

FOUR FACTS ABOUT A BELIEVER

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

This epistle of John was written when he was an aged apostle of 90 to 100 years old. He wrote to younger Christians whom he called “little children.” He was concerned primarily for the spiritual development of these Christians. He was concerned primarily for the spiritual development of these Christians. Some examples of this concern are found in the following verses that he penned: “That your joy may be full.” “That you sin not;” and “That you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn 1:4; 2:1; 5:13). Because of this concern, some Christians call this epistle a pastoral letter. Every concerned pastor desires to see the Christian qualities of joy, holiness and assurance of salvation in each of his members as expressed in the above verses.

Furthermore, John was concerned over the safety of his “little ones.” Certain false teachers had arisen within the churches and were spreading their insidious false doctrine. John wanted to expose these false teachers. This purpose is expressed as follows: “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you” (2:26); and “Little children, let no man deceive you” (3:7). John called these teachers false prophets, deceivers, and antichrists. Their doctrinal deviation was related to the person of Christ or to a wrong concept of sin. To combat their heresy John gave at least four features of a true believer in this chapter. This list of characteristics was given to assure the hearts of true believers as well as expose the lives of false teachers. False teachers had caused much confusion among Christians so that believers needed assurance of salvation and instruction in spiritual growth.

I. True Believers are Children of God – 3:1-3

A. Their Present Condition – 3:1

3:1 – “Called the sons of God” – As John began this passage of Scripture, he was immediately caught up in the wonder of God’s love, that God should call true believers His children. The phrase, “sons of God,” actually should be translated “children of God” or “born ones of God.” “Children” is not the same word that Paul so often translated as “sons.” Paul’s word refers to a believer’s position in Christ, i.e., his adoption; but the word in this passage refers to a believer’s birth through Christ, i.e., his regeneration. The word used here relates to the truth that Jesus Christ was teaching Nicodemus in John three when He told him that he needed to be “born again.” Those that have experienced God’s love in the new birth are **called** His children, but more than that, they **are** His children. In the Greek text there are two words that follow the phrase, “called the sons of God,” which says, “and we are.” True believers are not only called the children of God, but they are the children of God.

“The world knows us not” – The word for “know” in this verse is different from the one used in the next verse (3:2). In this verse it means “experiential, observable” knowledge. In the next verse it means “absolute, intuitive” knowledge. The world has not experienced what believers have experienced; therefore, they do not have the basis for understanding true believers. The reason for this ignorance is their refusal to accept Christ as their Savior and experience the new birth that He provides. Since they “knew Him not” by personal experience, they cannot know true believers by personal experience.

B. Their Future Condition – 3:2

3:2 – John reiterated that believers **are** the children of God and then he went on to tell of their future condition. John confessed that he did not know exactly what their future condition would be, but one thing for certain they would be like Christ. At the rapture they would be glorified together with Him (Romans 8:17; Colossians 3:4). The future order of events is (1) Christ will appear; (2) believers will see Christ as He is (glorified); and (3) they will be like Him (also glorified).

C. Their Present Hope – 3:3

3:3 – John’s reason for writing about the return of Christ was not merely theological, but also ethical. He taught the practical result of the doctrine of the return of the Lord. (1) “Hope: a confident expectation based on the promise of Christ (Heb. 10:23). (2) “Pure”: the removal of moral stains which mar his life so that he will be completely pure like Christ when He appears. This hope will cause him to begin to purify himself in his present life so he can be more like Christ now.

II. True Believers Have the Nature of God – 3:4-10

A. Their Old Nature is Lawless – 3:4

3:4 – “Commits sin” – This does not refer to a one-time act of sin. The present tense of the Greek verb indicates a continual act of sinning. It is the old nature that we received from Adam that causes all people to sin.

“Transgression of the law” – This phrase would be clearer if translated “lawlessness.” The focal point of attention is not on an act of sin, which is suggested by “transgression of the law,” but is on the spirit involved in sinning which is “lawlessness.” It is a spirit of rebellion; it is lawless. Rebellion is when every man does that which is right in his own eyes and disregards the law of God (cf. Jud. 21:25).

B. The New Nature is Holiness – 3:5-8

3:5 – “And you know” — It is a knowledge that is intuitive. One does not have to experience it to know it. The reason for Christ’s coming is obvious

“He was manifested to take away our sins” – This is the first purpose for Christ to come into the world. Christ obeyed His Father and came to carry away the believer’s sins, yes, and even the sins of the whole world (cf. Jn 1:29; 1 Jn 2:2). The effect of His work is able to purge the whole world of sin. However, only sinners that receive Him as their Savior receive the benefit of His work. The sins of those who reject Him have no benefit from His work.

“In Him is no sin” – Since Jesus had no sin of His own, He alone could take the sins of all men and pay their penalty for them. Since our sins offended the holiness of God, the sacrifice for our sins need to be as holy as He is. Animal sacrifices were temporary, because they were not as holy as He is. Only Jesus Christ could be as holy as God, because He is God. He is sinless Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29; Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Jn 5:20).

