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A0436 -- Sept. 5, 2004 -- 1 John 3:1-5 -- Antithesis of Sin and Righteousness

Last week, we finished the fourth section of John's first epistle and moved into the body of the letter which extends from 2:28-4:17 as indicated by the *inclusio*. We closed v. 27 with comments regarding the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He presently teaches and He (*aorist*) taught. This indicates that the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is always, without exception, consistent. He never has anything to do with something contrary to the word of God and He never teaches anything contrary to the word of God. He is the revealer of Scripture and He never teaches something contrary to what He previously revealed.

He also teaches us *all things*. We discovered that this means everything. We may agree on some conclusions with non-Christians, but upon closer inspection, we realize that we do not agree on the reasons behind the conclusions. So, we don't really share the same knowledge because biblically, knowledge includes both the conclusions and the set of reasons behind those conclusions. The result is that the Holy Spirit teaches only believers and not unbelievers. They have come to the same conclusions by a different route, a route that antagonistically rejects the necessity of God in reasoning properly and therefore rejects the only sound basis for reasoning at all. They have shot themselves in the foot. And so, we are to *abide in Him* where all wisdom and knowledge is found. All things must be known in relation to Christ or else they are not truly known and we are not "abiding in Him" at that point. As we *abide in Him*, we store up rewards which will be issued at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I gave you a formula for determining rewards at any given point in time while you are still in the body. The time for rewards is over at physical death or the Rapture. Your future is fixed in that regard for all eternity. The formula is:

$$(O_C \div O_G) \times 100 = \% \text{ of } C_T$$

where **O_C** = Opportunities Capitalized, **O_G** = Opportunities Given, and **C_T** = Capacity at any given Time (t).

John closes with the same themes of *confidence* and the *Judgment Seat of Christ* in 4:17. Every verse we are about to embark on is bracketed by these two ideas.

Verse 28 was the theme verse of the body of the letter. It gives the basic command “to abide in Him.” We looked briefly at the Doctrine of Abiding in John 15:1-8 where Jesus makes the analogy of a believer abiding in Him as a branch abides in the vine. Jesus was showing His apostles that in order to have a fruitful Christian life, the believer has to abide in Christ. We have to abide in His teaching. We can accomplish nothing without Him. We have to operate under the power of the filling of the Holy Spirit and not according to our human power. Without Him, we can do nothing. A believer can make a wreck of His life if he does not abide. It can be so bad that God will physically take him out because of his failure to abide and bear fruit. Because the non-abiding Christian gives God a bad name, God takes him out. If we abide in Him then we will have **boldness** and we will not **shrink back** or be **embarrassed** at His coming for His saints at the pre-Tribulation Rapture. The Rapture is an at-any-moment event that is certain to occur, but uncertain as to when it will occur. Therefore, the Rapture doctrine is supposed to keep us on our toes so we will constantly be abiding. Since He could come at any moment, how ought we to be living all the time? As if He could come right now! Are you abiding?

In verse 29, John shifts gears and begins a new thought (no *asyndeton*—no transitional word). His new thought consists of a test to see whether a Christian is able to detect the manifestation of divine life. But first, there is the condition. One must first **know that He is righteous**. If one truly knows that God is righteous, then he will be able to detect the regenerate nature being manifested in another believer. This is not a test of salvation. This is a test of detecting God’s divine nature in another believer. The Regenerate nature is the creation of Christ’s life in the believer (Gal. 2:20). If one knows Christ’s righteousness, then they will be able to detect that righteousness when it is manifested in another person’s life.

1 John 3:1

(Wonder of Regeneration)

See what sort of (potapos) love the Father has given us, that we should be called children (teknon) of God, and we are. For this reason, the world (kosmos) did not know (ginosko) us, because it did not know (ginosko) Him.

