

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Seven

A Discerning Life (1 John 2:18-4:6)

Part Three (Brotherly Love – 1 John 3:10-24)

Introduction:

- I. In his first epistle John uses sharp contrasts to make a point.
 - A. His letter is a discussion of opposites.
 1. We have already seen examples of such contrasts throughout chapters one and two.
 2. John continues his message of contrasts in chapter three:
 - a. Between the children of God and children of the devil.
 - b. Those who continually sin (who are of the devil) and those who do not continually sins (who are born of God).
 - B. However, John transitions back to a familiar theme – brotherly love (1 Jn 3:10).
 1. The difference between the children of God and children of the devil is clearly seen by which one truly practices righteousness and brotherly love.
 2. In the second half of chapter three the apostle discusses two important aspects of brotherly love:
 - a. The necessity of brotherly love (1 Jn 3:11-15).
 - b. The true definition and value of brotherly love (1 Jn 3:16-24).

Discussion:

- I. Brotherly love is an essential characteristic of the children of God (1 Jn 3:11-13).
 - A. The command regarding brotherly love is "from the beginning." (1 Jn 3:11).
 1. It was taught by Jesus (Jn 13:34-35).
 - a. This is the second of three occasions when John talks about brotherly love (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:11-18; and 4:19-5:4).
 - b. He often uses repetition for emphasis.
 2. John wants his readers to recall what they previously learned about brotherly love.

3. More importantly, he wants his readers to remember how we must love one another – like Jesus taught, not like Cain's example (1 Jn 3:12).
 - a. Here's another contrast – between the teaching of Jesus and the ungodly wicked example of Cain (Gen 4).
 - b. Two reasons why Cain murdered Abel:
 - (1). Cain was "of the wicked one" – a child of the devil.
 - (2). Cain's "works were evil and his brother's righteous."
 - c. Both knew the kind of sacrifice God required – Abel complied; Cain rebelled.
 - d. Cain's example of hatred is the antithesis of brotherly love – the opposite of the child of God who practice righteousness and love their brother.
 4. The world will hate us for the same reasons Cain hated his brother Abel.
 - a. They are "of the wicked one."
 - b. Their works are "evil" while ours are "righteous."
- B. We must guard against maligning and mistreating our own brethren over doctrinal differences.
1. It's easy to allow discussions and debate to become seditions (divisions) and heresy (Gal 5:20).
 - a. We must speak "the truth in love" (Eph 4:15).
 2. We must contend for the faith, teach the truth, and expose the works of darkness (Jude 3; 2 Tim 3:16; Eph 5:11), but we must also "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing they generate strife" (2 Tim 2:23).
 - a. Allowing differences to descend into of animosity, bitter resentment, and hatred makes us no different from Cain.
- II. Brotherly love is essential because it shows we have passed from death to life (1 Jn 3:14-15).
- A. It's an indication of true, lasting conversion (1 Jn 3:14)
1. Failure to practice brotherly love is common among those who sow division and discord.

- a. Sometimes they believe their mistreatment of others is justified (cf. Jn 16:2).
 2. However, lack of brotherly love indicates we are still abiding in death – as if no real conversion has taken place in our lives (1 Jn 3:14b; cf. 1 Jn 2:9, 11).
- B. To make his point, John returns to the example of Cain (1 Jn 3:15).
1. Anyone who hates their brother is "a murderer."
 - a. The word "hates" (Gr. miseo) means to "detest, dislike strongly, with the implication of feelings of hostility, to have malicious and unjustifiable feelings toward another."
 2. Why was Cain a murderer?
 - a. Jesus taught the act of murder is preceded by hatred in the heart (Matt 5:21-22).
 - b. Moses refused to grant asylum to those who commit murder prompted by hatred (Deut 19:11-12).
 - c. John concluded that "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn 3:15b).
 3. At the very least, failure to practice brotherly love indicates we are still fleshly and not being led by the Spirit (1 Cor 3:1-4).

