

FIRST JOHN

Chapter 3

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

3:1-7 Easter is both the proclamation of an accomplished fact and the down payment of what is not yet, but is coming in Christ. The glory of Easter is known only in part now, and God has not yet shown forth this glory to us and through us. For now, we wrestle with the principdoms and powers of this world, against spiritual enemies and physical temptations, with those around us, and even our own flesh and blood. But we walk along, some might say plod along, toward the goal that is before us. We shall be like him, but what he is shall be clear to us only when he comes again. First John compares and contrasts what we see and know now with that which is to come. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:1-2 The theme of 2:28–3:10 is the righteousness that results from being God's child. The argument is stated simply: every child of the righteous Father also practices righteousness, while every person who practices sin is of the devil. The character of a person's life reveals whose child he or she is. The wonderful contrast between the old and the new life is described in terms of the new birth. As St. John had made clear in his gospel, the new birth is through water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

We need to go back to 1 Jn 2:28 to put this text in the context of being "children of God." This is a theme that runs through the Epistle. We are begotten of (from) the Father. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We therefore have fellowship with the Father and Jesus and with one another. Having been born from God, it is our new nature to want to live as children of God and to see Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The First Epistle of St. John, according to most commentators, was written to combat early versions of Gnosticism, that is, the belief that humans are basically good spirits that are trapped in an evil material world, including corrupt, inferior physical bodies. The way out of this dilemma is through special knowledge (*ginōsis*). This belief led to serious Christological errors such as a denial of the true, full deity of Christ. The very first verses of 1 John clearly stipulate that the "Word of life," Jesus Christ, was actually "seen" and "touched" and "heard." In other words, Jesus Christ,

the “very God of very God,” “Son of God,” truly did come in the flesh and yet remained uncorrupted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

But there is more to 1 John than a condemnation of Christological heresy, for John also clearly preaches salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, but not without works. As Luther says, “Thus the epistle fights against both parties: against those who would live in faith without any works, and against those who would become righteous by their works. It keeps us in the true middle way, that we become righteous and free from sin through faith; and then, when we are righteous, that we practice good works and love for God’s sake, freely and without seeking anything else” (AE 35:393). John proclaims without equivocation the relationship between faith and works. Our salvation is totally dependent on Christ’s atoning sacrifice, who is the “propitiation” (*hilasmon*) for our sins (4:10). With statements such as “We love because he first loved us” (4:19), John makes clear the relationship and necessity of love in the Christian life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

3:1 see. The pericope begins with the aorist imperative, “see” (*idete*), which has the sense of “take note,” “perceive,” “look.” For some reason, the NIV 1984 edition passes over this initial verb and thus misses the thought that John here is calling us to pay attention, to notice and appreciate the kind of love that the Father has lavished on his children. (CSB)

3:1 what kind of love – “How great is the love”: (original language, “behold what sort of!; how great!”). “Love the Father has lavished on us”: (original language, “the Father has *given* to us”). His *agape* love has been (perf. act. ind.) given to us. It is the love that is unconditional, undeserved, unmerited, unlimited, unimaginable, and unfailing in the person of his Son. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

John can hardly get over the greatness of God’s love. Can anyone blame him for the amazement? That God should love us so as to come down from His glorious heaven to this sinful earth to redeem us by suffering and dying in our place – the whole story is so amazing it can hardly be believed. In fact, it would not be believed if the Holy Spirit has not convinced us the power of Gospel. (LL)

This new birth identifies us as the Father’s children. The wonder of this gracious act leads John to exclaim in effect, “See how great the gift of his love really is! Why, he has identified us as being his very own children! And this is exactly what we have become through his acts. We have really been born of him!” (Glenn Barker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 12:330). The *agapē* love of God has given us our new, gracious birth. This love is indeed “lavished on us,” covering the old, sinful, anti-God nature and giving us our new nature. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Quantity and quality of God’s love. Despite all our iniquity, our selfishness and sinfulness, He has called us His own children through the waters of Baptism. This love God has lavished on us is unique because it is not what our corrupted, and sinful nature deserves; it is not what our thoughts, words, and deeds have earned. (TLSB)

“Behold,” as in the KJV, conveys the thought of the original much better than the rather weak rendering “see.” Likewise, the force of *potapēn* (ESV “what kind of”) could certainly be strengthened to something more akin to what John is trying to say—for example, “how great” or “how wonderful”—when referring to the love that the Father has given to us. The perfect *dedōken* implies that this wonderful love was given but with its effects continuing up to and through the present. It is not something that was merely once given and perhaps taken away, but it is an

everlasting love. The word for “love” (*agapē*) is a noun with a verbal idea behind it. *Agapē* is not merely an attitude or a feeling, but it is something that leads to action. The love spoken of here is expressed not only in emotion, but in the action of the Father in sending his Son as the propitiation for our sins. For this reason the KJV sometimes translates *agapē* as “charity.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

This love from God has earned for us the right to be called his “children” (neuter plural *tekna*), and not only are we *called* children, but in fact we *are* (*esmen*) his children. Of course the world does not recognize (*ginōskō*, “to know, have knowledge of”) the child of God as such because it cannot fathom by its own “reason or strength” that someone born in sin, and who is still subject to the temptations of sin, could be considered holy, pure, and blameless in the sight of God by the imputed righteousness that is ours by faith. If the world does not know the love of God, it cannot comprehend the holiness of a child of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

His agape love. It is the love that is unconditional, undeserved, unlimited, unimaginable and unending.

Quantity and quality of God’s love. (TLSB)

has given – We have received Christ through faith. (Concordia Bible)

dido – bestow, bring forth, commit, deliver.

