

1 John 3:10-12

The Obvious Nature

1 John 3:10-12: “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. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”

This wonderful passage in 1 John is talking about that which is obvious, and I like obvious stuff. There’s a lot of confusion, and the world would like to take that which is very simple and clear and confuse it, convolute and twist it. That’s one of the reasons why Satan is called the “twisted serpent,” because he twists things. What we have in this passage is “you’ll know.” I want to know. I want to have confidence. I want there not to be any ambiguity about what I believe and what I follow. This book is just so clear, isn’t it? You’ll know. The very fact that he makes mention in 1 John 3:5 that we had made apparent to us what God’s plan was. If you look there within the passage,

“You know that He appeared...”

See the word “appear” there? It’s actually the same word, if you drop on down to verse 10,

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...”

It’s actually the same word, “obvious” and “appeared.” “*Phaneros*” making reference to “made apparent.” If you look in verse 5, it says,

“You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.”

So, the point is that we know why He came. We know why He died on the cross. I mean, a lot of people wear the cross, and a lot of people talk about it, but we know why He did it. It’s obvious to us, and He made it clear to us and we see that. It is His apparent purpose and apparent plan and who He is. It’s so clear to us that we want to be like Him. There’s no confusion about what that is. There’s no confusion in our hearts and our minds because of the Holy Spirit within us about what that looks like. It’s very clear to us.

In this book he’s going to be talking about what is clear and that which is evident. One of the statements that he makes is that we have this fellowship with God. Of course, the world has all

kinds of fellowship and different things to pursue that man gathers together around, but we have a common fellowship. He starts off that way in 1 John 1, and he begins to talk about this fellowship that is in Christ. In fact, his statement in verse 3 is,

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

What we’re talking about at the very beginning of 1 John is what is called “real fellowship,” something real; and I believe that those that are searching and seeking truth according to John 3, can see and recognize that which is real. Another way of putting it is in John 10, “My sheep hear My voice.” There’s a recognition of what is true, the voice of Christ; there’s no mistake, that’s Him calling me. How wonderful it is that His sheep come. “That’s Him! He’s asking for me.” You hear His voice. There’s no doubt about that, and there’s a fellowship that comes around that.

The concern that we oftentimes have, and once again part of the lie of Satan is that this fellowship that we have as believers is not really real, it’s kind of this ethereal thing that takes place; this airy tenuous thing that happens, and the world will talk about it in philosophical terms. You come together; you have this kind of “spirit” thing with God, and of course, a lot of people like to keep in that realm of the theoretical and abstract, but the point is that our fellowship is real, and it’s very tangible. So, throughout 1 John, he’s going to be talking about the reality of this fellowship.

We just recently came out of the epistle of 1 Thessalonians and let me just reiterate this because to me it’s one of the great texts that clarifies just how real our faith is. If you look with me in 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul takes it out of the whole theoretical and ethereal realm, and he puts it in the realm of “but you saw, you felt,” right? So, the passage reads this way in 1 Thessalonians 1:5,

“for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake;” and because of this, verse 6, it changed your life. There was a real transformation that took place.

“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation...”

That’s where the rubber meets the road, right? I mean, you can talk about “Oh, how wonderful Jesus is.” Ok, now you’re going to suffer for Jesus. Ok, where are you going to be? You’re going, “It’s hard to tell who the real Christians are.” Put some suffering in the realm. Then you’ll go, “There they are, over there” and “They’re the liars. They’re hightailing it.”

So, as you go on in this passage, what you begin to see is that the transformation that takes place is, verse 7,

“So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

(1 Thessalonians 1:8) For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you.”

Why? Because they saw the reality of your faith.

If you go on a little bit further, he goes on, and says, “and I’ll tell you something else that was evident,” verse 9,

“For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”

You dumped your idols, you stopped sinning, and stopped pursuing those other things. The evidence was so clear, “and to wait for His Son from heaven.” (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

Of course, you go into chapter 2, and he goes, “and the reason you changed, and the reason you received the message that we gave you is because you saw us willing to suffer for you and to take you in as a father or as a mother.” He begins to share that; and the ultimate declaration is in 1 Thessalonians 2:13,

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men,” but something that literally transforms peoples’ lives.

So, we’re talking about something that is real, tangible, and dealing with real healing, real help, and real change that happens in peoples’ lives. You can tell, it’s not debatable; it’s not theoretical. Here again, we go back to that simple hymn, “You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart.” Well, you could easily refute that if in fact you didn’t see the evidence of Christ in that person; if in fact, they weren’t devoted to the saints; if in fact, they weren’t longing to be in the word of God. You could say, “That’s not true.” You can see these things. You’ll know them by their fruit.

