

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Ten

A Confident Life (1 John 4:6-5:21)

The Essence of True Love – 1 John 4:12-21)

Introduction:

- I. How do we know God exists and cares for us?
 - A. Even the Bible says no one has ever seen God.
 1. In the OT:
 - a. God would not allow Moses to see Him (Ex 33:20).
 2. In the NT:
 - a. The apostle John testified twice that no one has seen God (Jn 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12).
 - b. Paul also affirmed the same (1 Tim 6:15-16).
 - B. We know God exists because Jesus declared Him to all humanity.
 1. John testified of this (Jn 1:18).
 2. Jesus assured His disciples that they could see the true character and nature of God in Jesus (Jn 14:8-11).
 - a. To see Jesus is to see and know the Father.
 - C. John also offers evidence of God's existence in his first letter
 1. According to John, we not only know God exists but that He also loves us and cares deeply for us because we see the love of God in His Son (1 Jn 4:9-10).
 2. Therefore, since God loves us, the apostle concludes we should also love one another (1 Jn 4:11).
 - D. Anyone can claim to know God and love God.
 1. But the proof of that claim is whether we manifest the love of God toward our brethren and live a faithful and obedient life.
 2. Therefore, John assures us that we can have confidence that we abide in God and He in us because we love one another.

Discussion:

- I. We are often tempted to doubt two things: God's love for us manifested by His grace and mercy, and our own worthiness in the eyes of God.
 - A. The apostle John has repeatedly addressed those concerns; but nowhere as much in this final section – 1 Jn 4:12-5:21.
 1. We have seen three reasons for John writing this letter:
 - a. That we may live a joyful life (1 Jn 1:1-10).
 - b. That we may live a clean life (1 Jn 2:1-17).
 - c. That we may live a discerning life (1 Jn 2:18-4:6).
 2. And now John explains the primary reason for this epistle.
 - a. That we may live a confident life (1 Jn 4:7-5:21) – confidence in the love, mercy, and grace of God seen through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - B. The proof of the true nature and character of God is now to be seen in us (1 Jn 4:12).
 1. God previously manifested Himself in His Son; and is now made known through those who through faith in the Son have become children of God.
 2. As John put it, "if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected (made complete – brought to completion) in us."
 - a. God "abides in us" in the sense that His own loving nature and character become an integral part of our life.
 - b. Paul affirmed the same thing concerning the word of Christ – when the word dwells in us richly, then God and Christ dwell in us richly through the indwelling word (cf. Col 3:16).
 - c. This is not denying the indwelling of God but simply explains how God and Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (cf. Eph 3:17).
- II. The Christian who holds firm to their faith in Christ and remains obedient to God's word has absolute confidence in their standing before God.
 - A. We know we abide in God and He in us by the gift of His Spirit (1 Jn 4:13).
 1. This is the second time John mentioned this (1 Jn 3:24).

2. Abiding in God means to remain in fellowship with Him by our faithful obedience to His will.
 3. However, John's use of the pronouns "we" and "us" means he is speaking of himself and the other apostles of Christ – they are the "we" and "us" under discussion here.
 - a. The Spirit was not given to all Christians in the way it was given to the apostles – they alone are the ones with direct knowledge of the divine nature and character of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Furthermore, this is not referring to "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) since the wording indicates the Holy Spirit is the giver of the "gift" and not the gift itself.
 - c. The "gift," according to Peter, is "the promise" of Acts 2:39 – spiritual salvation to Jew and Gentile alike.
 4. Jesus promised to give His apostles the Spirit (the Helper, Comforter, or Counselor) (Jn 15:26-27).
 - a. The Spirit was given to the apostles to testify or bear witness to us.
 - b. Therefore, the truth of God dwells in us because we have heard and believed the divine Spirit-given testimony of the apostles.
 5. This is how the Spirit of Truth dwells in us today as it did in those who heard and believed the testimony of the apostles in their day.
 - a. And this is how we know we abide in Him (in God) and He in us.
- B. We also know that we abide in God and He in us by the confession of our faith in His Son (1 Jn 4:14-15).
1. Again, John speaks of himself and the apostles of Christ.
 - a. They are the ones who saw the evidence and testified to the validity of that evidence that "the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."
 - b. Again, the pronoun "we" (1 Jn 4:14) is speaking of the apostles – they are the ones who saw and testified of Jesus.
 - c. John made this claim earlier in this same letter (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3) – "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you."

