρδία [ἡμῶν] μὴ καταγινώσκη, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν*, Beloved, *if our heart doesn’t condemn us, then we have confidence before God*.¹⁷ The noun *παρρησία* is best defined as confidence with the sense of being willing to undertake activities involving risk or danger. Second, thus with this *παρρησία* we are able to approach God with our requests in prayer: *καὶ ὁ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν*, and *what ever we ask we receive from Him because we are keeping His commandments and are making our requests before Him*. The first part of this is no ‘blank check’ to ask anything we desire from God.¹⁸ Not at all! The limits of our requests are defined by our obedience to His commandments. We ask nothing beyond the boundaries of those commandments!

FIRST JOHN 3:23-24 TEXTS

N-A 28 GNT:

23 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολήν ἡμῖν. 24 καὶ ὁ τηρῶν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ· καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ

¹⁷“Apart from Gal 2:11, the verb *καταγινώσκειν* (‘to condemn’) occurs in the NT only here (vv 20 and 21). Law (Tests, 391) finds three shades of meaning in the word: to ‘accuse,’ to ‘declare guilty’ and to ‘give sentence against’ (= *κατακρίνειν*). In this context, Law claims, the second connotation is predominant. When the conscience (for *ἡ καρδία* see the comment on v 19b) of the Christian accuses, it also brings in a verdict of guilty; but while it ‘condemns’ (*ὅτι ἐὰν καταγινώσκη*), it does not pronounce sentence. This linguistic analysis is, perhaps, oversubtle; but the thought which Law uncovers is undoubtedly accurate, and it emphasizes again the primacy of God’s judgment (so v 20b).” [Stephen S. Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 202–203.]

¹⁸“The thought of God’s immediate response to human prayer is present elsewhere in the NT (cf. Matt 7:7–8 = Luke 11:9; Matt 18:19; Mark 11:24; John 15:7; 16:24; Jas 1:5; note also John 11:41–42, where the phenomenon of answered prayer is reflected in the experience of Jesus himself).” [Stephen S. Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, vol. 51, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 205.]

ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν.

NRSV:

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

LB 1984:

23 Und das ist sein Gebot, dass wir glauben an den Namen seines Sohnes Jesus Christus und lieben uns untereinander, wie er uns das Gebot gegeben hat. 24 Und wer seine Gebote hält, der bleibt in Gott und Gott in ihm. Und daran erkennen wir, dass er in uns bleibt: an dem Geist, den er uns gegeben hat.

COMMENTS

This is the final pericope in chapter three in which John returns to pick up some of the language of the earlier discussion in 2:3-11, as well as play off the mentioning of τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ, *His commandments*, in 3:22. And in the usual pattern of this essay, when he resumes an earlier theme he does so in order to add new insights. The grammar pattern is the same as found elsewhere. Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν ἡμῖν, *And this is His commandment: we must believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and must love one another, just as He gave us commandment*. Note that although in 3:22 John mentions obeying τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ, *His commandments* (plural), here he mentions two commandments as though they were one: ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ / ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν.

What one must recognize in the NT is that a ἐντολὴ is not a Law, especially in the ancient Jewish definition of Torah. Instead, it is a divine mandate placed upon the followers of Christ that will serve as the criteria for final judgment of believers at the end of time. In the Phariseism of Jesus' day, the νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ was viewed as Law which Covenant Israel was required to keep by its own abilities and self discipline. Jesus made this difference very clear at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5:17-20, and then proceeded to amplify the difference in the rest of the Sermon.

The ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ properly understood set forth the idealized standard that is derived from God's own perfect character and behavior (cf. Mt. 5:48). Believers must aspire to these. But not by imitating them. Instead it must be by allowing God to reproduce Himself in their life. I love others as a Christian, but it is actually God's love flowing through me to others, as Paul makes clear

in Gal. 2:20. My obligation is to totally open up my life to God so that He can do this in me.

The language here echoes ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία, *this is the message*, in 1:5; καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπαγγελία, *and this is the promise*, in 2:25; αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία, *this is the message*, in 3:11; Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ, *and this is His commandment*, in 3:23. It becomes a frequently used pattern to introduce something considered particularly important.

The substantival use of the ἵνα clause is John's favorite vehicle for defining the content of various ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ: 3:1, 11, 23; 4:17; 5:3, 16. In ancient Greek it was one of the many ways to express obligation or mandate. This expression contains two obligations: ἵνα (1) πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ (2) ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, *that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and that we be loving one another*.

This is the first mentioning of believing in Christ in the essay, but not the last: 5:1, 5. This stands against the backdrop of 98 of 241 NT uses of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John, where believing in Christ is a central theme. In this essay more common as a synonymous idea is coming to know Christ: 2:3, 4; 13, 14, 18; 3:1, 16, 4:2, 7, 8; 5:20. To a lesser degree is loving God / Christ: 4:20, 21; 5:2. The verb ἀγαπάω is more often emphasizing Christians loving one another: 2:10; 3:10, 14, 18, 23; 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21. Very close to believing in Christ also is confessing Christ: 2:23; 4:2-3, 15.

All three verbal concepts have at their core the common idea of commitment to another. Thus John can use these pretty much interchangeably throughout the essay.

