

1 John 3:15-4:21

INTRODUCTION

As Pastor Charley so amply showed in his study last week on the first part of chapter 3, John is concerned with showing what a genuine relationship with God looks like; how it will play out in our daily lives.

In vs. 1-9, John shows that if we've been born again, then we will live a *new life!*

Just as being the physical progeny of our parents means we have certain *physical traits*, being the *spiritual children* of God means we will bear His spiritual traits.

Because God is righteous, John says, those born of Him will also be righteous.

And that righteousness will work itself out in daily, practical acts of righteousness.

Then in v. 10, John turns a corner and shows how the daily practical righteousness of the child of God isn't a dry kind of perfunctory observance of religious rituals and rules.

Genuine righteousness, God's kind of righteousness, is demonstrated in love!

And so John says in v. 14 –

CHAPTER 3

14We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

The word for “know” here is that word which refers to an experiential knowledge – one gained from intimate personal experience.

John says we know that we know because it has been our personal testimony that we have eternal life – how?

Because we love the brethren – we have a deep affection and loyalty for other believers.

A lack of this kind of love is evidence that a person has NOT been born again and does NOT possess eternal life.

It's critical we don't miss how John links *practical righteousness* to *practical love* in this passage.

We must never separate these two things; righteousness & love.

They go together.

Righteousness that lacks love is merely cold & stiff *moralism*.

Love without righteousness turns into a weak and sappy *sentimentalism*.

But righteousness that's empowered and motivated by love for God and man is *godly virtue*.

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

This seems incredibly harsh and an overstatement on John's part until we remember something Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-22 -

21“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ 22But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

Where does Jesus say the motive for murder begins? In the heart, with anger and hatred!

John draws a sharp contrast between verses 14 & 15.

He is saying that those who possess eternal life are marked by love.

The alternative to love is hate – there's no middle ground!

Just as there's not middle ground between being born again and being lost; between possessing eternal life or being spiritually dead.

There isn't some *gray zone* between spiritual death and life, between love and hate; each of us are in one place or the other.

There may be various shades of hatred, just as there are different intensities and expressions of love – but John's point is that love for other believers is the determining factor on whether or not a person is truly born again!

We are not saved by love – we're saved by faith in Christ, but that faith will reveal itself in love.

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

He goes on to further qualify and describe what genuine love looks like.

We see the supreme manifestation of love in the Cross.

Because we believe Jesus died for us and that we died with Him at the Cross, the eternal life we now possess is HIS life, motivated by His love, and that means we will live in the shadow of the cross.

Jesus has given us the pattern of love we're to follow – it's *sacrificial*, even to the point of laying down our lives for others.

Now, John is not calling us to some kind of dramatic martyrdom!

He's not saying we should all go out on Eastman here and when a truck comes by, shout out, "Look, I love you," and then throw ourselves in front of the truck.

The sacrifice he means is the less dramatic martyrdom of daily dying to self and putting others first.

It means deferring to others, of listening to them, of being sensitive to other's feelings and being careful not to harm or hurt them.

Even more, it means to follow hard after Christ so that His character can be formed in us and we can thus be a blessing to others.

I don't want to merely love with my own love – that's a weak and paltry thing.

I don't want to be a blessing to others with my own virtues.

I want Christ to be formed in me – I want my hands to be His hands, His feet to be His feet, His words to be spoken through my mouth, my eyes to look on others with His vision.

So I can best love others by pursuing Christ with every ounce of strength I have.

I want His life, offered at Calvary, and risen again to flow through me and out to others.

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

John shows that the sacrificial love he mentioned in v. 16 doesn't mean to literally die.

It means to use your resources of time, talent and treasure to serve others.

John had known many people who held a pious exterior and had the god-talk down pat, but when it came to acts of practical love – they were cold and hard-hearted misers.

God's love, the kind of love that fills the heart of those who possess eternal life reaches out to help when it sees need.

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

He just gives a simple reminder here to live it out!

The love has got to flow.

The CC senior pastors have a email bulletin board that we post messages to daily.

There are about 300 guys on it and we often get a question from someone who has a need for some insight or counsel.

One pastor of a smaller fellowship recently expressed his concern over a letter he'd received from a lady who had left after attending for several weeks.

She said that while she'd found it difficult to "connect" and so she had left to see if she could find a place she could make that connection.

This pastor asked what other CC's do to welcome people and help them make a connection. Several of the guys wrote back the different things they do – but one guys response seemed crucial and right on.

He said that he'd learned something from Pastor Chuck years ago, that if you have to strive to gain, then you will have to strive to maintain.

For that reasons, they didn't have any elaborate program or assimilation ministry.

Rather, they sought to live out what genuine Christian fellowship really is.

In other words, they sought to DO what John describes here!

He said the way that works is people look for needs all around them in their church and then without having to be asked or recruited, they just reach out.