III. John defines true brotherly love (1 Jn 3:16-18).

- A. The sacrificial love of Jesus is the best definition (1 Jn 3:16).
1. The word "love" (Gr. Agape) is the highest, purest form of love – active goodwill toward another demonstrated by selfless sacrifice.
 - a. Paul defined God's love the same way (Rom 5:6-11).
 - b. Jesus also defined love for His disciples in sacrificial terms (Jn 10:11, 15, 17; 13:37-38; 15:12-13).
 2. If Jesus laid down His life for us, the least we can do is sacrifice ourselves for fellow believers (1 Jn 3:16b).
 3. Yet some refuse to even show brotherly compassion in time of need (1 Jn 3:17).

- a. Other examples of this unloving, selfish attitude (Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31; Jas 2:15-17).
4. Brotherly love must be demonstrated – actions not words (1 Jn 3:18).

IV. The value and importance of brotherly love (1 Jn 3:19-24).

A. Brotherly love gives us assurance before God (1 Jn 3:19-21).

1. We know we are "of the truth" (1 Jn 3:19)
 - a. Genuine sacrificial love gives our conscience peace and security.
 - b. We know we are "of the truth" because we obey God's word.
 - c. To be "of the truth" means we have been obedient "to the truth" and are living in keeping "with the truth."
2. But what if our heart still condemns us – what then? (1 Jn 3:20).
 - a. We might harbor doubts and uncertainties about forgiveness, but God is "greater than our heart" – He know all things and knows if we truly love Him.
3. Keeping God's will and trusting in His grace frees us from guilt (1 Jn 3:21).
 - a. And there are benefits in having this confidence (Phil 3:13-14; Heb 4:16).

B. Brotherly love assures us that our prayers will be answered (1 Jn 3:22-23).

1. This is not an unconditional promise.
 - a. We must ask according to His will (1 Jn 5:14).
2. John places great importance on obedience (1 Jn 3:22).
 - a. Obedience makes answered prayers possible – disobedience makes answered prayers impossible (Isa 59:7).
 - b. God does not grant His disobedient children the wishes of their heart any more than a parent would give their rebellious children what they desire.
3. Keeping His commandments and doing what is pleasing in His sight opens the doors to God's spiritual and material blessings (1 Jn 3:22).
4. Therefore, John reduces the commandments of God to their purest essence (1 Jn 3:23).

- a. Our duties as a Christian are summed up in the two-fold command to believe in Jesus Christ and to love our brothers and sisters as Christ loved us.
5. The ability to faithfully keep the commandments of God and love one another as Christ loved us depends on the depth and sincerity of our love for God (Jn 14:9-10, 15, 21).
- C. Brotherly love assures us that we abide in Christ and He in us (1 Jn 3:24).
 1. Abiding "in Him" and Christ abiding in us describes the intimate spiritual relationship we enjoy with God our Father and with Christ (1 Jn 3:24a).
 - a. Jesus urged His disciples to maintain this same intimate relationship with Him (Jn 15:4).
 - b. We choose to remain in that relationship by keeping His commandments, or we choose to leave that relationship by disobeying His commandments.
 2. How do we know the Lord abides in us? (1 Jn 3:24b).
 - a. We know we abide in Christ and He in us because we keep the Spirit-given word.
 - b. The Holy Spirit guides, influences, and enlightens us through the word – through the scriptures written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The Summary:

- I. In the last 14 verses of chapter three, John returns to the topic of brotherly love.
 - A. We must understand the necessity of brotherly love.
 1. Brotherly love is characteristic of the children of God.
 2. It indicates a true, lasting conversion has occurred.
 - a. Failure to practice brotherly love shows we are still fleshly and not led by the Spirit.
 - b. Brotherly love must be demonstrated by actions not just words.
 - B. We must also understand the value and importance of brotherly love.
 1. It gives us assurance that we are "of the truth" and in fellowship with God.

2. It assures that our prayers will be answered.
3. And it assures us that we abide in Christ and He abides in us.

Review Questions:

1. Why does John use contrasts (opposites)?
2. According to John, how are we to love one another?
3. What two reasons did John give for calling Cain a murderer?
4. How do we know true conversion has taken place in our lives?
5. How does John define brotherly love?
6. How does brotherly love give us assurance before God?
7. What assurance do we have if our heart still condemns us?
8. How does brotherly love assure us our prayers will be answered?
9. What else is important for prayers to be answered?
10. How does brotherly love assure us that we abide in Christ and He in us?