

# 1 John 3:10 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

**1John 3:10** By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother:

**Greek:** en touto phanera estin (3SPAI) ta tekna tou theou kai ta tekna tou diabolou pas o me poion (PAPMSN) dikaiosunen ouk estin (3SPAI) ek tou theou kai o me agapon (PAPMSN) ton adelphon autou.

**ESV** - 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.

**Wuest** - In this is apparent the born-ones of God and the born-ones of the devil. Every one who is not habitually doing righteousness is not of God, also the one who is not habitually loving his brother.

- **children of God:** 1 Jn 5:2 Lu 6:35 Ro 8:16,17 Eph 5:1
- **children of the devil** - Mt 13:38 John 8:44 Ac 13:10
- **Anyone who does not** - 1 Jn 3:7,8 2:29
- **Is not of God** - 1Jn 4:3,4,6 5:19 John 8:47 3Jn 1:11
- [1 John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **"WHOSE YOUR DADDY?" IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS!**

Have you ever heard the slang American phrase "**Who's your daddy?**" which is often asked as a rhetorical question? It is commonly used as a boastful claim of dominance over the intended listener. Or stated another way it is an expression which asserts one's authority over the person to whom the question is posed. In the context of 1 John 3:10, who is your "daddy?" the question is "Is God your Father or is the Devil your father?" It is either one or the other. There is no middle ground on this question. So how can you discern who your "Daddy" is? John says it is **BY THIS**. This should provoke a question "by what" or "what is this?" This is simply by your practice or by your lifestyle, one can determine in which family they belong. Note carefully the answer to what is "by this" is not whether you profess to believe in Jesus, not whether you go to church regularly (and have done this all your life), not whether you belong to one particular denomination, not to whether other people think you are a "good person," not to whether you think you are a "good person," and the list goes on. The spiritual "pedigree" for being in God's family and having Him as your legitimate Father is are you righteous in His sight. Are you justified (declared righteous)? That is, is your **POSITION** before God, that of being in right standing with Him, and the only way to be in right standing is by being in His Son by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And how do you know you are in Christ, that you are righteous in your **POSITION**? The simple answer is that you practice righteousness as a habit of your life. Not that you are sinless but that over time you sin less and less. While your **POSITION** in Christ is **PERFECT** and eternally secure, [your practice will not be perfect in this life](#) because you still possess the old sin nature within your mortal body. And so you will still commit sins. The difference is not in your "PERFECTION," but in your "DIRECTION." If your lifestyle is generally "heavenward" ([progressive sanctification](#)) than that is good evidence that God is your Father. And this will show itself in how you treat your "brother." If you are not loving your brother (present tense), that is evidence that your father is the Devil. This concept of "who is your daddy" is so critical, that it is discussed in more detail in the notes that follow. The "inheritance" from one Father is eternal life with Jesus in Heaven, while the "inheritance" from the other father is eternal death separated forever from God in Hell.

**Ligon Duncan** - 'The children of God and the children of the devil are distinguishable by the contrast of their subtle habit and character.' He says this: "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." John's concern is for Christians to have a concern for pursuing holiness. John is telling us that those who know what Christ is like want to be like Him. Some of you are married. Can you remember early in your relationship when you began to see qualities in your spouse that you admired? You thought to yourself, 'She is a woman of such upstanding integrity,' and it made you want to be like she was. Or perhaps you said, 'He is a man of such kindness and justice, and I want to be like that.' Well, everyone who is born of God sees the qualities of the heavenly Father displayed in Jesus Christ, and in the depths of our being begins to say, "Lord, that's what I want to be like. I want to be like Him. Make me like Your Son. Make me want to be like Your Son. Against all the temptations of the world and the flesh and the devil, cause this desire to grow.' That's what John is urging us to. John is telling us that we should not only relish the forgiveness of sins that we have in Jesus Christ, but recognize that He came to make us like Himself. "Conformed to the image of His Father, He who was the very image of the invisible God." May God help us to pursue that righteousness by grace. (**1 John 2:29-3:10 The Test of Righteousness**)

**By this** - This should prompt you to ask '**By what?**' Read on where John proceeds to explain the only two kinds of children in the world, **children of God** and **children of the devil**. There is no intermediate state. You can not belong partially to one and partially to the other. You are "all in" (as they say). You are alive in the Spirit or dead in your trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). You are either in Christ or in Adam (dead in your sins) (1 Cor 15:22) When the "flood" (figuratively speaking) of God's righteous wrath comes (1 Th 1:10) you are either safe in the "Ark," Christ Jesus, or you will die in your sins (Jn 8:24) and be washed away eternally from the presence of God (2 Th 1:7-9).

**Wuest** - The words "**by this**" point particularly to what follows, although a secondary reference might be to what precedes.

