

Homily 4 1 John 2:27-3:8

by St. Augustine

We must abide in Christ, purify ourselves, and have faith in Him to be like Him when we see Him as He is.

Scripture: 1 John 2:29 - 3:3, 1 John 3:5-8

Topics: "Righteous Living", "Spiritual Purity"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of abiding in God and living a righteous life, emphasizing the need to purify oneself and not be deceived by sin. He highlights the love of the Father in calling us His children, even though the world may not recognize us. Augustine encourages believers to have hope in Christ, strive for purity, and avoid being seduced by unrighteousness, as those who sin are of the devil. He explains the significance of Christ's manifestation to take away sin and destroy the works of the devil, pointing to the dual birth-stocks of Adam and Christ, where one leads to sin and the other to justification.

Transcript

And it is true, and lies not. Even as it has taught you, abide in it. And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be put to shame by Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, know ye that every one that does righteousness is born of Him. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew not Him, us also the world knows not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it is not yet manifested what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure. Whosoever commits sin commits also iniquity. Sin is iniquity. And ye know that He was manifested to take away sin; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abides in Him sins not: whosoever sins has not seen Him, neither known Him. Little children, let no man seduce you. He that does righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested; that He might destroy the works of the devil.

1. You remember, brethren, that yesterday's lesson was brought to a close at this point, that you have no need that any man teach you, but the unction itself teaches you concerning all things. Now this, as I am sure ye remember, we so expounded to you, that we who from without speak to your ears, are as workmen applying culture from without to a tree, but we cannot give the increase nor form the fruits: but only He that created and redeemed and called you, He, dwelling in you by faith and the Spirit, must speak

to you within, else vain is all our noise of words. Whence does this appear? From this: that while many hear, not all are persuaded of that which is said, but only they to whom God speaks within. Now they to whom He speaks within, are those who give place to Him: and those give place to God, who give not place to the devil. Ephesians 5:27 For the devil wishes to inhabit the hearts of men, and speak there the things which are able to seduce. But what says the Lord Jesus? The prince of this world is cast out. John 12:31 Whence cast? Out of heaven and earth? Out of the fabric of the world? Nay, but out of the hearts of the believing. The invader being cast out, let the Redeemer dwell within: because the same redeemed, who created. And the devil now assaults from without, not conquers Him that has possession within. And he assaults from without, by casting in various temptations: but that person consents not thereto, to whom God speaks within, and the unction of which you have heard.

2. And it is true, namely, this same unction; i.e. the very Spirit of the Lord which teaches men, cannot lie: and is not false. Even as it has taught you, abide ye in the same. And now, little children, abide ye in Him, that when He shall be manifested, we may have boldness in His sight, that we be not put to shame by Him at His coming. 1 John 3:27-28 You see, brethren: we believe in Jesus whom we have not seen: they announced Him, that saw, that handled, that heard the word out of His own mouth; and that they might persuade all mankind of the truth thereof, they were sent by Him, not dared to go of themselves. And whither were they sent? You heard while the Gospel was read, Go, preach the Gospel to the whole creation which is under heaven. Consequently, the disciples were sent every where: with signs and wonders to attest that what they spoke, they had seen. And we believe in Him whom we have not seen, and we look for Him to come. Whoso look for Him by faith, shall rejoice when He comes: those who are without faith, when that which now they see not has come, shall be ashamed. And that confusion of face shall not be for a single day and so pass away, in such sort as those are wont to be confounded, who are found out in some fault, and are scoffed at by their fellowmen. That confusion shall carry them that are confounded to the left hand, that to them it may be said, Go into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:31 Let us abide then in His words, that we be not confounded when He comes. For Himself says in the Gospel to them that had believed on Him: If you shall abide in my word, then are you verily my disciples. John 8:31, 32 And, as if they had asked, With what fruit? And, says He, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. For as yet our salvation is in hope, not in deed: for we do not already possess that which is promised, but we hope for it to come. And faithful is He that promised; Hebrews 10:23 He deceives not you: only do not faint, but wait for the promise. For He, the Truth, cannot deceive. Be not a liar, to profess one thing and do another; keep the faith, and He keeps His promise. But if you keep not the faith, your own self, not He that promised, has defrauded you.

3. If you know that He is righteous, know ye that every one that does righteousness is born of Him. 1 John 2:29 The righteousness which at present is ours is of faith. Perfect righteousness is not, save only in the angels: and scarce in angels, if they be compared with God: yet if there be any perfect righteousness of souls and spirits which God has created, it is in the angels, holy, just, good, by no lapse turned aside, by no pride falling, but remaining ever in the contemplation of the Word of God, and having nothing else sweet unto them save Him by whom they were created; in them is perfect righteousness: but in us it has begun to be, of faith, by the Spirit.

