

Homily 6 1 John 3:19-4:3

by St. Augustine

St. Augustine's homily emphasizes the necessity of genuine love and self-examination in our relationship with God and others.

Scripture: Matthew 5:19, Matthew 23:3, John 15:13, Romans 2:21, 1 John 4:1-2

Topics: "Discerning Spirits", "Christian Unity"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of discerning the spirits and testing them to see if they are from God. He emphasizes the need to look beyond words and examine deeds, particularly in relation to confessing that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Those who have charity and love one another demonstrate the Spirit of God, while those who divide the Church, lack unity, and go against Christ's teachings are considered antichrists. St. Augustine urges believers to question their own hearts, seek unity, and abide in the love of God to discern the true Spirit.

Transcript

And herein we know that we are of the truth, and assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart think ill of us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart think not ill of us, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do in His sight those things that please Him. And this is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keeps His commandments shall dwell in Him, and He in him. And herein we know that He abides in us, by the Holy Spirit which He has given us. Dearly beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into this world. In this is known the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the antichrist, of whom you have heard that he should come; and even now already is he in this world.

1. If ye remember, brethren, yesterday we closed our sermon at this sentence, 1 John 3:18-20 which without doubt behooved and does behoove to abide in your heart, seeing it was the last ye heard. My little children, let us not love only in word and in tongue; but in deed and in truth. Then he goes on: And herein we know that we are of the truth, and assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart think ill of us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. He had said, Let us not love only in word and in tongue, but in work and in truth: we are asked, In what work, or in what truth, is he known that loves God, or loves his

brother? Above he had said up to what point charity is perfected: what the Lord says in the Gospel, Greater love than this has no man, that one lay down his life for his friends, John 15:13 this same had the apostle also said: As He laid down His life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren. 1 John 3:16 This is the perfection of charity, and greater can not at all be found. But because it is not perfect in all, and that man ought not to despair in whom it is not perfect, if that be already born which may be perfected: and of course if born, it must be nourished, and by certain nourishments of its own must be brought unto its proper perfection: therefore, we have asked concerning the commencement of charity, where it begins, and there have straightway found: But whoso has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of the Father in him? 1 John 3:17 Here then has this charity, my brethren, its beginning: to give of one's superfluities to him that has need to him that is in any distress; of one's temporal abundance to deliver his brother from temporal tribulation. Here is the first rise of charity. This, being thus begun, if you shall nourish with the word of God and hope of the life to come, you will come at last unto that perfection, that you shall be ready to lay down your life for your brethren.

2. But, because many such things are done by men who seek other objects, and who love not the brethren; let us come back to the testimony of conscience. How do we prove that many such things are done by men who love not the brethren? How many in heresies and schisms call themselves martyrs! They seem to themselves to lay down their lives for their brethren. If for the brethren they laid down their lives, they would not separate themselves from the whole brotherhood. Again, how many there are who for the sake of vainglory bestow much, give much, and seek therein but the praise of men and popular glory, which is full of windiness, and possesses no stability!

Seeing, then, there are such, where shall be the proof of brotherly charity? Seeing he wished it to be proved, and has said by way of admonition, My little children, let us not love only in word and in tongue; but in deed and in truth; we ask, in what work, in what truth? Can there be a more manifest work than to give to the poor? Many do this of vainglory, not of love. Can there be a greater work than to die for the brethren? This also, many would fain be thought to do, who do it of vainglory to get a name, not from bowels of love.

It remains, that that man loves his brother, who before God, where God alone sees, assures his own heart, and questions his heart whether he does this indeed for love of the brethren; and his witness is that eye which penetrates the heart, where man cannot look. Therefore Paul the Apostle, because he was ready to die for the brethren, and said, I will myself be spent for your souls, 2 Corinthians 12:15 yet, because God only saw this in his heart, not the mortal men to whom he spoke, he says to them, But to me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or at man's bar. 1 Corinthians 4:3 And the same apostle shows also in a certain place, that these things are oft done of empty vainglory, not upon the solid ground of love: for speaking of the praises of charity he says, If I distribute all my goods to the poor, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not charity, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 Is it possible for a man to do this without charity?

It is. For they that have divided unity, are persons that have not charity. Seek there, and you shall see many giving much to the poor; shall see others prepared to welcome death, insomuch that where there is no persecutor they cast themselves headlong: these doubtless without charity do this. Let us come back then to conscience, of which the apostle says: For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience. 2 Corinthians 1:12 Let us come back to conscience, of which the same says, But let each prove his own work, and then he shall have glorying in himself and not in another.

