

### Adam Clarke:

## Introduction

The extraordinary love of God towards mankind, and the effects of it, 1 John 3:1-3. Sin is the transgression of the law, and Christ was manifested to take away our sins, 1 John 3:4-6. The children of God are known by the holiness of their lives, the children of the devil by the sinfulness of theirs, 1 John 3:7-10. We should love one another, for he that hateth his brother is a murderer; as Christ laid down his life for us, so we should lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John 3:11-16. Charity is a fruit of brotherly love; our love should be active, not professional merely, 1 John 3:17, 1 John 3:18. How we may know that we are of the truth, 1 John 3:19-21. They whose ways please God, have an answer to all their prayers, 1 John 3:22. The necessity of keeping the commandment of Christ, that he may dwell in us and we in him by his Spirit, 1 John 3:23, 1 John 3:24.

### Verse 1

Behold, what manner of love - Whole volumes might be written upon this and the two following verses, without exhausting the extraordinary subject contained in them, viz., the love of God to man. The apostle himself, though evidently filled with God, and walking in the fullness of his light, does not attempt to describe it; he calls on the world and the Church to behold it, to look upon it, to contemplate it, and wonder at it.

**What manner of love.** - ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἀγάπη ἡ ἰσότης τῆς ἀγάπης. What great love, both as to quantity and quality; for these ideas are included in the original term. The length, the breadth, the depth, the height, he does not attempt to describe.

The Father hath bestowed - For we had neither claim nor merit that we should be called, that is, constituted or made, the sons of God, who were before children of the wicked one, animal, earthly, devilish; therefore, the love which brought us from such a depth of misery and degradation must appear the more extraordinary and impressive. After ἰῶν τὸν υἱόν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, that we might be called, ἰῶν τὸν υἱόν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, and we are, is added by ABC, seventeen others, both the Syriac, Erpenâ€™s Arabic, Coptic, Sahidic, Ethiopic, Slavonic, and Vulgate.

Therefore the world - The Jews, and all who know not God, and are seeking their portion in this life; knoweth us not - do not acknowledge, respect, love, or approve of us. In this sense the word  $\text{ἐπίγνωσις}$  is here to be understood. The world Knew well enough that there were such persons; but they did not approve of them. We have often seen that this is a frequent use of the term know, both in Hebrew and Greek, in the Old Testament and also in the New.

**Because it knew him not - The Jews did not acknowledge Jesus; they neither approved of him, his doctrine, nor his manner of life.**

## Verse 2

**Now are we the sons of God - He speaks of those who are begotten of God, and who work righteousness. See the preceding chapter.**

**And it doth not yet appear what we shall be - Ἰὺ...ἰεῖ%ο ἡμῖν±ἡ½ἡμῖν%οῶ ἡ-Â It is not yet manifest; though we know that we are the children of God, we do not know that state of glorious excellence to which, as such, we shall be raised.**

**When he shall appear -  $\hat{I}\hat{\alpha}\pm\hat{I}'_{1/2}$   $\hat{I}\hat{T}\hat{\alpha}\pm\hat{I}'_{1/2}\hat{\mu}\hat{l}\hat{\alpha}\hat{\rho}_{\infty}\hat{J}_1$ - $\hat{A}$ . When he shall be manifested; i.e., when he comes the second time, and shall be manifested in his glorified human nature to judge the world.**

**We shall be like him - For our vile bodies shall be made like unto his glorious body; we shall see him as he is, in all the glory and majesty both of the Divine and human nature. See Philemon 3:21; and John 17:24: Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. John had seen his glory on the mount when he was transfigured; and this we find was ineffably grand; but even this must have been partially obscured, in order to enable the disciples to bear the sight, for they were not then like him. But when they shall be like him, they shall see him as he is - in all the splendor of his infinite majesty.**

### Verse 3

And ever man that hath this hope in him - All who have the hope of seeing Christ as he is; that is, of enjoying him in his own glory; purifieth himself - abstains from all evil, and keeps himself from all that is in the world, viz., the lusts of the flesh, of the eye, and the pride of life. God having purified his heart, it is his business to keep himself in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. The apostle does not here speak of any man purifying his own heart, because this is impossible; but of his persevering in the state of purity into which the Lord hath brought him. The words, however, may be understood of a man's

anxiously using all the means that lead to purity; and imploring God for the sanctifying Spirit, to â€œcleanse the thoughts of his heart by its inspiration, that he may perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his name.â€