**W E Vine** - **In this** (by this)—while this phrase recalls what has just been said, it also serves to introduce the contrast about to be

stated. For in v. 9 the apostle has mentioned what characterizes the children of God. In v. 10 he is about to restate what characterizes the children of the devil. "In this" governs what is said of both families. (Collected Writings)

**By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious-** Obvious means plain, evident, easily discovered, seen or understood, readily perceived with the eye or intellect. John is preparing to state an obvious truth (if one lets the text say what it says!)

**Children** (5043) (**teknon** from **tikto** = bring forth, bear children, be born) is strictly a child produced, male or female, son or daughter. **Teknon** is thus a child as viewed in relation to his or her parents or family. In the plural, **teknon** is used generically of descendants, posterity or children. John writes that "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become **children** (teknon) of God (GOD IS THEIR FATHER), even **to those who believe in His Name**, (JESUS - Acts 4:12+)" (John 1:12+)

John's uses of **teknon** in his epistles - 1 Jn. 3:1; 1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Jn. 3:10; 1 Jn. 5:2; 2 Jn. 1:1; 2 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 1:13; 3 Jn. 1:4

**God** (2316) (**theos**) in the Biblical context refers to the supreme being described in the OT and amplified in the NT in Jesus, the Son of God.

## THE TEST OF PATERNITY!

As a physician I used to perform **paternity testing** in the Blood Bank and so I found Daniel Akin's following comment interesting - "The foolproof test in this paternity dispute is to *take swabs of lifestyle*, and the one that shows *no evidence* of someone doing the right thing can't be God's child." (Italics mine) That works in medicine and it works in theology...

**No fruit, no root.**

**No changed conduct, no changed heart.**

**No changed spiritual life, no changed spiritual family!**

Jesus Himself summed up Paul's great work of the Gospel declaring that he was sending him to Gentiles "to open their eyes so that they may turn from **darkness** to light and from the **dominion of Satan** to (the dominion of) God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:18+) If an individual's "eyes" have never been spiritually opened, they are still in the kingdom of Satan and under his dominion as "children of the devil." The Greek word for dominion is **exousia** which in this context means that the devil has the might and the right when it comes to your life. This does not mean you will join a Satanic cult, but that your general decisions are to some degree under the dominion of the devil.

**Children of God and children of the Devil** (cp Acts 13:10) - All the world is in one of two families. **Children of God** can never become children of the Devil, but praise God for His great mercy and grace that **children of the Devil** can become **children of God** by grace through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8-9). John proceeds to give two markers of one's "family line." One is not in God's family if he or she (1) does not practice righteousness or (2) love his brother.

**Vine** - the distinction is now clearly marked by the contrasting relationships. The tree is known by its fruit. Whether a person is born of God or is unregenerate is to be tested by his manner of life. While the phrase "the children of the Devil" does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, yet the Lord interpreted the tares in the parable, as "the sons of the Evil One," the word "sons" conveying the thought of likeness to parentage. In John 8:44 the Lord says to the Jews who were intent upon murdering Him, "ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do." Again, Elymas the sorcerer was called a "son of the Devil" (Acts 13:10). While the word "children" here expresses relationship, yet the apostle is stressing the evidence of it rather than the mere relationship. (Collected Writings)

Here is a comment by **Zane Hodges** (The Epistles of John) on the **children of the devil** - "*There is no good reason to take this phrase as a reference to unsaved people generally.*" **Ed comment:** Why not? This comment directly counters the simple reading of the text! You do not have to be a Greek scholar (Hodges was a Greek scholar) to discern that even the context explains that those people who **habitually** do not "**practice righteousness are not of God**" **Hodges** even goes to the extreme to say that a *truly regenerate person could...be called a child of the devil.*" Woe! This statement is frightening! It is so against what John says, one can hardly believe Hodges made this statement! Beloved **be wary** of ANYTHING written by Zane Hodges and also be very wary when reading commentaries by ANYONE WHO QUOTES him in a positive light! Read the paper [The Unusual Teachings of Zane Hodges](#). and see the first entry under [1 John 3 Resources](#).

**Middleton Bible** comments on **Hodges'** unusual interpretation regarding this verse - According to Hodges, righteous living proves that a person is saved but wicked living does not prove that a person is lost. Apparently a person can gain assurance if he is living righteously, but **if he is living wickedly he need not worry too much.** (ED: [WOE!](#)) Hodges teaches that saved persons can live just as wickedly as unsaved persons. Dillow says this: "When a Christian is 'of the devil,' John means that, when he commits even one sinful act, in the

doing of that act, the source of it was Satan" (p.172). John is not speaking of one sinful act or a single occurrence of unrighteousness. He speaking of a person who does not practice righteousness. His life is characterized by practicing unrighteousness. He does not love his brother. He is likened to Cain, who was "of that wicked one" (1 Jn 3:12+). Because he hates his brother he is likened to a murderer (1 Jn 3:15), "and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1Jn 3:15+). It is hard to imagine what stronger words could have been used to describe an unsaved person! (Bold added)([Children of God and Children of the Devil](#)). For >100 pages of discussion of [the unusual teachings of Zane Hodges. et al click here for index of topics](#))

Notice also that these two contrasting families put to rest the false belief in the so-called "universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man." God is not EVERYONE'S Father!