2. Therefore, we can have confidence that we abide in God and He in us when we acknowledge our belief in the testimony that "Jesus is the Son of God."
 - a. The word "confess" is a willing acknowledgement we make based on our belief and conviction in the validity of the things we have heard.
 - b. John has spoken of such confession or acknowledgement previously in this letter and will do so again (cf. 1 Jn 2:23; 4:2-3; 2 Jn 7).
- C. We also know that we abide in God and He in us because we abide in love (1 Jn 4:16).
 1. Again, John is speaking of himself and the apostles who "have known and believed" the love of God through their association with Jesus.
 - a. John was confident of God's love toward himself and the apostles because they witnessed it with their own eyes.
 - b. Our confidence in God's love is based on their eyewitness testimony that God demonstrated His love for us while we were still sinners by sending His Son to die for us.
 2. Therefore, John once again affirms the true nature and character of God: "God is love."
 - a. The love of God is seen in everything God has done for us – from "the breath of life" at the creation to "eternal life" through His Son at the end of time.
 - b. It is this love that binds us to the Father as a child of God and binds the Father to us as His beloved and precious offspring.
 3. The human mind simply cannot fully comprehend the breadth, the depth, nor the height of God's love for us.
 - a. We see it demonstrated in the sacrifice of Jesus, but even then, we cannot fully comprehend it.
 - b. Fortunately, it is not necessary to comprehend God's love to believe in it and have complete confidence in it.
 - c. All we need to know is that God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for our fellow man is to be the same love.

4. Therefore, we can have complete confidence that we abide in God and He in us because we abide in (continue to practice) genuine divine love.

III. John sums up the discussion of love by stating the obvious conclusion to the matter.

A. Previously, John declared if Christians love one another we have confidence that God lives in us and His love is made complete in us (1 Jn 4:12).

1. John then expanded on this truth by affirming ways we can have confidence that we abide in God and He in us (1 Jn 4:13-16).

B. In the following verses the apostle returns to discuss the evidence of our love for God (1 Jn 4:17-18).

1. The person who has bold confidence "in the day of judgment" is someone whose love for God has reached the level of maturity that it may be described as having "been perfected."

2. The reason for this bold confidence is "because as He is, so are we in this world."

- a. God in heaven sees us on earth as being like His Son – the one in whom He is well pleased.

- b. God is well pleased with us also "because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that [we] should follow His steps" (cf. 1 Pet 2:21).

3. Furthermore, John adds that the love that gives us bold confidence on the day of judgment also banishes fear.

- a. There is no fear in love.

- b. Adam and Eve were fearful of God because they transgressed the will of God (Gen 3:8-10),

- c. In the same way, we cannot have confidence if our love for God is not mature enough or perfect enough to compel us to be faithfully obedient.

C. Love for God and fear of God's judgment are completely incompatible – if we have one, we cannot have the other (1 Jn 4:18).

1. The reason love and fear are incompatible, according to John, is because "fear has to do with punishment" (ESV).

- a. We fear the consequences of the sins we commit.

