

*DIVINE SONSHIP PROVEN BY ACTIVE LOVE*

(The Second Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 3:11-24

A. *The Text*

"For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: (12) not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. (13) Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. (14) We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the bretheren. He that loveth not abideth in death. (15) Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (16) Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. (19) Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: (20) because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. (21) Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; (22) and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. (23) And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment. (24) And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us."

B. *Try to Discover*

1. What is the relation of command to love (3:11), to God as light (1:5) since both are presented as summary of the divine message?

2. How does the first murder demonstrate the effect of hate on the one hating?
3. Can a Christian ever be liked by the world? Explain. (Compare I John 3:13 and Acts 2:47)
4. When do Christians pass from death to life?
5. How can one be a murderer without killing anyone?
6. What is the relationship of love to need?
7. How do one's actions prove or disprove one's claim to Divine Sonship?
8. Should a Christian ever feel guilty to the point of self-condemnation?
9. Why are so many prayers seemingly unanswered?
10. What is Christian behavior in matters where there is no express commandment of God?
11. How does the experience of answered prayer have any bearing on John's argument that Jesus is indeed the Christ?
12. How does the habit of believing Christ and loving our brothers affirm the deity of Christ?
13. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives affirm the deity of Christ?

### C. *Paraphrase*

"Because this is the message which ye have heard from the beginning—That we should be loving one another, (12) Not just as Cain was of the wicked one and slew his brother! And for what cause slew he him? Because his works were wicked, Whereas those of his brother were righteous. (13) Be not marvelling, Brethren, if the world is hating you (14) We know that we have passed over out of death into life, Because we love the brethren: He that loveth not abideth in death. (15) Whosoever is hating his brother is a murderer; And ye know that no murderer hath life age-during within him abiding. (16) Hereby have we come to understand love: In that He for us His life laid down, And we ought for the brethren our lives to lay down. (17) But whoso hath this world's goods And beholdeth his brother having need, And shutteth up his tender affections from him How is the love of God abiding in him? (18) Dear children! Let us not be loving in word nor yet with the tongue, But in deed and truth. (19) Hereby shall we get to know that of the truth we are, And before Him shall persuade our heart; (20)

Because if our own heart condemn us Greater is God than our heart, and perceiveth all things. (21) Beloved! if our heart be not condemning us Boldness have we towards God; (22) And whatsoever we are asking we are receiving from Him, Because his commandments are we keeping And the things that are pleasing before Him are we doing. (23) And this is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ And be loving one another—Just as He gave a commandment unto us. (24) And he that keepeth His commandments In Him abideth And He in him. And hereby perceive we That He abideth in us, By reason of the Spirit which unto us He hath given.”

#### D. *Translation and Comments*

##### 1. Reiteration of the Gospel in summary . . . v.11

(11) “Because this is the message which you heard from (the) beginning, that we should be loving one another;”

This is the second time in I John that the entire meaning of the incarnation has been condensed as a single message. In 1:5, the summary is: “God is light.” Here the message is summarized: “That we should love one another.”

In the first instance, the summary concerns the nature of God. In this present text the abbreviated message concerns the practical outworking of God-likeness in His children. Just as God as light is the source of life to those who walk in the light, so we are to practice love in such a way as to bring and sustain life in others. (See comment on I John 1:5. *i.e.*, love illustrated by the process of photo-synthesis)

It is the nature of the life which we have in God to become as source of life to others. (Cf. John 4:14) This is done only when we love one another.

“From the beginning,” in this verse, goes back at least to the time of Cain and Abel. The new commandment is indeed old! (Cf. I John 2:7-8)

##### 2. The example of Cain proves the world hates those who practice righteousness . . . v. 12-13

###### a. The example of Cain . . . reason for the first murder . . . v. 12

(12) “not as Cain was of the evil one and slaughtered his brother. And for what reason did he slaughter him? Because his works were evil, and the ones of his brother righteous.”

Note the interplay here between love and righteousness. Righteous-

ness keeps God's commandments: the commandment is to love. No one is righteous who does not love!

There is nothing so violent as the inter-reaction which takes place when righteousness and sin meet. When the righteousness of God meets the sin of man, the result is called the wrath of God. (Cf. Romans 1:18-ff) When righteousness in men meets unrighteousness in men, the result is murder!