Despite all our iniquity, our selfishness and sinfulness, He has called us His own children through the waters of Baptism. This love God has lavished on us is unique because it is not what our corrupted, sinful nature deserves, it is not what our thoughts, words and deeds have earned. (TLSB)

love of the Father – Original language, “the Father has given to us.” His agape love has been (perfect active ind) given to us. It is the love that is unconditional, undeserved, unmerited, unlimited, unimaginable, and unending in the person of His Son. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

children of God. Membership in God’s family is by grace alone – the gift of God [Eph 2:8-9]. It is never a human achievement. (CSB)

In making guilty, polluted rebels and heirs of endless perdition holy – not merely servants but children, heirs of God, and partakers of endless life and glory – the grace of God surpasses all finite conception, and will be a theme of adoring praises from multitudes that no man can number, for ever and ever. (Concordia Bible)

We are God’s children now by the declaration of the Father acting in Christ to restore us to himself. In Baptism, we have the seal of that promise applied to us by water and the Word. The world does not know this or see this because the world does not see things through the eyes of faith. So the world rejects us as it rejected Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

“Children of God” (cf. 2:29) “born (begotten of/from) of him.” *Tekna*—little or young children. They have been born (begotten) of/from the Father. (See 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.) “And that is what

we are!” A parenthetical, personal expression of joy. What a great thing it is that we are children of God! (See the endearing term “children” of those begotten of God, in 1 Jn 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.) “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (cf. Jn 15:18–19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

Children of God! Amazing! But it was not always so. When we first entered this world, it was as God’s enemies. God had other adjectives to describe our first status – foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved. The dominant emotions that govern the lives of sinful rebels are malice, envy, and hatred, says Paul in Titus 3:3 (PBC)

God calls believers by various new names: we are His servants, a nation, His royal priests, soldiers. But the dearest term of all is that He calls us His children. And that’s not just an honorary title – He has literally adopted us into His family, making us brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus, through Baptism. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26 that we are all God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus, for all who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. Our baptismal certificates are also our adoption papers. (PBC)

What a great fear and doubt destroyer it is to be God’s children! This is not a patronizing term – the point is not to make us feel little, like babies. The point is to make us feel loved, important, and secure. God the Father has solemnly obligated Himself to do for us what all good fathers do for their children – provide for our daily needs, protects, and guidance. He provides us with a sense of being worth something, of being precious. He is there for us in emergencies just as good fathers bail their children out of trouble. When we need help, when we pray, we don’t have to feel as though we are approaching a stranger. We are talking to our Father! We can call on a relationship that He initiated – was His idea, His doing, His adoption, not ours. He stooped down to us since we couldn’t climb up to Him. (PBC)

so we are – Believers are not just “named” children of God, but are actually reborn as His children, are actually “fathered” by God. This is no metaphor, for a new being is created (2 Cor 5:17). God promises that He has made us His children. Despite the lies, deceptions, and partial truths of the world, God has never lied to us, and He has never failed to do what He has promised. You can count on Him. (TLSB)

did not know him – It did not understand His true character. (Concordia Bible)

The world is blind to this new relationship of grace, for it is spiritually discerned only by those who themselves are children of God. The world identifies us as church-goers, members of a local congregation, but it does not perceive our relationship to God. Because for now God is the *Deus absconditus*, the “God hidden from the eyes of the world,” this special parent/child relationship is also hidden from the world—and so much the better! Lenski comments, “Grieve not that the world does not know you; this is proof that you are God’s child. If the world knows you, you should grieve, for then there is proof that you are not God’s child” (pp. 450–51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Believers, the children of God possess eternal life now in time. Yet the corruption of our sin hides the glory that is already present in us. This glory is seen by faith. Although the world cannot see the glory of God in His children, the world does encounter the different lifestyles of believers. Often, the world hates believers. This hatred arises from the fact that a good life, when encountered, will always draw a comparison or judgment, confronting the world with how far it has fallen short. (TLSB)

This new, spiritual godly character of Christians is not particularly conspicuous at first sight to worldlings. If they come to see something of the righteous life in Christians, they are not aware of the source from which it springs. And the reason is that the children of this world have never learned to know the heavenly Father and His power and love. Therefore Christians should not be perturbed by the disrespect they receive or the lack of respect they experience from the world. (Stoekhardt)

3:2 beloved – “Dear friends” is a weak translation (lit. “beloved,” “ones whom I love”). (See 3:21; 4:1, 7, 11 for same endearing expression, “dearly beloved.”) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

what we will be – “What we will be has not yet been made known”: see 1 Cor 13:12. We cannot begin to imagine what it will be like to see God and to experience fully his love and life—to become fully aware of what it means to be a “child of God” Paul “was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things” (2 Cor 12:4). “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). This is true of spiritual things now and of eschatological fulfillment (Is 64:4; 65:17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

John emphasizes the “now” and “not yet” nature of the believer’s relationship with the Father. We are now (*nun*) God’s children. It is a realized fact. Yet, at the same time, there is something awaiting us, as what we will be has not yet appeared. The holiness and righteousness that is ours by faith leads to palpable blessings in this life, such as a clean conscience, joy in the face of trouble and persecution (cf. Mt 5:10–12), and a peace that passes all understanding. Yet there is something more, a similitude to Christ (*homoioi autōi*) such as we have not experienced in this life. In the future there will be a time when “we shall see him as he is” (*kathōs estin*). This similitude to Christ does not imply that the distinction between the Creator and the creature will be obliterated, as so many heresies seem to hope, but rather we will experience Christ in an even more direct and complete way, and, as Luther said, “Yet, we shall be like him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us” (AE 30:268). This is most clearly depicted for us in the first assigned lesson for All Saints’ Day from Revelation 7. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

1 Corinthians 13:12 – “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

2 Corinthians 12:4 – “(Paul) was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”

1 Corinthians 2:9 – “However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”

Isaiah 64:4 – “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.”

