

**An Introduction to John's First Letter:
The Epistle of Christian Certainty**

"These things have I written unto you who believe ... that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)".

Review

Introduction, 1:1-4

The apostle introduces us to the topic of the book, eternal life. He writes about the message that the life-giving Word gave to the apostle, and to us, when he was among them.

The Reality of Fellowship: Stated, 1:5-2:2

We have argued that the book can be viewed as having two principal parts. Here the apostle tells us that our knowing, walking with, and having fellowship with God must be based on the righteous character of God.

John makes the point that we do not need to deceive ourselves about the presence of sin in our lives. Christ has met and meets God's standards of fellowship. We can know that we know Him because of Christ's righteous character, His satisfaction for our sins through His sacrificial death on Calvary, and His constant advocacy for us.

The Reality of Fellowship: Tested, 2:3-5:20

Now, the apostle turns to tests or evidences that we do have fellowship and know Christ, though sin is present in all our lives. John's point seems to be that the miracle of fellowship with God is a life-changing experience. The effects of knowing God, as well as the knowing of Him, are grounds of assurance. Our experience with God and our works are grounds of assurance for us. Profession must match practice, not perfection! John lists five evidences of the gracious work of God in our lives.

The test of obedience, 2:3-17

An important evidence of God's great grace is a profound transformational change in our values. Though we are certainly not perfect people, the change that new life, the incoming of kingdom life, the life of God, is dramatic. We now see the world's value system as empty, shortsighted,

and impermanent. We have come to value God's commandment and love one another.

The test of fidelity to the apostle's teachings, 2:18-29

John's point in this section is that false teachers cannot sway true believers away from the apostle's teachings. Believers can sense error and are not enamored by it though the teacher of it may be attractive and persuasive; this is evidence that we are God's children.

The test of moral purity, 1 John 3:1-4:6

The person who fellowships, abides, and knows God is one who has been given the righteousness of Christ. That righteousness evidences its invisible presence through acts consistent with it—meaning moral integrity.

Today's Lesson: The test of love, 1 John 4:7-21

John elaborates on what he presented in John 3:16, that God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ as self-sacrificial love. It is because God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and we are His children, that we should love also. If we love, we are like our Father, who is love. The section begins (v. 7) and ends (v. 24) with the command to love. The word, "Love," occurs 23 times as a noun and twice as a verb in this section.

The origin of love, vv. 7-8

Positively, v. 7

John bases his argument on God's eternal nature. God is the source and origin of all love. The life of the child bears the imprint of the character of the parent. Because God is love, those who display love give evidence that they know God.

There are three other statements in the New Testament concerning God and His nature: He is "spirit" (John 4:24), "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29 quoted from Deut. 4:24), and "light" (1 John 1:5). However, love is the most comprehensive of the statements and is repeated twice in our passage (1 John 4:8, 16).

Negatively, v. 8

If a person has a settled disposition or habitual manifestation that is contrary to love, it is evidence that his or her parent (literally the word means "fathered") is someone other than God, who is love. A better

translation of “God is love” is “God love is.” Without the article, “love” cannot function as a predicate nominative. Further, “love is God” may suggest that God is not a person but a force (the subject and predicate are not interchangeable). In this instance, “love” emphasizes the qualities of a person. Thus, “love” is a quality of God’s character.

Point: God’s character is the basis of divine ethics.

The manifestation of love, vv. 9-10

In the coming of Christ, v. 9

The sending of God’s Son was both a revelation of His love and the essence of love itself. God’s unique Son was God’s unique gift of love to us! The “of” in “love of God” is a subjective genitive meaning that God’s very own love is for us.

What was God’s motive for sending His Son to us? It was rooted in the character of God, the effulgence or display of His glory. Redemption is the means to that end!

“Only begotten” appears only here in the epistle but four times in the gospel (See John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). Sometimes scholars translate the term as “well-beloved.” It indicates His uniqueness; He is God, being the Son of God (perhaps alternates would be “one and only Son,” “the unique one”). The apostle Paul describes Christ as “God’s unspeakable gift” in 2 Corinthians 9:15.

In the redemption through Christ, v. 10

It was not only in the incarnation that we were given evidence of God’s love; it was preeminently displayed in His atoning sacrifice for us. The greatness of God’s love is seen in the greatness of His gift! He loved us and sent His Son to rescue us—not because we are in any sense lovable—but because He is love.