Galatians 6:4 Therefore, let each one of us prove his own work, whether it flow forth from the vein of charity, whether it be from charity as the root that his good works sprout forth as branches. But let each prove his own work, and then he shall have glorying in himself and not in another, not when another's tongue bears witness to him, but when his own conscience bears it.

3. This it is then that he enforces here. In this we know that we are of the truth, when in deed and in truth we love, not only in words and in tongue: and assure our heart before Him. 1 John 3:19 What means, before Him? Where He sees. Whence the Lord Himself in the Gospel says: Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward with your Father which is in heaven. And what means, Let not your left hand know what your right hand does: except that the right hand means a pure conscience, the left hand the lust of the world? Many through lust of the world do many wonderful things: the left hand works, not the right. The right hand ought to work, and without knowledge of the left hand, so that lust of the world may not even mix itself therewith when by love we work anything that is good. And where do we get to know this? You are before God: question your heart, see what you have done, and what therein was your aim; your salvation, or the windy praise of men. Look within, for man cannot judge whom he cannot see. If we assure our heart, let it be before Him. Because if our heart think ill of us, i.e. accuse us within, that we do not the thing with that mind it ought to be done withal, greater is God than our heart, and knows all things. Thou hidest your heart from man: hide it from God if you can. How shall you hide it from Him, to whom it is said by a sinner, fearing and confessing, Whither shall I go from Your Spirit? And from Your face whither shall I flee? He sought a way to flee, to escape the judgment of God, and found none. For where is God not? If I shall ascend, says he, into heaven, You are there: if I shall descend into hell, You are there. Whither will you go? Whither will you flee? Will you hear counsel? If you would flee from Him, flee to Him. Flee to Him by confessing, not from Him by hiding: hide you can not, but confess you can. Say unto Him, You are my place to flee unto; and let love be nourished in you, which alone leads unto life. Let your conscience bear you witness that your love is of God. If it be of God, do not wish to display it before men; because neither men's praises lift you unto heaven, nor their censures put you down from thence. Let Him see, who crowns you: be He your witness, by whom as judge you are crowned. Greater is God than our heart, and knows all things.

4. Beloved, if our heart think not ill of us, we have confidence towards God: 1 John 3:21 -- What means, If our heart think not ill? If it make true answer to us, that we love and that there is genuine love in us: not feigned but sincere; seeking a brother's salvation, expecting no emolument from a brother, but only his salvation-- we have confidence toward God: and whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him, because we keep His commandments. 1 John 3:21-22 -- Therefore, not in the sight of men, but where God Himself sees, in the heart-- we have confidence, then, towards God: and whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him: howbeit, because we keep His commandments. What are His commandments? Must we be always repeating? A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another. John 13:34 It is charity itself that he speaks of, it is this that he enforces. Whoso then shall have brotherly charity, and have it before God, where God sees, and his heart being interrogated under righteous examination make him none other answer than that the genuine root of charity is there for good fruits to come from; that man has confidence with God, and whatsoever he shall ask, he shall receive of Him, because he keeps His commandments.

5. Here a question meets us: for it is not this or that man, or you or I that come in question--for if I have asked any thing of God and receive it not, any person may easily say of me, He has not charity: and of any man soever of this present time, this may easily be said; and let any think what he will, a man of man:-- not we, but those come more in question, those men of whom it is on all hands known that they were saints

when they wrote, and that they are now with God. Where is the man that has charity, if Paul had it not, who said, Our mouth is open unto you, O you Corinthians, our heart is enlarged; you are not straitened in us: who said, I will myself be spent for your souls: and so great grace was in him, that it was manifested that he had charity.

And yet we find that he asked and did not receive. What say we, brethren? It is a question: look attentively to God: it is a great question, this also. Just as, where it was said of sin, He that is born of God sins not: we found this sin to be the violating of charity, and that this was the thing strictly intended in that place: so too we ask now what it is that he would say. For if you look but to the words, it seems plain: if you take the examples into the account, it is obscure.

Than the words here nothing can be plainer. And whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Whatsoever we ask, says he, we shall receive of Him. He has put us sorely to straits. In the other place also he would put us to straits, if he meant all sin: but then we found room to expound it in this, that he meant it of a certain sin, not of all sin; howbeit of a sin which whosoever is born of God commits not: and we found that this same sin is none other than the violation of charity.

