

Homily 5 1 John 3:9-18

by St. Augustine

St. Augustine's Homily emphasizes the necessity of love and charity as the true indicators of being born of God, contrasting it with sin and hatred.

Scripture: Luke 23:34, John 15:13, Acts 7:59, Romans 13:8, 1 Corinthians 13:2, Philippians 1:21, 1 John 3:9-10, 1 John 3:14, 1 John 3:17-18

Topics: "Godly Love", "Sin Nature"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of charity and love as the ultimate test of being born of God. He delves into the concept of sin and how one cannot claim to be without sin, yet emphasizes that those born of God do not continue in sin. Augustine highlights the significance of loving one another, drawing from the story of Cain and Abel to illustrate the contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. He stresses that true love involves sacrificial actions, even to the point of laying down one's life for others, mirroring Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

Transcript

Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever is not righteous is not of God, neither he that loves not 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 slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate us. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not abides in death. Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. In this we know love, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how can the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us not love only in word and in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1. Hear intently, I do beseech you, because it is no small matter that we have to cope withal: and I doubt not, because you were intent upon it yesterday, that you have with even greater intentness of purpose come together today. For it is no slight question, how he says in this Epistle, Whosoever is born of God, sins not, 1 John 3:9 and how in the same Epistle he has said above, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8 What shall the man do, who is pressed by both

sayings out of the same Epistle? If he shall confess himself a sinner, he fears lest it be said to him, Then are you not born of God; because it is written, Whosoever is born of God, sins not. But if he shall say that he is just and that he has no sin, he receives on the other side a blow from the same Epistle, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Placed then as he is in the midst, what he can say and what confess, or what profess, he cannot find. To profess himself to be without sin, is full of peril; and not only full of peril, but also full of error: We deceive ourselves, says he, and the truth is not in us, if we say that we have no sin. But oh that you had none, and said this! For then would you say truly, and in uttering the truth would have not so much as a vestige of wrong to be afraid of. But, that you do ill if you say so, is because it is a lie that you say, The truth, says he, is not in us, if we say that we have no sin. He says not, Have not had; lest haply it should seem to be spoken of the past life. For the man here has had sins: but from the time that he was born of God, he has begun not to have sins. If it were so, there would be no question to embarrass us. For we should say, We have been sinners, but now we are justified: we have had sin, but now we have none. He says not this: but what says he? If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And then after a while he says on the other hand, Whosoever is born of God sins not. Was John himself not born of God? If John was not born of God, John, of whom you have heard that he lay in the Lord's bosom; does any man dare engage for himself that in him has taken place that regeneration which it was not granted to that man to have, to whom it was granted to lie in the bosom of the Lord? The man whom the Lord loved more than the rest, John 13:23 him alone had He not begotten of the Spirit?

2. Mark now these words. As yet, I am urging it upon you, what straits we are put to that by putting your minds on the stretch, that is, by your praying for us and for yourselves, God may make enlargement, and give us an outlet: lest some man find in His word an occasion of his own perdition, that word which was preached and put in writing only for healing and salvation. Every man, says he, that does sin, does also iniquity. Lest haply you make a distinction, Sin is iniquity. Lest you say, A sinner I am, but not a doer of iniquity, Sin is iniquity. And ye know that to this end was He manifested, that He should take away sin; and there is no sin in Him. And what does it profit us, that He came without sin? Every one that sins not, abides in Him: and every one that 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. This we have already said, that the word as is wont to be used of a certain resemblance, not of equality. He that does sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from the beginning. This too we have already said, that the devil created no man, nor begot any, but his imitators are, as it were, born of him. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He should undo the works of the devil. Consequently, to undo (or loose) sins, He that has no sin. And then follows: Every one that is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God: 1 John 3:9 he has drawn the cord tight!-- Belike, it is in regard of some one sin that he has said, Does not sin, not in regard of all sin: that in this that he says, Whoso is born of God, does not sin, you may understand some one particular sin, which that man who is born of God cannot commit: and such is that sin that, if one commit it, it confirms the rest. What is this sin? To do contrary to the commandment. What is the commandment? A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another. John 13:34 Mark well! This commandment of Christ is called, love. By this love sins are loosed. If this love be not kept, the not holding it is at once a grievous sin, and the root of all sins.

