

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Nine

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

Part Four (Truth and Love– 1 John 4:1-11)

Introduction:

- I. In this chapter John continues using contrasts to make his point.
 - A. John's love compelled him to give believers a warning (1 Jn 4:1).
 1. They cannot believe everything they hear.
 2. His greatest concern was the spread of Gnostic teaching.
 - a. Those who were most vulnerable were the untaught who remained spiritual infants (cf. Hos 4:6).
 - b. Believers must be rooted and grounded in the truth, otherwise they will be "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph 4:14).
 3. Similar warnings are not always welcomed in churches today.
 - a. Objections mostly come from those who believe everyone is entitled to their own opinion.
 - b. They often believe truth is more relative than absolute.
 - c. However, there is only one truth and anything that is not of the truth is of the devil.
 - B. John also wanted believers to understand the true nature of love.
 1. To understand the nature of God we must understand His love for us.
 - a. The best example of true love is found in God sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - b. This is also our example for loving one another.
 - (1). Such love gives us confidence in the day of judgment (1 Jn 4:17-18).
 - (2). And, if we love God, we must also love one another (1 Jn 4:21).

Discussion:

- I. John transitions from knowing that we abide in Christ "by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 Jn 3:24), to warn his fellow believers about believing "every spirit" (1 Jn 4:1).
 - A. We know the Spirit guides us through the Spirit-given word.
 1. But there are always some who claim special spiritual insight apart from the inspired word.
 - a. The Holy Spirit enlightens us and give us a deeper understanding, but only through our own intense study and meditation of the Spirit-given word.
 2. Therefore, since anyone can claim to be led by the Spirit, we must put those claims to the test (1 Jn 4:1).
 - a. Jesus warned His disciples to examine their fruits (Matt 7:15-16; cf. Gal 5:22-23).
 - b. But we must also examine their teaching theologically and doctrinally (Deut 13:1-4; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 6:3-5; 2 Jn 9-11)
 3. We must "test the spirits" because "many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1).
 - B. A closer look at two ways to "test the spirits."
 1. First, examine what they say (1 Jn 4:2).
 - a. The main issue was the heresy that denied Jesus had come "in the flesh."
 - (1). Cerinthus (c. 50-100 AD).
 - (2). Marcion (c. 85-160 AD).
 - b. John defended the deity of Jesus and His coming in the flesh in John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-2, 14; 20:30-31).
 - c. John's simple test was whether these teachers will confess that Jesus had come in the flesh (1 Jn 4:2-3).
 - d. Those who would not are "antichrist" (1 Jn 2:18).
 2. Second, examine how they live (1 Jn 4:4-5).
 - a. John praised the faithful as being "of God" (cf. 1 Jn 3:24).
 - b. He praised them because they "have overcome" false teachers.

- c. But it was the power of God that gave them this victory (1 Jn 4:4b).
 - d. The false teachers were "of the world" because they "speak as the world, and the world hears them" (1 Jn 4:5; cf. Jn 3:31).
 - e. There will always be worldly teachers who speak as the world speaks to entice the world to listen (2 Tim 4:3-4).
- C. Therefore, the key to remaining faithful is to listen only to those who speak the truth.
- 1. Listen to those who speak with divine authority (1 Jn 4:6; cf. Matt 10:40; Lu 10:16; Jn 13:20).
 - a. We must be extremely careful who we listen to when it comes to the word of God.
 - b. We must stay with the only trustworthy source of truth (Jude 17; 1 Jn 4:6).
- II. John returns to the theme of brotherly love – the mark of a true disciple of Christ.
- A. The apostle obviously used the expression "beloved" because he loved all believers and wanted them to love one another (1 Jn 4:7).
- 1. John urged believers to practice brotherly love for two important reasons.
 - a. First, because "love is of God" – God's nature and character is the very essence divine love; He is the author and the source of all pure love; love originates with God.
 - b. Second, "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" – those who love as God loves express that love and affection toward others by action; by actively doing things for others out of love, and by expressing our love for God by faithfully obeying Him in all things.
 - 2. By contrast, the absence of outward acts of genuine love is evidence that we have nothing in common with God, because "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).
- B. The greatest demonstration of God's love is providing redemption of sins and eternal life through His Son (1 Jn 4:9-10).
- 1. This manifestation of God's love occurred at the incarnation of Jesus Christ – the coming of His Son "into the world" (1 Jn 4:9).

- a. Jesus, the "only begotten Son," came as an outward, visual, and historically verifiable demonstration of God's love for all humankind.
 - (1). The term "only begotten" is an expression that means Jesus shared the same divine nature as God the Father.
 - b. The "only begotten Son" came into the world so "that we might live through Him."
2. God also manifested His love by sending His "only begotten Son" to be "the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).
- a. God's love for us was not reciprocal in nature – God didn't love us because we love Him.
 - b. Instead, we love Him because He first loved us.
 - c. Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
 - (1). He alone could satisfy the wrath of God against us sinners by the sacrifice of Himself.
 - (2). He alone could provide forgiveness that made reconciliation with God possible.
- C. Having said all this about the love of God, John draws his conclusion (1 Jn 4:11).
1. If God demonstrated such depth of love for us by giving His son, then the very least we must do in return is "love one another."
 - a. God's love for us is the reason we must love one another (cf. Eph 5:1-2).
 - b. We imitate the divine nature of God the Father and of Jesus Christ our Lord by loving as they loved us – a genuine self-sacrificing love, especially toward those who we might think least worthy of our love.

The Summary:

- I. One thing we have in common with first-century Christians is a proliferation of false religions and false teachers.
 - A. John's admonition to those in his day should be heeded by everyone today.
 1. We simply cannot afford to blindly accept everything we hear as true.
 2. To avoid falling victim to false teachers we must carefully examine:
 - a. Their life – looking for evidence of the "fruit of the Spirit."

- b. Their teaching – examining whether they're faithful to the gospel (the doctrine of Christ), or whether they're teaching otherwise.
 - 3. We can have complete confidence in the writings and teaching of the divinely inspired writers of Scripture.
 - a. We can know the difference between truth and error by relying on their word.
- II. But we must also love one another.
- A. God is the originator and source of love since God is the very essence of true divine sacrificial love.
 - 1. But love as defied by John is demonstrated by active goodwill toward others.
 - 2. God demonstrated His love for us through the sacrificial gift of His Son.
 - 3. Therefore, if God loved us by sacrificing His Son, the least we must do is love one another.

Review Questions:

1. Why did John urge his readers to "test the spirits" to determine if they are of God?
2. Name two ways we can put teachers to the test.
3. Why was it important to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?
4. According to John, how can we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error?
5. What reasons does John give in these verses for the necessity of our loving one another?
6. How was the love of God manifested to us?
7. What reason does John give to support his assertion that "we also ought to love one another?"