

1 JOHN—WEEK 3

THE DIFFERENCE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is by Jan van Eyck (1390–1441)

On display in Ghent at the St. Bavo Cathedral, it's looks like a statue, but it's a painting.

God plants supernatural love in Christians. Thus, the world doesn't even know us. But we will be even more transformed to be like Him when we finally see Him as He is.

Those who keep practicing sinning, are not Christians. Those who hate their brother are even likened to murderers.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

1 John, Week 3 — The Difference
Copyright 2022 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 1 John 3:1a

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

This sentence is so packed with meaning that it'll take a whole DEEP to unpack it. First off, “*that*” is a purpose construct. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us*, for the purpose *that we should be called children of God!* So we are given some special *manner of love* (ESV says, “*kind of love*”) for the purpose that we’d be called His children. Okay, great. What *manner of love* is that?

The Greek word translated as “love” here is a-ga-pane (ἀγάπην). That’s a conjugation of agapé, which is sacrificial love—putting another’s well-being above one’s own. But that doesn’t answer the question because the question is literally, “What manner of agapé ...?” So, the Father hasn’t just bestowed agapé on us; He’s bestowed some *manner of agapé*—for the purpose that we would be called His children.

Okay, great. What *manner of agapé* is that?

The Greek word translated as “manner” (ποταπὴν pot-a-pane) means either “what sort” or “how great.” So, it could be translated as great instead of manner. Sure enough, the NIV says, “*See what great love ...*” Opinions, even translations, differ. Our question isn’t answered by the nuances of the Greek.

So, let’s use scripture to interpret scripture. Where else do we see people called children of God?

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. ... But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; — Matthew 5:9, 44–45a

So, it’s definitely a manner—and an extreme one at that. Loving your enemies is love that’s more than just large. It’s different. It’s supernatural. Getting someone to call you a son of God takes abnormal love; it takes love that throws folks for a loop.

Love that looks supernatural is supernatural.

This is the thing that Christians (including me) habitually miss—trying harder isn’t the secret sauce. Yes, disciplines matter, but it’s God who does the heavy lifting.

You can’t learn to forgive your enemies by trying to forgive your enemies. If you could, no one would call you a son of God for doing it.

No, Daddy has to do it through you. That means prayer—disciplined prayer. The best time to start is when you don’t have any enemies.

And note well, your prayer could be asking God to provide an enemy for you to practice forgiveness on.

2 1 John 3:1b

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Here's another half-verse that takes a whole DEEP to unpack. Since the world didn't know Him, it doesn't know us. That sounds important, but what does John mean by "world," and what does he mean by "know"?

The BDAG lexicon has many definitions for the Greek word translated as "world" (κόσμος "kos-mos").

- 1: *adornment, adorning* (It's the Greek root for the English word "cosmetic.")
- 2: *the world* as the sum total of everything
- 3: *the world* as the sum total of all beings above the animals
- 4: *the world* as the Earth
- 5: *the world* as mankind
- 6: *the world* as the scene of earthly joys, possessions, cares, sufferings
- 7: *the world*, and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is hostile to God
- 8: *totality*

Thankfully, the Greek word translated as "know" (γινώσκει gin-ose-kay) isn't so complex. It means, "know, learn, understand, perceive."

That helps with interpreting kosmos. Only by the third and fifth definitions is "the world" smart enough to "know" anything. This isn't about plants and animals—or stars and planets. (Still, the sense of the seventh definition is unavoidable in the context of this passage.) So, this boils down to one question. Is it just humans, or are angels (specifically fallen angels) included in the definition of kosmos?

In the gospels, demons always know who Jesus is. In the book of Job, Satan converses directly with God. Thus, the world not knowing us (gin-ose-kay is in the present tense), *because it did not know Him* (past tense) can't be referring to angels.

So, the takeaway is that the world (unbelievers) don't know us because they didn't know Him.

We're strange to them.

This is why evangelism absolutely depends on miracles. Christianity doesn't make sense to *the world*.

The best apologetic explanation imaginable can't convert anyone. It takes the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit for someone to even *know* what you're talking about.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. — 1 Corinthians 1:18

3 1 John 3:2–3

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

John’s point in verse two seems simple enough. *When He is revealed* (in heaven or in the second coming) we’ll be transformed, because *we shall see Him as He is*.