You heard when the Psalm was read, Begin ye to the Lord in confession. Begin, says it; the beginning of our righteousness is the confession of sins. You have begun not to defend your sin; now have you made a beginning of righteousness: but it shall be perfected in you when to do nothing else shall delight you, when death shall be swallowed up in victory, 1 Corinthians 15:24 when there shall be no itching of lust, when

there shall be no struggling with flesh and blood, when there shall be the palm of victory, the triumph over the enemy; then shall there be perfect righteousness.

At present we are still fighting: if we fight we are in the lists; we smite and are smitten; but who shall conquer, remains to be seen. And that man conquers, who even when he smites presumes not on his own strength, but relies upon God that cheers him on. The devil is alone when he fights against us. If we are with God, we overcome the devil: for if you fight alone with the devil, you will be overcome. He is a skillful enemy: how many palms has he won! Consider to what he has cast us down!

That we are born mortal, comes of this, that he in the first place cast down from Paradise our very original. What then is to be done, seeing he is so well practised? Let the Almighty be invoked to your aid against the devices of the devil. Let Him dwell in you, who cannot be overcome, and you shall securely overcome him who is wont to overcome. But to overcome whom? Those in whom God dwells not. For, that you may know it, brethren; Adam being in Paradise despised the commandment of God, and lifted up the neck, as if he desired to be his own master, and were loath to be subject to the will of God: so he fell from that immortality, from that blessedness.

But there was a certain man, a man now well skilled, though a mortal born, who even as he sat on the dunghill, putrifying with worms, overcame the devil: yea, Adam himself then overcame: even he, in Job; because Job was of his race. So then, Adam, overcome in Paradise, overcame on the dunghill. Being in Paradise, he gave ear to the persuasion of the woman which the devil had put into her: but being on the dunghill he said to Eve, You have spoken as one of the foolish women. Job 2:10 There he lent an ear, here he gave an answer: when he was glad, he listened, when he was scourged, he overcame.

Therefore, see what follows, my brethren, in the Epistle: because this is what it would have us lay to heart, that we may overcome the devil indeed, but not of ourselves. If you know that He is righteous, says it, know ye that every one that does righteousness is born of Him: of God, of Christ. And in that he has said, Is born of Him, he cheers us on. Already therefore, in that we are born of Him, we are perfect.

4. Hear. Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called sons of God, and be 1 John 3:1 (such). For whoso are called sons, and are not sons, what profits them the name where the thing is not? How many are called physicians, who know not how to heal! How many are called watchers, who sleep all night long! So, many are called Christians, and yet in deeds are not found such; because they are not this which they are called, that is, in life, in manners, in faith, in hope, in charity. But what have ye heard here, brethren? Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it has not known Him, us also the world knows not. There is a whole world Christian, and a whole world ungodly; because throughout the whole world there are ungodly, and throughout the whole world there are godly: those know not these. In what sense, think we, do they not know them? They deride them that live good lives. Mark well and see: for haply there are such also among you. Each one of you who now lives godly, who despises worldly things, who does not choose to go to spectacles, who does not choose to make himself drunken as it were by solemn custom, yea, what is worse, under countenance of holy days to make himself unclean: the man who does not choose to do these things, how is he derided by those who do them! Would he be scoffed at if he were known? But why is he not known? The world knows Him not. Who is the world? Those inhabitants of the world. Just as we say, a house; meaning, its inhabitants. These things have been said to you again and again, and we forbear to repeat them to your disgust. By this time, when you hear the word world, in a bad signification, you know that you must understand it to mean only

lovers of the world because through love they inhabit, and by inhabiting have become entitled to the name. Therefore the world has not known us, because it has not known Him. He walked here Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh; He was God, He was latent in weakness. And wherefore was He not known? Because He reproved all sins in men. They, through loving the delights of sins, did not acknowledge the God: through loving that which the fever prompted, they did wrong to the Physician.

5. For us then, what are we? Already we are begotten of Him; but because we are such in hope, he says, Beloved, now are we sons of God. Now already? Then what is it we look for, if already we are sons of God? And not yet, says he, is it manifested what we shall be. But what else shall we be than sons of God? Hear what follows: We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. Understand, my beloved. It is a great matter: We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. In the first place mark, what is called Is. You know what it is that is so called. That which is called Is, and not only is called but is so, is unchangeable: It ever remains, It cannot be changed, It is in no part corruptible: It has neither proficiency, for It is perfect; nor has deficiency, for It is eternal. And what is this? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1 And what is this? Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Philippians 2:6 To see Christ in this sort, Christ in the form of God, Word of God, Only-Begotten of the Father, equal with the Father, is to the bad impossible. But in regard that the Word was made flesh, the bad also shall have power to see Him: because in the day of judgment the bad also will see Him; for He shall so come to judge, as He came to be judged. In the selfsame form, a man, but yet God: for cursed is every one that puts his trust in man. Jeremiah 17:5 A man, He came to be judged, a man, He will come to judge. And if He shall not be seen, what is this that is written, They shall look on Him whom they pierced? John 19:37 For of the ungodly it is said, that they shall see and be confounded. How shall the ungodly not see, when He shall set some on the right hand, others on the left? To those on the right hand He will say, Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom: Matthew 25:41 to those on the left He will say, Go into everlasting fire. They will see but the form of a servant, the form of God they will not see. Why? Because they were ungodly; and the Lord Himself says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8 Therefore, we are to see a certain vision, my brethren, which neither eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has entered into the heart of man: 1 Corinthians 2:9 a certain vision, a vision surpassing all earthly beautifulness, of gold, of silver, of groves and fields; the beautifulness of sea and air, the beautifulness of sun and moon, the beautifulness of the stars, the beautifulness of angels: surpassing all things: because from it are all things beautiful.