Isaiah 65:17 – “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

At this time our dignity as children of God, our new life obtained in our new birth is covered up by our sinful flesh as well as by cross and sorrow and so many humiliating experiences of life. But this disgraceful shroud shall someday completely be removed. (Stoeckhardt)

God's children - Our description, "children of God," is used in both vv 1 and 2. We will understand the full meaning of this relationship only in the parousia. In the present age our understanding is limited by our minds and experience. Yet the basis for our faith does not depend upon a perfect understanding; our faith is not in what we shall be then, but in our God now. As Lenski suggests, "There is no stage of existence beyond being 'children of God' to which we shall be raised by God at the time of Christ's coming. . . . Here on earth we are in a humiliation that is similar to that of Christ; eventually we shall be in a glory that is also similar to that of Christ" (p. 453). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

he ... him. Christ. (CSB)

when he appears we shall be like him – The beatific (bestowing bliss") vision. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

You were a dying sinner before God called you His child in Baptism. When Christ comes in glory, He will reveal the glory that He has given to you now. Luther: "God is infinite, but we are finite creatures. Moreover, the creature will never be the Creator. Yet we shall be like Him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us" (AE 30:268). (TLSB)

Our identity, however, cannot be separated from Jesus. We are God's children now in Christ. This is a statement of fact not under dispute; he repeats it for the third time. We may look like other folks in the world, and others may not recognize anything different about us, but we are God's children in Christ. We belong to the Lord not because we look or act or feel different but because of God's Word and promise, extended to us in Baptism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

Romans 8:29 – "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

2 Corinthians 4:6 – "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Because we are now wearing Christ's holiness, we have everlasting life in us already. We don't know as yet exactly how our heavenly bodies will differ from our earthly bodies. But we can get a pretty good idea that it will be wonderful, because we will be like Jesus. Imagine that – He loves us so much that He kept His body even after resurrection and ascension, just so that He could remain our human brother forever! Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that by the power that enables Jesus to bring everything under His control, he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. Wow! Is this worth waiting for or what? If these are promises waiting for us, why would we go off looking for something better? What new revelations, new insights, or new knowledge could the Gnostic cults offer that is better than that? (PBC)

God is infinite, but we are finite creatures. Moreover, the creature will never be the Creator. Yet we shall be like Him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we,

too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us. (Luther)

“When he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is”: Cf. 2:28, “when he appears.” The beatific (“bestowing bliss”) vision. “This is our destiny and glory (Rom 8:29) to be like Jesus who is, like God (2 Cor 4:6).” (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol 6 [Nashville: Broadman, 1933] 221). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

see him as he is – That transforming power of seeing Christ continues by faith as we “with unveiled faces all reflect [better contemplate] the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). It finally consummates in seeing Christ “face to face.”

Revelation 22:4 – “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

For now, that father-child relationship is not visible to the rest of the world. Frankly, to the naked eye, we don’t look like heavenly royalty. But even if we don’t get any respect from the rest of the world, that is no cause to doubt the Father’s love – most of the world couldn’t figure out that Jesus was God’s Son either. (PBC)

Only he that is like God can see God face to face. Then we shall fully and completely be partakers of the divine nature, and we shall be entirely pure and holy. And then the spiritual, godly life will permeate and illuminate the frame of our glorified body. Then we shall be fully transformed to the image of God and appear as His children in perfected glory. (Stoekhardt)

In being begotten of/from the Father, God “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). That transforming power of seeing Christ continues by faith as we “with unveiled faces all reflect [better ‘contemplate’] the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). It finally consummates in seeing Christ “face to face” and then “I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev 22:4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

3:3-7 Once we are in Christ, though, we *do* begin to look like him. John now gives a description of the believer’s life of sanctification, emphasizing the similarities to Christ: The baptized “purifies himself as he is pure” (v 3). The believer is already purified in his Baptism; now he strives to live according to his new Christlike status. “In him there is no sin,” so “no one who abides in him keeps on sinning” (vv 5–6). “Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous” (v 7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

Of course, even at this we see through the mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:12). On this side of heaven, our lives are a poor reflection of the Christ who lives in us. We have only a dim image of the future that Christ has gone to prepare for us (Jn 14:3). But when he comes again to bring to completion all things, then we will know and see what for now we know and see only by faith. Then we shall see him as he is, but we will also see ourselves clearly in Christ, with all impediments of sin and death fully removed from us. For now, we live like Christ did, in a state of “humiliation,” and we wait for the hour when we will be glorified, as Jesus waited and was glorified (Jn 12:23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:3 hopes. Not a mere wish, but unshakable confidence concerning the future. (CSB)

The hope of being like Christ and seeing Him as He is. (Concordia Bible)

him. Christ. (CSB)

purifies himself. By turning from sin. (CSB)

Having been purified and made holy, and given the sure hope of eternal life, we seek that which is holy and right. Born of God, we are now free to serve our Savior. (TLSB)

Here John clearly articulates the only way to true sanctification in the narrow sense. One who hopes in the Gospel is pure. It is a purity that belongs to the believer through the grace of God, by faith. John states that the believer “is pure” (*ekeinos agnos estin*). It is an accomplished reality, apart from works of the Law. Yet, it is through that reality that the believer, then, is free to flee from sin and do works of righteousness, with pure motives—not from a fear of punishment or a hope of reward. True works of sanctification are possible in the eyes of God only when done freely, and the Gospel frees the believer to do them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

Therefore, the one who hopes in Christ will purify himself (*agnizei heauton*). He will flee from sin and seek what is good and right in the sight of God and for the benefit of his neighbor. Thus, just as there are two extremes of Christological heresy to be avoided, a denial of Christ’s divinity or a denial of his humanity, there are two extremes to be avoided concerning the relationship between justification and sanctification. One side concludes that, being justified by faith, works of the Law are irrelevant. In other words, it is a justification that leads to licentiousness. The other side concludes that works of the Law are the necessary cause of righteousness in God’s eyes. But John maintains what Luther called “the true middle way,” by showing how God loves us, so we can love one another. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 4)

He strives now to be pure as Christ is pure. The apostle here gives the distinguishing mark of a true hope, as contrasted with every false hope. (Concordia Bible)

Every man who has the hope of the gospel, by a true steadfast faith in Christ, and earnest prayerful, persevering efforts to imitate His example, becomes, through the grace of God, more and more like Him. (Concordia Bible)

John hates the concept of “cheap grace” (the idea that we can just call on God for forgiveness, bask in it, and then live any way we please). God’s grace is free, but it is extremely expensive. It claimed Christ’s life to give it, and demands ours as we receive it. Immediately after comforting us with the message that we are God’s children, John challenges us to act like God’s children. There is a seamless connection between our justification (God’s “not guilty” verdict) and our sanctification (the way in which we live our lives for God). The former costs us nothing. The latter costs us everything. With regard to justification, we say, “We can’t.” With regard to sanctification, we say, “Yes, we can. (PBC)

