

1 John 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

Analysis

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. John applies the light/darkness imagery to the practical test of brotherly love. "He that saith" (ho legōn) addresses profession—claiming to be "in the light" (en tō phōti einai), enjoying illumination, truth, and fellowship with God. Yet profession is contradicted by conduct: "hateth his brother" (ton adelphon autou misōn). The present participle "hateth" indicates ongoing attitude and action—not momentary conflict but settled hostility toward fellow believers.

"Hatred" (miseō) in biblical usage encompasses more than violent animosity—it includes cold indifference, contempt, refusal to help, gossip, division. It's the opposite of agapē love. To claim enlightenment while harboring hatred reveals profound darkness—either self-deception or deliberate falsehood. "Is in darkness even until now" (en tē skotia estin heōs arti) emphasizes present, continuous state despite claims otherwise. "Until now" (heōs arti) stresses that even in the age of the shining light (v.8), this person remains in darkness—the light hasn't penetrated their heart.

This test demolishes claims to know God or walk in light that aren't accompanied by love for fellow believers. Gnostic teachers claimed superior spiritual enlightenment while despising ordinary believers as ignorant and inferior. John declares such claims false—genuine enlightenment produces love, not contempt. Hatred of brothers proves one remains in darkness regardless of claimed spiritual experiences or doctrinal knowledge.

Historical Context

In the Greco-Roman world, hatred between rival philosophical schools, social classes, and ethnic groups was common and often celebrated. Greek philosophy valued enlightenment but didn't necessarily demand love for others, especially inferiors. Roman society was highly stratified—contempt for slaves, foreigners, and lower classes was normalized.

Jewish teaching commanded love for neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) but many restricted "neighbor" to fellow Jews (evidenced in the lawyer's question in Luke 10:29). Some Jewish groups (like Qumran) explicitly taught hatred of outsiders: "love all the sons of light...and hate all the sons of darkness."

Christianity radically redefined community—"brothers" included all believers regardless of ethnicity, status, or education. Early church communities brought together Jew and Gentile, slave and free, educated and uneducated. The Gnostic teachers violated this unity by creating spiritual hierarchies—enlightened elites versus ignorant masses. John's test exposed them: hatred of brothers reveals darkness, proving their claimed enlightenment was false.

Church history repeatedly witnesses this tension. Medieval Christianity struggled with contempt for the uneducated laity from educated clergy. Protestant sectarianism sometimes produced bitter division and hatred between groups claiming superior light. John's test remains timeless: love for fellow believers is the litmus test of genuine spiritual enlightenment.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can you examine whether you harbor subtle hatred (contempt, indifference, gossip) toward fellow believers while claiming to walk in light?
2. What theological or cultural factors tempt you to view some Christians as inferior, unenlightened, or unworthy of love?
3. How should this verse shape church discipline when members exhibit ongoing hatred toward fellow believers?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	λέγων	ἐν	τῷ	φωτὶ	εἶναι	καὶ	τὸν	ἀδελφὸν
G3588	He that saith	in	G3588	the light	he is	and	G3588	brother
	G3004	G1722		G5457	G1511	G2532		G80
αὐτοῦ	μισῶν	ἐν	τῇ	σκοτίᾳ	ἐστὶν	ἕως	ἄρτι	
G846	hateth	in	G3588	darkness	is	even until	now	
	G3404	G1722		G4653	G2076	G2193	G737	

Additional Cross-References

1 John 4:20 (Parallel theme): If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

1 John 2:11 (Darkness): But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Psalms 82:5 (Darkness): They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

2 Peter 1:9 (Parallel theme): But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

1 John 2:4 (Parallel theme): He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 1:6 (Darkness): If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

John 9:41 (Parallel theme): Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

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