

**1st John 3: 10-15; “The Child of God Manifest”, Sermon # 14 in a series entitled –
“Behold What Manner of Love”, A Communion Sermon delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on February 4th, 2018,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In my last message to you from this book, I was talking to you about the practice of righteousness as integrally related to your being a true Christian. The person who sins; that is the person who practices sin, is of the devil. Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. The person who practices righteousness is of God. Therefore, in the true Christian, the works of the devil are being destroyed and the practice of righteousness is taking place. All of this good work is begun in the true Christian when he is born again. It is begun by Christ entering in to the heart of the sinner in regenerating power, planting the seed of righteousness in their heart. If you have been born again, this seed is your dying with Christ to sin and your living to righteousness by the power of His resurrection. There is, within you, the power to repent and mortify and forsake sin. And there is the inclination to do what is right in accordance with how God defines righteousness in His word the Bible. This is practicing righteousness from the heart motivation of love to God and man.

This is what John is anxious to convey to the reader of this letter. It is the truth that the practice of righteousness makes it apparent who is the child of God; and it is the lack of it which is found in the child of the devil. This reality of whether we are a true Christian or not, is important for us to discover in relation to ourselves, first of all. And then, we shall see, it is also important for us to attempt to discern the reality of grace in others, so that they might join with us in the worship and work of the Lord. Our observation of other people around us, must be conducted in a righteous way as well. We look at those who profess to know Christ, in order that we might know whether what they are trying to teach us, by their words and actions, is right for us and good for us, or not. The person who does not practice righteousness is not of God, John says, and neither is he who do not love his brother. So true Christianity is the practice of righteousness, but it is not the practice of self-righteousness or acceptance of sin. It is the practice of righteousness with a love for God and for our brother.

1st of all – Let us consider the truth that the child of God is manifest by the practice of righteousness.

Verse 10 – “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.” The practice of righteousness is keeping the commandments of God. The Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 7: 19 says, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.” In Galatians 5: 6 he says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” And in Galatians 6: 14 and 15 he says further, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” So if we collate all these verses together this is what we understand. The practice of righteousness is not related to circumcision, or keeping the ceremonial law of God. It is rather always directly related to keeping the moral law and all of the moral commandments of God. This commandment keeping is done by faith in relation to Jesus Christ, who we are in spiritual union with; and it works by means of love, to go about to do and to keep all of God’s moral commandments which have been given to all men to keep as long as the world stands. When Christ returns, every Christian will be made perfect in righteousness.

And so, if you are born again, you will most certainly come to realize that the power to do and keep the commandments of God has come to you through your being made a new creation in

Christ. And when you are made a new creature, it is only the beginning of the process of sanctification. And so, sometimes, even though a person may have believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, it may still be hard for them or for other people to see whether they are really a true Christian, at least for a time, because either they or we, may not see enough evidence of a change to do righteousness in them to draw the right conclusion that they truly are a Christian. A person is not a Christian simply because they say that they have believed and they declare themselves to be a Christian. Being a true Christian is evidenced by a real change of heart and by seeing repentance and faith evidenced by righteous actions. A person is only saved by grace through faith, and it is not of themselves, it is the gift of God. But if you have this gift of grace you will evidence it in righteous actions. If you do not have righteous actions, you have every reason to question whether you have ever been born again.

Now, we certainly ought to be very gracious with people who are making a profession of faith, in this whole matter of judging whether they are a Christian, for we are not infallible judges. But if we are not able to see clearly, what I have just described to you, let us remember that God does see clearly. He sees perfectly clearly. Listen to 2nd Timothy 2: 19 – “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’” So, we see here, that it is every Christian’s responsibility to discover the truth about themselves, as to whether they have been born of God, by their examining their life to see whether they are departing from iniquity. If they are departing from iniquity, they will know by their own attitudes and actions whether they have really been changed; whether they really are turning away from manifesting sinful attitudes and actions, to practice what is right, as it is defined in the Bible.