From the true faith issues forth a godly life. Whoever has this Christian hope cannot but cleanse himself from sin. We hope to be like God, free from every stain of sin. Then we should now already strive to be pure, so that we keep body and soul, as far as we can, without a blemish. Indeed, a Christian who daily bears in mind his Christian hope will find it an incentive to holiness and daily renewal of life. (Stoekhardt)

3:4-10 The reason for this letter of John is the occurrence of false teachers in the church. But the message of the text is most appropriate for Christmas. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

While the letter does not identify the specific group of false teachers, it does set forth the characteristics of their errors. They arose from within the church. They had separated themselves from the church (or were expelled) and were continuing to be a threat as they carried out a vigorous propaganda campaign. They saw themselves as very religious people, claiming prophetic authority from the Holy Spirit and propagating an elitist form of piety. They denied the true humanity of Christ, saying Christ had not come in the flesh—the very opposite of what the Christmas message is all about! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

Where this basic truth of the Christian faith is denied, other errors follow. Sin and forgiveness, the work of the devil and Christ's victory over him, and the Christian life are also not taken seriously. Some believed that their possession of knowledge made them perfect; others maintained that sin doesn't matter because it can't harm the enlightened. Both positions are wrong! One is blind to sin and denies its existence; the other is indifferent to sin and denies its gravity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

In response to the first error, John zeroes in on the universality of sin. You cannot deny your sin! To the second, he speaks of the incompatibility of sin in the life of the Christian. Errors are still prevalent today and need to be exposed for what they are—works of the devil—and countered with the message of who Christ is—God in the flesh—what he has done for us, and how he empowers us to live the new life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

For us at Christmas, John describes the truth and significance of the incarnation of God's Son. People today who are complacent about their Christianity and even soft about some of the basic Christian teachings need a clear proclamation of Jesus Christ, God born in human flesh, who came on a mission to redeem fallen humankind. And it began at Bethlehem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

3:4 *everyone - Pas*, “everyone” occurs 5 times in these verses (vv 4, twice in v 6, v 9, and v 10). The participle 6 note v, “he who” occurs 3 times (vv 7, 8, 10). John is stating universal truths that apply to all people. The Gospel proclaimed concerns all, not just some. Here is a reason for mission outreach! The phrase “who commits sin” also uses the present participle, depicting continuous action, as is the case throughout these verses: v 4 “does sin”; v 7 “does right”; v 9 “does sin”; v 10 “doesn't do right.” The lifestyle and habitual actions of people reveal whether they are a Christian or a non-Christian. Note the clear and revealing definition of sin as *anomia*, “lawlessness,” that which is contrary to God's law. This definition of the essence of sin reveals also the seriousness of sin, in stark contrast to our present society's understanding of sin! See Romans 14:23, James 4:17, and 1 John 5:17 for other definitions of sin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

practice of sinning. Only thing one can do prior to being born of God through faith in Christ. (TLSB)

sin is lawless – The essence of all sin is the transgression of God's law; in other words, sin is contrary to the revealed will of God, which must for ever be the rule of our action. (Concordia Bible)

The sinner's natural orientation and inclination to hate God and violate His Law. (TLSB)

Some Christians might entertain the notion, it could not matter so much if they would yield to sin a little here or there; they could still retain their Christian character. So the Apostle here would have such people consider that every person who deliberately sins, much or little, flies into God's face and lays violent hands on His majesty. And so the holy God would certainly be against him. Whoever bears that in mind will never make light of sin. (Stoekhardt)

3:5-10 Here indeed is Good News of the highest order. In vv 5, 8 the Good News follows strong statements of Law, and these two verses contain the Christmas good news of the birth of the Savior. The verb *ephanerōthē*, "he appeared" (with Epiphany overtones) appears in each verse: "he appeared to take away sins" (v 5); "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (v 8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

Here is the heart of your Christmas sermon. Why the incarnation? What's it all about? It is about God taking away sin and destroying the works of the devil through Jesus Christ. God in Christ acts decisively to destroy our enemies. He acts! We receive! The heart and core of the Christmas message is "he appeared" to do all this for us. And it began at Bethlehem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

The Greek words and sentence structure are extremely revealing in these verses. V 5: "he appeared (aorist for a completed historic fact) to (purpose clause) take away sin (aorist again; this is the same word used in John 1:29 by John the Baptist to describe Jesus taking away the sin of the world.) V 8: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to (purpose clause) destroy (aorist) the works (plural—not just some, but all!) of the devil." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

God took human form in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. In him there is no sin (unlike us). Here is a choice opportunity to zero in on the often-forgotten message of the obedience and sinless life of Jesus, carried out as an integral part of saving us. He is without sin and his mission was against sin and its originator, the devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

John also makes some practical applications. Since God in Christ appeared to take away sin and destroy the devil's works, Christians must not and indeed cannot compromise with sin or the devil. Don't continue to sin; realize that if you are a Christian you cannot go on sinning (v 9). God in Christ has set you free. God the Holy Spirit brings that Christmas Good News to you, empowering you to do that which is right and to love your brother (v 10). We're back to "doing" (sanctification)—doing right and loving others instead of doing sin. The Gospel changes and empowers us! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

In Christ, and specifically in our Baptism into Christ (John 3), we receive a new birth. V 9 says we are "born of God," a perfect passive participle denoting a single act of God with continuous efficacy—BAPTISM, the means through which the Spirit imparts to us the blessings of Christ's appearing! Likewise, "God's nature abides" in those born of God. "Nature" is *sperma*, "seed." Through Baptism we receive a new nature, the very seed or life-giving power of God. Here is a deep, radical, inward transformation. No wonder John emphatically states, "No one born of God commits sin" (leads a life characterized by sinning). For to keep on sinning habitually is to fail to see and know Christ (v 6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

The Christmas message is Good News indeed. And it is an empowering message. Consequently, in v 10 we are called to do right and to love. That's a call to action, to carry out the mission God gives us to "do." The Christmas Gospel announces what God has done for us in Christ ("he

appeared”) to deal with sin and the devil. The “new life” we have in Christ results in a life of appropriate Christ-like action, the fruit of our faith (Matt 7:20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 1)

3:5 *appeared* - God the Son appeared in human flesh, lived a perfect and righteous life without sin, gave His lifeblood in sacrifice to God to remove the guilt of our sins, and was raised from the dead so that we might know that the Father accepted Him as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). (TLSB)

take away sins – God on His own initiative transformed our identity from death row criminals into beloved children. (PBC)