**Warren Wiersbe - Yielding to sin** is the distinguishing mark of "the children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). They profess, or claim, one thing, but they practice another. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44, ED: Read Titus 1:16+), and his children are like their father. "He that saith, 'I know [God],' and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1John 2:4-note). The children of the devil try to deceive God's children into thinking that a person can be a Christian and still practice sin. "Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he [God] is righteous" (1John 3:7-note). ([Commentary](#))

**Ray Stedman** - I do not think anything could be put plainer than that (1Jn 3:10). It is crystal clear from this verse that all humanity, in the sight of God, is divided into two classes. Someone has said that people may be divided into two classes, the righteous and the unrighteous; and the classifying is always done by the righteous! Unfortunately, that may be true. Certainly it is true that humanity is divided into two classes -- not three, as we often fondly imagine. We would like to think there are the children of the devil, and the children of God, and then there is a vast group in between who are morally neutral, neither devilish nor angelic. Perhaps, if pressed on the point, most people would classify themselves in the middle somewhere. But God says "No." Characteristically throughout this letter, John draws the extremes of black and white, but these are not simply his ideas. These reflect the actual situation. Truth is truth and error is error. We have seen this before. John says there is no fellowship between them, no possible blending. There are no gray areas of truth -- it is either white or its opposite, black. There are no shades or degrees of truth. So it is in this matter of mankind -- we either belong to the children of God, or we are children of the devil, one or the other. There are not three classes... As we view humanity from the Biblical point of view we see that, without exception, every one of us were born into the family of the devil. We were born children of the devil because we are part of the fallen race of Adam. We are children of Adam who sold himself to the devil, and all his children are like him in that respect. The tendency and proclivity toward sin, that twisted perversion, is passed along to us from our forefathers along with the color of our eyes, the eventual height of our bodies and all other physical features. We are born with a bent toward evil. You only need to live with a few babies to see this demonstrated. How utterly self-centered a baby is! There is nothing more self-centered in the world. Everything exists for him, in his thinking. The whole world is there but to serve his particular need, and that, in essence, is the expression of the life of the devil. It is only by new birth that we become members of the family of God, children of God. ([One or the Other - 1 John 3:10 - Read this entire sermon](#))

**Wuest - Children** is tekna, born-ones of the devil in the sense that from Adam they inherit a totally-depraved nature, the same as the devil has.

**Devil** (1228)(**diabolos** from **diá** = through, between + **ballo** = to cast, throw) means a false accuser, slanderer (one who utters false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation), backbiting (malicious comment about one not present), one given to malicious gossip or a calumniator (one who utters maliciously false statements, charges, or imputations about, this term imputes malice to the speaker and falsity to the assertions). **Wuest** says the literal meaning of diabolos is "to throw through" means "to riddle one with accusations." **Diabolos** is applied some 34 times to Satan, the god of this world, and in each case has the definite article in the Greek ("the" = defining a specific entity) and is never in the plural (the three uses in the pastoral epistles are all plural) as when applied to men who, by opposing the cause of God, may be said to act the part of the devil or to side with him.

**Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God nor the one who does not love his brother**- John is saying that it is **obvious** whether one belongs to the family of God or the family of the devil. How is it made obvious? John gives two tests or markers of family identity - (1) practice of righteousness and (2) love for one's brethren. Notice that **not of God** parallels John's previous description **of the devil** (1Jn 3:8-note).

**Practice** (4160) (**poieo**) means to do or accomplish and is in the present tense in this passage which speaks of continuous action.

**Not of God** - Not here is the Greek marker signifying absolute negation. Thus this person is **absolutely** not of God!

**Obvious** (evident) (5318)(**phanerós** from **phaino** = give light; to make to shine, to cause to become visible from **phos** = light; Study verb **phaneroo**) means made visible as an external manifestation to senses. Phaneros stresses what is visible to the sight. **Phaneros** means conspicuous, apparent, (openly) manifest, obvious, visible, evident, plain, clear, easily seen, open to sight. What is

open and public (Mk 4:22). Webster says that **evident** means "Clear to the vision or understanding, readily perceived or apprehended. Evident implies presence of visible signs that lead one to a definite conclusion. Plain. Open to be seen; clear to the mental eye; apparent; manifest."

### Beloved, could John have been any clearer?

**Wuest** - "Love is **agapao**, which refers to divine love which is self-sacrificial in its essence, the love produced in the heart of the yielded saint by the Holy Spirit, the love defined by Paul in 1Corinthians 13:1-7-**note**, the love shown by God at Calvary. The **brother** here is ostensibly a Christian brother. The expression is equivalent to "a fellow-Christian."