Also important is to note the object of πιστεύω in this essay: ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός, ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται, *that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God* (5:1) and ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, *that Jesus is the Son of God* (5:5). Thus the command of God here in 3:23 is commitment to Jesus as the Son of God, as the One born of God, and as the Son of God. All of that is bundled in the object express here as τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *in the name of His Son Jesus Christ*. This expression comes within the framework of the ancient Jewish equating of name with the person having it. Unlike the English meaning that believing in the name of someone means believing the reputation of someone.

Not to be overlooked because it is completely washed out in translation is the aorist subjunctive verb πιστεύσωμεν which highlights a conversion moment of faith commitment to Christ, unlike the present subjunctive form πιστεύωμεν, which would stress ongoing obligation. The combination of πιστεύσωμεν and

ἀγαπῶμεν here highlights another emphasis of the Greek very difficult to preserve in translation. The two commands together stress an initial faith commitment to Christ that leads to an ongoing love commitment to fellow Christians. Out of surrender to Christ comes love for other Christians.

The theme of loving one another is very common: 2:10; 3:10, 14, 18, 23; 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21. But John packages faith commitment and love commitment together here in a new way that adds further insights into what it means to being committed to the welfare of other believers.

The comparative clause καθὼς ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν ἡμῖν. *just as He gave us commandment*, re-enforces the opening statement αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ by alluding to Christ having taught this to His disciples during His earthly ministry.

John then picks up another frequent emphasis on keeping His commandments: 2:3,4,5; 3:22, 24; 5:3. The object τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ, His commandments, links it back to v. 23. The similar emphasis in v. 22, τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ τηροῦμεν καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ποιοῦμεν, *we keep His commandments and are doing what is pleasing before Him*, defines keeping commandments as doing what pleases God.

The very rich concept of μένω found often in First John is linked to keeping God's commandments. Note for μένω: ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, *to abide in Him* (2:6); ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν μένει, *the Word of God abides in you* (2:14); τὸ χρῖσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, μένει ἐν ὑμῖν, *the grace gift which you received at the beginning abides in you* (2:27); μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ, *abide in Him* (2:27, 28); πᾶς ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μένων οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει, *everyone abiding in Him is not sinning* (3:6); σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, *His seed abides in him* (3:9); ζῶην αἰώνιον ἐν αὐτῷ μένουσαν, *eternal life abiding in him* (3:15); ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ, *God's love abiding in him* (3:17); ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν, *in Him we are abiding and He in us* (4:13); ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ θεῷ, *God abides in him and he in God* (4:15); ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, *the one abiding in love abides in God and God abides in him* (4:16). The concept of 'residing in God' and God in us is profoundly rich and stands as an important definition of κοινωμία with God and with Christ in the Prologue (1:3). It is linked to loving God, confessing Christ, obeying God's commandments; God's gift of grace at conversion etc.

Here in 3:24 the link is to keeping His commandments as a new aspect of residing in God. But this is reciprocal: ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν αὐτῷ, *in Him he abides and He abides in him*. This is a beautiful picture of κοινωμία that John put on the table in 1:3.

And it is this mutual relationship of κοινωμία defined

as μένων, abiding, that leads to the next point of John at the very end of the sentence: καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι μένει ἐν ἡμῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος οὗ ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν, *and by this we know that He is abiding in us: Out of His Spirit He has given us*. The false teachers claimed God's presence through their possession of γνῶσις given to them in conversion. The confirmation of that was speaking in tongues. John dismisses this as nonsense and instead argues that knowing that God is present in us is closely linked to the presence of His Spirit, not to enable us to speak some imaginary heavenly language, but to lead us to obey His commandments in daily living.

The full implications of this will now be put on the table in chapter four. This last statement of v. 24 sets the stage for the emphasis of chapter four, especially 4:1-6.

CONCLUSION

What can we say about chapter three? We have observed John continuing to develop the foundational ideas of who Christ is and nature of κοινωμία in the Prologue (1:1-4). But the way of doing this is not in logical progression with systematic development of each theme. John is a first century Jewish writer most of all, and he thinks within the framework of the OT prophets who are responsible for so much of the Hebrew Bible. Off of these two central themes of Christ and κοινωμία in the Prologue he picks up first one and then another and expands them with new insights and implications.

But he doesn't do his expansion of each theme all at once. Rather, it comes in small chunks and pieces. Plus the deeper he goes into these two topics the more often he weaves them together with inter connecting terminology and conceptualizations. He is step by step painting his kaleidoscopic portrait of Christ and κοινωμία. The full picture won't be clear until all is completed.

This is challenging for us as modern western readers. But it is a presentation structured more on how everyday like works than on how our brain works. We experience daily life not as a well structured, highly organized set of ideas. No, not at all! Indeed, life comes at us in bits and pieces of thematic ideas. Usually they are inner connected but it takes reflection to see all of this. It is not readily apparent.

The 'chunks and pieces' of chapter three are children of God; what sinning means; avoiding being deceived; loving one another as the message of the Gospel; being hated by the world; what the commandments of God are. All of these have connecting points in chapters one and two. But the new presentation in chapter three adds new perspectives to each one.

Fascinating reading!