The context suggests the concept of a complete removal of our sins. If Christ came to take away our sins, we certainly will feel ourselves under obligation to avoid every sin and never think of yielding to any sin. (Stoeckhardt)

in him there is no sins - See Hebrews 4:15. For those who are in Christ by faith, God no longer counts their sin against them (Romans 8:1). (TLSB)

3:6 *keeps on sinning*. John is not asserting sinless perfection (see 1:8–10; 2:1), but explaining that the believer’s life is characterized not by sin but by doing what is right. (CSB)

A person who practices sin habitually is only a sinner and not a child of God. Such a person cannot know the love of God in Jesus. “If sin does what it wants, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present” (SA III 44). (TLSB)

Sin is evil. So people redeemed by Christ, who are now brothers and sisters of Christ, hate sin too. They refuse to get comfortable with, and they declare war on it too. As we grow our in faith, we grow also in our determination to let go of behaviors that insult and infuriate God. An automatic corollary of “I love God is” is “I hate sin.” Proverbs 8:13 says, “To fear the Lord is to hate evil.” (PBC)

Men who live in love and practice of known sin, secret or open, of omission or commission, of heart or of life, have no interest in Christ, and have never experienced His salvation. (Concordia Bible)

The ego that commits the sin is not the ego of the Christian, but rather the ego of his flesh. The ego of the Christian does not knowingly and deliberately enter upon sin, but rather shrinks back and refuses to sin. The ego of the Christ is in Christ and so is of one mind with Him, and also ever averse to sin. (Stoeckhardt)

either seen him or known him – Everyone who deliberately sins is ignorant of Christ. Whoever yet toys with, and yields himself to sin shows that he has absolutely no understanding of Christ, the Savior from sin, the Holy and Righteous One. To do sin and to know Christ are irreconcilable opposites. (Stoeckhardt)

“See” and “know” are used to speak of believing in Christ. No sinner can see God directly (John 1:18). God can be “seen” and “known” only by faith in Jesus. In Jesus, we see and know God (John 14:6-10). (TLSB)

Romans 6:1-2, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

3:7 *let no one deceive you* - There is no true Christian life without a complete break with the old life of sin. Those born of God deplore and reject their own sinfulness and daily repent of their sins. Christians are born with the desire to grow in the righteousness of Christ, which has credited to them through faith in Jesus. (TLSB)

he is righteous – He is righteous in his character. The tree – a righteous character – is known by its fruit – doing righteousness. (Concordia Bible)

Christians should not allow anyone to talk them into believing that sin is no serious a matter, or that as children of God they are free to do as they please. Only he who does right is righteous and is fashioned after Christ. Moreover, he who sins shows himself to be the opposite of Christ and therefore can have no part in Him or be a Christian. (Stoekhardt)

3:8 *devil*. In this short letter John says much about the devil: 1. He is called “the devil” (here) and “the evil one” (v. 12; 2:13–14; 5:18–19). 2. He “has been sinning from the beginning” (here), i.e., from the time he first rebelled against God, before the fall of Adam and Eve (Jn 8:44). 3. He is the instigator of human sin, and those who continue to sin belong to him (vv. 8, 12) and are his children (v. 10). 4. He is in the world (4:3) and has “the whole world” of unbelievers under his control (5:19). 5. But he cannot lay hold of the believer to harm him (5:18). 6. On the contrary, the Christian will overcome him (2:13–14; 4:4), and Christ will destroy his work. (CSB)

Sin has its origin in the corruption of God’s good creation of mankind by the work of the devil in deceiving Eve and tempting Adam to distrust God. Therefore, everyone who sins serves the devil and continues his evil work (cf. John 8:34-47; Eph. 2:1-3). “God is not the creator, author, or cause of sin. By the instigation of the devil through one man, sin (which is the devil’s work) has entered the world” (FC SD 1 7). (TLSB)

Son of God appeared...destroy - God the Son became flesh to take away sins and to purify us from the corruption of sin brought into the world through Adam by the devil. Ultimately, in the resurrection, He will rid of all sinfulness those who trust in Him. On the Last Day, He will bring all the devil’s hateful work to nothing. Luther: “Here you have fulfillment of the first sermon of the Gospel. The Seed of the woman had to be born to destroy the works of the devil (Gen 3:15). Now He has appeared in the flesh and has destroyed them” (AE 30:272). “Just as the devil cannot be conquered except by Christ’s help, so we cannot free ourselves from this slavery by our own strength. World history shows how great and powerful the devil’s kingdom is. The world is full of blasphemies against God and wicked opinions. The devil keeps all tied up many hypocrites who appear holy and who are wise and righteous in the world’s eyes. Even greater vices are seen in other people. Since Christ was given to us to remove both these sins and these punishments and to destroy the devil’s kingdom, sin, and death (1 John 3:8), we will never be able to recognize Christ’s benefits unless we understand our evils” (Ap. II 48-50). (TLSB)

3:9 *born of God*. The picture is of human reproduction, in which the sperm (the Greek for “seed” is *sperma*) bears the life principle and transfers the paternal characteristics. (CSB)

Jesus speaks of Himself as the seed that bears much fruit if it falls into the earth and dies (John 12:24). He also describes His Word as seed (Mt. 13:19; Mk. 4:14). Jesus us also the “seed” and the “living and abiding word” of 1 Peter 1:23. The Gospel proclaims and delivers Jesus Himself, who remains in those who trust His promises. (TLSB)

cannot go on sinning. Not a complete cessation of sin, but a life that is not characterized by sin. (CSB)

been of of God - Bernard: "Even tho they are seen to have sinned in time, their offenses do not appear in eternity, because the charity of their Father covers the multitude of sin" (WDC, p. 174)

3:10 *it is evident* - Jesus taught that people would recognize His followers by their love for one another (John 13:34-35). Despite any claim to Christ a person may make, the refusal to love other Christians marks him as a child of the devil. While this love is manifested most clearly in forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven us, it also insists on the true teaching (2:18-27; 4:1-6) because love "does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6). Any who do not hold to the true teaching of Christ do not love their brothers. (TLSB)