The chapter division is unfortunate, because 3:1 clearly flows out of 2:29. Verse 2:29 introduced the fact of regeneration. Verse 3:1 is John’s response to the fact of regeneration. It is a response of wonder regarding the Doctrine of Regeneration. He begins with the word *idete*, which is emphatic and means “Look at this.” “Behold this.” John wants us to take a close look at something, namely **the love of the Father**. The visibility of God’s love in the

church is the key teaching in 2:29-4:17. Obviously, there must be something to see. In verse 2:29, the righteousness of God was visible to those who knew that God was righteous. In the same way, believers can see the love of God when His loving nature is manifested in another believer. The words translated *how great a love* are good but might better be understood as *what sort of love* (Gk. *potapos*). It refers to a certain class of love. John wants us to take a careful look at the class *of love the Father has given us* in regeneration. His love falls into the class of Creator love (Creator-creature distinction). As the Creator cannot be measured, so neither can His love. As the Creator is unchanging, so His love is unchanging. God's love is as stable and immeasurable as God Himself. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And, certainly, God's love is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. On the other hand, we have love that falls into the class of creature love. This is a love that can be measured. This love can and does waiver. The expression of creature love often depends on the actions of the object, but God's love never depends on anything outside of Himself. God even loved us when we were His enemies (Eph. 2:1-5). To love our enemies will be the ethic of the Millennial kingdom (Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:27, 35). *The Father has given us* this love in regenerating us. The result is *that we should be called children of God*. *Children* is a term that signifies close relationship and dependence on the parent. At the moment we were *born again* (i.e., regenerated), a close and dependent relationship was formed between the believer and God. Before regeneration, we were *children of wrath* (Eph. 2:3). We had a close relationship to the *wrath of God*. But now we have a close relationship to the *love of the Father*. We are now the spiritual offspring of God. We now have an acquired characteristic: Christ's life in us.¹

However, the next phrase shows that *the world* cannot recognize the regenerate nature of the child of God. The reason is *because* the world *did not know Him*. This the same argument John makes in his gospel 15:18ff. The *world* can no more recognize the manifestation of divine life than it recognized that divine life itself in Jesus Christ, God incarnate. We often think that if Jesus were here today on earth it would make a big difference in people's recognition of God, that more people would believe in Jesus Christ. Trust me, it didn't and it wouldn't. We already had a test case 2,000 years ago. People stared "eternal life" in the face and did not recognize Him as God the Savior. Remember the dialogue in the gospels where Jesus asked his apostles (READ Matt. 16:13-17), "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" *Some said He was John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah, and still others one of the prophets. These were all unbelievers! But then Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* Remember the brother who wanted Abraham to go back and tell his brothers? What was the response, they have Moses and the prophets; if they don't listen to them, then they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. These are

stunning statements. They illustrate that the issue is not physical evidence. The issue is not that unbelievers just need more evidence to believe in Christ. That's a fool's way of arguing Christianity. Time and again, the Bible says that faith comes by hearing, not by seeing. In fact, the only ones who are able to see the physical evidence properly are those who believe. The unbeliever can never interpret the physical evidence rightly. So, it follows that unbelievers could not perceive God even if He came in the flesh and stood right in front of their eyes. God has to reveal this to them by the Word of God. So, this verse is for believers only. Believers are to take a careful look at this class of love that God has given us; a class of love that transferred us from being children of wrath to being *children of God*. Because the world cannot perceive the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ Himself, there is no way they can recognize us.

1 John 3:2

(Eschatological Transformation)

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed (phaneroo) what we will be. We have known (oida) that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.

Beloved is quite fitting in this context since John's readers are recipients of the ***love of the Father*** who considers them ***children of God***. ***Now*** is emphatic (Gk. *nun*) meaning, presently we are ***children of God***. But ***it has not yet been revealed what we will be***. It is not physically visible what the future holds for the ***child of God***. We already have a regenerate nature that can be seen when manifested by the ***child of God***. However, this manifestation does not consist of any physical characteristics. Presently, we only manifest a spiritual likeness. However, ***when He is revealed, we will be like Him*** in a physical likeness. "Just as doing righteousness makes manifest a likeness to the righteous One, so also our future destiny involves the same principle: manifest likeness to Christ physically as well as spiritually (cf. Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:20-21)."ⁱⁱ While we presently do not know this likeness, we do know that we will be transformed into the physical likeness of our glorious Savior ***when He is revealed***. This revealing of Christ is clearly at the Rapture, in accordance with 1 John 2:28. It is an appearing that only believers will see, unlike the Second Coming where every eye will see Him. The Rapture is an at-any-moment event that is certain to occur but uncertain as to when it will occur. It is pre-Tribulational and pre-Millennial.ⁱⁱⁱ Commonly, it is thought that the Rapture starts the Tribulation. The Rapture does *not* start the Tribulation. The Rapture precedes the Tribulation. It may occur five minutes, five months or five years before the Tribulation, nobody knows. If the Rapture does not begin the Tribulation then what does? The mark of the beginning of the Tribulation is the signing of a firm covenant between the Antichrist and Israel's leaders