6. What then shall we be, when we shall see this? What is promised to us? We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The tongue has done what it could, has sounded the words: let the rest be thought by the heart. For what has even John himself said in comparison of That which Is, or what can be said by us men, who are so far from being equal to his merits? Return we therefore to that unction of Him, return we to that unction which inwardly teaches that which we cannot speak: and because ye cannot at present see, let your part and duty be in desire. The whole life of a good Christian is an holy desire. Now what you long for, you do not yet see: howbeit by longing, you are made capable, so that when that has come which you may see, you shall be filled. For just as, if you would fill a bag, and know how great the thing is that shall be given, you stretch the opening of the sack or the skin, or whatever else it be; you know how much you would put in, and see that the bag is narrow; by stretching you make it capable of holding more: so God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious. Let us desire therefore, my brethren, for we shall be filled. See Paul widening, as it were, his bosom, that it may be able to receive that which is to come. He says, namely, Not that I have

already received, or am already perfect: brethren, I deem not myself to have apprehended. Philippians 3:13-14 Then what are you doing in this life, if you have not yet apprehended? But this one thing [I do]; forgetting the things that are behind, reaching forth to the things that are before, upon the strain I follow on unto the prize of the high calling. He says he reaches forth, or stretches himself, and says that he follows upon the strain. He felt himself too little to take in that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. 1 Corinthians 2:9 This is our life, that by longing we should be exercised. But holy longing exercises us just so much as we prune off our longings from the love of the world. We have already said, Empty out that which is to be filled. With good you are to be filled: pour out the bad. Suppose that God would fill you with honey: if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey? That which the vessel bore in it must be poured out: the vessel itself must be cleansed; must be cleansed, albeit with labor, albeit with hard rubbing, that it may become fit for that thing, whatever it be. Let us say honey, say gold, say wine; whatever we say it is, being that which cannot be said, whatever we would fain say, It is called-- God. And when we say God, what have we said? Is that one syllable the whole of that we look for? So then, whatever we have had power to say is beneath Him: let us stretch ourselves unto Him, that when He shall come, He may fill us. For we shall be like Him; because we shall see Him as He is.

7. And every one that has this hope in Him. You see how he has set us our place, in hope. You see how the Apostle Paul agrees with his fellow-apostle, By hope we are saved. But hope that is seen, is not hope: for what a man sees, why does he hope for? For if what we see not, we hope for, by patience we wait for it. Romans 8:24-25 This very patience exercises desire. Continue, for He continues: and persevere in walking, that you may reach the goal: for that to which you tend will not remove. See: And every one that has this hope in Him, purifies himself even as He is pure. See how he has not taken away free-will, in that he says, purifies himself. Who purifies us but God? Yea, but God does not purify you if you be unwilling. Therefore, in that you join your will to God, in that you purify yourself. Thou purifiest yourself, not by yourself, but by Him who comes to inhabit you. Still, because you do somewhat therein by the will, therefore is somewhat attributed to you. But it is attributed to you only to the end you should say, as in the Psalm, Be my helper, forsake me not. If you say, Be my helper, you do somewhat: for if you be doing nothing, how should He be said to help you?

8. Every one that does sin, does also iniquity. Let no man say, Sin is one thing, iniquity another: let no man say, I am a sinful man, but not a doer of iniquity. For, Every one that does sin, does also iniquity. Sin is iniquity. Well then, what are we to do concerning sins and iniquities? Hear what He says: And ye know that He was manifested to take away sin; and sin in Him is not. 1 John 3:5 He, in Whom sin is not, the same has come to take away sin. For were there sin in Him, it must be taken away from Him, not He take it away Himself. Whosoever abides in Him, sins not. 1 John 3:6 In so far as he abides in Him, in so far sins not. Whosoever sins has not seen Him, neither known Him. A great question this: Whosoever sins has not seen Him, neither known Him. No marvel. We have not seen Him, but are to see; have not known Him, but are to know: we believe in One we have not known. Or haply, by faith we have known, and by actual beholding have not yet known? But then in faith we have both seen and known. For if faith does not yet see, why are we said to have been enlightened? There is an enlightening by faith, and an enlightening by sight. At present, while we are on pilgrimage, we walk by faith, not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:7 or, actually beholding. Therefore also our righteousness is by faith, not by sight. Our righteousness shall be perfect, when we shall see by actual beholding. Only, in the meanwhile, let us not leave that righteousness which is of faith, since the just does live by faith, Romans 1:17 as says the apostle. Whosoever abides in Him, sins not. For, whosoever sins, has not seen Him, neither known Him. That man who sins, believes not: but if a man believes, so far as pertains to his faith, he sins not.