3. Mark well, brethren; we have brought forward somewhat in which, to them that have good understanding, the question is solved. But do we only walk in the way with them that run more swiftly? Those that walk more slowly must not be left behind. Let us turn the matter every way, in such words as we can, in order that it may be brought within reach of all. For I suppose, brethren, that every man is

concerned for his own soul, who does not come to Church without cause, who does not seek temporal things in the Church, who does not come here to transact secular business; but comes here in order that he may lay hold upon some eternal thing, promised unto him, whereunto he may attain: he must needs consider how he shall walk in the way, lest he be left behind, lest he go back, lest he go astray, lest by halting he do not attain. Whoever therefore is in earnest, let him be slow, let him be swift, yet let him not leave the way. This then I have said, that in saying, Whosoever is born of God sins not, it is probable he meant it of some particular sin: for else it will be contrary to that place: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. In this way then the question may be solved. There is a certain sin, which he that is born of God cannot commit; a sin, which not being committed, other sins are loosed, and being committed, other sins are confirmed. What is this sin? To do contrary to the commandment of Christ, contrary to the New Testament. What is the new commandment? A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another. John 13:34 Whoso does contrary to charity and contrary to brotherly love, let him not dare to glory and say that he is born of God: but whoso is in brotherly love, there are certain sins which he cannot commit, and this above all, that he should hate his brother. And how fares it with him concerning his other sins, of which it is said, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us? Let him hear that which shall set his mind at rest from another place of Scripture; Charity covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

4. Charity therefore we commend; charity this Epistle commends. The Lord, after His resurrection, what question put He to Peter, but, Do you love me? John 21:15-17 And it was not enough to ask it once; a second time also He put none other question, a third time also none other. Although when it came to the third time, Peter, as one who knew not what was the drift of this, was grieved because it seemed as if the Lord did not believe him; nevertheless both a first time and a second, and a third He put this question. Thrice fear denied, thrice love confessed. Behold Peter loves the Lord. What is he to do for the Lord? For think not that he in the Psalm did not feel himself at a loss what to do: What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits He has done unto me? He that said this in the Psalm, marked what great things had been done for him by God; and sought what he should render to God, and could find nothing. For whatever you would render, from Him did you receive it to render. And what did he find to offer in return? That which, as we said, my brethren, he had received from Him, that only found he to offer in return. I will receive the cup of salvation, and will call upon the name of the Lord. For who had given him the cup of salvation, but He to whom he wished to offer in return? Now to receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord, is to be filled with charity; and so filled, that not only you shall not hate your brother, but shall be prepared to die for your brother. This is perfect charity, that you be prepared to die for your brother. This the Lord exhibited in Himself, who died for all, praying for them by whom He was crucified, and saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 But if He alone has done this, He was not a Master, if He had no disciples. Disciples who came after Him have done this. Men were stoning Stephen, and he knelt down and said, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. Acts 7:59 He loved them that were killing him; since for them also he was dying. Hear also the Apostle Paul: And I myself, says he, will be spent for your souls. 2 Corinthians 12:15 For he was among those for whom Stephen, when by their hands he was dying, besought forgiveness. This then is perfect charity. If any man shall have so great charity that he is prepared even to die for his brethren, in that man is perfect charity. But as soon as it is born, is it already quite perfect? That it may be made perfect, it is born; when born, it is nourished; when nourished, it is strengthened; when strengthened, it is perfected; when it has come to perfection, what says it? To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I wished to be dissolved, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is needful for you. Philippians 1:21-24 For their sakes he was willing to live, for whose sakes he was prepared to die.

5. And that you may know that it is this perfect charity which that man violates not, and against which that man sins not, who is born of God; this is what the Lord says to Peter; Peter do you love me? And he answers, I love. He says not, If you love me, show kindness to me. For when the Lord was in mortal flesh, He hungered, He thirsted: at that time when He hungered and thirsted, He was taken in as a guest; those who had the means, ministered unto Him of their substance, as we read in the Gospel. Zacchæus entertained Him as his guest: he was saved from his disease by entertaining the Physician. From what disease? The disease of avarice. For he was very rich, and the chief of the publicans. Mark the man made whole from the disease of avarice: The half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man, I will restore him fourfold. Luke 19:8 That he kept the other half, was not to enjoy it, but to pay his debts. Well, he at that time entertained the Physician as his guest, because there was infirmity of the flesh in the Lord, to which men might show this kindness; and this, because it was His will to grant this very thing to them that did Him kind service; for the benefit was to them that did the service, not to Him. For, could He to whom angels ministered require these men's kindness? Not even His servant Elias, to whom He sent bread and flesh by the ravens upon a certain occasion 1 Kings 17:4-9 had need of this; and yet that a religious widow might be blessed, the servant of God is sent, and he whom God in secret did feed, is fed by the widow. But still, although by the means of these servants of God, those who consider their need get good to themselves, in respect of that reward most manifestly set forth by the Lord in the Gospel: He that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward: and he that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward: and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward: Matthew 10:41-42 although, then, they that do this, do it to their own good: yet neither could this kind office be done to Him when about to ascend into Heaven. What could Peter, who loved Him, render unto Him? Hear what. Feed my sheep: i.e. do for the brethren, that which I have done for you. I redeemed all with my blood: hesitate not to die for confession of the truth, that the rest may imitate you.