So, in this passage, we’re talking about that which is evidential and a fellowship that he really defines throughout this book. If you’ll look with me in 1 John 3:10, he talks about this mark, evidence, this authenticity of our faith and how it’s so clear. His statement in verse 10 is,

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...” Now, right away we have a clarity. I mean, “are they on the same side?” You don’t have to think about that one. There’s a devil and there’s God, and the very fact that the devil is slanderous and wanting to destroy. “*Diabolos*” refers to one that wants to tear down people. Then, you have God who wants to save. I mean, how different could you be?

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...” apparent to all of us, self-evident. “...anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God.”

Once again, I want to emphasize this, that what He's dealing with, the present participle, the fact that that's what you're pursuing. In other words, is your desire to pursue doing right, or is your desire to pursue doing wrong? Well, the one who's pursuing to do wrong can't be motivated by God. That's obvious, so the passage is making it clear. Of course, he's already established that up to this point; we've been talking about that throughout. In fact, it's repeated in 1 John 3:7,

"Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness..."

Then in verse 8, "the one who practices sin..." and again in verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin."

Once again, it's that which you were pursuing.

So, in verse 10, it's kind of a summary of what he's been covering up to this point, "anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God..." and then he tags this on, which is really where we're heading towards in this paragraph, and that is the relationship that we have one with another. In fact, the way that it reads is, "nor the one who does not love his brother."

Now, he's going to go on and explain this in a deeper way. In fact, let's go ahead and read verse 11, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

When we're talking about the beginning, we're going back to the one who is the Creator of all things; so, the beginner of all things, who begins, creates, causes all things to exist, that's Christ. We know that in John 1. The point of the passage is that you came in contact with the Creator, and He established a new creation in you; so that from the beginning of that creation you knew what the truth was. He's taking us back to that in every case. Of course, he writes about that at the beginning of chapter 1 in 1 John. That which was from the beginning, we're going to see one of the phrases that really comes from Him talking with the disciples and establishing this point in John 13. We'll get there in just a minute, but the passage reads,

(1 John 3:11) "This is the message we have heard..." which is the message of loving your brother, "...that we should love one another."

Now, you might want to underline the words "one another."

(1 John 3:12) "not as Cain..." Once again, we're getting really obvious here because he wasn't loving. In case you haven't read Genesis.

"not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him?"

I oftentimes think of the Psalm where the psalmist goes, "I didn't do anything wrong, and you still hated me. I can't understand that." From time to time, I have people come up to me, going, "I don't know why people don't like me." and I said, "Well, maybe it's because they're

miserable, and miserable people are always going to act miserably.” The thought is, “Is it me?” Well, it probably is in the sense that you’re probably doing something right, and it’s making them feel guilty. As Ephesians 5 says, by being light you expose sin, but misery actually loves company. So, the stirring up of evil and hostility, and one of the reasons why it doesn’t take much to get a mob up. The point of the passage is that “Cain, who was of the evil one;” that’s in the genitive case which seems to convey that he actually belonged to the evil one. He had turned his life over to evil. Think about that. He embraced it to such a degree. The word that he uses, “*ponēros*,” is making reference to that which was injurious, hurtful, bad, sorrowful, painful, and would cause hurt to other people. Why would somebody embrace something like that? I don’t know, look at the movies. Most of them are focused on that kind of thing, and people go, “I want to see it again.” In my mind, I just can’t try to figure out why people like zombies. Wouldn’t you rather be with a walking living?

“Not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds...” If you look in the passage, “*ergon*” is making reference to the fact that it’s what he was occupied with. The point is it’s because of what his focus was, what he loved, his business, the thing that he pursued; because his deeds were destructive and hurtful. The very things that he was pursuing were things that were destructive. We go, “How did this person get into a world of destruction?” Well, because you sowed the wind, you reaped the whirlwind. (Hosea 8:7) So, it just makes sense, whatever you sow, that shall you also reap.