You say to me – Well I have been a compliant child from my youth. Morally and ethically I have tried to manifest good behavior. I have almost always obeyed my parents and the authority figures in my life; my pastor and my teachers when they have been moral. How can I tell whether I am a true Christian, and whether I have been born again? I believe that you can tell by looking at what the motivations for your actions are. What are your motivations for keeping the commandments of God. Is it to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, or is it to glorify yourself and enjoy the fruit of your own labors throughout this life? Before you came to Christ, you used your good and compliant behavior to justify yourself before God and men. But now that you have come to Christ, you see that there was much sin in the finest of your actions in the past. You thought of yourself, not as a sinner, but as a pretty good person. Your motivation to good was to prove to others that you were just as good as the next person, and perhaps better than them. You were always comparing yourself with others. You saw those who were trusting in Christ for salvation, as those who needed a crutch. You did not need that crutch. For you thought of yourself as smart enough and strong enough to be able to do everything that God and men were asking you to do.

Therefore, even though perhaps you did not know it, you were self-righteous in your religious orientation. You believed in yourself; in your own wisdom and strength. You only looked to your own good works and your good opinion of yourself in relation to all the decisions that you made. You trusted in yourself that you were righteous, and you tended to look down on others who said that they needed to have Christ to be saved. If you read the Bible and prayed, you did it because you knew that this is what Christians were supposed to do, but you did not do it because you really loved God and wanted to have fellowship and communion with Him. You did it because you wanted to keep up with the best of Christians, or even to exceed them, in your performance of religious duties. Or perhaps you thought it was spiritual to fulfill all the expectations of your parents and pastor in terms of being polite. You have always tried hard to please others, and so you wrongly concluded that you were a Christian when you were kind and thoughtful in a purely human sense. But when you are born again, you realize that your motivation was really purely self-centered in the ultimate sense, because you did not see yourself as a sinner in any great or damning

sense. You believed that God should accept you, just as you are, without your having to change anything in your thinking and behavior.

But I want you to know that a person who is a true Christian has come to see themselves as a great sinner. You have experientially come to understand the truth – We all stumble in many ways. You have learned to distrust your own heart and you have come to the place where you are not leaning upon your own understanding. You now see that it is true that he who trusts in his own heart is a fool. You now believe the Biblical truth that your own heart is deceitful above all things and it is desperately wicked. You now see that all of your righteousnesses are like filthy rags. You now see yourself as poor in spirit; that in yourself, you do not have the spiritual resources in order to be able to please God and keep His commandments. You now comprehend the truth that without Christ, you can do nothing, but with Him, you can do all the things that God is commanding you to do. You know that even as a Christian, you do not do these things perfectly, but because your heart has been changed, you long to be able to do them perfectly. You now mourn over your sins as you find the motions of them in your heart. You now have come to hate the past life that you once loved. You no longer want to pursue any sin, but you find that you want to learn to do righteousness in regard to keeping all of God’s commandments because you now hate every evil way. This is what John is showing us here. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.

2nd – Let’s consider that the child of God is manifest by his love for his brother.

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” Whenever we think of the practice of righteousness we are to think of it in terms of love. We are not being righteous for ourselves ultimately. Our righteousness translates into love the love of men in the sight of God whom we love with a whole heart loyalty. If Christ’s grace and His Spirit are not manifesting themselves in the love of God and the brethren, there will be a self-righteousness that will manifest itself, and a despising of others in our heart. I think that we need to prove this to ourselves, so turn with me to Luke 18: 9. Jesus says here, “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.” Then he relates the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer. The Pharisee in his prayer to God relates what he had been doing which he thought would merit favor with God. But really he was praying with himself and not to God, because God was not listening to hear him favorably. He said, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-gatherer.” Now, we must ask ourselves – Why does he throw that in, the part about not being like the tax-gatherer? It is because there is an integral link between his self-righteousness and his despising of others. He thought that he was better than this tax-gatherer because of the religious things that he had been doing. And since he was doing them, and the tax-gatherer was not, therefore he thinks has a right to despise him. But this is not correct thinking in God’s sight. Whenever we start comparing ourselves with others and concluding that we are better or more righteous than they, we had better stop right there and confess it as sin. We haven’t learned the first principle of being a true Christian. If you love God, you will love your brother.