**Sam Storms** - 1John 3:10a summarizes the substance of the moral test by indicating that the failure to practice righteousness is the criterion by which to distinguish the children of the devil from the children of God.

**MacDonald** - There is no in-between ground. There are none who are half-and-half. God's children are known by their righteous lives.

#### THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN

Unsaved People Habitually  
Living Sinful Lives

#### GOD'S CHILDREN

Saved People Habitually  
Living Spiritual Lives

Listen to Paul's warning about who will not inherit (or enter) the Kingdom of God (another way of saying they have never been born again - cf Jn 3:3-8).

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who **practice** ([prasso](#) in the present tense = as one's habitual practice, the "general direction" of one's life) such things **shall not inherit the kingdom of God.** (Gal 5:19-21+)

Paul writing to the sin-filled church at Corinth warned them that practitioners of sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God but some who come in and try to deceive them saying "Don't worry. If you have made a profession of faith, you have a guaranteed "fire insurance" policy, no matter how you live the remainder of your life! This is mocking God beloved and the sowing of this evil seed will be reaped! - see Gal 6:7-8+...

Or do you not know that the **unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived** (present imperative with negative - stop an action that has begun); neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, **will inherit the kingdom of God.** (1 Cor 6:9-10)

**Comment** - Paul is warning in both Galatians and First Corinthians that if one continues to practice evil deeds (lawlessness), then their **deeds demonstrate** that they are not born again, are not new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17+), and do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ro 8:9+), Who is continually energizing one to have the desire and the power to live in a manner which is pleasing to the Father (Php 2:13NLT+). In short, they will not receive an inheritance from the Father, the Kingdom of God! Do not be deceived. Examine yourselves (2 Cor 13:5+).

**Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God**- Could this simple statement be any clearer? Habitually living in sin (**present tense**) identifies a person as **not of God** and thus clearly this person is an unbeliever, regardless of what he or she professes. Sadly as discussed above there are some who twist this passage and try to distort it as a description of a believer! **Beware!** Do not be deceived (see above 1 Cor 6:9-10)! As mentioned, Jesus was very clear that a person can Him **'Lord'** but continually practice (**present tense**) lawlessness and thus clearly not be a believer! (Mt 7:23)

**Spurgeon** - It were well if we always remembered that practical godliness is the sort of godliness; that it is not **talking** religion, but **walking** religion which proves a man to be **sincere** (Webster 1828 on **sincere** = pure, unmixed, Being in reality what it appears to be; not feigned; not simulated; not assumed or said for the sake of appearance; real; not hypocritical or pretended.); it is not having



a religious *tongue*, but a religious *heart*; it is not a religious *mouth*, but a religious *foot*. The best evidence is the salvation of the soul. Avaunt! (begone, depart). Talkative; go thy way, thou mere *professing formalist*! Your ways lead down to hell, and your end shall be destruction; for "He that practices righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

**Henry Mahan** - By attitude, conduct and daily walk it is made perfectly clear who are those who take their nature from God and are His children, and who are those who take their nature from the devil and are his children. No one who does not practice and seek godliness and righteousness, who does not seek to be conformed to the will of God in purpose, thought and deeds, is of God. A man who does not love others is not of God either. A godly walk and a spirit of love and mercy are evidences of grace and faith. The absence of these is evidence of the absence of grace. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**George Findlay** - "Children of the Devil" at last St John calls the antinomian religionists outright, who neither "do righteousness" nor "love their brethren" (1Jn 3:10). He had the warrant for this epithet in the words with which the Lord Jesus stigmatized the Jewish party who sought His life, who hated the light that shone in Him because their deeds were evil: "You are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a man-slayer from the beginning, and in the truth he standeth not... He is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44). Those who claimed Abraham, and even God, for their father, are referred to this dreadful paternity, since they have Satan's disposition and work his will against the Son of God. Their moral affinity proved their spiritual descent; their features betrayed their family. On the same principle, Elymas the sorcerer was in the eyes of the Apostle Paul, a "son of the Devil," being "full of all guile and all villany, an enemy of all righteousness, a perverter of the ways of the Lord" (Acts 13:9 f.). ([1 John 3:4-9 Commentary - scroll down to page 252](#) )

