

1 John Chapter 3:10-24

Verse 10

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

It is worth repeating in our study of John's epistle that it is not a devotional treatise on the subject of love although the word "love" or "to love" is mentioned over 40 times. It is rather a practical examination of our faith. John is interested in our testimony but not a time when, a manner how, and a place where. Our first confession of faith may have happened many years ago – John wants to know how we stand presently. He wants to know what we are producing in our lives today. The Lord expressed the same thought in the sermon on the mount.

Mt 7:16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Mt 7:18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Mt 7:20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

So what we practice in our lives is an indication as to whether children of God or children of the devil. The expression "doeth not righteousness" is a challenging one. It is not simply a question of good works. Many unsaved men can do good works. To do righteousness goes further – it is a man who always does what is righteous. Paul distinguishes between good and righteous in Romans chapter 5:

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

The world can appreciate a good man more than a righteous man but the bible reverses these two traits in a man.

What else would mark a child of the devil? "He loveth not his brother." Brotherly love is the mark by which we identify the believer.

Verse 11

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

"From the beginning" takes us back to the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus as expressed in the opening words of this epistle. In the upper room, the Lord sets new standards for our love – we are to love another as He has loved us. His love was unselfish, sacrificial, causeless, endless. The opposite of this love was seen in the works of Cain.

Verse 12

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous

A first reading of Genesis 4:3 might make us ask, "In what way were the works of Cain evil?"

Ge 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

Was not Cain worshipping God, albeit in his own way. But Hebrews 11 tells us that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith. God told him what to bring – a lamb – and Cain obeyed. Cain chose to disobey God, not once but several times, hence the bible speaks of "the way of Cain". It was a life of disobedience. God had no respect for the offerings of Cain, and Cain showed his displeasure by murdering Abel.

Ge 4:5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. Ge 4:8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Verse 13

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

The Lord said of Himself that men hated Him without a cause, and if they hated Him, they would also hate His disciples. On the contrary, He said to the unbelieving Jews in John chapter 7, "The world cannot hate you". The readers of John's epistle were not to be surprised if the world hated them.

Verses 14 and 15

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Indeed our love for our brethren is one of the proofs that John is looking to find in the believer. John uses this expression 8 times in this epistle, 3 times in chapter 3 and 5 times in chapter 5. We know we have eternal life not by what we profess but by what we do. I might say to an unbeliever, "I have eternal life". He might well reply, "How do you know that?" My reply would be here in this section, "Because I have a love for my brethren. It is one of the proofs I have that I am a child of God.

The opposite is true in verse 15. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer". This was the new teaching given by the Lord in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a

cause shall be in danger of the judgment:

Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

This is not to be taken too literally for sometimes men in the condemned cell have put their faith in the Lord Jesus. I believe rather that we can paraphrase the second part of verse 15 to read, "and no one who hates his brother has eternal life abiding in him". John as we often say speaks in shades of black and white – there are no grey areas. Love for my brethren is a proof of eternal life – hatred towards my professed brother is a proof that I do not have eternal life.

Verse 16

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

We know that the Lord Jesus loved us because of His sacrificial love for us.

Joh 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.

We therefore should have the same kind of love towards our fellow believers. But surely laying down our lives for the brethren is a bit extreme? We must not try to water down John's words by making it good deeds and spending time on them. Paul had this kind of love towards the Philippians chapter 2:

17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

Verse 17

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

Verse 17 gives us an example of how we can show love towards a brother who is lacking in material wealth. If we fail to respond in a practical way, "how dwelleth the love of God in him?" It is all too easy to say in our day that welfare benefits take care of such needs but they provide the absolute minimum for survival and the believer and indeed the assembly has to share the responsibility. The apostle James also deals with this subject in his epistle, chapter 2:

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

(At this point we may remark that one word which is very characteristic of this epistle has already been translated by four different words in English:-abide,

continue, dwell, remain.)

The early church was prominent in this respect according to Acts chapter 4:

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Acts chapter 6 speaks of the widows who were cared for in the daily ministrations. The church at Antioch sent a gift to relieve the suffering of the saints at Jerusalem. The Philippians supported Paul at Thessalonica and at Rome.

Verse 18

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

It is easy for us to say, "I love my brethren" but our love should be shown, not in word only, but in deed ie in practical terms.

Verses 19 to 21

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Here is the second of John's "we know"s . Both John and Paul link love and truth together – they are not opposite extremes. It is by practical expressions of our love that we know that we are of the truth.

"Alas! This desirable fruit has often been lacking in me." That is what many of us would have to say. That is just what the Apostle anticipates in the next verse. Considering these things, our hearts condemn us. How solemn then is the fact that "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Solemn, and yet very blessed. For see how this great fact worked in the heart of Simon Peter, as recorded in John 21: 17. Peter who had so confidently boasted of his love to the Lord, had signally failed to show it in deed. He had instead thrice denied Him with oaths and curses. The Lord now thrice questions him on the point, letting down a probe into his conscience. Instead of having assurance, Peter's heart condemned him, though he knew that at bottom he did love the Lord. If Peter had some sense of his failure the Lord who knew all things saw the depth of it as Peter did not. And yet by that very fact He also knew that, in spite of the failure, genuine love was there. So Peter said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He was glad to cast himself upon the fact that "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." So may we be, when in a like situation. On the other hand there are times-God be thanked-when our heart does not condemn us; times when the life and love

and truth of God in our souls has been in vigour, expressing themselves in practice. Then it is that we have confidence and boldness before God. We have liberty in His presence. We can make request of Him with the assurance of being answered, and receiving in due season that which we have desired.

Verses 22 to 24

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 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.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

The last three verses of chapter 3 have to do with keeping His commandments. Verse 22 gives us the secret of having a successful prayer life. By "successful", we mean having a prayer life in which we ask God for certain things and He responds by granting us our requests. How we would long to have such a response to our prayers. What is the secret? We have to keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. The Lord spoke of these things in the upper room as recorded in John chapter 15:

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

The principal commandment, according to verse 23, is to believe in His Son and to love one another.

Joh 6:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Faith in God's Son is God's great work today. The Father's will is that men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father.

Keeping God's commandments is our proof to ourselves that we dwell in God and that He dwells in us. This link between commandments, love, and dwelling are established in John 14:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

23 If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him

How do we know that God abides in us? It is by the witness of His Spirit. The Spirit is telling us that we are the children of God.