“His deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”

Now, what’s interesting is he puts the contrast in here; which also conveys that there’s a separation between the two. The passage is actually going to be doing something that Christ did in Matthew 12. In Matthew 12:46-50 Jesus is told that His brothers and sisters are looking for Him, and He goes, “Ok, let’s define brothers and sisters.” And He redefines it. He says, “I’ll tell you the ones who are my brothers and sisters, the one that does the will of My Father.” And He literally redefines brethren. Within this passage, I want to clarify that whole word “brother” because within the epistle of 1 John, he’s defining it in a very distinct way. It’s very important that we understand how he’s defining this because the thought is that “well, all the world is my brother.” That’s not true. What he’s been doing all along has been setting the stage for this. For instance, in 1 John 1:3, who does he say our fellowship is with? He says, “with the Father, and with His Son,” right? So, it’s actually saying that our commonality, or the word “fellowship, “*koinōnia*,” is that which brings us together and causes us to unite. We have a common bond, basically what “*koinōnia*” is referring to. And what is that common bond and union? Well, like David says in Psalm 119, “I am a companion of all those who fear Thee and keep Your commandments.” So, there’s a commonality there; what unites us, what causes them to be my brother.

All the way through 1 John, he’s going to be describing to us what a brother is. A brother is somebody that has common fellowship, that’s what he’s stating in 1 John 1:3. In 1 John 1:6, he’s clarifying that if we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie. So, what

is the fellowship? The fellowship is in light. What is light? Well, light is truth. So, if somebody's living a lie of hypocrisy, façade, can you have fellowship with somebody like that? No. Do you have a comradery? No. Is he your brother? No, because you're not seeking the same things. You have no companionship here. Of course, it goes back to 2 Corinthians 6, what fellowship is light and darkness? You can't have fellowship, and that's the point. So, he begins to establish what the fellowship is around, and ultimately as he goes into chapter 1, that love for transparency, light, truth, is embraced; even to the point of admitting "I was wrong."

A person who truly loves God loves the fact that God shines the light on them and reveals, like the psalmist in Psalm 119, "I was so glad that He pointed out my sin. I was glad that He disciplined me. I was glad that He stopped me from doing the wrong thing; had He not, I would've surely gone astray." There is a joy over the fact, "thank You for revealing this." It's exactly what you see with the woman at the well, and that's one of the reasons why Jesus says that the time has come, and now is that the Father's going to find those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Here's a woman going, "This man told everything about me," and she's happy about it. Now, what He did was put her sins on a big screen, and she's thrilled to death about it. That's telling us that she's seeking light. "So, You can tell me where I've gone wrong?" "Oh, yeah. Here it is." "Thank you." That's one of the things we have in common and draws us together. We're not drawn together because we're uppity people that perceive ourselves to be perfect. Obviously, I wouldn't be standing here, but the reason we're together is we go, "Isn't it wonderful that Jesus came to save sinners, among whom we were chief?" It unites our hearts. I can feel the warm fuzzies just coming from you guys.

As he goes into chapter 2, it's clear, and he uses this phrase 1 John 2:1, "we have an advocate with the Father." Let me just ask you, does the world have an advocate with the Father? No. They don't have any place to turn. That's why they go to drugs and all these other resources, but we have an advocate with the Father. So, he begins to clarify the brethren. So, in 1 John 2:3, what do we do? We keep His commandments. Does everybody keep His commandments? Does everybody want to keep His commandments? The focus is that we desire to keep His commandments.

In 1 John 2:6, we "walk in the same manner as He walked." In other words, we want to follow Him; one of the reasons why we're called Christians, followers of Christ. So, we want to follow Him and walk in His footsteps.

1 John 2:10, we love our brothers, and now we begin to understand who he's talking about. The ones that have fellowship with us, the ones that think the same way; we're part of the same family.

1 John 2:15, we don't love the world. If you love the world and the things in the world, then the love of the Father is not in you.

So, we're very distinct, aren't we? It's pretty clear, 1 John 2:19, many are going to be against you. Who are the ones against us?

When you read 1 Thessalonians 5, he talks about the fact that the day is coming, and you know what's going to happen. Then he turns, and he goes, "but they don't." Ok, so there's an "us" and a "they." See the distinction? There's a division. The world wants to get away from believers when they're doing the right thing, but then when we're talking about heaven and hell then they want to say, "we're all part of the same family." That's not true. As is clear in chapter 2, many are against the Christ. Are you against the Christ? No, the one thing that holds us together is we confess Christ. We are of the truth. One of the statements that he makes in chapter 2 is "an anointing from the Holy One" that says we know what's right and what's wrong. We know the truth, and we know those who love the truth. It's just that sense of "that's the Spirit of God" within us.