6. But this, as we have said, brethren, is perfect charity. He that is born of God has it. Mark, my beloved, see what I say. Behold, a man has received the Sacrament of that birth, being baptized; he has the Sacrament, and a great Sacrament, divine, holy, ineffable. Consider what a Sacrament! To make him a new man by remission of all sins! Nevertheless, let him look well to the heart, whether that be thoroughly done there, which is done in the body; let him see whether he have charity, and then say, I am born of God. If however he have it not, he has indeed the soldier's mark upon him, but he roams as a deserter. Let him have charity; otherwise let him not say that he is born of God. But he says, I have the Sacrament. Hear the Apostle: If I know all mysteries, and have all faith, so that I can remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

7. This, if you remember, we gave you to understand in beginning to read this Epistle, that nothing in it is so commended as charity. Even if it seems to speak of various other things, to this it makes its way back, and whatever it says, it will needs bring all to bear upon charity. Let us see whether it does so here. Mark: Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin. We ask, what sin? Because if you understand all sin, it will be contrary to that place, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Then let him say what sin; let him teach us; lest haply I may have rashly said that the sin here is the violation of charity, because he said above, He that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 1 John 2:11 But perhaps he has said something in what comes afterwards, and has mentioned charity by name? See that

this circuit of words has this end, has this issue. Whosoever is born of God, sins not, because His seed remains in him. 1 John 3:9 The seed of God, i.e. the word of God: whence the apostle says, I have begotten you through the Gospel.

And he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 1 Corinthians 4:15 Let him tell us this, let us see in what we cannot sin. In this are manifested the children of God and the children of the devil. Whosoever is not righteous is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother. 1 John 3:10 Aye, now indeed it is manifest of what he speaks: Neither he that loves not his brother. Therefore, love alone puts the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Let them all sign themselves with the sign of the cross of Christ; let them all respond, Amen; let all sing Alleluia; let all be baptized, let all come to church, let all build the walls of churches: there is no discerning of the children of God from the children of the devil, but only by charity.

They that have charity are born of God: they that have it not, are not born of God. A mighty token, a mighty distinction! Have what you will; if this alone you have not, it profits you nothing: other things if you have not, have this, and you have fulfilled the law. For he that loves another has fulfilled the law, says the apostle: and, Charity is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:8, 10 I take this to be the pearl which the merchant man in the Gospel is described to have been seeking, who found one pearl, and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matthew 13:46 This is the pearl of price, Charity, without which whatever you may have, profits you nothing: which if alone you have, it suffices you. Now, with faith you see, then with actual beholding you shall see. For if we love when we see not, how shall we embrace it when we see! But wherein must we exercise ourselves? In brotherly love. You may say to me, I have not seen God: can you say to me, I have not seen man? Love your brother. For if you love your brother whom you see, at the same time you shall see God also; because you shall see Charity itself, and within dwells God.

8. Whosoever is not righteous is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother. 1 John 3:10-11 For this is the message: mark how he confirms it: For this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. He has made it manifest to us that it is of this he speaks; whoso acts against this commandment, is in that accursed sin, into which those fall who are not born of God. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. 1 John 3:12 Therefore, where envy is, brotherly love cannot be. Mark, my beloved. He that envies, loves not. The sin of the devil is in that man; because the devil through envy cast man down. For he fell, and envied him that stood. He did not wish to cast man down that he himself might stand, but only that he might not fall alone. Hold fast in your mind from this that he has subjoined, that envy cannot exist in charity. You have it openly, when charity was praised, Charity envies not. 1 Corinthians 13:4 There was no charity in Cain; and had there been no charity in Abel, God would not have accepted his sacrifice. For when they had both offered, the one of the fruits of the earth, the other of the offspring of the flock; what think ye, brethren, that God slighted the fruits of the earth, and loved the offspring of the flock? God had not regard to the hands, but saw in the heart: and whom He saw offer with charity, to his sacrifice He had respect; whom He saw offer with envy, from his sacrifice He turned away His eyes. By the good works, then, of Abel, he means only charity: by the evil works of Cain he means only his hatred of his brother. It was not enough that he hated his brother and envied his good works; because he would not imitate, he would kill. And hence it appeared that he was a child of the devil, and hence also that the other was God's righteous one. Hence then are men discerned, my brethren. Let no man mark the tongue, but the deeds and the heart. If any do not good for his brethren, he shows what he

has in him. By temptations are men proved.