**Ray Stedman** - Now as we have also seen in this passage, and others, once we become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ and are really born of God, it is an irreversible process. We cannot be unborn. God, having "begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," (Philippians 1:6 KJV). Once that wonderful change has taken place, God himself undertakes to bring us along, and he will do his job. We cannot lose this new life. Ah, but there is the rub! This is what John is pointing out. There are many people who sincerely think they are children of God because they have repeated a certain set of words, or prayed a certain prayer, or gone forward in a meeting, or performed some other activity or ritual, when actually they are not and never have been born again. They are self-deceived. What has happened is that the flesh, which is subtle, and, as Jeremiah put it, "irreversibly wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9), i.e., unspeakably bad, has determined to remain in the seat of power (as it always does), and has simply turned religious or moral; perhaps it has cleaned up a few unsavory aspects of life and thus deceived the heart of the individual so that he thinks he is a Christian because he has done certain things. Now what happens in this case is that such people have been content with a surface change, or with a mere relief of feelings. Perhaps they were greatly distressed about some condition in their life, and someone talked to them about Christ. It looked like a way out, so they said, "Well, yes," they would receive Christ, and they went through the performance of asking him to come into their life. But all they were really looking for was relief from the conditions they were under. They got relief, there was a temporary betterment of the problem, and they thought this was conversion, this was regeneration. But they never came to the place where, absolutely helpless, sensing that they could do nothing in themselves any more, they cast themselves upon the sustaining grace of God. That is what conversion is. It is a feeling of: "I can't do anything to help myself. There's no improvement that I can bring about. I'm licked. I've got this problem within me, with which I've come face to face, and which I can do nothing to solve." Then the eye of faith sees the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross as doing for them what they could never do for themselves, and, casting themselves upon the grace of God in helpless, lack of self-trust, they are born again. God's Spirit regenerates them and they move into the kingdom of God. "Well," you say, "how do you know that you've been born again? How can you really tell that this has happened?" This is what Verse 10 is all about. All the apostles tell us this, but no one puts it any clearer than John. In the latter part of the tenth verse he says, "whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." (1 John 3:10b RSV)

In other words, the unmistakable sign, the "unimitatable" sign, is a two-fold mark. He puts it negatively. **If he has not begun to turn from evil, from wrong, and if he has not begun to love his brother, then he is only deceiving himself.** As we have just seen in the passage before this, John says that he who is born of God cannot continue to sin (see 1 John 3:9a RSV). He just cannot do it. **If you can go on living as you have always lived before you professed belief in Christ, then you have not been born again.** You have only experienced a surface psychological reaction that is not the new birth at all. And this is quite possible. John does not say that he who is born of God should not continue to sin, he says he cannot do so, because the life in him says "No" to these things that are wrong, and he cannot go on in them. John will also go on to show us, this life in him will inevitably cause a person to begin to love his brother, to love those around him with a new kind of love (**Ed**: Supernaturally enabled love - Gal 5:22+). That is the subject of the next theme he will develop and this verse introduces it to us. I shall leave that till we come to it, but here is the two-fold mark: **righteousness, and love**, and these two are interwoven, intertwined together. You cannot have the one without the other. As we saw in an earlier message, righteousness is love so behaving as to satisfy justice. Righteousness and love are thus intertwined together. ([One or the Other - 1 John 3:10 - Read this entire sermon](#))

## THE SECOND TEST BROTHERLY LOVE

**The one who does not love his brother** - This serves to introduce the next section (1Jn 3:11-24). John had spoken earlier of the importance of love of one's brother (in Christ). (1Jn 2:7-11). This will be discussed in more detail in the notes on 1Jn 3:11-24.

**John Piper** observes that now "John shifts gears and brings us into a discussion of the Christian's obligation to love his brother. Now John's transition from a discussion of righteousness in general to a discussion of love in particular should not catch us by surprise. It is not new to us. Already in chapter 2, John has followed the same pattern. In 1John 2:3–6-**note**, John spoke in a general sense about keeping God's commandments and the assurance of knowing God that such obedience brings (1Jn 2:3-**note**). He ends this section by asserting that **"he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way he walked** (1Jn 2:6-**note**). But how do we walk in the same way that he walked? Preeminently by walking in love. And so immediately in 1Jn 2:7–11-**note** John shifts to a discussion of loving one's brother. It is on the one hand the old commandment which John's readers had heard from the beginning, while on the other hand it is a new commandment because its fulfillment belongs to the new age in which the true light is already shining. Now again in 1 Jn 3, John follows the same pattern. Last week in 1 Jn 3:4–10-**note** of chapter 3, we considered John's discussion of righteousness and the way it serves to provide evidence of the new birth and of divine sonship. John spoke in general terms about not-sinners (1 Jn 3:6-**note**, 1Jn 3:9-**note**) and about doing what is right (1Jn 3:7-**note**, 1Jn 3:10). But what exactly does it mean to do what is right? The answer is the same: doing what is right means loving your brother. Which is the theme of our passage now. The same flow of thought of 1 Jn 2 is repeated in 1 Jn 3. The apostle John writes in spirals, not in straight lines. He really has only a few major points in 1 John, but he keeps returning to them again and again and again, each time in different words, each time at a higher and higher level. " (1 John 3:11-18 [Love: A Matter of Life & Death](#))

