

### *1 John 3*

This entire chapter focuses on the relational aspect of our faith: God's love for us, our reciprocal love for God, and how that reciprocal love for God manifests itself on love for others, as well as the individual pursuit of holiness.

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”*

John expresses amazement that all of us who are in Christ are adopted by God. We are His children. There are many forms of love. The English language tends to combine them all into the one word “love.” The early Greek language had three words for love: One is “eros” which is where the English word “erotic” comes from. Eros refers to romantic and physical love. This form of love is often practiced outside its intended boundary of courtship and marriage, but it is a vital component to our humanity. God created us to be “eros” beings. In Creation, God created Adam and Eve to “become one flesh.” The biblical books of Ruth and Song of Solomon feature it. The Orthodox wedding service rejoices in eros. In it we pray:

*“Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine on the sides of your house...Your children like young olive plants around your table.*

*That there may be given unto them soberness of life, and fruit of the womb as may be most expedient for them; let us pray to the Lord.*

*That they may rejoice in the beholding of sons and daughters; let us pray to the Lord.*

*That there may be granted unto them the happiness of abundant fertility, and a course of life blameless and unashamed; let us pray to the Lord.*

*Remember, O Lord our God, Your servant (Name) and Your servant (Name), and bless them.*

*Give to them fruit of the womb, fair children, concord of soul and body.*

*Let them behold their children's children as newly planted olive trees round about their table...”*

Another Greek word for love is “storge.” It is “is familial affection, the kind that comes from kinship or close contact. It can be felt for a pet as much as for a family member or regular acquaintance.” Paul used a form of storge in Romans 12:10. *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, devoted in honor giving preference to one another;”*

A third Greek word for love is “philia,” which refers to the love of friendship, often called brotherly love. C.S. Lewis describes philia as “a shared interest or viewpoint or activity fosters the growth of friendship... wrapped up in the same third thing—God’s word, politics, art, a sport.” In Romans 12:10, Paul also uses the word “Philia” - *“Be kindly*

*affectionate to one another with brotherly love, devoted in honor giving preference to one another;“*

Another Greek word translated into English as “love” is “agape.” This is the deepest form of love. It is described in great detail in 1 Corinthians 13, often called “the Love Chapter.”

*“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love (agape), I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love (agape), I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love (agape), it profits me nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love (agape) suffers long and is kind; love (agape) does not envy; love (agape) does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love (agape) never fails... <sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

1 John 3:1 uses the agape form of love to describe the divine love for humanity: *“Behold what manner of love (agape) the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”*

The text returns to the relational basis of our faith:

*“Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”*

In the Bible there are two Greek words translated as “to know” in English. One is “oida,” which is used 56 times in the New Testament. It means “to know how” or “to know about.” For example, it was used in Mark 1:23-24, *“Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, ‘Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know (oida) who You are—the Holy One of God!’”*

The second Greek word for “to know” is “ginosko,” which describes a personal knowledge or significant relationship with another person. In Jewish idiom it can mean physical intercourse, as in *“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain...” (Genesis 4:1).* Christ said of Judgement Day: *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you...” (Matthew 7:22-23)* It is the personal relational knowledge of Christ, not the knowledge about Christ, that matters. This is what 1 John 3:1 teaches here:

*“Therefore the world does not know (ginosko) us, because it did not know (ginosko) Him.”*

*“<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*

When we enter into relationship with Christ, he takes us as we are. But He does not intend for us remain as we are. He intends for us to be transformed into something far better. He calls us to the process of deification, which the Holy Spirit empowers. It takes the rest of our lives, but eventually culminates in our creaturely perfection. “...*we shall be like Him.*”

We must willingly and actively cooperate with God in this process: “<sup>3</sup> *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*”

Sinfulness and righteousness are mutually exclusive:

*“<sup>6</sup> Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.”*

*“<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you.”*

Who is the one who is always trying to deceive us? The devil. Deceit is fundamental to his nature. Christ said of him, “*for he is a liar and the father of it.*” (John 8:44). We see Satan practicing his deceit in the first chapters of the Bible, where he deceives Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He has been deceiving humans ever since.

*“He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. <sup>8</sup> He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”*

In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve they could disobey God and still enjoy the fruit of God’s full blessing. They could have the best of both worlds – relationship with God AND live according to their own rules instead of God’s. They could have it both ways. It was an effective lie then, and it is still an effective lie today:

*“<sup>10</sup> In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. <sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, <sup>12</sup> not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”*

Satan tells us we can have relationship with God but not have to practice the righteousness of God. He tells us we can receive God’s love for us, but we don’t have to practice love for others. He says we can receive pardon from God for our sins, and still murder our brother like Cain. Christ taught the parable of the man who owed the king ten thousand talents. He begged the king to have mercy on him, and the king forgave him the debt. However, the man demanded payment of a small amount from someone else, and even grabbed him by the throat. The king found out, and threw the forgiven man in prison until the debt was

paid. That man believed Satan's lie that he could receive mercy from the king, but show no mercy on another.

*“<sup>13</sup> Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.”*

Here John is summarizing in his Epistle what he recorded from the teachings of Jesus in his Gospel:

*“<sup>18</sup> If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20).*

Christianity has been completely at peace in America and Europe for centuries. Our faith has been followed by a sizeable majority of our citizens. Christianity has wielded enormous influence in politics, law, education, and the arts. However, Christianity is now rapidly declining in America. And with that decline, forces of opposition to Christianity have rapidly gained influence. Expressing one's Christian faith has become suppressed, while hatred of Christianity has become emboldened. At the March for Life in Washington last week:

<https://youtu.be/EOgDAAjnXgc>

During Covid, thousands of churches were closed but other gatherings were allowed:

<https://youtu.be/Lujxsx7n1zs>

Anti-Christian sentiment is comparatively mild in the US, but it is surging in Europe:

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## **Europe sees more than 500 anti-Christian hate crimes in 2021: religious watchdog group**

France reportedly had the highest number of anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe last year

In contrast to Western Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy has suffered severe persecution for much of the past millenium; the Greeks under Turkish occupation (1453-1832), the Russians and other Slavic Orthodox Churches of Communism (1917-1991), and Middle Eastern Orthodox Churches (750-present).

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The text affirms again that love of one's brother is a defining characteristic of what it means to be a Christian:

*“<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”*

Now, once again, John recalls the words of Jesus, which he heard with his own ears, and which he also recorded in his Gospel. At the Last Supper Christ said, “*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends*” (John 15:13). Now in his Epistle he rephrases:

*“<sup>16</sup> 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.”*

Part of loving one's brother is relieving genuine material needs:

*“<sup>17</sup> 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?” <sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

The Apostle James says the same thing in slightly different words:

*“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:15-16).*