9. Little children, let no man seduce you. He that does righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. 1 John 3:7 What, on hearing that we are righteous as He is righteous, are we to think ourselves equal with God? You must know what means that as: thus he said a while ago, Purifies himself even as He is pure. Then is our purity like and equal to the purity of God, and our righteousness to God's righteousness? Who can say this? But the word as, is not always wont to be used in the sense of equality. As, for example, if, having seen this large church, a person should wish to build a smaller church, but with the same relative dimensions: as, for example, if this be one measure in width and two measures in length, he too should build his church one measure in width and two measures in length: in that case one sees that he has built it as this is built. But this church has, say, a hundred cubits in length, the other thirty: it is at once as this, and yet unequal. You see that this as is not always referred to parity and equality. For example, see what a difference there is between the face of a man and its image from a mirror: there is a face in the image, a face in the body: the image exists in imitation, the body in reality. And what do we say? Why, as there are eyes here, so also there; as ears here, so ears also there. The thing is different, but the as is said of the resemblance. Well then, we also have in us the image of God; but not that which the Son equal with the Father has: yet except we also, according to our measure, were as He, we should in no respect be said to be like Him. He purifies us, then, even as He is pure: but He is pure from eternity, we pure by faith. We are righteous even as He is righteous; but He is so in His immutable perpetuity, we righteous by believing on One we do not see, that so we may one day see Him. Even when our righteousness shall be perfect, when we shall be equal to the angels, not even then shall it be equalled with Him. How far then is it from Him now, when not even then it shall be equal!

10. He that does sin, is of the devil, because the devil sins from the beginning. 1 John 3:8 Is of the devil: ye know what he means: by imitating the devil. For the devil made no man, begot no man, created no man: but whoso imitates the devil, that person, as if begotten of him, becomes a child of the devil; by imitating him, not literally by being begotten of him. In what sense are you a child of Abraham, not that Abraham begot you? In the same sense as the Jews, the children of Abraham, not imitating the faith of Abraham, have become children of the devil: of the flesh of Abraham they were begotten, and the faith of Abraham they have not imitated. If then those who were thence begotten were put out of the inheritance, because they did not imitate, you, who art not begotten of him, art made a child, and in this way shall be a child of him by imitating him. And if you imitate the devil, in such wise as he became proud and impious against God, you will be a child of the devil: by imitating, not that he created you or begot you.

11. Unto this end was the Son of God manifested. Now then, brethren, mark! All sinners are begotten of the devil, as sinners. Adam was made by God: but when he consented to the devil, he was begotten of the devil; and he begot all men such as he was himself. With lust itself we were born; even before we add our sins, from that condemnation we have our birth. For if we are born without any sin, wherefore this running with infants to baptism that they may be released? Then mark well, brethren, the two birth-stocks, Adam and Christ: two men are; but one of them, a man that is man; the other, a Man that is God. By the man that is man we are sinners; by the Man that is God we are justified. That birth has cast down unto death; this birth has raised up unto life: that birth brings with it sin; this birth sets free from sin. For to this end came Christ as Man, to undo the sins of men. Unto this end was the Son of God manifested, that He may undo the works of the devil.

12. The rest I commend to your thoughts, my beloved, that I may not burden you. For the question we labor to solve is even this-- that we call ourselves sinners: for if any man shall say that he is without sin, he is a liar. And in the Epistle of this same John we have found it written, If we say that we have no sin, we

deceive ourselves. 1 John 1:8 For you should remember what went before: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And yet, on the other hand, in what follows you are told, He that is begotten of God sins not: he that does sin has not seen Him, neither known Him.-- Every one that does sin is of the devil: sin is not of God: this affrights us again. In what sense are we begotten of God, and in what sense do we confess ourselves sinners? Shall we say, because we are not begotten of God? And what do these Sacraments in regard to infants? What has John said? He that is begotten of God, sins not. And yet again the same John has said, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us! A great question it is, and an embarrassing one; and may I have made you intent upon having it solved, my beloved. Tomorrow, in the name of the Lord, what He will give, we will discourse thereof.

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