As he is pure - Till he is as completely saved from his sins as Christ was free from sin. Many tell us that â€œthis never can be done, for no man can be saved from sin in this life.â€ Will these persons permit us to ask, how much sin may we be saved from in this life? Something must be ascertained on this subject:

1. That the soul may have some determinate object in view;

2. That it may not lose its time, or employ its faith and energy, in praying for what is impossible to be attained.

Now, as he was manifested to take away our sins, 1 John 3:5, to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John 3:8; and as his blood cleanseth from all sin and unrighteousness, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 1:9; is it not evident that God means that believers in Christ shall be saved from all sin? For if his blood cleanses from all sin, if he destroys the works of the devil, (and sin is the work of the devil), and if he who is born of God does not commit sin, 1 John 3:9, then he must be cleansed from all sin; and, while he continues in that state he lives without sinning against God, for the seed of God remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born, or begotten, of God, 1 John 3:9. How strangely warped and blinded by prejudice and system must men be who, in the face of such evidence as this, will still dare to maintain that no man can be saved from his sin in this life; but must daily commit sin, in thought, word, and deed, as the Westminster divines have asserted: that is, every man is laid under the fatal necessity of sinning as many ways against God as the devil does through his natural wickedness and malice; for even the devil himself can have no other way of sinning against God except by thought, word, and deed. And yet, according to these, and others of the same creed, â€œeven the most regenerate sin thus against God as long as they live.â€ It is a miserable salvo to say, they do not sin so much as they used to do; and they do not sin habitually, only occasionally. Alas for this system! Could not the grace that saved them partially save them perfectly? Could not that power of God that saved them from habitual sin, save them from occasional or accidental sin? Shall we suppose that sin, how potent soever it may be, is as potent as the Spirit and grace of Christ? And may we not ask, If it was for Godâ€™s glory and their good that they were partially saved, would it not have been more for Godâ€™s glory and their good if they had been perfectly saved? But the letter and spirit of Godâ€™s word, and the design and end of Christâ€™s coming, is to save his people from their sins. Dr. Macknight having stated that  $\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , purifieth, is in the present tense, most ridiculously draws this conclusion from it: â€œIn this life no one can attain to perfect purity; by this text, therefore, as well as by 1 John 1:8, those fanatics are condemned who imagine they are able to live without sin.â€ Yes, doctor, the men you call fanatics do most religiously believe that, by the grace of Christ cleansing and strengthening them, they can love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and their neighbor as themselves; and live without grieving the Spirit of God, and without sinning against their heavenly Father. And they believe that, if they are not thus saved, it is their own fault. But a blind man must ever be a bad judge of colors.

#### Verse 4

Sin is the transgression of the law - The spirit of the law as well as of the Gospel is, that â€œwe should love God with all our powers, and our neighbor as ourselves.â€ All disobedience is contrary to love; therefore sin is the transgression of the law, whether the act refers immediately to God or to our neighbor.

#### Verse 5

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins - He came into the world to destroy the power, pardon the guilt, and cleanse from the pollution of sin. This was the very design of his manifestation in the flesh. He was born, suffered, and died for this very purpose; and can it be supposed that he either cannot or will not accomplish the object of his own coming?

In him is no sin - And therefore he is properly qualified to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of men.

#### Verse 6

Whosoever abideth in him - By faith, love, and obedience.

Sinneth not - Because his heart is purified by faith, and he is a worker together with God, and consequently does not receive the grace of God in vain. See on 1 John 3:3 (note).

Hath not seen him - It is no unusual thing with this apostle, both in his gospel and in his epistles, to put occasionally the past for the present, and the present for the past tense. It is very likely that here he puts, after the manner of the Hebrew, the preterite for the present: He who sins against God doth not see him, neither doth

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and benevolent, we give the lie to our profession. If we have not bowels of compassion, we have not the love of God in us; if we shut up our bowels against the poor, we shut Christ out of our hearts, and ourselves out of heaven.

This world's good. - *ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου*... *ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου*... *ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου*... The life of this world, i.e. the means of life; for so *ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου* is often used. See Mark 12:44; Luke 8:43; Luke 15:12, Luke 15:30; Luke 21:4, and other places.

