

1 John 3:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Analysis

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. John provides assurance of salvation based on the evidence of love. "We know" (hēmeis oidamen) expresses certain knowledge, not mere hope or feeling. "That we have passed from death unto life" (hoti metabebēkamen ek tou thanatou eis tēn zōēn)—the perfect tense indicates a completed action with continuing results. Conversion is a decisive transition from the state of spiritual death to spiritual life.

The evidence: "because we love the brethren" (hoti agapōmen tous adelphous). The present tense indicates habitual, characteristic love. This isn't claiming perfect love but a genuine pattern of loving fellow believers. Love is both the evidence that we've passed to life and the result of that new life. We don't earn salvation by loving; rather, salvation produces love as inevitable fruit.

The negative: "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (ho mē agapōn ton adelphon menei en tō thanatō). The present tenses indicate continuing states—ongoing lovelessness means remaining in death. This person never passed from death to life; they remain in their unregenerate state. This stark statement echoes Jesus's parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46), where treatment of Christ's brethren reveals one's relationship to Christ.

Historical Context

The language of passing from death to life recalls Jesus's teaching in John 5:24: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." This transition occurs at conversion through faith. John emphasizes that this invisible spiritual transaction has visible behavioral evidence—love for fellow believers.

The phrase "abideth in death" would have resonated with Jewish understanding of spiritual death. Before Christ, all humanity was dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Regeneration brings life. Those who lack love's evidence have never been made alive, regardless of their profession. This challenged false professors in the early church who claimed Christian identity without transformation.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does your pattern of loving (or not loving) fellow believers provide evidence about whether you've truly passed from death to life?
2. What's the relationship between assurance of salvation and the evidence of love—can you have one without the other?
3. How can you cultivate more love for believers you find difficult to love, given that this love evidences genuine salvation?

Interlinear Text

ἡμεῖς	οἴδαμεν	ὅτι	μεταβεβήκαμεν	ἐκ	τοῦ	θανάτῳ
we	We know	because	have passed	from	G3588	death
G2249	G1492	G3754	G3327	G1537		G2288
εἰς	τὴν	ζωήν,	ὅτι	ἀγαπῶν	τοὺς	ἀδελφόν,
unto	G3588	life	because	He that loveth	G3588	his brother
G1519		G2222	G3754	G25		G80
ἀγαπῶν	τὸν	ἀδελφόν,	μένει	ἐν	τῷ	θανάτῳ
He that loveth	G3588	his brother	abideth	in	G3588	death
G25		G80	G3306	G1722		G2288

Additional Cross-References

John 13:35 (Love): By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

1 John 5:2 (Love): By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

Matthew 25:40 (Parallel theme): And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

John 5:24 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 (Love): But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

1 Peter 1:22 (Love): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Hebrews 13:1 (Love): Let brotherly love continue.

John 15:12 (Love): This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Colossians 1:4 (Love): Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

1 John 3:23 (Love): And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.