When you come to chapter 3, he then gets into the whole realm of the righteousness and now we settle the focus on "I just want to be really crystal about this, the mark that makes us different is that we love those who love these things." So, what unites us? What makes us brothers? We don't love the world, we don't love the things in the world, we love the Father. We want to do what is right. We're not perfect, but our heart and our business, and our persistence is in pursuing right. That's our heart. We gather around those that feel strongly about the fact that Jesus came to eradicate sin. Therefore, we want sin out of our lives. We feel very strongly about that, and this is what pulls us together. This is what makes us family.

So, as you come into 1 John 3, he's wanting to make clear that we have this message, and if you look in verse 11,

"For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." *Allēlōn* is the word for "another," "one another." The word itself refers to reduplication; to describe it another way, it would be a kind of reciprocity. In other words, "I love you; you love me." It's not just one way. For instance, you go out in the world, you might love the world, but they don't love you back. In the true brotherhood, they love back. That's why it's put in the way that it is. It's in this mutual relationship that we have that is very unique. So, it's very important that you don't confuse this with a love that's philanthropic, or a love that is humanitarian, benevolent, or altruistic.

It's clear in Matthew 5 that we're called to be merciful, gracious to humanity, there's no doubt about it. The passage says,

(Matthew 5:43) "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

(Matthew 5:44) But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

(Matthew 5:45) so that you may be sons of your Father..."

Then he goes and defines that God is gracious to the evil and the good. So, we actually make the distinction between the two. We're talking about the grace, the compassion, and mercy of

God. Has God called us to do that to all the world? Yes, absolutely, positively, no doubt about it, but the fact of the matter is, if you look with me in Isaiah 26:10,

“Though the wicked is shown favor,
He does not learn righteousness;
He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness,
And does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.”

Now, should that stop us from being kind? No, but I have no comradery with the world. I am called to show the grace and the mercy of God to all mankind; there’s no doubt about that. God calls us to minister in such a way. What’s also clear is you read a passage like Hebrews 6, where people will even come into the body of Christ and they’ll receive all kinds of benefits, but turn those benefits, love and the care into an opportunity to hurt people. You can see that mentality in the sense that is being described in Hebrews 6:4,

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

(Hebrews 6:5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.”

They felt the kindness and the benevolence of the body of Christ, and the reaching out, embracing, and the caring for; in some cases, even the person giving them the shirt off their back.

(Hebrews 6:6) “and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

(Hebrews 6:7) For ground that drinks the rain...” We were talking about that the rain falls on the good and the evil alike. “...which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God,” but watch this, for others, verse 8, “it yields thorns and thistles.” It’s the same rain, same blessings falling from the sky, but one receives it, and then turns and brings forth good fruit; another uses it to hurt people. How can that be? How could somebody take the grace of God and use it to hurt people? Yet there are. Scripture is telling us that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and good and evil. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, the clarification just couldn't be more blatant.

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship...” The word “fellowship there is the same word that is used in 1 John, “*koinōnia*.” His point is you can’t have fellowship. So, if I’m not having fellowship with somebody, can I call them my brother? No, because John is defining “brother” as one you have fellowship with. So, he goes on, and says, “what harmony has Christ with Belial...” that which is wasteful and destructive, “...or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” Nothing. The clarification of this, and the reason I do this is because people will always bring up, “Well, we need to really be drawn to loving these sinners.” I don’t see that. I mean, it shows me that I should be compassionate to the ungodly, but it doesn’t show that I should be drawn into a

relationship that I have fellowship with them. This is why I oftentimes tell people that minister to people, "Christ ministered to sinners, he sat at their table; but who was in charge in the time that he gathered together with them? Christ was; He was pointing them to the truth." Now, I can tell you this, that if they rejected the truth, there was no fellowship after that. In this passage, we're talking about the fellowship that we have in the person of Jesus Christ. So, there's a clear difference that is being relayed within the passage.

It makes the antithesis in 1 John 3:12,

"Not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother." So, it's interesting that it is referring to the fact that "brother" in the flesh, but obviously not "brother" in the Spirit, and that's what we're talking about.

All the way through, we're going to see in the epistle of John the reality of obvious, of apparent that God reveals to us and there's a love that is just inexplicable. I think about Paul, Saul when he was first changed, and God revealed Himself on the road to Damascus to Saul, and he saw this great light. He came into the presence of God, and then he was sent to Ananias. Of course, if I was Ananias, I'm going, "Ok, I saw him dragging people off by their hair, I saw him beating people on the streets. Please, I don't want the guy next to me." The disciples were very reticent. They didn't want to fellowship with him at first. What's interesting is that there comes a point where they begin to gather. It says in Acts that he began preaching the word of God boldly, and then it says, "and they came together with him." Scripture is telling us that they go, "This is our brother. He has been changed." There was a drawing together.

