

3:1 See What Love the Father Has Given Us

The World.

Clement of Alexandria: The “world” means those who live in pleasure. Adumbrations.¹

The Inheritance Given Us.

Andreas: God shows us the necessary patience because of the inheritance which he has given us. Here the “world” refers to wicked people. Catena.²

Children of God.

Oecumenius: John is telling us that we know from all that has been said above that we have been taken up by God as his children. Even if that is not immediately apparent, we should not be disturbed, for it will be fully revealed when he comes again. Commentary on 1 John.⁴

3:2 We Shall Be Like God

God’s Children Now.

Didymus the Blind: By writing these things John is exhorting his readers to recognize what it means to be born again of God. He tells them that they are now worthy to be loved as children of God, even in this world, and that the adoption of sons is a reality here and now. For since we now know in part and have the first fruits of the Spirit, we already have something of the adoption of sons and can see what the fullness of it will be like when it arrives. Commentary on 1 John.⁵

We Shall Be Like Him.

Augustine: Despite the measure of likeness which we find in God’s Word, we also recognize a great unlikeness to God and his Word in this enigma. We must admit that even when we are like him and shall see him as he is (words which clearly imply an awareness of our present unlikeness), we shall still have no natural equality with him. For the created nature must always be less than the Creator. On the Trinity 15.16.26.⁶

We Shall See Him As He Is.

Severus of Antioch: Therefore we live as children of God even in this present life, sanctifying ourselves by virtue and striving toward the likeness of something even better. Encouraged by this, we shall be fashioned according to the brightness of the resurrection, when we shall see him, insofar as that is possible, as he is. Catena.⁷

John Does Not Contradict Paul.

Maximus the Confessor: Is there any connection between what John says here and what Paul says when he writes: “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things

of God”? 9 What then shall we be like? The answer is that here John says that he does not know what form the coming deification through the virtues of faith will take for those who are children of God here on earth now. The independently existing nature of the good things to come has not yet been revealed in detail. Here on earth we walk by faith, not by sight. Paul on the other hand says that through revelation we have received the divine promise concerning the good things which are to come but does not claim to know what these are in any detail. Thus he says quite clearly that he examines himself and pursues the higher calling as far as he understands what it is.¹⁰ Any contradiction between the two apostles is merely apparent, not real, because they are both inspired by the same Spirit. Catena.¹¹

3:3 Purify Yourselves as God Is Pure

Faith Past and Present.

Hilary of Arles: We shall see him as he is because we shall be like him. This is our hope for the future, our love in the present and our faith in both the past and the present. Introductory Commentary on 1 John.¹²

The Image and Likeness of God in Humanity.

Andreas: Some people argue from this that God made man according to his image but not according to his likeness, which he will give us later on. We have supposedly believed in him according to the likeness which we have, and if that is worthy enough, then we shall receive God’s likeness as well. But if you have believed according to the likeness and then turn away from it and destroy it, who will give you what belongs to the likeness? You will not be able to acquire the likeness unless you have fully perfected the image first. This is supposed to be why John adds the words: “Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself, as he is pure.” But my bishop, in his letter to Conon, has shown on the basis of the recognized Fathers of the church that the image and the likeness are one and the same thing and that John was speaking here of something which has already taken place. Catena.¹³

Purify Yourselves.

Theophylact: Note that John uses the present tense when he talks about our need to purify ourselves. The practice of virtue is an ongoing thing and has its own inner dynamic. If we stop living this way or put it off until some future time, there is nothing virtuous about that at all. Commentary on 1 John.¹⁵

3:4 Sin Is Lawlessness

Everyone Who Commits Sin.

Hilary of Arles: John says that sin and iniquity are the same thing, though there were heretics who denied this. According to some of them, iniquity was a crime deliberately committed, but sin was a fact of nature and therefore not a crime. Introductory Commentary on 1 John.¹⁶

Clinging to Evil.

Oecumenius: John's message is that those of us who have been adopted into Christ must do the works of righteousness and not show ourselves to be lazy in that respect. However, the person who has sinned or will sin is not called wicked or a sinner merely on that account. What John is talking about here is the person who clings to evil and becomes a worker of evil on an ongoing basis. Commentary on 1 John.¹⁸

Sin Is Against Nature.

Theophylact: Sin is a falling away from what is good, whereas iniquity is transgression of the law. The first is a rejection of good as a general principle, the second is a particular violation of a law. The sinner therefore is someone who goes against nature, and it is the nature of human beings to live rationally. Sin is therefore something which must be regarded as absurd. Commentary on 1 John.¹⁹

3:5 In Christ There Is No Sin

No Sin in Christ.

Hilary of Arles: There is no sin in Christ because he was not conceived in sin as we are. Introductory Commentary on 1 John.²⁰

No Excuse to Sin.

Oecumenius: Since Christ, in whom there was no sin, came to take away your sins, now you have no excuse to go on sinning. Commentary on 1 John.²³

3:6 Sinners Have Not Known Christ

One Who Sins Is Outside Christ.

Didymus the Blind: Just as the person who dwells in virtue and true doctrine does not sin and is not ignorant, so the one who remains in Christ, who is his righteousness and sanctification, does not sin. For how can someone act unrighteously when he is in the company of righteousness, and how can he be content to place corruption alongside holiness? Therefore anyone who sins is outside Christ and has no part or fellowship in him. Commentary on 1 John.²⁴

Sinners Do Not See Christ.

Hilary of Arles: Sinners have not seen Christ with the eye of faith, nor have they known him by putting that faith into practice in the right way. Introductory Commentary on 1 John.²⁵

No One Who Abides in Him Sins.

Andreas: How can someone sin if he is not cut off from God in any way? Catena.²⁶

3:7 Do Right and Be Righteous

Let No One Deceive You.