We have also a manifest example from the Gospel, when the Lord says, If I had not come, they had not had sin. John 15:22 How? Were the Jews innocent when He came to them, because He so speaks? Then if He had not come, would they have had no sin? Then did the Physician's presence make one sick, not take away the fever? What madman even would say this? He came not but to cure and heal the sick. Therefore when He said, If I had not come, they had not had sin, what would He have to be understood, but a certain sin in particular?

For there was a sin which the Jews would not have had. What sin? That they believed not on Him, that when he had come they despised Him. As then He there said sin, and it does not follow that we are to understand all sin, but a certain sin: so here also not all sin, lest it be contrary to that place where he says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: 1 John 1:8 but a certain sin in particular, that is, the violation of charity. But in this place he has bound us more tightly: If we shall ask, he has said, if our heart accuse us not, and tell us in answer, in the sight of God, that true love is in us; Whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him.

6. Well now: I have already told you, my, beloved brethren, let no man turn toward us. For what are we? Or what are you? What, but the Church of God which is known to all? And, if it please Him, in that Church are we; and those of us who by love abide in it, there let us persevere, if we would show the love we have. But then the apostle Paul, what evil are we to think of him? He not love the brethren! He not have within himself the testimony of his conscience in the sight of God! Paul not have within him that root of charity whence all good fruits proceeded! What madman would say this? Well then: where find we that the apostle asked and did not receive? He says himself: Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me. For which thing I besought the Lord thrice, that He would take it from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you: for strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 Lo, he was not heard in his prayer that the angel of Satan should be taken from him. But wherefore? Because it was not good for him. He was heard, then, for salvation, when he was not heard according to his wish. Know, my beloved, a great mystery: which we urge upon your consideration on purpose that it may not slip from you in your temptations. The saints are in all things heard unto salvation: they are always heard in that which respects

their eternal salvation; it is this that they desire: because in regard of this, their prayers are always heard.

7. But let us distinguish God's different ways of hearing prayer. For we find some not heard for their wish, heard for salvation: and again some we find heard for their wish, not heard for salvation. Mark this difference, hold fast this example of a man not heard for his wish but heard for salvation. Hear the apostle Paul; for what is the hearing of prayer unto salvation, God Himself showed him: Sufficient for you, says He, is my grace; for strength is perfected in weakness.

You have besought, hast cried, hast thrice cried: the very cry you raised once for all I heard, I turned not away my ears from you; I know what I should do: you would have it taken away, the healing thing by which you are burned; I know the infirmity by which you are burdened. Well then: here is a man who was heard for salvation, while as to his will he was not heard. Where find we persons heard for their will, not heard for salvation? Do we find, think we, some wicked, some impious man, heard of God for his will, not heard for salvation?

If I put to you the instance of some man, perchance you will say to me, It is you that callest him wicked, for he was righteous; had he not been righteous, his prayer would not have been heard by God. The instance I am about to allege is of one, of whose iniquity and impiety none can doubt. The devil himself: he asked for Job, and received. Job 1:11-12 Have ye not here also heard concerning the devil, that he that commits sin is of the devil? Not that the devil created, but that the sinner imitates.

Is it not said of him, He stood not in the truth? John 8:44 Is not even he that old serpent, who, through the woman pledged the first man in the drink of poison? Genesis 3:1-6 Who even in the case of Job, kept for him his wife, that by her the husband might be, not comforted, but tempted? The devil asked for a holy man, to tempt him; and he received: the apostle asked that the thorn in the flesh might be taken from him, and he received not. But the apostle was more heard than the devil.

For the apostle was heard for salvation, though not for his wish: the devil was heard for his wish, but for damnation. For that Job was yielded up to him to be tempted, was in order that by his standing the proof the devil should be tormented. But this, my brethren, we find not only in the Old Testament books, but also in the Gospel. The demons besought the Lord, when He expelled them from the man, that they might be permitted to go into the swine. Should the Lord not have power to tell them not to approach even those creatures?

For, had it not been His will to permit this, they were not about to rebel against the King of heaven and earth. But with a view to a certain mystery, with a certain ulterior meaning, He let the demons go into the swine: to show that the devil has dominion in them that lead the life of swine. Demons then were heard in their request; was the apostle not heard? Or rather (what is truer) shall we say, The apostle was heard, the demons not heard? Their will was effected; his good was perfected.