**W E Vine** - Not to love one's brother is a special form of not doing righteousness, as righteousness, or right-wisdom, is being right with God, and brotherly love is a mark of being right with God; the absence of it is a mark of the absence of divine relationship. "The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Gal. 5:14). To fulfill the Law is to be right with God and so to do righteousness. A proof of the existence of divine relationship, then, consists in the manifestation of love to others. One who is born of God will love those whom God loves. In this verse the article is absent before "righteousness" whereas it is present in 1 Jn 3:7. While its presence in 1 Jn 3:7 stresses the completeness and unity of righteousness, its absence here stresses the character of righteousness in a special way. (Collected Writings)

**Love** (25)(**agapao**) means to love unconditionally, sacrificially, which is like the love God Himself is and demonstrates to unlovely people! Agapao is not sentimental or emotional but is an act of one's will desiring another's highest good. It is unconditional and thus is still given even if it is not received/returned! Of course these definitions indicate this quality of love is not natural, but supernatural. In fact agapao is IM-possible, but it is HIM-possible! In other words agapao love can be demonstrated only when the one showing the love is filled with the Holy Spirit and thus is enabled to do supernaturally what they absolutely cannot do naturally! And John describes this type of love as one's lifestyle for agapao in the **present tense** describes the general direction of one's life. Let's be clear on this for no believer perfectly loves his brother, especially a brother who is not very "lovable!" (You know what I mean!). What John is saying is that if one does not generally manifest love to the brethren, he or she is not a child of God but is a child of the devil.

**Ray Stedman** a pastor with a true, gentle "pastor's heart" lovingly gave the following sobering warning to his congregation...

Now, in all faithfulness, **I must tell some of you that you are deceiving yourselves. There are some here, I am convinced, who think they are Christians but who are not Christians, who have never been born again.** There are some who have been Christians, *you thought*, for years, but there has been **no change** in your attitude toward others. You have held resentments, and have been bitter about certain situations for years, and you have done nothing about them. There has been no upwelling of love within your heart to change your attitude and make you go to another and settle the problem that has been between you. **There are some of you who have professed to be Christians, and yet you have been going on consistently, week after week, month after month, year after year, doing things that the Word of God clearly says are wrong.** You have covered them up. You have not let anyone know about them, and you think you have hidden them. If this is so, you are fooling yourself. You never have been born again. We are dealing now with One who knows our hearts. You may fool us, you may fool your friends, and even your wife or husband, but you do not fool God. He knows the heart, and he precisely puts his finger on the situation as it is. He says if these changes are not occurring then **you have never been born again.** ([One or the Other - 1 John 3:10 - Read this entire sermon!](#))

**MacArthur** explains that "The false teachers not only had an erroneous view of Christ's nature and displayed disobedience to God's commands, but they also displayed a distinct lack of love for true believers, who rejected their heretical teaching."

**Jon Courson** - In the lives of those who are born again, there is not only the absence of something negative but also the presence of something positive. That is, there is not only an absence of habitual, constant sin, but there is the presence of love.

**Stephen Charnock** observed that the actions of a person reveal more about him than his words writing that "The testimony of works is louder and clearer than that of words, and the frame of men's hearts must be measured rather by what they do than by what they say. There may be a mighty distance between the tongue and the heart."

**Steven Cole** - John's last verse in this section explains and clinches his point: **'By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.'** This verse is parallel to John's warning about deception in 1Jn 3:7. Don't be fooled. It's easy to say, *'I believe in Jesus.'* But John says, *"Look at his life. If he doesn't practice righteousness, if he doesn't live in obedience to God's Word, especially with regard to love, his claim is false."* John's final comment shows that true righteousness includes love for your brother and it introduces the **relational test** (1Jn 3:11-18). ([The Believer and Sin - 1 John 3:4-10](#))

**Cole** concludes his sermon on this section - The modern American church has fallen into serious deception on this crucial matter of sin. The popular view is that there are two options for the Christian life. **"Plan A"** is for the really committed: you trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is tough. You have to obey Jesus totally, repenting of all your sins. It means giving up the right to spend your money as you choose, because you yield it to Jesus and manage it as His steward. It means following Jesus as His servant. He may call you to go to the mission field or even die as a martyr. But, you will have rewards in heaven. If that's too difficult, you may want to try **"Plan B."** In this option, you accept Jesus as Savior, but you don't need to follow Him as Lord. With this plan, you will go to heaven when you die, but you just don't get as many rewards. But, you can enjoy the pleasures of sin now and at least get in the door of heaven later. But the truth of the Bible, the truth that John emphasizes here is, **"There is no Plan B!"** Plan A is the only plan for eternal life. Christ calls you to follow Him as Savior and Lord. You cannot do this by your own strength or willpower, but only if He imparts new life to you, causing you to be born of God. **If you have been born of God, it will be obvious. The new life in you will produce a life of righteousness.** "Little children, make sure no one deceives you!" ([The Believer and Sin - 1 John 3:4-10](#)) (Bolding added)