The first demonstration of this truth is in the murder of Abel by Cain. John says it explicitly, "And for what reason did he slay him? Because his works were evil and the ones of his brother righteous."

b. The world may hate us also . . . v. 13

(13) "Stop marveling, brothers, if the world is hating you."

Since the confrontation between righteousness and unrighteousness normally results in murder, we ought not be surprised if the world hates us. John will shortly show that hate is, after all, tantamount to murder. Since love is righteousness because it is obedience to God's command, love may be expected to be crucified! Is not this what happened to our Lord?

John does not say that everyone in the world will always hate everyone who practices Christian love. Indeed many instances may be cited from the scriptures to prove otherwise. However, since hate is the natural reaction of unrighteousness to love, we ought not be surprised when it happens.

3. Love is evidence of life . . . v. 14

(14) "We know that we have passed over out of death into life, because we are loving the brothers. The one not loving is remaining in death."

The practice of loving the children of God is evidence that we have *already* passed out of death into life. To state it another way; when we have, as the normal course of our lives, the giving of ourselves to our brothers in such a way as to sustain life in them, we know we have passed out of death into life.

Here, again, is testimony of scripture that eternal life is not something that takes place *only* on the other side of physical death. Rather it begins here and now. Love for one another proves eternal life is a present reality.

A word of caution is needed here. Love as *evidence* of life does not mean our own loving *causes* us to live. We do not live *because* we love;

we love because we live in Him. A man who does not love is a dead man. The man who does love, and so gives life to others, is alive.

4. Just as loving gives life; hating takes life . . . v. 15-18

- a. Whoever hates is a manslayer and does not have eternal life . . . v. 15

(15) "Everyone who is hating his brother is a manslayer, and you already know that every manslayer is not having eternal life remaining in him."

Just as darkness is the absence of light; hate is the absence of love. As does the absence of light, so does the absence of love result in death.

One does not need to uproot or chop down a plant to kill it, he need merely shut off the light. Likewise, one need not actually shoot or stab his brother to become a killer. He need only withhold the love which gives life.

*Meseo*, here translated hate, means simply *indifference*. It is the absence of the self-giving concern called love. It is the failure to become involved in the *needs* of our brothers.

In realizing that one who hates his brother is a manslayer, a taker of human life, we must bear in mind that the tests of life presented in I John are subjective. John is primarily concerned with what the absence of love does to the person who fails to practice it. The effect of hate is subjectively the same whether one actually kills or merely withholds the means of life.

John's point here is that the failure to love is proof of the absence of life. A murderer is not only a taker or withholder of life, he is himself a dead man!

- b. The proof of love is not words but deeds . . . v. 16-18

(16) "In this we have come to know love, because He, in our behalf, laid down His life; we ought also, in behalf of the brothers, to go on laying down our lives. (17) Whoever may be having the necessities of the life of the world and may see his brother having need and shuts up his affections from him, how is the love of God remaining in Him? (18) Children, let us not go on loving by word, neither with the tongue, but in work and reality."

We know love only through the incarnation, and especially through Calvary. In all the pre-Christian Papiri on which Koine Greek was written, the word *agape* (love) has been found less than ten times. Such

self-effacement to meet the needs of others, regardless of their response, was virtually unknown before Christ.

Our awareness of this love, and especially since we have come to know it as the supreme will of God for man, carries with it the moral obligation to demonstrate it as He demonstrated it. The world of men will only come to know love as we know it when they see it in us as we saw it in Him.

How are we to do this? John says we are to be constantly ready to lay down our lives as He laid down His; not as a martyr, but in the presence of need and for the purpose of giving and sustaining life. Laying down our lives, in this sense, involves *living* for others more than *dying* for them.

Giving our lives, which must be themselves redeemed by His life, obviously cannot be the means of atonement for others. Only Christ can do this. However, the same love which motivated Him can be shown to the world when we give what we possess of the necessities of life to sustain the temporal life of others.

What He did on the higher plain in His atoning death, we do on the lower plain when we give our means of livelihood to assure the necessities of temporal life to others. John's question is rhetorical. The life of Christ does not remain in the person who withholds the necessities of life from another.