The same thing sort of takes place in Acts 10, where you have Peter, and he has this vision of unclean animals, and he goes, "I can't eat unclean," and God goes, "Ok, but I want you to know if I tell you to eat it, you eat it." So, finally he comes to this guy by the name of Cornelius, who's a Roman soldier. First of all, a Jew doesn't have anything to do with these Gentiles. On top of this here's a Roman soldier, so you don't want to have anything to do with them. Cornelius loves the Lord, and he sees the love of God and the Spirit moving upon him and his friends, and Peter goes, "I know now that God's not a respecter of person, this is my brother." There's something that you recognize almost instantaneously, the Spirit of God, and you go, "That's my brother." Ultimately, it doesn't matter because we're going to offend each other. We're going to say something that bothers another person. Maybe you put the fork on the right side, but there's going to be something that really annoys you about the people around you; but you know what? It's not going to matter because it's a love that supersedes all of that stuff. We become devoted to one another in love, and we go, "I can't leave you, you're my brother." There's a deepening that happens, and now you begin to serve one another. There's something inside of you, the Spirit of God goes, "You can't sit back and not serve the people." Why? "Because it's my brother." We would oftentimes tell our kids, if there was something happening in the church that they could be involved in, some youth thing, and sometimes they didn't feel like going; and we'd say, "Guess what, you're going." Because we taught them how to be

devoted to the body. “Why should I go?” Because that’s the body of Christ, and we’re in love with the body of Christ. We’re going to support the body of Christ.

You come to church, and I know that the thought is in some people’s mind, “Well, I come to church to get something.” That’s not why you come. You’re part of the body of Christ, and you come to build up the body of Christ. So, you shouldn’t be thinking “Well, I’m going to go this, and I’m not going to go this, because this is what’s for me.” That’s Cain. The reason why he puts Cain within the text is because Cain had his agenda, and it was “me.” People oftentimes come into the church, and they go, “It’s about me.” It’s not about you, and that’s where you miss it. It’s about one another, and it’s the “one another” that brings us together. We encourage one another, we build up one another, we pray for one another. There is no “me” in the church; there’s only the one another’s. We’re the body of Christ, there is no “part of the body of Christ” roaming around out there, it’s us coming together. That’s why the whole communion thing is so important. As you come together, you have a communion, and that communing is around Him bringing the body together. You begin to think, “whatever brings the body together, that’s what I want to do because that’s the love of God.”

“Not as Cain, “because he was only concerned about how he looked. Just read it in Genesis 4. He was only concerned about how he looked, how things related to him. So, because his brother was looking better than him, because Cain didn’t feel like doing the right thing, but on top of that, his brother is now making him feel guilty about it and making him look bad. Then, God is not grateful because he brought trash before Him? It’s kind of like in Malachi, “Why are you bringing Me your lame and all of your throwaways, and I should be happy with this? Would a governor be happy with that?” The same thing was true with Cain. We oftentimes come, and we bring, and we go, “Ok, so what’s in it for me?” and God goes, “Ok, I’m not happy about that.” God is calling us together, and there’s a different mindset with believers. This is one of the things that John is wanting to hit over and over again. You’re highly recognizable because you love each other. You’re highly devoted to one another. You take the shirt off the back; you would do whatever is necessary. Are there times that I’m sure some of you women go, “Ok, nursery duty...” Are there times that you feel that way? Sure, you’re going to feel that way, but those kids are God’s kids, and I can’t not serve them. There’s something that draws me. I can’t come in this body and think about myself. I can’t do that. It’s not because Pastor Gary’s so wonderful, though I wouldn’t mind you saying so, but it’s because the Spirit of God won’t let us do that. So, John is going to emphasize this over and over again, and how wonderful it is that we love the brethren.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we give You thanks for the transformation that occurs in our hearts. The love of God, as You tell us in Your word, is poured out in our hearts for those who love You, for those who desire to fellowship with You, for those who love truth as You do, for those who pursue what is right as You always have. We come together with like mind, and we’re united, we’re family. We can’t help but feel a great relationship with one another.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I trust the Spirit of God is upon you. I can tell you this, it's obvious.