The greatness of God’s love, manifested in the nature of His gift and its purpose, is seen also in its beneficiaries; for God gave his Son to die for us undeserving sinners.

The fruit of love, vv. 11-21

Love and others, v. 11

If what John has written of God's 1st condition love is true (and it is being a first-class condition) , then His children should love also. The command is a deduction drawn from divine love. The gift of God's Son not only assures us of God's love, it lays upon us an obligation.

What God commands, God provides. Christ purchased in His atoning death the Spirit who dwells within us. The Spirit is love shed abroad in our hearts.

Love and assurance, vv. 12-13

The unseen made visible, v. 12

When we love others, it is evidence that we are God's children. Like begets like! The word "perfected" means through loving because our love matures.

"If we love" in mood is passive; it is something that has God as its cause.

The unseen seen gives confidence, v. 13

Since the Spirit is the love of God expressed in us, and Christ is the love of God manifested to us, we have grounds of assurance when we love others. Love is of God and everyone who is born of God love.

Love and confidence, vv. 14-19

An affirmation, v. 14

Though no one has seen God, God revealed Himself through His Son to the apostles as the redeemer. They are here announcing it to us (1 John 1:1-3).

In what sense will Christ be the "Savior of the world? The "world" means sinful society estranged from God and under the dominion of the evil one. There will be a day when the "world" will be composed of the godly in the new heavens and new earth. "World" has several meanings in Scripture: An inclusive term for all those who are in the kingdom of darkness and have not been born of God (5:19). It can also mean the sphere of the extension of God's love and saving mercy (John 3:16, 1 John 2:2, 4:14).

The consequences, vv. 15-16

A mutual indwelling: stated, v. 15

The means whereby God indwells the confessor of Christ is the Spirit. To assert that Jesus is the "Son of God" is to affirm His deity.

What is the nature of knowing? It is far more than intellectual ascent something is true. It involves commitment. It consists of consent, ascent, and affectionate embrace.

A mutual indwelling: elaborated, v. 16

The indwelling of God is the manifestation of His love in us; this love is the Spirit. It is the divine indwelling which alone makes possible both belief and love.

A mutual indwelling: the fruit, vv. 17-20

Surety in the Day of Judgment, v. 17

Love in its mature manifestation gives us assurance that we are God's in that in possessing His character we have confidence that we are His. The words "know and believe" indicate a single, composite action (John 4:16, 6:69).

Lack of fear, v. 18

The love that spells confidence banishes fear; fear and love are mutually incompatible. The reason for this is that fear is rooted in the potential of punishment. The threat of punishment has been banished in Christ by the Spirit (the punishment in question is eternal damnation). Fear is punishment already. Christ has eliminated the cause of true fear. He took our punishment for us! One knows that love is mature when a relationship of trust casts fears away.

A mutual indwelling: the ground, v. 19

The great characteristic of Christians is that they share in the life of God. Since God is love, we love. There is no direct object; what should be supplied; should it be God, one another, or both?

What does it mean to be "perfected in love"? By the indwelling of the Spirit, we share in God's character; it is not that we are perfect in ourselves, but the Spirit is our perfection. Such is not in the creature, but it comes through the Spirit indwelling us. It is not a matter of degrees because there is not imperfection of love in the divine character. All believers manifest the possession of divine love; the opposite of love to John is hatred (John sees not degrees, either He is loved or hated!!

Love and true life, the conclusion, vv. 20-21

A clarification, v. 20

Love excludes the disregard of others. It is incontrovertible.

A commandment reiterated, v. 21

Because God is love, He commands us to love. We should not separate what God joins.

A clarification: what is cause and what is effect, a persistent confusion? The cause of our redemption is not love; it is the evident. The cause is the discriminatory grace of God procured by the Son through the gift He purchased for us (the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, in us) and validated by the declaration of God the Father. Our love does not save us, being imperfect, it is God's love expressed through the accomplishments of Christ.

Thoughts

1. A consuming passion for the well-being of others has its wellspring in the character of God. We love because Christ first loved us! To know the God of love means to express love.
2. God showed us the meaning of love when He gave us His Son; the Son showed us His love when He died for us on Calvary's tree; the Spirit is the love of the Father and Son expressed in and through the believer. "While the origin of love is in the being of God, the manifestation of love is in the coming of Christ," said Stott. The experience of love is the Spirit.
3. The Spirit is the love of God in us (vv. 12-13).
4. Fear or distrust of God is evidence that our love is immature.
5. Love and callousness are antithetical for the Christian.