There are people in the parking lot who just stand around and as people arrive, they greet them and help them find a parking place.

Others stand by the doors and pass out bulletins and show visitors around the facility.

After service, people turn to one another and ask if they need prayer.

Others make it their ministry to move to look around for those who are not being talked to, and then they move to them and engage them in conversation.

In a church like that, you don't need a program because people are simply doing what they are – Christians, people of love!

If you've come here, and you've seen a need that doesn't seem to be being met, and you've been disappointed, let me suggest that being a mature believer means that YOU step out in faith and start loving and serving in that area.

If you've not connected, and have sat after service and waited for someone to come and talk to you – let me suggest that you look around for another person who's alone, or another couple who are by themselves, and you go to them.

Crash some group that's chatting it up – step right in and say, "Here I am!"

And if you're a group that gets crashed – you KNOW what you're to do; you open that circle and extend the hand of love and fellowship.

¹⁹And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Do you remember learning how to ride a bike?

I like to study a thing and go over the procedure before actually trying something.

I read 4 books on backpacking before I ever went on a hike.

And when I taught my children how to ride a bike, I talked through the process before they got on the seat. [Go through it]

Then I put them on the seat, placed their feet on the pedals and walked behind them, holding the seat, while they learned how to coordinate their little legs.

As they got pedaling down, then we worked on balance.

Each time we went down the street, it was a little faster, until the time came when I let go of the seat and they rode away on their own.

The more they rode by themselves, the more assured they were of their ability to ride, until they were popping wheelies and doing jumps off the curb.

John is saying here that you and I can KNOW that we are in the Truth by the fact that our dead and hateful hearts have been made alive in loving the brethren.

Our hearts can become confident and assured by this daily expression of love.

How absolutely true this is!

Most of us know the experience of reaching out in love to another and being far more blessed by the sense of God's good pleasure than the blessing we bestowed on another.

Who gets more out of a missions trip – the people you go to minister to or you?

I'm sure the people that we go to share with are blessed – but there is an overwhelming sense of God's peace and pleasure that floods the heart of the one who goes!
You see, you cannot out-give God!
When we love someone in a practical way, what we are doing is giving out some of the love that God has placed within us.
And what that does is make room for another deposit of His love – a fresh anointing of His Spirit of love.
It's been my experience over the years to minister and give out and to do so to the point of being spent, downright exhausted at times.
But there's a joy and sense of peace and God's pleasure that is profound.
God will not be out-given; He will be a debtor to no one.
The love you give, you will see given back to you in even greater measure.

Vs. 19-21 deal with the confidence practical love produces.

But what about the times when we *lack* confidence; when we feel condemned?
Notice John didn't use the term "conviction;" he said, "What about when our hearts condemn us?"
John knows that there are certain issues in the Christian life that some people constantly battle with.
They're people who are overly critical, not of others, but themselves.
They feel that they never do enough.
For instance, a sure way to bring guilt on just about anyone is to ask, "Do you pray *enough*?"
Most people would answer in the negative. Who prays *enough*? What is *enough* when it comes to prayer?
The same can be said for this issue of practical love – right?
There's an infinite amount of need around us.
And there are those who, no matter what they do, feel it isn't enough.
So their hearts condemn them.
John is saying – listen, God is greater than your sense of condemnation and knows that your desire and motivation is to love.
Even Jesus did not minister to EVERY need.
Not every person in Israel was healed.
Rather, He went through each day, sensitive to the Father's will and ministered to those needs the Spirit drew Him to.
That's what you and I need to do.

²²And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

V. 22 is an *expression of the confidence* John spoke about in v. 21.

If we are obediently loving and serving God, then the requests we make of God are requests that are in line with His will – and He will perform them.
If my daughter is consistently obeying Lynn & I and showing a tender kind of loyalty and devotion to us as her parents, she's never going to come to us with a request for something that's contrary to what we want for her.
Rather, her requests will be an expression *OF* her obedience and devotion.
The children of God will obey Him – and the chief command they will observe is abiding faith in Jesus Christ that manifests itself in daily, practical love for other children of God. [John 15:17]

²⁴Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Jesus had made this abundantly clear in John 14:23 -

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

From all that John has said in chapter 3, it’s clear that the early church had one of the same problems we have today in the church; people who claim to be believers but who do not *walk the talk*.

They have the *words* but not the *deeds* – as John says in v. 18.

So he wants to make it abundantly clear that those who are truly abiding in Christ obey God.

At the end of v. 24, John adds one more evidence of eternal life – the possession of the Holy Spirit.

It’s natural that John would mention this at this point because it’s part of the teaching of Jesus this whole section has been drawn from.

You see, the real backdrop of all that John has said here is John 14-16, which records Jesus’s words during the Last Supper when He talked to the disciples, and told them the relationship between abiding in Him, obeying Him, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who would come to indwell them after His departure.