Hilary of Arles: Let no one deceive you by saying that there is nothing wrong with sin. The devil has sinned all along because there is no truth in him. He is the ultimate deceiver. Introductory Commentary on 1 John.²⁸

Righteous or Wicked.

Oecumenius: Do not be confused about this. The person who does what is right is righteous, and the person who does what is wrong is wicked. It is as simple as that. Commentary on 1 John.³⁰

3:8 To Destroy the Works of the Devil

One Who Commits Sin.

Origen: Insofar as we commit sins, we have not yet put off the generation of the devil, even if we are thought to believe in Jesus. Everyone who is not of the devil does not commit sin. Commentary on John 20.103–4.³¹

The Devil Has Sinned from the Beginning.

Didymus the Blind: Since the devil was first and foremost sent into the world in order to lead people astray, that is where his name comes from. ³² Thus anyone who sins can be called a devil. Sin is not inherent in the human race, since if it were it could not have been eradicated by a sinless human being. But this is exactly what happened when the Son of God appeared in human flesh, and so sin must be regarded as accidental to human nature, not as intrinsic to human nature. Commentary on 1 John.³³

First to Sin.

Chrysostom: Because the devil was the first to be locked into sin, everyone who now sins acts according to his bidding. For the devil rules in the sinner by a mass of evil thoughts, as in the case of Judas. Someone might say that the devil is present in sinners even before they sin because they have made room for him. The answer to this is that committing sin and making room for the devil amount to one and the same thing—sin. Catena.³⁴

As Often As We Sin.

Andreas: As often as we sin, we are born of the devil. But we are of God once again, as often as we pursue virtue. Catena.³⁵

3:9 No One Born of God Commits Sin

Receiving Bad Seed.

Origen: When we are persuaded by the devil to sin, we receive his seed. But when we go on to complete the work which he urged, then he has begotten us, for through sin we are born to him as children. Sermons on Exodus 8.6.³⁷

Born of God.

Didymus the Blind: Heretics, ³⁸ who are deceived in everything by everything, like to object that any birth which is produced by the creator of this world is automatically sinful, whereas any birth which comes from the God of the New Testament is not so. They base this idea on the supposition that sinners and the righteous must have different creators, but this notion is based on a misunderstanding of the teaching of Scripture. The Bible does not say that whoever is born of God is sinless but that such a person will not sin as long as he walks according to the way of righteousness. If he turns aside from that he will sin, and indeed those who do sin have turned away from their Creator. The ability not to sin is guaranteed by the presence of God's seed in us. This seed is either his power or the spirit of adoption, which cannot sin. Commentary on 1 John.³⁹

Lust Extinguished in the Next Life.

Augustine: If our circumstances are such that we make some progress in this life by the grace of the Savior, when lust declines and love increases, it is in the next life that we reach perfection, when lust is finally extinguished and love is made perfect. That saying, that whoever is born of God does not sin, is undoubtedly meant to apply to that pure love which alone does not sin. The love in us which is increasing and being perfected also belongs to the new birth from God, but as long as lust continues to exist in us it fights against the law of our mind. As a result, the one who is born of God and who does not obey his own lusts can say that it is no longer he who sins but the sin which dwells in him.⁴⁰ Letters 177.⁴¹

Sin Is Undone by Love.

Augustine: How can we avoid sin? By keeping the commandment of Christ. And what is that commandment? It is that we should love. Love, and sin is undone. Ten Homilies on 1 John 5.2.⁴²

Retaining Grace.

Severus of Antioch: John did not say this with respect to the existence of sin in our lives, as if our nature were covered with impassibility. Rather he means that insofar as someone who is born of God retains the grace of his new birth he cannot sin in the way he behaves. And the reason for this is that God's seed dwells in him. What is this seed of God which dwells in believers? What else but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by which we have been born again? This presence never leaves us. Catena.⁴³

Two Meanings of "Born of God".

Maximus the Confessor: If someone who is born of God does not sin, how is it that we who have been born of water and the Spirit, and thus of God, do in fact commit sins? The answer is that the phrase "born of God" has two different meanings. According to the first of these, God has given the grace of sonship with all power to those who have been born again. According to the second, the God who has thus given birth is working in us to bring us to perfection. By faith we are born again in principle, but God still has to get to work on us in order to refashion us according to his likeness. Catena.⁴⁴

The Seed Dwells in Believers.

Andreas: The divine seed is Christ, who dwells in believers and makes them become sons of God. Likewise, when it is said that in Abraham's seed all the nations will be blessed, this too is a reference to Christ. John says that the Spirit is the seed which we receive through the blessing of our mind. For he dwells in us, making the mind of sin no longer welcome. Catena.⁴⁵

3:10 Children of God and Children of the Devil

By This It May Be Seen.

Didymus the Blind: Since a person who walks in righteousness is born of God, it follows that someone who is so born will love his brothers. Someone who lacks righteousness because he does not practice it, but instead hates his brother, is not born of God. Commentary on 1 John.⁴⁸

Children of the Devil.

Cyril of Jerusalem: The chief author of sin is the devil, the begetter of all sin. Before him, no one sinned. Nor did he sin because he was by nature prone to sin (since in that case the responsibility for his sin would lie with his Creator). Rather, being created good he became a devil by his own free choice, receiving that name from his willed action. Though he was originally an archangel, he became a slanderer (diabolos), because of his slandering. Catechetical Lectures 2.4.⁴⁹

Not of God.

Andreas: Love is the mark of sinlessness, and hate is the mark of sin. Since the person who walks in righteousness is born of God, it follows that someone who is so born will love the brothers, whereas someone who does not have this new birth will not do so. Rather he who hates his brother is not of God.

Catena.50

3:11 *The Message You Have Heard*