How dwelleth the love of God in him? - That is, it cannot possibly dwell in such a person. Hardheartedness and God's love never meet together, much less can they be associated.

#### Verse 18

My little children - *ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ κόσμου*... *ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ κόσμου*... , My beloved children, let us not love in word - in merely allowing the general doctrine of love to God and man to be just and right;

Neither in tongue - In making professions of love, and of a charitable and humane disposition, and resting there; but in deed - by humane and merciful acts;

And in truth - Feeling the disposition of which we speak. There is a good saying in Yalcut Rubeni, fol. 145,4, on this point: *ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ κόσμου* consisted in word only, then love ceaseth as soon as the word is pronounced. Such was the love between Balak and Balaam. But if love consisteth not in word, it cannot be dissolved; such was the love of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest of the patriarchs which were before them.

#### Verse 19

Hereby we know that we are of the truth - That we have the true religion of the Lord Jesus, and shall assure our hearts - be persuaded in our consciences, that we have the truth as it is in Jesus; as no man can impose upon himself by imagining he loves when he does not: he may make empty professions to others, but if he loves either God or man, he knows it because he feels it; and love unfelt is not love, it is word or tongue. This the apostle lays down as a test of a man's Christianity, and it is the strongest and most infallible test that can be given. He that loves feels that he does love; and he who feels that he loves God and man has true religion; and he who is careful to show the fruits of this love, in obedience to God and humane acts to man, gives others the fullest proof that he has the loving mind that was in Jesus.

#### Verse 20

If our heart condemn us - If we be conscious that our love is feigned, we shall feel inwardly condemned in professing to have what we have not. And if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, for he knows every hypocritical winding and turning of the soul, he searches the heart, and tries the reins, and sees all the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart which we cannot see, and, if we could see them, could not comprehend them; and as he is the just Judge, he will condemn us more strictly and extensively than we can be by our own conscience.

#### Verse 21

If our heart condemn us not - If we be conscious to ourselves of our own sincerity, that we practice not deceit, and use no mask, then have we confidence toward God - we can appeal to him for our sincerity, and we can come with boldness to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. And therefore says the apostle,

#### Verse 22

Whatsoever we ask - In such a spirit, we receive of him, for he delights to bless the humble, upright, and sincere soul.

Because we keep his commandments - Viz., by loving him and loving our neighbor. These are the great commandments both of the old covenant and the new. And whoever is filled with this love to God and man will do those things which are pleasing to him; for love is the very soul and principle of obedience.

The word heart is used in the preceding verses for conscience; and so the Greek fathers interpret it, particularly Origen, Nicephorus, and Ecumenius; but this is not an unfrequent meaning of the word in the sacred writings.

#### Verse 23

That we should believe on the name of his Son - We are commanded to believe on Christ, that for the sake of his passion and death we may be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses; and being through him redeemed from the guilt of sin, restored to the Divine favor, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost, we are enabled to love one another as he gave us commandment; for without a renewal of



the heart, love to God and man is impossible, and this renewal comes by Christ Jesus.

#### Verse 24

Dwelleth in him - i.e. in God; and he - God, in him - the believer.

And hereby we know - We know by the Spirit which he hath given us that we dwell in God, and God in us. It was not by conjecture or inference that Christians of old knew they were in the favor of God, it was by the testimony of God's own Spirit in their hearts; and this testimony was not given in a transient manner, but was constant and abiding while they continued under the influence of that faith that worketh by love. Every good man is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and wherever he is, he is both light and power. By his power he works; by his light he makes both himself and his work known. Peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost must proceed from the indwelling of that Holy Spirit; and those who have these blessings must know that they have them, for we cannot have heavenly peace and heavenly joy without knowing that we have them. But this Spirit in the soul of a believer is not only manifest by its effects, but it bears its own witness to its own indwelling. So that a man not only knows that he has this Spirit from the fruits of the Spirit, but he knows that he has it from its own direct witness. It may be said, "How can these things be?" And it may be answered, By the power, light, and mercy of God. But that such things are, the Scriptures uniformly attest, and the experience of the whole genuine Church of Christ, and of every truly converted soul, sufficiently proves. As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit: the thing is certain, and fully known by its effects; but how this testimony is given and confirmed is inexplicable. Every good man feels it, and knows he is of God by the Spirit which God has given him.