2:28–3:10 False teachers and false believers had excuses and rationalizations for not showing true Christian love for the whole family of God. But Jesus taught, "You will recognize them by their fruits" (cf Mt 7:15–23). We are often tempted to rationalize and excuse our sin. But no one born of God wants to give in to sinning. Those who give themselves over to sin will not be exonerated by the excuses they put forward. Through daily repentance and the practice of righteousness, we show ourselves to be true children of God and will not be ashamed when our Lord Jesus appears on the Last Day. Then we will be like Him and see Him as He is in all His glory. • Heavenly Father, forgive my sinful excuses so I may remain in Christ through Your Word and love everyone as He has loved me. Amen. (TLSB)

Love One Another

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; 20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

3:11 *message* - The teaching they received when they were taught of Christ, His salvation, and living in Christ. (TLSB)

3:12 *Cain.* See Heb 11:4(CSB)

who was of the evil one - Cain showed that he was of the evil one because he hated his brother simply because Abel did what was good and right (Gen. 4:7). (TLSB)

his own deed were evil - Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God because it was made without faith. Jude 11 hints that Cain's offering was stingy because of greed. But since Cain was of the evil one, we also know that his works did not proceed from faith (cf. Romans 14:23). (TLSB)

3:13 If we trust our Lord's teaching, we are not surprised that the world hates us. Our Lord Jesus told us ahead of time that the world would hate us because we do not belong to this world any more than He did. The world hated Jesus because His whole life testified that their deeds were evil (John 3:19-20; 7:7). (TLSB)

3:14 *passed out of death into life* - When we receive the gift of faith. Cf. Eph 2:1, 5. (TLSB)

brothers. Fellow believers. (CSB)

abides in death - Those who have no genuine love are spiritually dead; i.e., they are unbelievers. "Love is a fruit that surely and necessarily also follows true faith. The fact that a person does not love is a sure sign that he is not justified. He is still in death or has lost the righteousness of faith again, as John says" (FC SD III 27). (TLSB)

3:15 *hates*. According to Jesus, to hate a brother is to be guilty of the sin of murder and to be worthy of the fire of hell. Eternal life cannot remain in any who refuse to admit that they are murderers and repent of their hatred for their brothers. (TLSB)

3:16 *he laid down his life* – The source of all love and the ultimate example and pattern for love is, of course, Jesus Christ. His magnificent self-sacrifice on Calvary's cross not only bought for us the forgiveness we needed to be God's children again. It also inspires us to love and forgive people in our lives. Jesus parable of the unmerciful debtor (Matthew 18:21-35) shows the comparative size of the debts we owe and are owed. What a joy it is to honor Christ by showing compassion to other people! His sacrifice is the motivating fire that drives all we do. (PBC)

Jesus showed God's love when He laid down His life for all people. So, as Jesus laid down His life for our salvation, Jesus wants us to use our lives—to lay down our lives—that our brothers and sisters might be blessed and saved. (TLSB)

We may be called on to sacrifice life, but never to give up our salvation, for the good of others. (Concordia Bible)

3:17 *sees his brother in need* – The very opposite of Cain's murderous hatred is a Christian's willingness to sacrifice himself for a brother or sister. It is no coincidence that Christians have been leaders in developing ministries of mercy in many communities all over the world – hospitals, schools, orphanages, food pantries, and safe places for the handicapped and elderly. Christians with resources who won't help people in need better check for a spiritual pulse. (PBC)

The possession of property involves high responsibilities, increases obligation, and multiplies duties. By the manner in which men use it they show their character. (Concordia Bible)

closes his heart – He feels no compassion, but turns away from a brother in need even when he has the means to help him. Luther: "God is merciful. Yet He is no idle. He does not let

sinners go unpunished. To the humble, who fear Him, He is merciful... There are several degrees of love: an enemy must not be offended, a brother must be helped, a member of one's household must be supported. You Christ's commandment concerning love for one's enemies. But you owe more to a brother who love in return" (AE 30:278). (TLSB)

God's love. God's kind of love, which he pours out in the believer's heart (Ro 5:5) and which in turn enables the Christian to love fellow believers. Or it may speak of the believer's love for God. (CSB)

To communicate one's earthly goods to the brother in need is an evidence of brotherly love. Giving which requires self-denial is a token of love. Whoever is not ready to practice self-denial to help the brother suffering want shuts up his heart against him. (Stoekhardt)

Hand and heart are very closely related. Some Christians thin that giving is unimportant. But here we see by one's giving one can tell what is going on in the heart. Whoever gives generously open his heart wide, and whoever gives niggardly, does not open his heart at all, but rather shuts it up, and finally strangles every germ of spiritual life. It takes sincere love to move one to willing, generous giving. (Stoekhardt)

It is the love of God which has transferred Christians into a new life, into fellowship with the Father and the Son. And it is this love of God in Christ which preserves this new life. But this love of God cannot find a place to stay where the heart is closed. And a heart that offers no place to love, offers no place to faith. Therefore, he who refuses to give and to bring sacrifices is living in a mortal sin. (Stoekhardt)

3:18 *little children* – Means “my beloved children,” this is a very affectionate greeting by a father to children whom he tenderly loves. His darlings. (CSB)

“Dear children”: An endearing term that John uses frequently. (See 3:7; 4:7; 5:2, 19.) They have fellowship with God and with John and other believers (1:3). They are born of/from God and believe that Jesus is the Christ (5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

love – agape - Love in an unconditional sense. (CSB)

Love is prompted and proceeds from the truth and is carried out in actual deeds done for the benefit and blessing of another. Whatever tends to our brother's salvation is done “in truth.” Luther: “To love a brother who is kind and pleasant in return - this is a trivial matter. This is the way the world also loves. ‘The crowd judges friendships by their usefulness.’ Accordingly John does not say: ‘Let us love those who are saintly, agreeable, and rich.’ No, he says: ‘Let us love the brethren,’ in such a way that then nothing but the brotherhood is loved and regarded; for a brother loved out of a sense of duty, not because of usefulness and not because of praise. All the gifts we have should serve those who do not have them. For example, he who is learned should serve him who is not learned; he who is rich should serve him who is poor; he who is sensible should serve him who is foolish, etc.” (AE 30:278-79). (TLSB)

“Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth”: To speak and *not* to act is like the Pharisees, who “do not practice what they preach” (Mt 23:2). (See James 2:15–17; 3 in 3, 4. Note v 17 for love in action.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

in deed – To speak and not act is like the Pharisees, who “do not practice what they preach” (Mt. 23:2). (See James 2:15-17; 3 John 3:4) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

in truth – In faithfulness, sincerity, from the heart. Hypocrites may imitate love, but it is not genuine. Genuine love is both from the heart of faith and hands in action. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

This verse is a passionate plea for Christians to get rid of double-mindedness. Talking the talk without walking the walk doesn't fool too many people. Even unbelievers – especially unbelievers – can smell religious hypocrisy from an astounding distance. As James pointed out in his second chapter, if you have a spare blanket, and all you can do for a shivering brother or sister is say “Keep warm,” your so called faith must be dead. In the sports world, it is common for agents to say to owners, “Show me the money.” In other words, don't praise my client and say how important he is for your team and then offer peanuts. Your cash offer shows what you really think. (PBC)

3:19-24 These verses are not moralizing or legalistic nagging. John has total confidence in the gospel. He believed in his heart that:

1. God passionately wanted to win people back to Him, was sending His Word out everywhere, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, was making new believers all over the place.
2. The Spirit, working through Word and Sacrament, would cause people's hearts and minds to grow spiritually.
3. Christian hearts are eager to please God and are open to guidance.
4. Fruits of faith (good deeds) will flow out of a living Christian.
5. Whenever our hearts condemn us (that is, when Satan massages our sense of guilt and fools us into thinking that we are worthless failures), we can find real comfort and satisfaction in real deed done from love.
6. God is greater than our hearts, that is, even when our own self-analysis is too confused and weak to think straight, God has us figured out and knows that we are still Christians. And He will help us find the internal assurance we need.

John links this whole discussion to prayer. Believe it or not, your spiritual self-confidence has a lot to do with your prayer life. As James wrote, a person praying with a doubtful heart better not expect anything from the Lord – such a person is double-minded, unstable (1:6-7). John's point is that God apparently finds it insulting if people approach Him halfheartedly, unsure of His love of their relationship. (PBC)

What a string of powerful incentives in these verses to live our faith! We obey the Lord and all kinds of good things happen: we worship and please God, we bring some kind of benefit to our neighbor, we grow in our sense of inner peace, we grow in self-confidence, and – we receive from Him anything we ask. Amazing! (PBC)

3:19 *we are of the truth* – This means absolute truth. This truth is closely connected to Jesus and is always the same because Jesus does not change. It is the truth about our salvation. When we know this there is absolutely no doubt in our hearts. (CSB)

“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth”: Jesus is the truth (Jn 14:6); God’s word is truth (Jn 17:17); the Spirit leads into truth (Jn 16:13); those who have fellowship with Christ live by the truth (1 in 1:6); the person who says he knows Christ but does not do what Christ commands is a liar and the truth is not in him (1 Jn 2:4); the truth sets one free (Jn 8:32); we are to be faithful to the truth and walk in the truth with consistent lives of love (3 Jn 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

By our love “with actions and in truth” we know we belong to the truth. Love in action is a fruit and evidence of faith. “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (v 14). Our actions of love will be cited on the final day of judgment as evidence of faith (Mt 24:34–46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us” (vv 19–20). The heart of the believer is troubled and restless when we think of how we fall short of consistent love in action in our life. John is quick to reassure us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

reassure our heart – This means to have an inward certainty that is not shaken by anything that happens in life. Ordinarily when we are in the presence of greatness we feel very self-conscious. But, because we know that God knows all about us and has redeemed us anyway, we can be totally at ease in his presence. (CSB)

To love one another as Jesus loved us flows from genuine, saving faith. Believers are reassured as the Lord keeps His promises to bless them through His means of grace. (TLSB)

3:20 *heart condemns* – To find fault with or to blame and condemn. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Our consciences are over-active because we continue to live under the burden of the Law when God has already freed us from that load. When this happens we live defensively hoping not to make mistakes rather than boldly serving the Lord.

“If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God”: Our confidence is that “we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (v 16). “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 In 1:7). Our confidence is in the Father’s lavish love (3:1). We are the children born of God (5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The more earnestly Christians strive for perfection in love, the more they come to realize their lack of it. It takes an especially dear heart of love to be sensitive to the many failures in love. (Stoekhardt)

God is greater than our heart. An oversensitive conscience can be quieted by the knowledge that God himself has declared active love to be an evidence of salvation. He knows the hearts of all—whether, in spite of shortcomings, they have been born of him. (CSB)

“For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything”: “An oversensitive conscience can be quieted by the knowledge that God himself has declared active love to be an evidence of salvation. He knows the hearts of all—whether, in spite of shortcomings, they have been born of him” (*Concordia Self-Study Bible*, note on 3:20). His grace is “much more” than the condemnation of sin (Rom 5:15–17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

One caution, we must not judge someone’s faith by measuring how much love that person shows by action. Nor ought we to spend time counting up our own loving actions to see how much faith we have, (LL)

When we Christians are now condemned for falling short in so many things, so that we may feel that we are no longer the children of God, then the acts of love performed towards the brethren rise up in our defense and persuade our hearts to believe that in spite of our many sins we are yet true children of God. And this conviction is based on the ground that God Himself approves us as His children by working in us such works of love. And obviously God’s judgment overrules any other, because God is greater than our heart or anyone who might condemn us. (Stoeckhardt)

This action of God at the same time implies to troubled souls the divine assurance that wherever they have fallen behind in love, out of weakness, their faults and failures are all covered up with the mantle of Christ’s righteousness. (Stoeckhardt)

The situation here described is similar to the one in chapter 2:1, 2, where Christians are assured that when they commit sin in their weakness, they have an Advocate with the Father. It is that love in Christ which again and again covers up all our guilt. As we Christians, then turn to Christ, we receive comfort against the strongest reproaches of our conscience. Even all our shortcomings in brotherly love have been full atoned for by the blood of Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

We are baptized. God has put His mark on us. We are His. We get constant “do overs.”