And here the Apostle John uses a negative example to make it perfectly clear what he is trying to say. He uses the example of Cain as a person who we should not be like. Verse 12”not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother.” “And why did he murder him?” “Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” Cain and Abel were the first two children born into the world; the children of Adam and Eve. And, if you recall, the incident that provoked Cain to kill his brother Abel was the two of them bringing their offerings to God to be accepted by Him and Abel’s was accepted and Cain’s was not. The issue was worship and whose worship was going to be accepted by God. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. And Abel brought of the first born of his flock and of their fat. And it says, “And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.” Why was this? It

was because God was defining for Cain what kind of an offering that he would be pleased with; that of sacrifice of a living creature in the place of the sinner. This living creature being sacrificed was the type of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Yes, this was true, and we will glory in this in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

But perhaps you have missed the more subtle reason. It was because Cain was proud of what he had done in growing the crops, and in his bringing them to God. He assumed that God would regard his offering brought in pride and self-righteousness. He wanted God to regard what he had done. He was not interested in his regarding what God thought, or what He must do some day through Jesus Christ our Lord, the perfect, sinless sacrifice. In Genesis 4: 5 it says that "Cain was very angry and his countenance fell," when God did not regard it. And I think that he despised Abel and his offering because he thought his own was just as good or better. And so, when he talked to him in the field before he killed Abel, he told him so. He did not like God's evaluation of him, nor God's regard for Abel over himself.

This is an extreme example but it is a good one, to show us what love is not. Love is not being angry with your brother in an unrighteous way. Unrighteous hatred develops from sinful self-justifying thoughts and it leads to murder. If you are angry with your brother without a righteous cause, you are in danger of the judgment, Jesus says in Matthew 5: 22. Cain killed Abel because his deeds were evil. But his deeds began with what was crouching at the door of his heart. It was sin, and specifically it was the sin of hating God and his brother. Sometimes we do not see the sin that is crouching in our heart, right up alongside our most favorable evaluation of our ourselves, in terms of our religious works. Sin is crouching at the door and we must master it, or it will master us. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." So as we come down to the Lord's Table now, let us examine our hearts to see what is in them. Do we have a love for all the brethren? Are we patient, kind, thoughtful and forgiving in our attitude toward them? Let us now ask our God to fill us with the love of Christ, so that we might manifest righteous attitudes and actions towards all of our dear brethren.

3rd – Let us consider that the child of God is manifest by their love for the brethren even when the world hates them.

Verse 13 says, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you." "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." "He who does not love his brother abides in death." It should not surprise us to know that people of the world hate us. They hated our Master and Lord without a (righteous) cause. The question is: What will you do when you find out that it is so? I believe that the text is telling us, John is telling us, that if we can continue to love the brethren, even when the world hates them, and then the world hate us as well for loving them, then we may reasonably conclude that we have passed from death to life. To not love the brethren is to abide in death. To love them, and to continue to love them even when you see their faults and sins; that is the evidence that you yourself have passed from death to life. This love eventually, as we shall see in the next set of verses, shall lead us to lay down our lives for the brethren in the way of God's providential ordering of things. In no greater way does God teach His children to be like His Son. Jesus, before He went to the cross for us said these words. "This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you." If Jesus laid His life down for us whom He called friends, then we also will, by His grace, learn to do the same for those who are called by the same name we are – Christians. As we partake of the Supper, let us pray that we will have the grace to do so.