8. Agreeably with this, we ought to understand that God, though He give not to our will, does give for our salvation. For suppose the thing you have asked be to your hurt, and the Physician knows that it is to your hurt; what then? It is not to be said that the physician does not give ear to you, when, perhaps, you ask for cold water, and if it is good for you, he gives it immediately, if not good, he gives it not. Had he no ears for your request, or rather, did he give ear for your good, even when he gainsaid your will? Then let there be in you charity, my brethren; let it be in you, and then set your minds at rest: even when the thing ye ask for is not given you, your prayer is granted, only, you know it not. Many have been given into their own hands, to their own hurt: of whom the apostle says, God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts. Romans 1:24

Some man has asked for a great sum of money; he has received, to his hurt. When he had it not, he had little to fear; no sooner did he come to have it, than he became a prey to the more powerful. Was not that man's request granted to his own hurt, who would needs have that for which he should be sought after by the robber, whereas, being poor, none sought after him? Learn to beseech God that you may commit it to the Physician to do what He knows best. Confess the disease, let Him apply the means of healing. Only hold fast charity. For He will needs cut, will needs burn; what if you cry out, and art not spared for your crying under the cutting, under the burning and the tribulation, yet He knows how far the rottenness reaches. You would have Him even now take off His hands, and He considers only the deepness of the sore; He knows how far to go. He does not attend to you for your will, but he does attend to you for your healing. Be sure, then, my brethren, that what the apostle says is true: For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered: for He makes intercession for the saints. Romans 8:26-27 How is it said, The Spirit itself intercedes for the saints, but as meaning the charity which is wrought in you by the Spirit? For therefore says the same apostle: The charity of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. Romans 5:5 It is charity that groans, it is charity that prays: against it He who gave it cannot shut His ears. Set your minds at rest: let charity ask, and the ears of God are there. Not that which you wish is done, but that is done which is advantageous. Therefore, whatever we ask, says he, we shall receive of Him, I have already said, If you understand it to mean, for salvation, there is no question: if not for salvation, there is a question, and a great one, a question that makes you an accuser of the apostle Paul. Whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do these things that are pleasing in His sight: within, where He sees.

9. And what are those commandments? This, says he, is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another. 1 John 3:23 You see that this is the commandment: ye see that whoso does anything against this commandment, does the sin from which every one that is born of God is free. As He gave us commandment: that we love one another. And he that keeps His commandment 1 John 3:24 -- ye see that none other thing is bidden us than that we love one another-- And he that keeps His commandment shall abide in Him, and He in him. And in this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. Is it not manifest that this is what the Holy Ghost works in man, that there should be in him love and charity? Is it not manifest, as the Apostle Paul says, that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given us? Romans 5:5 For [our apostle] was speaking of charity, and was saying that we ought in the sight of God to interrogate our own heart. But if our heart think not ill of us: i.e. if it confess that from the love of our brother is done in us whatever is done in any good work. And then besides, in speaking of the commandment, he says this: This is His commandment, That we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that does His commandment abides in Him, and He in him. In this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. If in truth you find that you have charity, you have the Spirit of God in order to understand: for a very necessary thing it is.

10. In the earliest times, the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4 These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away. In the laying on of hands now, that persons may receive the Holy Ghost, do we look that they should speak with tongues? Or when we laid the hand on these infants, did each one of you look to see whether they would speak with tongues, and, when he saw that they did not speak with tongues, was any

of you so wrong-minded as to say, These have not received the Holy Ghost; for, had they received, they would speak with tongues as was the case in those times? If then the witness of the presence of the Holy Ghost be not now given through these miracles, by what is it given, by what does one get to know that he has received the Holy Ghost? Let him question his own heart. If he love his brother the Spirit of God dwells in him. Let him see, let him prove himself before the eyes of God, let him see whether there be in him the love of peace and unity, the love of the Church that is spread over the whole earth. Let him not rest only in his loving the brother whom he has before his eyes, for we have many brethren whom we do not see, and in the unity of the Spirit we are joined to them. What marvel that they are not with us? We are in one body, we have one Head, in heaven. Brethren, our two eyes do not see each other; as one may say, they do not know each other. But in the charity of the bodily frame do they not know each other? For, to show you that in the charity which knits them together they do know each other; when both eyes are open, the right may not rest on some object, on which the left shall not rest likewise. Direct the glance of the right eye without the other, if you can. Together they meet in one object, together they are directed to one object: their aim is one, their places diverse. If then all who with you love God have one aim with you, heed not that in the body you are separated in place; the eyesight of the heart you have alike fixed on the light of truth. Then if you would know that you have received the Spirit, question your heart: lest haply you have the sacrament, and have not the virtue of the sacrament. Question your heart. If love of your brethren be there, set your mind at rest. There cannot be love without the Spirit of God: since Paul cries, The love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. Romans 5:5

11. Beloved, believe not every spirit. 1 John 4:1 Because he had said, In this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. But how this same Spirit is known, mark this: Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they be from God. And who is he that proves the spirits? A hard matter has he put to us, my brethren! It is well for us that he should tell us himself how we are to discern them. He is about to tell us: fear not: but first see; mark: see that hereby is expressed the very thing that vain heretics taunt us withal.

Mark, see what he says, Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they be from God. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in the Gospel by the name of water; where the Lord cried and said, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. John 7:37-39 But the evangelist has expounded of what He said this: for he goes on to say, But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him should receive.

Wherefore did not the Lord baptize many? But what says he? For the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified. Then seeing those had baptism, and had not yet received the Holy Ghost, whom on the day of Pentecost the Lord sent from heaven, the glorifying of the Lord was first waited for, so that the Spirit might be given. Even before He was glorified, and before He sent the Spirit, He yet invited men to prepare themselves for the receiving of the water of which He said, Whoso thirsts, let him come and drink; and, He that believes in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

What means, Rivers of living water? What is that water? Let no man ask me; ask the Gospel. But this, says it, He said of the Spirit, which they should receive that should believe in Him. Consequently, the water of the sacrament is one thing: another, the water which betokens the Spirit of God. The water of the sacrament is visible: the water of the Spirit invisible. That washes the body, and betokens that which is done in the soul. By this Spirit the soul itself is cleansed and fed.

This is the Spirit of God, which heretics and all that cut themselves off from the Church, cannot have. And whosoever do not openly cut themselves off, but by iniquity are cut off, and being within, whirl about as chaff and are not grain; these have not this Spirit. This Spirit is denoted by the Lord under the name of water: and we have heard from this epistle, Believe not every spirit; and those words of Solomon bear witness, From strange water keep far. What means, water? Spirit.

Does water always signify spirit? Not always: but in some places it signifies the Spirit, in some places it signifies baptism, in some places signifies peoples, Revelation 17:15 in some places signifies counsel: thus you find it said in a certain place, Counsel is a fountain of life to them that possess it. Proverbs 16:22 So then, in various places of the Scriptures, the term water signifies various things. Now however by the term water you have heard the Holy Spirit spoken of, not by an interpretation of ours but by witness of the Gospel, where it says, But this said He of the Spirit, which they should receive that should believe in Him.

If then by the name of water is signified the Holy Spirit, and this epistle says to us, Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they be of God; let us understand that of this it is said, From strange water keep far, and from a strange fountain drink not. What means, From a strange fountain drink not? A strange spirit believe not.

12. There remains then the test by which it is to be proved to be the Spirit of God. He has indeed set down a sign, and this, belike, difficult: let us see, however. We are to recur to that charity; it is that which teaches us, because it is the unction. However, what says he here? Prove the spirits, whether they be from God: because many false prophets have gone out into this world. Now there are all heretics and all schismatics. How then am I to prove the spirit? He goes on: In this is known the Spirit of God. Wake up the ears of your heart. We were at a loss; we were saying, Who knows? Who discerns? Behold, he is about to tell the sign. Hereby is known the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the antichrist, of whom you have heard that he should come; and even now already is he in this world. 1 John 4:2-3 Our ears, so to say, are on the alert for discerning of the spirits; and we have been told something, such that thereby we discern not a whit the more. For what says he? Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, is of God. Then is the spirit that is among the heretics, of God, seeing they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? Aye, here perchance they lift themselves up against us, and say: You have not the Spirit from God; but we confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh: but the apostle here has said that those have not the Spirit of God, who confess not that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Ask the Arians: they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh: ask the Eunomians; they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh: ask the Macedonians; they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh: put the question to the Cataphryges; they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh: put it to the Novatians; they confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Then have all these heresies the Spirit of God? Are they then no false prophets? Is there then no deception there, no seduction there? Assuredly they are antichrists; for they went out from us, but were not of us.

13. What are we to do then? By what to discern them? Be very attentive; let us go together in heart, and knock. Charity herself keeps watch; for it is none other than she that shall knock, she also that shall open: anon you shall understand in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Already you have heard that it was said above, Whoso denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, the same is an antichrist. There also we asked, Who denies? Because neither do we deny, nor do those deny.

And we found that some do in their deeds deny; and we brought testimony from the apostle, who says, For they confess that they know God, but in their deeds deny Him. Titus 1:16 Thus then let us now also make the enquiry in the deeds not in the tongue. What is the spirit that is not from God? That which denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. And what is the spirit that is from God? That which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Who is he that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?

Now, brethren, to the mark! let us look to the works, not stop at the noise of the tongue. Let us ask why Christ came in the flesh, so we get at the persons who deny that He has come in the flesh. If you stop at tongues, why, you shall hear many a heresy confessing that Christ has come in the flesh: but the truth convicts those men. Wherefore came Christ in the flesh? Was He not God? Is it not written of Him, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God?

John 1:1 Was it not He that did feed angels, is it not He that does feed angels? Did He not in such sort come hither, that He departed not thence? Did He not in such sort ascend, that He forsook not us? Wherefore then came He in the flesh? Because it behooved us to have the hope of resurrection shown unto us. God He was, and in flesh He came; for God could not die, flesh could die; He came then in the flesh, that He might die for us. But how died He for us? Greater charity than this has no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:13 Charity therefore brought Him to the flesh. Whoever therefore has not charity denies that Christ has come in the flesh. Here then do you now question all heretics. Did Christ come in the flesh? He did come; this I believe, this I confess. Nay, this you deny. How do I deny? You hear that I say it! Nay, I convict you of denying it. You say with the voice, deniest with the heart; sayest in words, deniest in deeds. How, do you say, do I deny in deeds? Because the end for which Christ came in the flesh, was, that He might die for us.

He died for us, because therein He taught much charity. Greater charity than this has no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You have not charity, seeing you for your own honor dividest unity. Therefore by this understand ye the spirit that is from God. Give the earthen vessels a tap, put them to the proof, whether haply they be cracked and give a dull sound: see whether they ring full and clear, see whether charity be there. You take yourself away from the unity of the whole earth, you divide the Church by schisms, you rend the Body of Christ.

He came in the flesh, to gather in one, you make an outcry to scatter abroad. This then is the Spirit of God, which says that Jesus has come in the flesh, which says, not in tongue but in deeds, which says, not by making a noise but by loving. And that spirit is not of God, which denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; denies, here also, not in tongue but in life; not in words but in deeds. It is manifest therefore by what we may know the brethren. Many within are in a sort within; but none without except he be indeed without.

14. Nay, and that you may know that he has referred the matter to deeds, he says, And every spirit, qui solvit Christum, which does away with Christ that He came in the flesh, is not of God. A doing away in deeds is meant. What has he shown you? That denies: in that he says, does away (or, unmakes). He came to gather in one, you come to unmake. You would pull Christ's members asunder. How can it be said that you deny not that Christ has come in the flesh, who rendest assunder the Church of God which He has gathered together? Therefore you go against Christ; you are an antichrist. Be thou within, or be thou without, you are an antichrist: only, when you are within, you are hidden; when you are without, you are made manifest. Thou unmakest Jesus and deniest that He came in the flesh; you are not of God.

Therefore He says in the Gospel: Whoso shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19 What is this breaking? What this teaching? A breaking in the deeds and a teaching as it were in words. Thou that preachest men should not steal, do you steal? Romans 2:21 Therefore he that steals breaks or undoes the commandment in his deed, and as it were teaches so: he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, i.e. in the Church of this present time. Of him it is said, What they say do ye; but what they do, that do not ye. Matthew 23:3 But he that shall do, and shall teach so, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. From this, that He has here said, fecerit, shall do, while in opposition to this He has there said solverit, meaning non fecerit, shall not do, and shall teach so-- to break, then, is, not to do-- what does He teach us, but that we should interrogate men's deeds, not take their words upon trust? The obscurity of the things compels us to speak much at length, chiefly that that which the Lord deigns to reveal may be brought within reach even of the brethren of slower understanding, because all were bought by the blood of Christ. And I am afraid the epistle itself will not be finished during these days as I promised: but as the Lord will, it is better to reserve the remainder, than to overload your hearts with too much food.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-augustine/homily-6-1-john-319-43/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net