This means not only larger or greater but doing so because of being more experienced and knowledgeable.

He knows everything – This word has the meaning that there is absolutely nothing that is excluded. Perfect knowledge which only God can have. (CSB)

God knows our heart, our thoughts, knows that we are sincere and that we do not deliberately offend our brother. It can happen to the best Christians that without intention he says or does something which hurts the feelings of the brother. The offended brother cannot look into the offender’s heart, but God can. That is then our comfort. God knows everything, and so He is also aware when inadvertently we have wronged our brother. But the greatest comfort still is this that God actually covers these unintentional lapses with the broad mantle of His love in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

The condemnation of the Law burdens a believer’s conscience. God, who knows everything, gets the last word by affirming that on the cross Christ Jesus removed the guilt and condemnation of all. (TLSB)

3:21 *we have confidence* – This is a type of confidence that is so self-assured that there is nothing that can be said that is too extreme a statement. In a Christian’s life it is based on a complete trust in the Lord and is used for positive purposes.

The Law always accuses, and the Gospel always pardons and comforts. After God has forgiven us all our sin because of Jesus we have reassured ourselves with the promise that “God is greater than our heart” (v. 20), then we have confidence before God to ask for anything. (TLSB)

Our confidence is that we know what love is: “Jesus laid down His life for us.” “The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Our confidence is in the Father’s lavish love (3:1). We are the children born of God (5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

God covers our sin with Christ’s righteousness. And when, as a result, our hearts no longer accuse us, we look to God with confidence and are unafraid. A Christian tells his heart that God has forgiven all sins according to His great love, and then the heart has peace. It no longer disturbs the Christian with reproaches. (Stoeckhardt)

3:22 *receive from him* – “And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands [original language, ‘are keeping his commandments’] and [‘are doing’] do what pleases him”: “We are constantly receiving from him whatever we keep asking.” “Every answer to our petitions is thus the clearest factual evidence that he treats us as children” (R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1945] 479). It is to be understood that children would ask only what pleases the Father: “Thy will be done.” John clearly states this in 1 Jn 5:14–15, and Jesus promises in Jn 15:7, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” (See Mt 7:8; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13; 16:23.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

According to His will and His Word. (TLSB)

When a Christian thus has again gained a good conscience, he now approaches God with boldness and assurance in prayer. Then prayers flow forth freely and with fullness of joy. While a Christian feels disturbed in his conscience, his prayer life begins to halt and to hesitate. But when he then remembers the forgiving grace of God, he can again freely pour out his heart to his Father in heaven and can joyfully accept what He grants him in answer to his prayer. The blessed relationship destroyed by sin has again been fully reestablished with his God. He calls and God answers; he asks and God gives; and so it becomes evident that he stands right with his God. (Stoeckhardt)

do what pleases him – The good works of Christians are really good in the sight of God. A Christian is born of God and so he has a new life. And from this life flows forth his works. The blemishes which may be attached to them are a foreign matter, but the substance, as deeds of love, is something good. And what is good pleases God. And because God is pleased with such works of love, He indicates to Christians that He is pleased with them by hearing their prayers. So the heavenly Father is kindly disposed toward His children on earth. He is happy to see that His children are glad to please Him. And so His heart flows over by bestowing His benefits upon them. (Stoeckhardt)

Those who have been born of God can walk in the light through faith. Through this God-given faith, all one does is pleasing and perfect in Christ. (TLSB)

3:23 This command has two parts: (1) Believe in Christ (see Jn 6:29), and (2) love each other (see Jn 13:34–35). The first part is developed in 4:1–6 and the second part in 4:7–12. (CSB)

his commandment that we believe – To have faith in God. (CSB)

To believe in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and all that He has done and still does to this day for salvation. (TLSB)

“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” What is God’s will and command? Believe (Jn 6:40; 2 Thess 4:3); love (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 17). “We cannot believe without loving and love without believing” (Lenski, *ibid.*, 479). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“Believe in the name”: All that Jesus is—Messiah, Son of God, Word of Life, etc. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

First we must believe in the name of Jesus, and then we come to love each other. The love to which the Apostle exhorts flows from faith. (Stoeckhardt)

3:24 *he abides in us* – This happens when we are baptized. Then we can obey his command to believe and if we have faith we can do great things for God. It is really not us doing them but Christ who lives in us. (CSB)

There is a reciprocal indwelling between Jesus and all believers. (TLSB)

“Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them”: (original language, “remains in him, and he in them”). Cf. Jn 15:5, “remain” or “live” as in text. “Whoever claims to live [*(menein)*] in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 Jn 2:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

“And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us”: See 1 Jn 5:6–7. The Spirit testifies through the testimony of John, an eyewitness, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who came by water (Baptism) and blood (crucifixion). (Cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6–7.) The Spirit is our assurance through the Word, not by our changing subjective feeling. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The possession of the spirit of Christ, and its manifestation in the fruits of the Spirit, prove that one is born of God, and an heir of heaven. (Concordia Bible)

The Apostle does not intend to convey this meaning as if one through observing His commandments abides in Him. It is by faith alone that we apprehend Christ, and it by faith alone that we hold Him fast. It is by faith alone that we abide in Christ. The Apostle here merely wants to describe the person who by faith abides in Christ. It is such a person who keeps the

commandments and abides in love. In other words, one gives evidence of being in Christ, of moving in His communion, and of abiding in Him by obedience towards His commandments, especially and also the commandment of brotherly love. And if we see then that we love the brethren and keep God's commands, we gain assurance that we truly believe on Him and so by faith abide in Him. (Stoeckhardt)

He has given us. All true believers receive Christ's Spirit at the time of their conversion. The Holy Spirit Himself grants us to know His Word and abiding presence. (TLSB)

3:11–3:24 Our heart condemns us when we look at our brother, see his needs, and yet excuse ourselves from acting in love. However, in Christ we know that we have passed out of death into life; that is, we have true saving faith, because we love our fellow Christians. Jesus laid down His life for us. His love for us has covered all our sins. God is greater than our heart, and His sure and certain promises of salvation give us confidence to come before Him. • Heavenly Father, forgive my lack of real love for my brothers and sisters, and enable me to love everyone as Jesus has loved me. Amen. (TLSB)