John is not talking about the giving of our surplus to meet the needs of others. That is not love. It is not even giving. It is only when we give the means of sustaining our own lives to sustain the lives of others that we are following the example of Christ.

Jesus did not give a spare life, He gave the only one He had. The widow who gave the mite had learned the lesson of love. She gave what she needed to meet the needs of others.

The reason this is so necessary in assuring our own life is made clear in Jesus statement, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these, my brethren, (*even*) these least, ye did it unto me." (Matt. 25:40) When we consider that this statement was made by Jesus in reference to the final judgment, it becomes evident that giving is literally a matter of life and death; life and death, not only for the recipient, but for the giver also. It really is "more blessed to give than to receive!"

According to Matthew 25:44, there are going to be some surprised people at the judgment; lost because they never learned to demonstrate their love by giving treasure rather than talk.

The word "children" in verse 18 is intended to call attention to the claim of Divine Sonship. This claim is proven by active love for our brothers in His family. If it is not so proven, Divine Sonship does not, in fact, exist at all.

5. Love of our brothers issues in full confidence of our own sonship . . . v. 19-22

a. Knowledge of our own situation, and consequent assurance before God results from love rather than words . . . v. 19

(19) "In this we shall get to know that we are of reality and before Him we shall assure our heart."

Contemplation of one's actual relationship to God, in terms of eternal life and eternal death is a staggering experience. It can result either in the most hollow dismay or the most joyous confidence of the future.

Arrival at a reassuring conclusion in such vital personal invoice is determined by facts rather than fancy. If we actually give beyond our means for the sake of bringing life to others, we have tangible evidence that our own situation is as it ought to be. The conclusion can now be reached on the basis of fact instead of philosophy or feeling.

This assurance is not intended to bring us to a smug self-righteousness, but to a calm inner confidence which John calls boldness. The experience of loving is the expeller of doubts.

b. God's infinite knowledge linked with His mercy and compassion . . . v. 20

(20) "because if our heart should know (something) against us, God is greater than our heart and is knowing everything."

Any honest person can think of a million reasons why God should not claim him as His child. For this reason, many people will never say "I am a Christian." When asked if he is a Christian, such a person will reply, "I hope so" or "I'd like to be." This fearful and negative evaluation of self by one who actually does strive to obey God, to face his own guilt, to love his brothers, and to hold fast his faith in Jesus Christ, is totally unnecessary.

No child of God has any right to a guilt complex. Even though he may hold in the recesses of his heart the remembrance of the most heinous sin, one begotten of Him need not live in constant horror of death or terror of facing God.

Even if our heart knows something real and terrible against us, God is greater than our hearts. God knows both the deed and the reason. He does not make excuses for our guilt, and neither should we. But He

does make propitiation for our guilt in the blood of Christ, and we cannot but accept it. No matter how terrible the sin nor how far reaching the hurt, when it is given over to God to be washed away by the blood of Calvary, we have no right to hold it any longer as our own.

We said earlier that one of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. In verse 20, we have come face to face with the reason this is so.

The incidence of suicide among church members is evidence of how desperately we need to realize the mercy and compassion of God toward one who is acutely aware of his own guilt. How desperately we need to practice this mercy and compassion toward one another! Otherwise how does the love of God abide in us?

c. Understanding of verse 20 results in assurance before God . . .

v. 21

(21) "Beloved, if our heart should not know anything against us, we are having boldness toward God,"

Because all have sinned, there is no basis upon which an honest person's heart can keep from condemning him, save in the realization of the mercy and compassion of God. When we do realize this, our hearts no longer condemn us.

We must not delude ourselves. The *mercy* and *compassion* of God, as well as the *cleansing* from that for which our hearts condemn us, are to be had only in the confession of our guilt. (I John 1:8-9) We ought never assume that forgiveness is ours because we have rationalized away our guilt by blaming the pressures of life for our sins.

Nevertheless, when, in the realization of forgiveness, our hearts no longer condemn us, we may indeed walk tall and straight as children of God. There are no second class sons in His family!

d. The fact of answered prayer is evidence of the deity of Jesus

. . . v. 22

(22) "and whatever we may ask we are receiving from Him because we are keeping His commandments and the things pleasing in His sight we are doing."