Really, all of Chapter 3 is a loose paraphrase and application of John 14-16.

CHAPTER 4

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

As a concerned spiritual father, John now issues a word of warning to his children.

They have to be on guard because not everyone who professes to speak for God is in fact sent from Him.

False prophets, teachers, and ministers are numerous so we must put what we hear to the test.

What test should we apply? What criteria do you suppose John intends us to use?

The Word of God codified in the pages of the OT and the authoritative teaching of the Apostles who had been commissioned by Christ to lay down the foundation of the Christian Faith!

The Apostle Paul refers to this authoritative body of doctrine in Ephesians 2:20 as the *foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone*.

That’s the test, the criteria we use in testing the spirit behind what we hear.

Next John gives a specific test to apply to the unique situation and error that was beginning to surface in that day – the problem of docetism.

As we covered a couple weeks ago – docetism was an early precursor to Gnosticism which was a major challenge to the church in the 3rd and 4th Century.

Docetism was a mish-mash of various Middle Eastern religions.

It combined a measure of Greek philosophy, with Christian thought and terminology.

It appears that some Greek teachers of morality found in the story of Jesus a hero.

His moral excellence captivated them, but they couldn’t swallow the crucifixion because it was so scandalous and shocking.

So they said that Jesus was just a really good man, upon whom a Spirit Being named *Christ* descended at his baptism.

Jesus was not Christ – he was just a man, who was the earthly vehicle for Christ, right up to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Then just prior to the arrest, the Christ Spirit departed from Jesus so that what hung on the cross was merely a broken man.

The docetists considered Jesus Christ to be just an example of moral perfection – that’s all.

They taught that any man who had proven himself to be of upstanding moral character, could, like Jesus, have the Christ Spirit descend on him.

John nukes that whole idea here because he sees that it guts the heart of the gospel.

²By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has

come in the flesh is of God,³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

John is *emphatic* – Jesus and Christ are one and the same.

Jesus wasn't the only one to come in the flesh – So was Christ!

If you deny this – you're not from God!

Now, if you have a more modern translation, note something here.

The King James & New KJ Bible words it thus –

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.

But those versions render v.3 like this –

NIV

³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

New Living Translation

³If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God.

International Standard Version

³But every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

NASB

³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

Do you see the difference? It's small but significant.

And there's a reason why all the modern Bibles drop the second use of the word Christ and don't refer to Him as coming in the flesh.

It's because modern translations are drawn from the Alexandrian textual tradition.

Meaning they're influenced by ancient manuscripts that were discovered in Northern Africa long after the King James Bible was developed.

It was thought that the more ancient the manuscript, the more accurate and reliable it would be.

On the surface that's true – but what historians later discovered was that the region of North Africa was heavily dominated by Gnosticism and the texts and manuscripts from that regions all show a propensity to alter the text to fit with Gnostic ideas.

And the Gnostics picked up the idea from the docetists that Jesus and Christ were two different entities and that the Christ, as a spirit being, could not have had flesh!

By doing some fancy semantic arguing, the Gnostics felt they could affirm what John affirms in v. 2, but they couldn't agree with what he says in v. 3, because John was speaking specifically about what they denied, so they dropped the reference to Christ coming in the flesh.

By following the Alexandrian Textual tradition as opposed to the Textus Receptus which is the basis of the King James Bible, modern translations actually play into the hands of an ancient fraud.

What's all the more worrisome is what John goes on to say about this in v. 3 –

And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

John sees in the denial of the humanity of Jesus Christ a sinister conspiracy that will culminate in the deception of the last days and will focus in the career of the antichrist.

He could see that the stage was already being set in his own day.

Indeed, it took the advent of the real Christ before the platform of the antichrist could be erected.

A truth must be affirmed before it can be denied.

And as soon as the TRUTH became embodied in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the father of lies set about to dismantle it.

It's not hard to see how the ancient heresy of docetism and Gnosticism is being revived in our age through the New Age movement.

Indeed, this is the very thing they teach – that the Christ–spirit, or *consciousness*, as they call it is waiting to descend on the person who has proven him or herself to be of sufficient worthiness.

One group says it has already come and is living in London in the form of man named Lord Maitriya.

How convenient it will be for the Antichrist to step forward and say that he is the modern embodiment of the Christ-consciousness – and then to give supposed evidence of that by performing the miraculous in the sight of the world, just as Paul says he will in 2 Thess. 2.

We must heed John's warning and test the spirits.

Not everyone who says the name "Jesus" is of the true Jesus and we must be on guard.

⁴You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John lumps humanity into one of two camps; those who belong to God and those who are of the world.

His point is that just as the family of God lives in His Kingdom and by His rules, the people of the world live in the world-system and by its rules.