**Sam Storms** - 1Jn 3:10 is perhaps the most explicit statement in the epistle concerning the irreconcilable contrast between Christian and non-Christian. Christians are designated as children of God (note the immediately preceding emphasis on their being begotten of God) who may be recognized as such because they practice righteousness and love the brethren. Non-Christians are called children of the devil because they do not practice righteousness and care nothing for the brethren. It is to this latter notion of brotherly love as a criterion for determining one's filial status that John now devotes his attention. Simply put: whoever persistently hates the brethren is spiritually dead. Conversely, the genuine believer may know himself to be alive if he loves the brethren. ([Sam Storms - 1 John 3:10b-24](#))

**John Stott** summarizes John's teaching in 1Jn 2:28-3:10 - "We are in a position now to look back over the foregoing twelve verses... in which the moral test has been elaborated, and feel the compulsion of its argument. If Christ appeared first both 'to take away our sins' and 'to destroy the works of the devil', and if, when he appears a second time, 'we shall see him' and, in consequence, 'we shall be like him,' **how can we go on living in sin?** To do so is to deny the purpose of his two appearances. If we would be loyal to his first coming and ready for his second, we must purify ourselves, as he is pure. **By so doing we shall give evidence of our birth of God**" ([The Letters of John by John R. W. Stott](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - A true believer does not practice sin; a counterfeit believer cannot help but practice sin, because he does not have God's new nature within him. The true believer also loves other Christians, which is discussed in detail in 1 John 3:11-24. But these words were not written so that you and I might check on other people. They were inspired so that we may examine ourselves. Each of us must answer honestly before God:

1. Do I have the divine nature within me, or am I merely pretending to be a Christian?
2. Do I cultivate this divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?
3. Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?
4. Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me?
5. When temptation comes, do I "play with it," or do I flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the divine nature within me?

The life that is real is honest with God about these vital issues. ([Commentary](#))



## And the Doctrine of Perseverance

One thing John emphasizes is the reality and gravity of sin. In 1John 1:8 he forcefully labels those who say they have no sin as self-deceived and void of the truth. In 1John 1:10 the claim not to have committed sin is tantamount to calling God a liar, and in 1John 2:1 John clearly implies that Christians will sin (although he writes to help them avoid it). How then do we understand the statement in 1John 3:9 that the one who is begotten of God **"does not do sin"** (lit.) and in fact "is not able to sin"?

Following are the major interpretative options (excluding the suggestion of some that John simply contradicts himself):

- (1) To avoid the difficulty some have narrowed the definition of "sin" to notorious crimes or offences against love (this was the view of both Augustine and Luther).
- (2) It has been suggested that what John means is that a Christian cannot sin because what is sin in the life of an unbeliever is not regarded as such by God when committed by a believer. This is contrary to both John and the rest of the NT.
- (3) One interpretation draws a distinction between the "old" nature in the Christian and the "new" nature. The "old" nature may continue to sin but the "new" cannot. But how do we isolate a "nature" from the "individual" himself/herself? We may speak of "flesh" and "spirit" in a person, but it is always the person who sins or does not sin, not merely a "nature".
- (4) Others say John is speaking about the ideal and not reality. The argument is: Since all anticipate that sinlessness will be characteristic in the age to come, and since John believed that the age to come had come (1John 2:8), he naturally asserted the sinlessness of Christians!
- (5) Some say that John, in the heat of controversial circumstances, breaks forth in holy passion and speaks with apparent exaggeration and over-emphasis.
- (6) One view stresses 1John 3:6 where it is stated that the one who **"abides"** in him does not sin. They contend that this "abiding" in Christ is not descriptive of all Christians but is a condition which only some (those "in fellowship") believers fulfill. The degree of a believer's holiness, then, and his ability to sin or not sin are dependent on whether or not he **"abides"**. When one is abiding in Christ he cannot sin. When one does not abide, one does sin. But 1John 3:9 makes it clear why a Christian doesn't practice sin, indeed, is unable to sin, and it has nothing to do with abiding. It is because he/she **"is born of God"**.
- (7) Others say that the sin of which John speaks in 1John 3:9 is willful and deliberate sin. The Christian, so they say, cannot commit such deliberate sin in the face of the Lord. Oh, really? What of David?
- (8) A few take John quite literally. Hence they believe he is teaching **perfectionism**. 1John 3:9 proves that sinlessness is attainable in this life. The statements in 1John 1:8,10 and especially 1John 2:1 are describing the immature believer who although not yet sinless may still become such through diligent activity and love.

**[I personally find either of the next two options to be the most likely.]**

- (9) Some argue that the "sin" which a believer does not and cannot commit is the "sin that leads to death" in 1 John 5:16, namely, hatred of believers and denial of Jesus. I will address this view in great detail when we come to 1John 5:16.
- (10) **The view adopted by most commentators is that the sin a Christian does not and cannot commit is habitual, persistent, unrepentant sin.** John is not concerned so much with the momentary, individual acts of sin as he is with the overall characteristic tendencies and inclinations of a person's life. John is looking at the pervasive temper of one's overall experience in life, not at the singular incidents individually. John is not taking a snapshot, but a moving picture. His repeated use of the Greek present tense appears to bear this out. He focuses on the habitual character of the activity in view.