(Dan. 9:27). Truly, the “snatching away” of the Church from earth will precipitate a one-world secular government grasping for peace at all costs. It will be a major worldwide event that will leave the earth in a desperate situation. Believers may not realize it now but their presence in the world is restraining sin to a large degree. Their absolute moral ethic and subjection of culture provides a pier and beam for all society and culture. With their sudden disappearance, the world will crumble quickly. While the world is crumbling, we will be caught up in the air to forever be with the Lord. John says, *we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is*. Apparently, the mere sight of Jesus Christ in His glory will result in our instant transformation. We are commanded to be transformed day by day (Rom. 12:1-2) and this transformation begins while in the body on earth (2 Cor. 3:18). However, at the moment we see Him, the mere sight of His glory will be instantly transforming (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:48-53; **Col. 3:4**). “*When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*” Christians have a marvelous event to look forward to—their instant transformation from this present body into a glorified body. This should motivate us toward abiding, toward pressing on to Christ-likeness in the present. This comes by way of knowledge.

1 John 3:3

(Regenerate Nature)

And everyone who is having this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He Himself is pure.

The word *hope* as always in the NT, does not refer to something which we are unsure about, but means absolute certainty that what God has promised will come to pass. The rest of this verse is quite difficult. Many commentators take this to mean that anyone having a hope in Christ’s coming results in pure living in the present. No doubt this is true to an extent, but it is not clear that John is teaching that here. John is about to teach us about a sinless aspect of the Christian in 1 John 3:6, 9, 10; and the words *just as He Himself is pure* indicate the idea that this sinlessness aspect is already present here in this context. What we are going to find is that the regenerate nature does not sin—period-- because He has in him the sinless seed of God’s nature and He cannot sin. Thus, at the level of the regenerate nature, the believer is every bit as pure as the Savior. The phrase *everyone who has this hope in Him* therefore means *everyone who has this certainty in Christ*. Because of the immediate context, the *certainty* John is referring to has to do with being like Christ both *spiritually* and *physically* (1 John 3:2). We have certainty that we are presently like Him spiritually and will, in the future, be like Him physically. The only people who have this *certainty* are those who are believers. So, this phrase refers to everyone who is a believer *in Christ*. The phrase *purifies himself* points to the individual’s role of believing

in Christ. “Believing the gospel” is the human condition for salvation, and this phrase refers to that act of believing. The one who *purifies himself* is the one who believes. By believing he is purified. In a sense he *purifies himself* because he has to believe in order to be cleansed by God’s salvation. A few examples may clarify this relationship between faith and salvation.

1) **Taking a Shower.** You turn on the water and water rushes through the pipes and shoots out. While you turned on the water, it’s the water that does the actual cleansing, not you. We believe, but it is God who does the saving.

2) **Firing a Gun.** When you pull the trigger, you don’t actually shoot the gun. The gunpowder is actually what ignites and fires the bullet out of the barrel. However, the firing of the gun was conditioned upon your pulling the trigger. In the same way, salvation is conditioned on faith. Faith is the human condition, but faith doesn’t save, God saves.

3) **Turning on a Light.** You flip the switch, but you don’t turn on the light. The light only turns on because of electrical circuits that are connected to an energy source and the light bulb. You flip the switch, but the electricity turns on the light. In the same way, you believe, and God saves.

The sole human condition for salvation is faith. Man believes, God saves. Faith/belief adds nothing to salvation and takes nothing away from salvation. Salvation is totally from God. Faith does not save, God saves. Faith is instrumental. This is where many theologians and Christians go wrong. Reformed theology asserts that God has to regenerate a person before he can believe. Therefore, in this view, regeneration precedes faith. They deny that regeneration is conditioned on faith. But this is never found in Scripture. Instead, it is always stated the other way around. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). It does not say “be saved by the Lord Jesus and you will believe.” Further, Reformed theology never explains how one can be regenerated but not saved. Of course, this does not mean that faith precedes salvation chronologically. Faith only precedes salvation logically. Faith is always given as the human condition that must be fulfilled in order for God to save someone. In time, faith is simultaneous with salvation/regeneration. There is no lapse of time between the human exercise of faith and the divine exercise of regeneration.

1 John 3:4

(Sin is Wicked)

Everyone who is doing sin also does wickedness (anomia), and sin is wickedness (anomia).