9. Marvel not, brethren, if the world hate us. Must one often be telling you what the world means? Not the heaven, not the earth, nor these visible works which God made; but lovers of the world. By often saying these things, to some I am burdensome: but I am so far from saying it without a cause, that some may be questioned whether I said it, and they cannot answer. Let then, even by thrusting it upon them, something stick fast in the hearts of them that hear. What is the world? The world, when put in a bad sense, is, lovers of the world: the world, when the word is used in praise, is heaven and earth, and the works of God that are in them; whence it is said, And the world was made by Him. John 1:10 Also, the world is the fullness of the earth, as John himself has said, Not only for our sins is He the propitiator, but (for the sins) of the whole world: 1 John 2:2 he means, of the world, of all the faithful scattered throughout the whole earth. But the world in a bad sense, is, lovers of the world. They that love the world, cannot love their brother.

10. If the world hate us: we know-- What do we know?-- that we have passed from death unto life-- How do we know? Because we love the brethren. 1 John 3:14 Let none ask man: let each return to his own heart: if he find there brotherly love, let him set his mind at rest, because he is passed from death unto life. Already he is on the right hand: let him not regard that at present his glory is hidden: when the Lord shall come, then shall he appear in glory. For he has life in him, but as yet in winter; the root is alive, but the branches, so to say, are dry: within is the substance that has the life in it, within are the leaves of trees, within are the fruits: but they wait for the summer. Well then, we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not, abides in death. Lest ye should think it a light matter, brethren, to hate, or, not to love, hear what follows: Every one that hates his brother, is a murderer. 1 John 3:15 How now, if any made light of hating his brother, will he also in his heart make light of murder? He does not stir his hands to kill a man; yet he is already held by God a murderer; the other lives, and yet this man is already judged as his slayer! Every one that hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

11. In this know we love: 1 John 3:16 he means, perfection of love, that perfection which we have bidden you lay to heart: In this know we love, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Lo here, whence that came: Peter, do you love me? Feed My sheep. John 21:15-19 For, that you may know that He would have His sheep to be so fed by him, as that he should lay down his life for the sheep, straightway said He this to him: When you were young, you girded yourself, and walked whither you would, but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you whither you would not. This spoke He, says the evangelist, signifying by what death he should glorify God; so that to whom He had said, Feed my sheep, the same He might teach to lay down his life for His sheep.

12. Whence begins charity, brethren? Attend a little: to what it is perfected, you have heard; the very end of it, and the very measure of it is what the Lord has put before us in the Gospel: Greater love has no man, says He, than that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 Its perfection, therefore, He has put before us in the Gospel, and here also it is its perfection that is put before us: but you ask yourselves, and say to yourselves, When shall it be possible for us to have this charity? Do not too soon despair of yourself. Haply, it is born and is not yet perfect; nourish it, that it be not choked. But you will say to me, And by what am I to know it? For to what it is perfected, we have heard; whence it begins, let us hear. He goes on to say: But whoso has this world's good, and sees his brother have hunger, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how can the love of God dwell in him? 1 John 3:17 Lo, whence charity begins withal! If you are not yet equal to the dying for your brother, be even now equal to the giving of your

means to your brother. Even now let charity smite your bowels, that not of vainglory you should do it, but of the innermost marrow of mercy; that you consider him, now in want. For if your superfluities you can not give to your brother, can you lay down your life for your brother? There lies your money in your bosom, which thieves may take from you; and though thieves do not take it, by dying you will leave it, even if it leave not you while living: what will you do with it? Your brother hungers, he is in necessity: belike he is in suspense, is distressed by his creditor: he is your brother, alike you are bought, one is the price paid for you, you are both redeemed by the blood of Christ: see whether you have mercy, if you have this world's means. Perchance you say, What concerns it me? Am I to give my money, that he may not suffer trouble? If this be the answer your heart makes to you, the love of the Father abides not in you. If the love of the Father abide not in you, you are not born of God. How do you boast to be a Christian? You have the name, and hast not the deeds. But if the work shall follow the name, let any call you pagan, show by deeds that you are a Christian. For if by deeds you do not show yourself a Christian, all men may call you a Christian yet; what does the name profit you where the thing is not forthcoming? But whoso has this world's good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how can the love of God dwell in him? And then he goes on: My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:18

13. I suppose the thing is now made manifest to you my brethren: this great and most concerning secret and mystery. What is the force of charity, all Scripture does set forth; but I know not whether any where it be more largely set forth than in this Epistle. We pray you and beseech you in the Lord, that both what you have heard you will keep in memory, and to that which is yet to be said, until the epistle be finished, will come with earnestness, and with earnestness hear the same. But open ye your heart for the good seed: root out the thorns, that that which we are sowing in you be not choked, but rather that the harvest may grow, and that the Husbandman may rejoice and make ready the barn for you as for grain, not the fire as for the chaff.

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