If prayer in His name is answered, it is evidence that Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be. If Jesus is not God, and therefore unable to answer prayer, it is absurd to pray in His name.

To the first century Christian, answered prayer was a common occurrence. It was an experience so normal that it could be cited as evidence



of Jesus' deity. This is obviously not the case among modern Christians, so John's argument here is weakened.

Perhaps the reason real prayer is a rare commodity in the average "New Testament" congregation today is that we have lost sight of the conditions upon which prayer is answered. Too much contemporary prayer is merely the vain repetition of pious platitudes and selfish desires. Often our prayers sound more like ordering a meal in a restaurant than they sound like "letting our request be made known of God." (Phil. 4:6)

John reminds his readers that the two-fold circumstance within which prayer is answered has to do with the life of the one praying rather than the form of the prayer. The common attitude of one's everyday life must seek the will of God in all things.

*First*, it must be the predisposition of our lives to keep His commandments. Whenever we are confronted with a specific command, our immediate response must be willing obedience.

*Secondly*, in areas of life where there is no "thus saith the Lord," the habitual course of action must be motivated by the desire to be well pleasing to God.

With these two conditions fulfilled, prayer in Jesus' name becomes a mighty means, not of getting our will done in Heaven, but God's will done on earth, and particularly in our own personal lives. When a totally committed person goes to his knees in such an attitude, he can rise from prayer with the full assurance that whatever he has asked is his.

Such prayer is so common an everyday experience of those totally committed to God in Christ that the experience can be used as evidence of the truth of the Gospel. There is no question whether prayer will be answered. Rather the frequency of answered prayer becomes a confirmation of faith. Where this is not true, total commitment is obviously lacking.

A. T. Robertson has summed it up incisively, "In form no limitations are placed here (on prayer) save that of complete fellowship, which means complete surrender of our will to that of God our Father."

e. The two-fold commandment confronting Christians in the context of the gnostic crisis . . . v. 23-24

(23) "and this is the commandment of Him, that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and that we should love one another

just as He gave us commandment. (24) And the one keeping His commandments is remaining in Him and He in him; and in this we are knowing that we are remaining in Him, from the spirit which He has given us."

Repeatedly in I John we are reminded that the child of God must habitually "keep His commandments." Obedience is to be the normal response of his life to his Father. This was easily understood in the patriarchal society of that day. The father's word was law in any household, and to say that God was Father brought to mind first of all His authority.

This is in contrast to the image of sentimental overindulgence which so often comes to mind when the word "father" is mentioned in our society. We have unseated the father, where authority is concerned, and have replaced him with the unfettered self-expression of the individual. In so doing we have made it very difficult to think of God as Father in the way the first century Christian thought of Him in this role.

Nevertheless, it is required in all ages that the child of God, confronted with a command from the Father, obey at once and without question.

In the gnostic crisis, the commands which the Father sets before His children are *believe* and *love*. Obedience to the first is necessary if the Christian Gospel is to survive at all. Obedience to the second is necessary if the family of God is to remain united rather than torn asunder by the quarrel over the gnostic heresy.

Faith must have an object. The Christian faith has as its object the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Eternal Christ, the Son of God. "The name" of a person stands for all that he is. To believe "the name of His Son Jesus Christ," is to believe that He is Who He is and Who He has ever been from eternity.

It is very popular, in some pseudo-intellectual circles among present day theologians, to say that the important thing is to confront men with the question, "Whom say *Ye* that I am;" that the answer is entirely subjective and therefore of secondary importance.

John will have none of this. Rather, he informs us, we are commanded to believe "the name of His Son Jesus Christ."

The translation of this verse which reads, ". . . that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," is unfortunate. The phrase *to onomati tou hui ou* (translated "in the name of") does not contain the preposition *en* (in). The construction is in the dative case! The case of

personal interest. When it is used, as here, as the direct object of a verb it is done for a reason, since the normal case of the direct object is the accusative.