Sin is absolutely contrary to Christ and all those who have believed in Christ. John says ***the one who practices sin also practices lawlessness***. The word ***lawlessness*** is not what the Greek word *anomia* meant in John's day. It meant "wickedness, iniquity." John's intent is to show that all ***sin*** is not wrong.^{iv} "The apostle's statement is intended to stigmatize sin as 'evil,' 'wicked,' 'iniquitous.'"^v If the Revisionists were saying that God was both light and darkness, righteousness and sin, then they would be trying to convince John's readers that sin is a normal part of the Christian experience, that immoral behavior was normal. John is countering that idea by stigmatizing sin as ***wickedness*** and something that has no place in the Christian life.

1 John 3:5

(Sin is Contrary to Christ's Mission)

And you have known that He was revealed (phaneroo) so that the sins should be taken away (airo), and in Him is no sin.

For believers who have a new regenerate nature, sin is not only absolutely wicked, but it stands in direct opposition to the person and work of Christ. Indeed, Christ was revealed to take away sin. This is the fourth time since 2:28 that John has used the word ***revealed*** (Gk. *phaneroo*). In 2:28 and 3:2, it clearly refers to the Rapture, but here it refers to the First Coming, when His mission was not to capture the Church, which didn't even exist, but was to ***take away sin***. This recalls John the Baptist's words, "Behold, the Lamb of God who ***takes away the sin*** of the world" (John 1:29). The Greek word for ***take away*** is *airo* and can mean "to lift up" (as in John 15:2), but it can also have the meaning "to take away" as here. The idea here (and in John 1:29) is certainly that Christ came to make the sacrifice for sin so that men could be born again. However, John's idea probably goes further than that. Ultimately, sin will be so removed that there will be no more sinning in the Kingdom of our Lord's New Heavens and New Earth. No one (in God's kingdom) will ever sin again. That is the full extent of what Christ's sacrifice accomplished. So, not only did Christ die for our sins, but "His ultimate goal is our total freedom from sin forever."^{vi} This was implied in 3:2 where we will be like Him physically when we see Him.

As Christians, we should strongly reject sin. Not only because ***sin is wickedness***, but also because Christ's First Coming was precisely so that He could take it away. To sin is to bring the issue up again, to smother it in His face. He came to remove sin completely from our lives, not just partially. He is totally pure and we are to reject sin in every form. We hear a lot of rationalizations for sin today. The Revisionists were pawing these rationalizations off on John's readers. But there can be no rationalization of sin. Sin is

absolutely contrary to Christ. As John says *in Him is no sin*. He is absolutely without sin in any form or degree. He is perfectly holy and believers who partake of His nature can therefore never justify sin. Of course, we all know that sin is a reality in our lives and no Christian will ever reach the state of total perfection in this life. But this does not nullify John's point that we are to stigmatize sin as something that has no place in the Christian life. Sin is never okay.

ⁱ Contrary to the scientific rejection of Lamarck's Hypothesis of Acquired Characteristics there are actually three acquired characteristics; 1) Adam acquired a sin nature which he passed on to his offspring, 2) those who believe acquire the regenerate nature from Christ, and 3) those who believe acquire a redeemed body like Christ's at the rapture of the Church.

ⁱⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX; Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 129.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pre-Tribulational means "before the 7-year Tribulation. The purpose of the Tribulation is two-fold: to purge Israel to belief in the Messiahship of Jesus and to punish the nations for their treatment of Israel. The Tribulation has nothing to do with the Church, the Bride of Christ. Would Christ send His bride through the Tribulation in preparation for the wedding? Pre-Millennial means "Christ will return to earth before the 1,000-year Kingdom on earth."

^{iv} 1 Jn. 3:4: Πα/ j ο` ποιw/n th.n a`marti,a kai. th.n avnomi,a poi ei/(kai. h` a`marti,a evsti.n h` avnomi,a, is not wholly clear....the saying is directed against those who argue more or less as follows: Even if a`marti,a is present, it is no great evil. in 1 Jn. this can hardly be based on an inherent relation to the OT Law. The inner force of avnomi,a is probably supplied by a more general sense such as rebellion or revolt against God, or alienation from Him, as suggested by v. 6b, 9 f. Freely translated v. 4 would then be to the effect that "he who commits sin is thereby in revolt against God; indeed, sin is nothing but rebellion against God." Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Vol. IV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 1086.

^v Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX; Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 129.

^{vi} Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX; Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 133.

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