

I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

IX. Discerning True Fellowship With God By Its Love Of The Brethren

(1 John 3:10b-18)

I. Introduction

- A. 1 John was written to counter heretical views (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment, and is thus “filled with contrasts – light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:7-12, 16-21).” (Ryrie Study Bible KJV, 1978, “Introduction to the First Letter of John: Contents,” p. 1770)
- B. We view the epistle for much needed spiritual discernment today, and study 1 John 3:10b-18 on discerning true fellowship with God by its love of the brethren for our insight, application and edification:

II. Discerning True Fellowship With God By Its Love of the Brethren, 1 John 3:10b-18.

- A. Beginning at 1 John 3:10b-11, John began to discuss how not only righteousness, but love of fellow believers is another mark of true fellowship with the Lord. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 895)
- B. John’s goal was to go beyond merely stating the fact that brotherly love is a mark of true fellowship with God to define what “love” is in regard to action. Thus, he contrasted the action that illustrated lovelessness or hatred in 1 John 3:12-15 with the action that illustrated true love in 1 John 3:16-18 as follows:
 1. Lovelessness, or hatred of the brethren, is marked by jealousy, guilt, and harm to others, 1 John 3:12-15:
 - a. John used Cain who slew his brother Abel in Genesis 4:1-8 as an example of lovelessness, 1 John 3:12a.
 - b. Cain’s murder of Abel grew out of jealousy that God had accepted Abel’s sacrifice while not accepting his own, Genesis 4:2-5. (Some believe that God wanted only an animal sacrifice, that Cain’s offer of the fruit of the ground was unacceptable to God, but Leviticus 2:1, 4, 14, and 15 show that bloodless offerings “were perfectly appropriate” under the Mosaic Law. (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Gen. 4:3) God had wanted either a different sacrifice or a different attitude on Cain’s part, what is not clarified in the Genesis 4 text.
 - c. In addition, Cain’s jealousy also involved a sense of guilt as God had not accepted his sacrifice where He had accepted Abel’s sacrifice, 1 John 3:12b.
 - d. Thus, lovelessness, which is also hatred, is marked by jealousy and guilt over one’s own sin as compared to the righteousness of another person, and such lovelessness or hatred is a symptom of failure to “abide” in fellowship with the Lord, 1 John 3:13. (John’s reference to one’s having eternal life “abiding” in him does not mean that he is not saved, but it alludes to one’s fellowship with the Lord, John’s typical use for the term “abiding,” 1 John 3:14-15.)
 2. Conversely, love of the brethren is marked by sustaining the lives of the brethren, 1 John 3:16-18:
 - a. John used Jesus Who laid down His life for us on the cross as an example of love, 1 John 3:16a. If Christ laid down His life for us, we believers ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John 3:16b.
 - b. Significantly, the act of Christ’s giving His life for us was not an emotionally thrilling one, for it caused Him great agony as evidenced in His crying out to His heavenly Father to ask why the Father had forsaken Him, cf. Matthew 27:46. Thus, the kind of love that God calls believers to exhibit for one another is not necessarily one where the experience is an emotional delight but one where the **action** involved sustains or protects the lives of the brethren regardless of the emotional experience involved.
 - c. In reality, a believer may never need to lay down his life for the lives of other believers, so John gave a practical direction on expressing love that sustains life: he urged believers to give of their material goods to help sustain the lives of brethren who lack life-sustaining goods. (Ibid., Bib. Know. Com., N. T., p. 897) Thus, if we see a brother in Christ who needs life-sustaining material provisions, and we have the means to help him but we do not provide them for the brother, we do not have the love of God dwelling or abiding in us in the sense that we are not fellowshiping with the Lord, 1 John 3:17.
 - d. Accordingly, John called his Christian readers to love not just in one’s verbal profession that he loves the brethren, but in actions that truly reveal a loving sustainment of the lives of the brethren, 1 John 3:18.

Lesson: We discern true fellowship with God by a true love toward fellow believers in Christ, a love that does not harm the lives of the brethren out of jealousy or guilt, but one that selflessly sustains their lives either by laying our own physical lives down for the brethren or at least giving of our material goods to sustain their lives.

Application: May we fellowship with God in truth by truly loving the brethren in Christ not in a superficial sense of emotionalism or in the hatred of harmful jealousy and guilt but in deeds that sustain the lives of the brethren.