We have an agenda; *they* have an agenda.

Our agenda is to see Christ ruling over the kingdoms of this world, while their goal is to throw off His rule and establish man as sovereign over the earth, independent of God.

We live by God's wisdom and grace, they live by man's wisdom and the law of the jungle.

Now John returns to a subject he's already dealt with - the imperative of love.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The truths John propounds here are infinitely profound in their simplicity.

This is a well we could never exhaust.

Let me put it in the simplest terms I can muster.

God is love! Which means if we've been born of Him by the Spirit, then love will become a central part of our lives.

To know God is to love – and where there is no love, there is no knowledge of God.

When we say that God is love, it's important that we do not make the error so popular today of equating God with love so that we could turn it around and say Love is God.

That is not at all what John is saying here.

He does not EQUATE God and love; he is saying that love is so much a part of God's nature that all true love finds its root and origin in Him.

He is the source, the fountain of love.

So, wherever you see an expression of genuine love, it's an expression of the presence of God.

Where love is lacking, it's evidence of the absence of the experience of nature of God.

⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

Now John gets down to the nitty-gritty of defining love.

You want to know what love looks like? Look at the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God's love for us was demonstrated most perfectly in the incarnation.

¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Love does not begin with us, it begins with God!

And His love, which comes first, enables and empowers our love.

If not for God's love, we would never be able to love.

For a better understanding of what John means by Jesus being the propitiation for our sins, get the tape on chapter 2 where we went into depth on what that words means.

¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Again, being God's people means being a people who are like Him.

¹²No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

How do we know if a person has a genuine relationship with God?

You can't see God because He is a Spirit. So what's the evidence of being in fellowship with Him.

John makes it clear here – love for one another.

It's like the tube on the outside of a large coffee-maker.

The coffee pot is metal and far too heavy to lift and place on the floor so you can open the top and see what's inside.

So the manufacturer puts a small glass tube on the outside to show the level of coffee on the inside.

John is saying that our love for one another is like that tube.

Our direct love for God is unseen, but our love for one another is the register or gauge that reveals the fervor and intensity of our love for God.

If I tell you I love God with all my heart but you see no evidence of love for my brothers and sisters in Christ, then you can rightly say to me – “Your cup is empty!”

¹³By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

John sort of summarizes several things he's been saying with vs. 13-16.

And by doing so in this compact setting, he's moving us to realize his main theme of relationship with God is all about our abiding in Him, obeying Him and loving one another.

¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Remember what he'd said about confidence in 3:19-21? He returns to that here.

God is in heaven – we are here on Earth.

As He is in heaven – we are to be expressions of that here.

As we are, then we have confidence that when the time for the *judgment of rewards* comes, we'll be ready and eager.

I had the chance to teach US history to juniors in high school a couple years ago.

Prior to a test, I always told them what general topics and chapters they needed to study.

As I lectured, I would tell them to take special note of certain things because there was a good chance they would see it on a quiz or test.

You and I will face a kind of final exam – our lives will be tested, not for a judgment of punishment – Jesus already faced that for us at the Cross.

No – the judgment we will face is for rewards.

And here John tells us what to study to be ready to face the test – LOVE!

I remember actually looking forward to certain tests in school.

I knew the material and saw the test as an opportunity, not just to get an “A” but to score a perfect 100%.

This is the kind of confidence we can have as we face standing before our Master to give account as stewards – not with fear, but with bold confidence because we’ve been motivated and moved by the Love of God.

18There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19We love Him because He first loved us.

The fear that John is *primarily* referring to here is the fear of facing the Master and giving account. V. 18 goes with v. 17.

But we can extend it to freedom from *all fear* once we understand the pervasive nature of God’s all consuming love.

Let me return to the bicycle illustration.

Do you remember when you were first learning how to ride a bike.

Chances are, before every getting on the bike, you were a bit scared.

The first few trips down the street were filled with anxiety.

But the more you did it, the easier it got till fear was a thing of the past.

Who here has been sky-diving?

Those of you who haven’t – does the prospect of jumping out of an airplane spook you?

But you know what would happen – after the first jump, the second would be easier, the third even easier, until at the 50th jump, it would be just a thrill!

Experience leads us to greater and greater levels of freedom from fear and inexperience.

Because I’ve been backpacking for a week at a time in the Sierras, a stroll through the park is nothing to me.

That’s precisely the perspective John is giving us here between vs. 17 & 18.

If we can have bold confidence when thinking about the greatest of all moments – standing before God, how can any challenge we face here on Earth shake or trouble us?

If we do not fear standing on the Mountain of God’s holiness, where is there possibly any room for fear when it comes to the stroll through the park of living in this world?

20If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

John spells it out in such simple terms we do not even need to explain them.

The child of God will love the people of God – it’s that simple.

So, if there is no love for other believers, what does that say?