Other passages, where the English has *in*, or *on* His name, use the Greek *eis*, (literally into). (For examples, read I John 5:13, John 1:12, 2:23, and 3:18) The point is that John's grammar in this verse makes the command a very personal matter. He is not concerned with formal creedal statements drawn up by councils, as was done at Nicea some time later to settle the gnostic controversy. John is concerned with personal individual conviction that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is *de facto*, the unique Son of God.

The second command confronting the child of God in the gnostic crisis is that we love one another. To understand the vital necessity of obedience to this command, we must keep in mind the prayer of Christ (John 17) and the insistence of the apostles, (eg. Eph. 4:1-5) that the church must be united if it is ever to do the will of God or be worthy of the call of the Gospel.

The controversy brought about by the introduction of gnosticism was furious, and a century after John wrote it, threatened to tear the church permanently asunder. John insists that the protagonists must love one another.

The command obviously applies first of all to those who are on the side of truth! This is no easy command to heed in the face of false teaching, especially when we remember that love is the complete giving of one's self to another for the other's benefit and regardless of his reaction to us.

Nevertheless, love is still the only hope of healing the breaches which have been brought about in the family of God by the introduction of false teaching. And the command must be first of all obeyed by those who are on the side of truth. I Corinthians 13 is particularly apropos in controversy. It is in such a situation that love is evidence of Divine Sonship.

It is only in the keeping of these two commandments, to *believe* and to *love*, that we remain in Him. Except we believe He is Who He is and our attitude toward our brothers is what His is, we are not actually in Him at all.

Being in Him and He in us recalls at once the truth mentioned above in connection with I John 2:18-27. He is the Anointed One. We have also been anointed by the gift of the Spirit when we were baptized into

Him. (Compare Acts 2:38-39 and Galatian 3:27) We share with Him in the Family of God through this anointing. So, says John, "We are knowing that we are remaining in Him, from the Spirit which He has given us."

### E. Questions for Review

1. The second summary of the message of the incarnation in I John 3:11 is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. It is the nature of the life which we have in Christ to become a source of \_\_\_\_\_ to others.
3. This is accomplished when we \_\_\_\_\_.
4. How does the murder of Abel by Cain demonstrate that the world is prone to hate those who practice righteousness?
5. The confrontation of righteousness by unrighteousness *normally* results in \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Because love is obedience to God it is also \_\_\_\_\_.
7. When does a Christian "pass out of death into life?"
8. Do we love because we have eternal life, or do we have eternal life because we love?
9. Hate is the absence of \_\_\_\_\_ just as \_\_\_\_\_ is the absence of light.
10. The word translated hate in I John 3:15 means \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Failure to love is proof of the absence of \_\_\_\_\_.
12. How does the world become aware of love as we know it in Christ?
13. How do we demonstrate divine love in such a way that it is recognizable?
14. Just as He brought eternal life in the presence of our need, so we are to give \_\_\_\_\_ in the presence of temporal needs.
15. Does giving what we can afford demonstrate divine love? Explain.
16. Many will be surprised in the judgment, who expect to be saved, because they have not learned to give \_\_\_\_\_ rather than \_\_\_\_\_.
17. How may we have assurance before God, even when our hearts condemn us?

18. Explain the statement, "No Christian has any right to a guilt complex."
19. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. Explain this statement in light of I John 3:20.
20. The only basis upon which one's heart can fail to condemn him is \_\_\_\_\_.
21. The experience of answered prayer is evidence of \_\_\_\_\_ according to I John 3:22.
22. What are the two conditions which must be present in our lives in order to pray effectively?
23. When the word "father" was mentioned in the society of the first century, the first impression was of parental \_\_\_\_\_.
24. Why does the term "father" not suggest authority to us today?
25. Which is more important, the question, "Who is Jesus," or our personal belief in the answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?"
26. \_\_\_\_\_ is still the only hope of healing the divisions caused by false teaching.
27. How does the anointing of the Spirit demonstrate that we are in the Christ?

## CHAPTER XI

### *DIVINE SONSHIP DEMONSTRATED BY CONFESSION OF CHRIST AND ATTENTION TO TRUTH*

(The Third Test . . . The Second Time)

I John 4:1-6

#### A. *The Text*

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (2) Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) and every