3:6 – “Whoever abides in Him sins not” – Some believers think that a Christian can attain sinless perfection, but John says that a person that makes such a claim has deceived himself and is not truthful (1 Jn 1:8). Others look at sin as a mere mistake, an error in judgment, or a white lie, so he has not really sinned, but John says such a person calls God a liar and His word is not in him (1 Jn 1:10). A popular way to deal with this passage is to say that a believer does not practice sin. They note that “sins ” is in the present tense in the Greek, which indicates continuous action. This is true, but they go on to say a believer will not practice sin. He may sin occasionally, but he will not sin continuously. The

Greek text does not have the word for practice and to use the word is misleading for the following reasons. John gives instruction later in this letter on how to help a believing brother that is sinning (1 Jn 5:16) The word for “sin” is a present tense participle. Is he practicing sin? If so, how can he be called a believer, if believers do not practice sin? Furthermore, there are many believers that need help because they are practicing sin by refusing to obey Christ’s command to witness (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; cf Acts 8:1, 4). They are practicing sin by not asking, seeking and knocking repeatedly (Mt 7:7). These are just two examples of commands given by Jesus in which Christians habitually sin. So we must seek another way to interpret this verse.

Notice the condition for not sinning; it is to abide in Christ. The Christian has two natures which Paul called the old man and the new man (Eph 4:22, 24). He received the old man (sinful nature) from Adam when he was conceived in his mother’s womb (Ps 51; Rom 5:18-19). He received the new man (divine nature) from the Holy Spirit when he was born again by receiving Christ as His Savior (Jn 3:5-7; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4). In order for a Christian to abide in Christ, he must crucify the old man by dying to sin with Christ and embrace the new man by letting Christ live through Him. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). A believer must crucify his old nature every time he is tempted to sin. Then God can show him the way to escape (1 Cor 10:13). A Christian does not sin when he abides in Christ.

“Neither known Him” – If a person cannot get victory over sin after he has been taught to crucify the old man and live in the new man, he does not know Christ. “Known” is in the perfect tense, which means he has not known Christ in the past so he does not know Him in the present. He is still ruled by the old man that will sin again and again, but the believer knows Christ and can be ruled by the new man that he has received at salvation. When he is ruled by the new nature, he does not sin, not even once, because he is ruled by God’s sinless nature. If he sins, he has yielded to his old nature that is lawless.

3:7 – “He that does righteousness is righteous” – A believer does righteousness because he has a righteous nature that he received when he accepted Christ as his Savior. The fruit of righteousness comes from his divine nature.

“He is righteous” – Christ is righteous and it is His nature that is given to a believer when he receives Him as his Savior. He can be holy because He is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). His righteous nature in him gives him the ability to do righteous works.

3:8 – “Commits sin is of the devil” – The devil is the one who brought sin into God’s creation through his rebellion in Heaven. Then he corrupted the very fountainhead of the human race by getting Adam and Eve to sin. He is the origin of sin.

“Destroy the works of the devil” – This is the second purpose for Christ to come into the world (cf. 3:5 for the first purpose). Christ came to “destroy” the devil’s works, to undo them, to loose the power they have on the lives of men. Christ breaks the chains of sin and sets sinners free so they can live holy lives.

C. The Nature of a Believer is Sinless – 3:9-10

3:9 – “Whoever is born of God” – This is the person who has received Jesus Christ as his Savior (Jn 1:12-13). He has been born of God by the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:6-7).

“Does not commit sin” – The believer is not sinning (present tense). This verse is not teaching a person must reach a state of sinless perfection to be saved (this is contrary to the teaching of 1 Jn 1:9-2:2), but it is teaching that a believer who abides in Christ is not sinning. How can this be possible? Read on.

“His seed remains in him” – This “seed” refers to the nature of Christ in the believer. His divine nature in him makes it impossible for him to sin while he is abiding in Him.

3:10 - This verse brings the discussion of sin to a conclusion. The children of God do not sin (3:9), but the children of the devil do. The children of God have a divine nature that does not sin, which enables them not to sin. If a person does not have victory over sin in his life, he may be saved but not trained to yield to his divine nature, or else he is not saved and does not have a divine nature to give him victory over sin. The lack of victory in a person’s life is serious; he may not be in the family of God.

“Loves not his brother” – A child of the devil is marked in two ways: he does not live a life that is righteous by God’s standards, nor does he love his brother. This is a transitional thought that introduces the need for a child of God to love his brother, the next subject of John. Love is one of the highest expressions of righteousness in a believer’s life (Jn 13:34-35).

III. True Believers Love One Another – 3:11-18

A. The Command to Love – 3:11

3:11 – “The message” – This word is only used here and in 1:5 in the New Testament. It is used to summarize a truth of great importance. In 1:5 the great truth relates to the nature of God – He is light. In 3:11 the great truth is a command for Christians to love one another.

“From the beginning” – From the inception of their Christian life, the believers should be taught this important command to love one another (cf 2:7).