But there’s a key detail with the word “see.” There are two Greek words translated as “see.”

Blepo (βλέπω “blep-oh”) means to look at something (literally “the activity of the eyes”). This is the word Matthew uses in Matthew 7:3a when Jesus says, “*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye?*” (ESV) (the NKJV translates blepo as, “*look at*” here.)

But 1 John 3:2 doesn’t use blepo; it uses horao (ὁράω “ho-rah-oh”). Horao is also translated as “see” but in a broader, more conceptual sense—more like notice, recognize, understand. For example, “see” is horao in Matthew 9:30b when Jesus tells the blind men he has just healed, “*See that no one knows about it.*”

So, *when He is revealed*, we will do more than just behold Him with our eyes; we will understand—and be transformed into His likeness.

And “likeness” isn’t about physical appearance. Being like Him doesn’t mean we’ll look like Him. It’s way more than that.

Otherwise, we might as well think that we’re going to get Jesus’s hair color.

The prospect of being *like Him* is exciting, even if *it has not yet been revealed what we shall be*.

So, *everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*. But what does John mean by, “purifies” (ἀγνίζει “hag-ni-zay”)? What is this thing that all Christians do?

Fortunately, the BAGD lexicon lists a specific definition of Hag-ni-zay for 1 John 3:3—*become pure through forgiveness of sins*.

This isn’t some ritual Christians go through to purify themselves.

It’s justification unto sanctification.

4 1 John 3:4–9 (ESV)

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

The ESV translation is better here because it emphasizes the durative present tense sense of the Greek word translated here as, “*makes a practice of sinning*” (ἁμαρτίαν “ha-mar-tih-ahn”). The NKJV simply says, “*commits sin.*” The NIV just says, “*sins.*”

This distinction is important because one could be misled into thinking that this passage says that Christians never sin. That would contradict what Paul wrote about his internal struggles, particularly in Romans 7:15–17 (Note that the Greek there is in the present tense. Paul can't be speaking of his former self.)

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. (ESV)

Notice how Paul's anguish in Romans seven meshes with the final sentence in today's passage.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Sin has become *the very thing I hate*. So, *he cannot keep on sinning*. And how did sin become *the very thing I hate*? *Because he has been born of God.*

When we become Christians, we don't totally cease sinning. In fact, the sinning doesn't instantly change at all.

But the hating it does.

And thus begins our sanctification. With sins now visible, and ugly, the *practice of sinning* loses its appeal.

Unfortunately, old habits die hard. Sanctification is slow. Thus the word, “*practice*” takes on an additional connotation. Sin or not sin is a *practice*.

One might even say, “Practice makes perfect.”

5 1 John 3:10–15

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 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.

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. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

John twice relates hating your brother to murder. They're surely not the same to your brother. Isn't this comparison a bit much?

No, Jesus did the same thing.

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." — Matthew 5:21–22

There's something to this—something important. But what? How can these two things be the same?

First off, this comparison is between a feeling and an action. Hate and murder don't exist in the same realm. Feelings are the roots of actions. One leads to the other. They are as different as cause and effect.

And one is inherently invisible, while the other is as visible as anything can be. Your brother may not even notice that you hate him. He'll definitely notice if you murder him.

So, these two things look to all the world as different as night and day. But John's point, and Jesus's, is that they're not so different to God.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." — 1 Samuel 16:7

The murderer and the one who hates his brother have the same heart.

This continues yesterday's point about sanctification. While old habits die hard, the Holy Spirit changes the heart more quickly. That's where the real change is anyway.

So, it's appropriate for Jesus (and John) to nudge us on this.

Questions for reflection or discussion

Note: some of these questions may seem to have obvious answers. That's by design. Those answers should be a good springboard for discussion.

1. Has God ever helped you forgive someone?

2. Have you ever been gob smacked by an unbeliever's inability to understand you?

3. How do you imagine "being like Him"?

4. Do you hate some of the things you do?

5. How have you grown in loving your brother?

Items for prayer: