

THE
GRACE
BIBLE

1 JOHN 3

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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What is The Grace Bible?

My only aim is to complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. (Acts 20:24)

The good news of God’s grace declares that God is not mad at you, he’s mad about you. The One who sits on a throne of grace blesses you not because you are good, but because he is good and he longs to be good to you.

Grace declares that God is for us and with us and he freely gives us everything we need for life and godliness. Grace invites you to come in from the cold, rest from your labors, and feast at the table of his abundance. Grace is what makes the new covenant new and the good news *good news*.

If you have ever asked, “How do I read this scripture through a new covenant lens?” *The Grace Bible* is for you.

This book is not a law Bible with rules to follow, nor is it a works Bible that tells you what to do. It is not a judgment Bible to fear, or a guilt Bible to make you feel bad. It is a *grace* Bible that reveals the good news found on every page of scripture.

In this study Bible you will find no guilt or condemnation and none of the usual calls for blood, sweat, and tears. Our focus will be on Jesus Christ—who he is, what he has done, and what you can do because of what he has done.

The Grace Bible is for the weary and those tired of pretending. It’s for the burned out, the fed up, and the knocked down. It’s for those who are in distress or debt or are discontented.

It’s for all of us who need grace.

1 John 3

1 John 3:1–2

¹ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is

3:1 **See.** There are things you see that change the way you see everything else. When you see how much your Father loves you, it changes everything.

How great a love. The original word for love means to be well pleased or fond of or contented with. It describes the unconditional love God the Father has for his Son (John 3:35, 15:9, 17:26), the whole world (John 3:16), and his children (Eph. 2:4).

How great a love the Father has bestowed on us. The love of God seeks the lost, raises the dead, and embraces outcasts. It is a divine love such as the world does not know.

The bad news of the orphaned life says you are on your own and nobody cares. But the gospel of grace proclaims that God loves you more than you can know or imagine. He reaches down with love in his eyes and healing in his hands and says, “I’m your Daddy, you’re my child, and I love you.”

That we would be called children of God. Those who know the love of their heavenly Father are known as God’s children. They have been adopted into his family, sealed in Christ, and given his Spirit as a guarantee (Rom. 8:15, 2 Cor. 1:22). John refers to believers as the children of God on numerous occasions (1 John 2:12, 13, 18, 28, 3:1–2, 7, 9–10, 18, 4:4, 5:2, 21, 2 John 1:1, 4, 13, 3 John 1:4).

And such we are. There is no better test of our salvation than we know God as our Father and ourselves as his dearly-loved children. “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:26). We do not see ourselves as servants but as sons with all the rights and privileges that entails.

For this reason the world does not know us. Even great apostles like John can go unrecognized by those who measure influence in terms of wealth and power. God’s ways are so alien to this lost world, that those who are highly regarded in heaven are barely known on earth.

Because it did not know him. The world did not recognize the Son of God when he came (John 1:10). If you are a believer with no reputation in the eyes of the world, you are in good company indeed.

3:2 **Beloved;** see 1 John 2:7.

Now we are children of God. For the believer, adoption is not some future event but a present reality. You will never be a more dearly-loved child of God than you are right now. As a child of God, your future is secure and blessed (Rom. 8:17, Gal. 4:7).

It has not appeared as yet what we will be. Although the believer has been made brand new in their spirit, our physical bodies have not yet changed. Inwardly we are just like Christ. “As he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). But outwardly we will not change before Jesus returns.

We know that when he appears, we will be like him. When Jesus returns in glory, we will be instantly transformed. Our aging and worn-out earth suits will be replaced with imperishable resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:51–52). “What is mortal will be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

Because we will see him just as he is. We are changed by beholding Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18).

There are three kinds of change; past, present, and future. First, there is the adoption of the new believer into the family of God. You were a sinner, but now you are a child of God, and this change was in your past. Second, there is the future exchange of your mortal body for a resurrection body that will happen when Jesus returns. Third, there is the ongoing change in your walk that takes place as you behold Jesus. It is this third type of change that John is about to discuss.

1 John 3:3

³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

3:3 **Everyone who has this hope fixed on him.** Believers are looking forward to the Lord’s return.

Purifies himself, just as he is pure. We become what we behold. Those who fix their gaze on Jesus—who-is-pure find themselves shrugging off all the filth and clutter that might otherwise burden their souls.

The wrong way to read this verse is to think, “I must purify myself to become a child of God.” You already are a dearly-loved child of God (1 John 3:2). You are not a son or daughter because you avoid unclean things but because you have put your faith in Jesus (John 1:12). Nor should you think, “I must purify myself to become pure.” You are cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). Jesus is our holiness and purity from above.

He is pure. Jesus is the only person who lived untouched by sin and its damaging effects.

The gospel is a practical message with the power to bring lasting change into your life. You may not be pure. You may be struggling with all sorts of addictions and habits. But as you abide in Christ and fix your hope on the One-who-is-pure, your appetites will begin to change. With a new heart and a new mind, you’ll start thinking differently. The old habits that used to harm you will lose their grip and you’ll be free. All this is to the glory of his grace that empowers us to say no to ungodliness and impurity.

1 John 3:4–6

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins; and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or knows him.

3:4 **Everyone who practices sin**, meaning sinners or unbelievers. John is not referring to the children of God who occasionally stumble, but those who are sinners by nature. In context, he is teaching us how to recognize deceivers and false prophets (1 John 3:7, 10).

Lawlessness implies wickedness or anarchy. The original word (*anomia*) is sometimes translated as iniquity. To practice lawlessness is to live without moral restraint.

Sin is lawlessness. John is not offering a legalist interpretation of sin. He is saying those who habitually sin can be recognized by their iniquitous or lawless behavior.

3:5 **He appeared in order to take away sins.** Jesus came to carry away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and he accomplished that on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). Your sins have not been merely covered up or hidden under the blood of Jesus; they have been taken away, removed as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Your sins are gone.

In him there is no sin. Jesus is sinless and pure (1 John 3:3).

To carry our sins away, we needed a High Priest untouched by sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus is our high priest “who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

3:6 **No one who abides in him sins.** Dive into the ocean and you will get wet. Similarly, the one who dives into Jesus will be cleansed from sin and delivered from the power of sin because in him there is no sin. Those who abide or make their home in the sinless Son leave their sinful habits at the door. They lose all interest in sinning because they have found something better by far. See also 1 John 3:9.

No one who sins has seen him or knows him. Someone who remains captive to sin has not had the liberating revelation of the One in whom there is no sin (1 John 3:5). They may have heard about Jesus and even responded to him in faith. But if they are acting like captives to sin, their revelation of Jesus is incomplete.

It would be wrong to say that Christians never sin (1 John 2:1), but sinning is a trait of Adam’s nature, not Christ’s. Our old self with its sinful habits died with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:2–3). The person you used to be—captive to sin and the lusts of the flesh—is no more. So reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ and be free. You are a sinner no more (1 John 3:9).

1 John 3:7–8

⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

3:7 **Little children**; see 1 John 2:1.

Make sure no one deceives you. Again, John warns about false prophets and deceivers (see 1 John 2:26).

Those who preach another gospel or another savior can cause you to fall from grace. Jesus will never let you go, but bad teaching can lead you into a wilderness of doubt and dead works.

The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. The fruit reveal the tree. We are not righteous because we do righteous deeds; we practice righteousness because the Righteous One lives in us.

He is righteous. Again John reminds us that Jesus is righteous (1 John 2:1, 29). Apart from him, you are not righteous. But he is righteous and those born of him are righteous and they walk in his righteousness (1 John 2:29).

3:8 **The one who practices sin is of the devil.** Here and two verses later, John says those who practice sin are children of the devil (1 John 3:10). He does not mean the devil has the power to make life and create a second race of humans. To be of the devil is to act in the same spirit of rebellion as the evil one.

The devil. John refers to the devil as the evil one five times in his epistle (see 1 John 2:14).

The devil has sinned from the beginning. When the devil appeared at the beginning of the human story, it was for the purpose of harming humanity and ruining what God had wrought. Yet even before then he was a rebel in heaven.

The Son of God. John and the other apostles recognized that Jesus was the Son of God. See 1 John 5:5.

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. The devil tried to end us, but Jesus came to end him.

Earlier John said that Jesus appeared to take away sins (1 John 3:5), and that mission was accomplished at the cross. Yet much of the world remains under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The Lord's purpose is to end the devil's influence once and for all.

1 John 3:9–10

⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because his seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

3:9 **Born of God.** Believers; see 1 John 5:1.

No one who is born of God practices sin. The believer does not make a habit of sin because they are a new creation with a new nature and new desires.

Because his seed abides in him. They are no longer sinners because they carry the seed or the Spirit of Christ, and in him there is no sin (1 John 3:5).

He cannot sin, because he is born of God. One with the Lord, you are a sinner no more. It is no longer in your nature to sin, because you have been given a new nature. This is not about your performance but your pedigree. Adam breeds sinners, but God does not. In your old life, you followed in the faithless footsteps of your father Adam. You walked after the desires of the flesh because they were the only desires you had. But you have been taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. You have become a partaker of his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). When you know who your Father is (not a sinner), you will know who you are (not a sinner).

Some stumble over the “he cannot sin” part of this verse. They cannot imagine a life of sinless perfection so they invent bizarre theological explanations. “My redeemed spirit didn’t commit adultery—it was my unregenerate body.” He cannot sin means the old habit of sinning is contrary to our new nature. When we sin, we are acting at odds with who we are in Christ. You still have the capacity to sin, but you don’t enjoy it like you used to. Running after sin is like choosing to wallow in the mud when you could be reclining at the banquet table. Jesus cannot sin. When you abide in Christ, you won’t sin either.

3:10 **The children of God**; see 1 John 2:1.

The children of God and the children of the devil are two groups of people; those who walk in the light and those who prefer the darkness. It is those who receive Jesus (John 1:12) and those who deny him (1 John 2:22).

John is not saying the devil has sired another race of humans, for there is only one Father. He’s saying those who practice sin are like the devil who rebelled and has sinned from the beginning (1 John 3:8). In context, he is talking about false teachers and hate-filled hypocrites who belonged to their father the devil (John 8:44). He’s talking about those who follow the way of Cain who was of the evil one (1 John 3:12, Jude 1:11).

Obvious or evident means this is how we can recognize the children of the devil. “This is how we know.” This is not how God knows because God examines the heart. But since we can’t see the heart, we judge the tree by its fruit.

Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. Someone who hates their brother and walks in darkness is unacquainted with the love of God.

1 John 3:11–13

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

3:11 **The message** they heard originated with Jesus: “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

Love one another. We don’t love one another to become the children of God; we love because we are the children of the God-who-is-love (1 John 4:8). When we receive our Father’s unqualified love,

we are able to love others with the same abandon (1 John 4:7). As in all things, our Father takes the lead and we follow.

The exhortation to love one another is here expressed as the message you heard. Elsewhere it is “his commandment” (1 John 3:23, 5:3) or a “new commandment” (1 John 2:8, 2 John 1:5). Either way, the message or commandment comes from Jesus (John 13:34).

- 3:12 **Cain was of the evil one** because he rejected the word of the Lord (Gen. 4:7) and gave in to hatred and murder. We are slaves to whatever we obey (Rom. 6:16).

Slew his brother. The self-righteous often persecute the righteous (see next verse).

For what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil. We may think Cain’s murder was an evil deed, but this violent act came about “because his deeds were evil.” Evil deeds belie an unbelieving heart. They are the fruit of dead religion rather than living faith.

Abel was judged righteous on account of his faith (Matt. 23:35, Heb. 11:4) but Cain was self-righteous on account of his unbelief. Unbelief asks nothing from God but says, “Look at what I’ve done/built/brought for you.” Unbelief toils and accomplishes nothing, while faith understands that everything comes to us by grace alone.

His brother’s were righteous. Righteous deeds reveal faith in Jesus.

- 3:13 **Do not be surprised.** If the self-righteous persecuted Jesus, they will persecute those who follow him (John 15:20).

If the world hates you. Ever since Cain killed Abel, those who trust in their own righteousness have persecuted those who trust in the righteousness that comes from God. Self-righteous are threatened by grace because grace undermines all they’ve worked for. Self-righteous people hated the One called Grace and they hate those who follow him (John 15:18).

1 John 3:14–15

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

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- 3:14 **We know** or we can tell when someone has met Jesus because we see the evidence of brotherly love (John 13:35), but God knows because he sees the heart. The penitent man who turns to Christ on his deathbed is just as saved as the saint who has spent a lifetime serving others.

We have passed out of death into life not because we love others, but because we believe in the One who sent Jesus. “He who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Life. To give us new life or eternal life is the reason why did Jesus came (John 3:16, Rom. 6:4). Jesus did not come solely to free us from sin or to give us a new nature. He came to give us a new life that includes those other things. “I have come that they may have life” (John 10:10). When we preach the gospel, we are telling people about the new life that Jesus offers to all (Acts 5:20).

We love the brethren because Jesus loves people and his Spirit dwells within us.

When you surrender to Jesus, God pours his love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). He gives us so much love that we find ourselves overflowing with love for others. We don't love others to earn our Father's love; we love others because we have received his great love.

He who does not love abides in death. Hatred for others (1 John 2:9) or an inability to express love (1 John 3:10) is a sign that one has not received love from the One who is love (1 John 4:8). A loveless life is no life at all.

3:15 **Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer** and a follower of Cain who slew his brother (1 John 3:12). Like Jesus before him (Matt. 5:21–22), John hammers the self-righteous with the merciless law. You may not have murdered anyone, but if you hate your fellow man, you don't know the love of God (1 John 4:20). Hatred and murder are fruit off the same tree.

No murderer has eternal life abiding in him. This is not to say that murderers are lost for eternity, for God's grace can rescue murderers like Moses and David. But those who are captive to hatred need to turn to God before it is too late.

Eternal life; see 1 John 1:2.

1 John 3:16–18

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

3:16 **We know love by this.** God is love but what is love? Love is God the Father refusing to give up on us even when we gave up on him. Love is God the Son leaving the comforts of heaven to come and save us, knowing full well that we would nail him to a cross. Love is God the Spirit sticking with us through thick and thin and faithfully guiding us in the way of life.

He laid down his life for us. Those who wonder whether God's love is unconditional need only look to the cross. If Jesus did not love us unconditionally, he would not have died for us and there would be no new covenant based on his grace. But he does and he did and there is.

We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. The followers of Cain hate their brothers, but the followers of Jesus love their brothers (1 John 3:11). The followers of Cain murder their brothers (1 John 3:12), but the followers of Jesus lay down their lives for others. Cain founded a city of violence, but Jesus is building a peaceable city of love and grace (Heb. 12:22).

3:17 **Whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need.** Just as Paul saw little value in giving without loving (1 Cor. 13:3), John saw little value in loving without giving.

Closes his heart. A closed heart is revealed in closed eyes, closed ears, and a closed wallet.

The love of God is a giving kind of love. It's a love that moved Jesus to give up the comforts of heaven and give himself for us.

3:18 **Little children**; see 1 John 2:1.

Let us not love with word. Talk is cheap.

But in deed and truth. Love is more than words and Facebook likes. Love is help in a time of need. Love is seeking the best for others and putting their needs before our own (Rom. 12:10). Love is giving ourselves (1 John 3:16) and our stuff (1 John 3:17).

1 John 3:19–22

¹⁹ We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before him ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.

3:19 **We will know by this that we are of the truth.** Being generous with his love is how we can tell that we are abiding in Christ.

Will assure our heart before him. We can be confident in his presence.

3:20 **In whatever our heart condemns us.** Sometimes we battle condemnation in the form of self-criticism or self-doubt. “I’m a failure. I’ve messed up again, and God will never accept me.” When that happens, we need to remind ourselves that...

God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Our heavenly Father knows every dumb thing we’ve done and every dumb thing we’re going to do, and knowing this he still loves us and calls us beloved. There is nothing we can do to make our Father love us any more and nothing we can do to make him love us any less. Knowing how much God loves us fills us with confidence and silences the inner critic.

3:21 **Beloved**; see 1 John 2:7.

If our heart does not condemn us. If your conscience condemns you, you will have trouble believing what God says about you. This is why we need to reassure our hearts that God’s goodness is greater than our badness, and his best is better than our worst.

We have confidence before God. The default setting of the children of God ought to be one of confidence and boldness. Those who have been justified by God, cannot be condemned by anyone (Rom. 8:33). Yet many Christians are not confident. They’re anxious and fearful because they’ve swallowed a toxic cocktail of grace plus works. Instead of resting in Christ and his finished work, they’re striving to impress him with their dead works.

You can live under condemnation or confidence. The way to be free from condemnation is to assure your heart that God is for you, and he loves you no matter what. Nothing can separate you from his love (Rom. 8:38–39).

3:22 **Whatever we ask we receive from him.** When we know how much our Father loves us, it gives us the confidence to come boldly to his throne of grace in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). See also 1 John 5:14.

Because we keep his commandments. Because we trust him (see next verse).

And do the things that are pleasing in his sight. Nothing pleases the Lord more than a life of dependence on him.

You were created for relationship and to receive the love of your heavenly Father. Reveling in his love pleases the Lord. But living under doubt (does God really love me?), condemnation (God doesn't love me), and relying on the flesh (I have to make God love me), does not please the Lord.

1 John 3:23–24

²³ This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him. We know by this that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

3:23 **This is his commandment, that we believe.** Our heavenly Father wants us to trust his Son and experience the authentic and eternal life that flows from knowing him (1 John 5:13).

Believe in the name of his Son. To believe in the name of his Son is to believe in the Sonship of Jesus. Jesus is *the Christ* (the anointed one), and *the Lord* (supreme above all), but ultimately Jesus is *the Son of God*. The one who overcomes the world is not the one who believes in baby Jesus, but he who believes in the Son of God (1 John 5:5). And the one who has eternal life is not the one who believes in Jesus the teacher, but she who believes in the Son of God (1 John 5:13). We believe in his name, and we go out in his name (3 John 1:7) so that others might believe in the name of the Son.

His Son Jesus Christ; see 1 John 5:5.

Love one another, just as he commanded us; see 1 John 3:11.

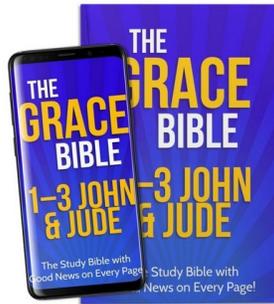
3:24 **His commandments** are that we believe in Jesus and love one another; see previous verse.

The one who keeps his commandments is the one who continues in the grace of God. Conversely, someone who tries to keep other commandments, such as those of the old law, is no longer walking in grace. They are trying to keep the old laws because they do not believe Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law on their behalf. In the old covenant, obedience meant following a long list of laws. But in the new covenant, obedience is the fruit of trusting Jesus.

Abides in him. The one who keeps his commands (i.e., believes in Jesus) abides in him. But the one who trusts in his own law-keeping performance does not abide in him and is alienated from Christ (Gal. 5:4). See also 1 John 2:6.

The Spirit. For the first time in this epistle, John mentions the Holy Spirit by name. Previously he has alluded to the Spirit as the anointing (1 John 2:27). From now on John will refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God (1 John 4:2) and the Spirit of Truth (1 John 4:6).

The Spirit whom he has given us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Grace who points you to Jesus and helps you remain in the grace of God. He is not the Spirit of Law who scores you on your law-keeping performance. Nor does he use the law to keep you in line. The Holy Spirit will always seek to convince you that you are righteous in Christ (John 16:10). He will always encourage you to rest in Christ and his finished work.



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