In 1John 3:6 John says that the believer who abides in Christ "sins not" (present tense). Also, the one who "does sin" (present tense) shows that he has neither seen nor known Him. John nowhere denies that a Christian commits acts of sin. He does deny, however, that the Christian sins persistently, habitually as a reflection of the characteristic inclination of his soul.

Note that in 1John 3:9a he says the one begotten of God "does not do sin." "Again," notes [Stott](#), "it is **not the isolated act of sin** which is envisaged, but **the settled habit of it**, indicated by the verb *poiein*, to do or to practice, which is used of 'doing' sin in 1John 3:4a, 1John 3:8 and 1John 3:9, of 'doing' lawlessness in 1John 3:4b, and of 'doing' righteousness in 1John 2:29, 3:7 and 3:10a" (126).

John also says the one begotten of God **'is not able to sin'**. But again notice that **"to sin"** is not an aorist infinitive but a present infinitive. If the infinitive had been aorist John would be contradicting what he said in 1John 2:1. The present infinitive again indicates that he has in mind **the inability of the born-again believer to habitually live in sin as if it were the prevailing temper of his soul.**

If the Christian "does not" practice sin, indeed, "cannot" practice sin, wherein lies this "impossibility"? That is to say, how does a believer avoid the life of persistent sin so characteristic of the non-believer? Stott's answer is excellent:

"Wherein lies this 'impossibility'? John's answer is given in two phrases: for his seed remaineth in him and because he is born of God... his seed is accurately rendered in the RSV text 'God's nature', or 'the divine seed' (NEB), and ... in him refers to the child of God. In this way the two parts of verse 9 become exactly parallel, each part consisting of a statement that the Christian does not or cannot sin, to which is added the reason for such an assertion. The implication will then be this: the new birth involves the acquisition of a new nature through the implanting within us of the very seed or life giving power of God. Birth of God is a deep, radical, inward transformation. Moreover, the new nature received at the new birth remains. It exerts a strong internal pressure towards holiness. It is the abiding influence of his seed within everyone who is born of God, which enables John to affirm without fear of contradiction that he cannot go on living in sin... **Indeed, if he should thus continue in sin, it would indicate that he has never been born again**" (127).

**When those born of God do sin, conviction, grief, brokenness, misery, sorrow, discontent, all of which lead to repentance, will occur.**

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**Strong Words** - The book titled UnChristian lists reasons why some non-Christians don't like people who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Their major complaints have to do with the way some Christians act toward unbelievers. The unbelievers in the study tended to view Christians as being hypocritical, judgmental, harsh, and unloving toward people not like themselves.

I'm sure you dislike hearing their view of Christians as I do. Sometimes there's more truth in their perceptions than we wish there was. In 1 John 3, which begins with the words, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (v.1), John introduces a sharp contrast: Believers love righteousness, keep themselves from sin, and love one another; nonbelievers practice sin, hate others, and abide in death.

These are strong words! We are either followers of Jesus Christ or of the devil. We are like Cain or Abel (1Jn 3:12; Gen. 4:8-15). **John says that love for others is what proves we are genuine children of God (1Jn 3:10,18-19; 4:7-8). We can't continue to practice sin and claim to be followers of Christ.** Let's always make sure our words and deeds back up our beliefs. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O help us, Lord, to live our lives  
So unsaved people clearly see  
Reflections of Your loving heart,  
Your kindness, and Your purity.  
—Sper

**Following Christ has two requirements:  
Believing, and acting like you do.**

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**Say No And Yes - Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. —1 John 3:10** - When we wash our hands to clean off the grime and germs, do we actually clean them ourselves? No and yes. To be precise, the soap and water does the job—not us. But we make the choice to use the soap and water to clean our hands.

In 2 Timothy 2, the apostle Paul tells us, "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself ... he will be a vessel for honor" (v.21). This does not mean that we on our own have the power to cleanse ourselves from sin. Rather, we use the cleansing provided by Jesus Christ, who died for us on the cross.

Philippians 3:9 tells us that we are "found in Him, not having [our] own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

When we receive Christ, His death and resurrection sets us free from the penalty and the power of sin, thus enabling us to say no and yes in everyday life. We can say no to the desires of the flesh, or "youthful lusts" that Paul mentioned (2Ti 2:22). And we can

say yes to “righteousness” (right behavior), “faith” (right belief), “love” (right response), and “peace” (right focus).

As we’re cleansed daily, we’ll be “useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2Ti 2:21). By Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, help us to think of the right and the true,  
The pure and the noble—it all points to You;  
For if we consider what’s worthy of praise,  
We’ll then want to live for You all of our days. —Fitzhugh

Right thinking leads to right living.