B. The Contrasts to Love – 3:12-13

3:12 – “Cain” – He is the first contrasting illustration of love – he killed his brother. Literally, he cut the throat of his brother, Abel (Gen 4). This murderous event took place because Cain’s deeds were evil. The Genesis account shows that Cain had no grounds for complaint about God’s rejection of his sacrifice (Gen 4:6). If he had done well, God would have accepted his sacrifice as He did Abel’s (Gen 4:7). Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel’s sacrifice was “by faith” showing that God had given instructions for a proper sacrifice. Jude 10-11 indicates that Cain was willfully disobedient. Abel, on the other hand, was submissively obedient to God, and thus he was righteous. The only thing he did to provoke such hostility from Cain was his obedience to God.

3:13 – “The world” – The second illustration of contrast to love is the world’s hatred of believers. This hatred springs from the devil whose nature is in them, just as it was in Cain. Christians are not to be surprised if the world hates them (Jn 15:18, 19, 25; 16:1ff; 17:14; 1 Pet 4:12ff). It should be expected because of their relationship to Christ (3:1b).

C. The Confidence of Love – 3:14-15

3:14 – “We know” – An emphatic statement of intuitive knowledge and absolute fact.

“Passed from death to life” – It was used of persons passing from one country to another.

“We love the brethren” – This is the basis for having strong confidence that we possess eternal life.

“He that loves not...abides in death” – The person who does not love is still in the realm of death; he has no biblical confidence for eternal life.

3:15 – “Whoever hates” – If a person is hating (present tense) his brother, he is a murderer; he has the spirit of murder in his heart. Such a person is not acting like a child of God and certainly does not have confidence that he has eternal life (cf. Mt. 5:21-22); we know that no murderer has eternal life.

D. The Compassion of Love – 3:16-18

3:16 – “Hereby” – Looks forward to Christ’s demonstration of love when He laid down His life for the believers.

“Perceive we the love of God” – “Perceive” is the word for knowledge received by experience. Believers are obligated to follow Christ’s example of love. Although they cannot accomplish what He did through His act of love, they are encouraged to go to the same extent as He did by sacrificing their lives for the believers, if necessary.

3:17 – “Has this world’s good...has need” – One brother has prosperity...the other has poverty.

“Sees” – This word indicates a long look that takes in the whole picture.

“Shuts up his bowels of compassion” – This is a deliberate act of slamming the door of one’s heart to the desperate need of a brother.

“Love of God” – The compassion of Christ does not express itself in a selfish person’s life.

3:18 – “Love in word...in tongue” – Talk about love is sentimental and emotional, but love for the brethren must go deeper.

Love “in deed and in truth” – True love is active with deeds of self-sacrifice. “Actions speak louder than words.” Compassion will not be satisfied with words; it must do something to relieve the problem or pain of the one who is loved.

IV. True Believers Have Assurance – 3:19-24

A. Assurance from Love – 3:19

3:19 – “Hereby” – Refers back to 3:18 which speaks of genuine love.

“We know” – The believer knows by the experience of active love that he is of the truth.

Shall assure” – The believer then receives assurance from the experiential knowledge of love in his life. He has assurance in his heart before God. Heart seems to refer to the conscience in this passage.

B. Assurance from God – 3:20-21

3:20 – “Heart condemn us” – The believer’s conscience judges him guilty. Whether or not his conscience is correct in its judgment is not known.

“God is greater” – God is a better Judge than one’s conscience. He knows all things. Furthermore, He can help him to do right, whereas his conscience cannot.

3:21 – “If our heart condemn us not” – The conviction of a bothered conscience drives away assurance, but a conscience at peace through the love of God brings confidence.

“We have confidence toward God” – The word for “confidence” is also translated boldness (4:17). It is not a brashness, but a healthy assurance.

C. Assurance from Obedience – 3:22-24a

3:22 – “Whatever we ask, we receive of Him” – Confidence leads a believer to come to God in prayer. Obedience allows God to answer his prayer.

“We keep His commandments” – An obedient believer is in harmony with the will of God and he asks for those things that please Him. Therefore, God answers his prayers, and these answers bring strong assurance to his heart.

3:23 – “This is His commandment” – God’s commandment is two in one. The first part is believing on the name of Jesus Christ for salvation. The second part is loving one another. The two cannot be separated so it is truly one commandment. Keeping this commandment is necessary for assurance.

“Believe” – This is in the aorist tense – a one-time decision for salvation. This is the first time John has used this word in his epistle.

“Love” – This is in the present tense – keep on loving one another.

3:24a – “Dwells in Him, and He in him” – Obedience is necessary for answers from God, but it is also necessary for abiding in God. The believer dwells in God and God dwells in the believer. This mutual experience brings further assurance to the believer.

D. Assurance from the Holy Spirit – 3:24b

3:24b – “Hereby we know” – Here the knowledge of the Holy Spirit indwelling a believer is based on experience and by it the believer has assurance before God. He knows the Holy Spirit is present when He works in his life and gives him the power to believe on Christ, to love others and to keep all of His other commandments.