- b. In other words, fear not only includes the anticipation of punishment, fear is itself a form of punishment.
 2. This is why perfected love must "cast out fear" – the two cannot coexist and are completely incompatible.
 - a. Perfected and mature love for God anticipates heaven, not torment; it anticipates reward not punishment.
 3. Therefore, according to John, the way to measure the perfection of our love for God is whether we live in fear.
 - a. The word "fears" (v. 18) is in the present tense, which suggests a continual habitual state – a state in which there is an ever-present dread of judgment and punishment.
 - b. Living in this constant state of fear is clearly an indication that love for God has not reached full maturity.
 - c. It is unthinkable for the soul redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ to live in fear of punishment for sins already forgiven.
 - d. To do so not only shows a lack of maturity, but a lack of confidence and trust in God's love for us.
 - D. All this assumes that we are not living in a state of sin but are led by the Spirit to live a faithful, albeit imperfect, life.
 1. The apostle Paul said something quite similar (Rm 8:13-16):
 2. The only way to have confidence when we are aware of our imperfections is to remember the assurances John has previously given (1 Jn 1:7, 9; 2:1-3, 12, 28-29; 3:2-3, 7-9, 19-22, 24; 4:9-11).
- IV. In conclusion, John reminds his readers of three things: (1) the motive for our love (1 Jn 4:19); (2) the incompatibility of love and hate (1 Jn 4:20); and (3) the command of Christ to love our brother (1 Jn 4:21).
- A. The reason we love God is God's love for us (1 Jn 4:19).
 1. This is the second time John repeats this fundamental truth (1 Jn 4:10).
 - B. However, love for God and hate toward a brother is incompatible (1 Jn 4:20).

1. We cannot claim to be in fellowship with God and walk in darkness; nor can we claim to know God and disobey His commands; nor can we claim to love God and hate our brother in Christ.
 2. Therefore, John poses a simple question.
 - a. How can one claim to hate his brother whom he sees while at the same time claim to love God whom he cannot see?
 - b. How can we love the invisible God when we hate His visible creation – man, whom He made in His own image?
 3. John's conclusion to such an erroneous claim is that the one making it is "a liar" – a term John has used before (1 Jn 2:4, 22).
 - a. This is clearly strong language.
 - b. However, John does not hesitate to express his hatred for sin – especially the sin of lying.
 - c. The "apostle of love" clearly "hates every false way" (cf. Ps 119:104, 128, 163).
 4. We need to understand that John does not hate the sinner, despite the harm they have caused.
 - a. However, he does not hesitate to call their sin what it is – a lie.
 - b. It is a lie because the doctrine taught and promoted by false teachers is a lie.
 5. Unfortunately, this is true of all false doctrine – it is based on lies.
 - a. It cunningly and deceptively twists and perverts the truth to win the favor of the ignorant and untaught (2 Pet 3:16).
 - b. This is why the apostle Paul warned the Ephesians against being tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the cunning craftiness of deceitful teachers (Eph 4:14).
- C. Therefore, John urged his readers to simply remember the commandment of the Lord to love their brother (1 Jn 4:21).
1. Jesus taught that those who love God must also love their brother (Mk 12:29-31; Jn 13:34-35).

2. In the first passage Jesus simply repeated what the Law of Moses taught about loving our neighbor as ourselves.
3. However, in the second passage, a statement given to the apostles on the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus raised the bar on brotherly love.
 - a. To love our neighbor as ourselves is one level of brotherly love that is often expressed in simply doing no harm to our neighbor because we would do no harm to ourselves.
 - b. However, to love one another as Jesus loved us is the highest and purest form of brotherly love that is expressed in self-sacrifice – a proactive, self-sacrificial kind of love that does for others by giving of ourselves.
4. This is the truest definition of brotherly love – loving others as Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us.

The Summary:

- I. Since no one has seen God how do we know He exists?
 - A. Aside from simply looking at all He has created as evidence of His existence we can also look at Jesus.
 1. Two key passages in John's Gospel affirm this truth.
 - a. Jesus declared the true character and nature of God (Jn 1:19).
 - b. The character and nature of God can be seen in Jesus (Jn 14:8-11).
 2. Furthermore, the evidence of God's love for us is also seen in Jesus.
 - a. God loved us so much that He sent His Son into the world to become the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 4:9-10).
 - b. Therefore, God's love for us is why we should also love one another (1 Jn 4:11).
 - B. Being confident of our relationship with God is crucial to our faith.
 1. The apostle John mentions several reasons for this confidence.
 - a. We know we abide in God because we love one another (1 Jn 4:12).
 - b. We know we abide in God and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit (1 Jn 4:13).

6. Why do we love God?

7. Why must we also love our brother if we love God?